

X. Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element

Purpose

Parks, recreation facilities and open spaces make an important, distinct contribution to the landscape and quality of life in Kirkland. Over the years, the City has had the vision to pursue land acquisition and park development for the public's enjoyment, especially along Lake Washington. An outstanding system of parks, open spaces, trails, and recreation facilities have evolved as a result of this vision.

The Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element (Parks Element) supports the continued provision of accessible and well-maintained facilities and services for current and future community members. Policies are established to provide and plan for parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces. Policies promote preservation and restoration of publicly owned natural areas for the community and wildlife. The City will continue to coordinate with partners, neighboring cities, and other organizations to seek opportunities for collaboration and further regional approaches for meeting park, open space, and recreational demand.



Juanita Beach Park

Vision

The Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element aims to:

- Support accessible and well-maintained parks and recreation facilities to create safe places for people to visit.
- Conserve and sustain natural areas for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations.
- Provide comprehensive year-round recreation opportunities to enhance physical, mental and social well-being.
- Establish partnerships to ensure a comprehensive system of programs, facilities and services are available to meet the recreation needs of the Kirkland community.
- Support the City's sustainability, climate, and environment goals.



Summer camp in Kirkland

Existing Conditions

The Kirkland Parks and Community Services Department manages the City's recreation programs; park planning, acquisition, development and maintenance; community services; and the Green Kirkland Partnership.

Kirkland's park system includes 706 acres of parkland and open spaces, include community and neighborhood parks and natural areas (see Figure PR-1). Other parks, open spaces, and publicly-accessible school sites through partnership agreements add another 1,191 acres of parkland. 62 miles of trails and park paths connect people to parks, neighborhoods, and provide paths within parks. The City also offers a diverse array of recreation, sports, fitness, arts, music and self-improvement classes and programs for all ages and a range of needs and abilities.

Kirkland has a number of large parks owned by other public agencies that are within, or adjacent to, the City limits. These parks help meet local recreation needs and contribute significantly to the overall quality and diversity of parks and recreation in Kirkland. These sites include Saint Edward State Park, Bridle Trails State Park, and Big Finn Hill Park.

Estimates of park and recreation demand and an evaluation of facilities and service needs can be found in the City's Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan.

Waterfront Parks

Kirkland's waterfront parks are a distinctive part of the City's park system. The City's waterfront parks stretch from the Yarrow Bay Wetlands on the south, to O.O. Denny Park on the north, providing community members year-round waterfront access and diverse waterfront experiences. Community members can enjoy the passive and natural surroundings of Juanita Bay and Kiwanis Park as well as the more active swimming and sunbathing areas of Houghton and Marsh Parks. The high use of the City's waterfront parks require high levels of maintenance, periodic renovation, and security.

Natural Park Areas

The natural park areas such as Juanita Bay Park, Yarrow Bay Wetlands, and Watershed Park provide community members with important natural open space and critical urban wildlife habitat. Passive recreation uses such as walking, bird watching, interpretive educational programs and signage, and trail systems for walking, biking, and rolling are appropriate for these sites.

Community Parks

Community parks are usually 15 to 30 acres in size and are generally defined as larger, diverse recreation areas serving both formalized active recreation needs as well as recreation use benefiting the neighborhood surrounding the park. Community parks often include recreation facilities such as sport fields and/or community centers, such as Crestwoods Park and Everest Park.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks such as Totem Lake Park and Edith Moulton Park serve both the limited active and passive recreation needs of a residential neighborhood and are usually no more than 15 acres and no less than 0.5 acres in size.



Edith Moulton Park

Trails

The nearly six-mile Cross Kirkland Corridor (CKC) Trail, managed by the Public Works Department, runs through the heart of Kirkland and connects the City to communities to the north and south as part of the Eastrail. In addition to the CKC, the City manages over 18 miles of additional trails, primarily within parks as loop walks and connecting paths. Over 38 miles of other trails are associated primarily with large parks such as Bridle Trails State Park and are managed by other entities.

Recreation Facilities

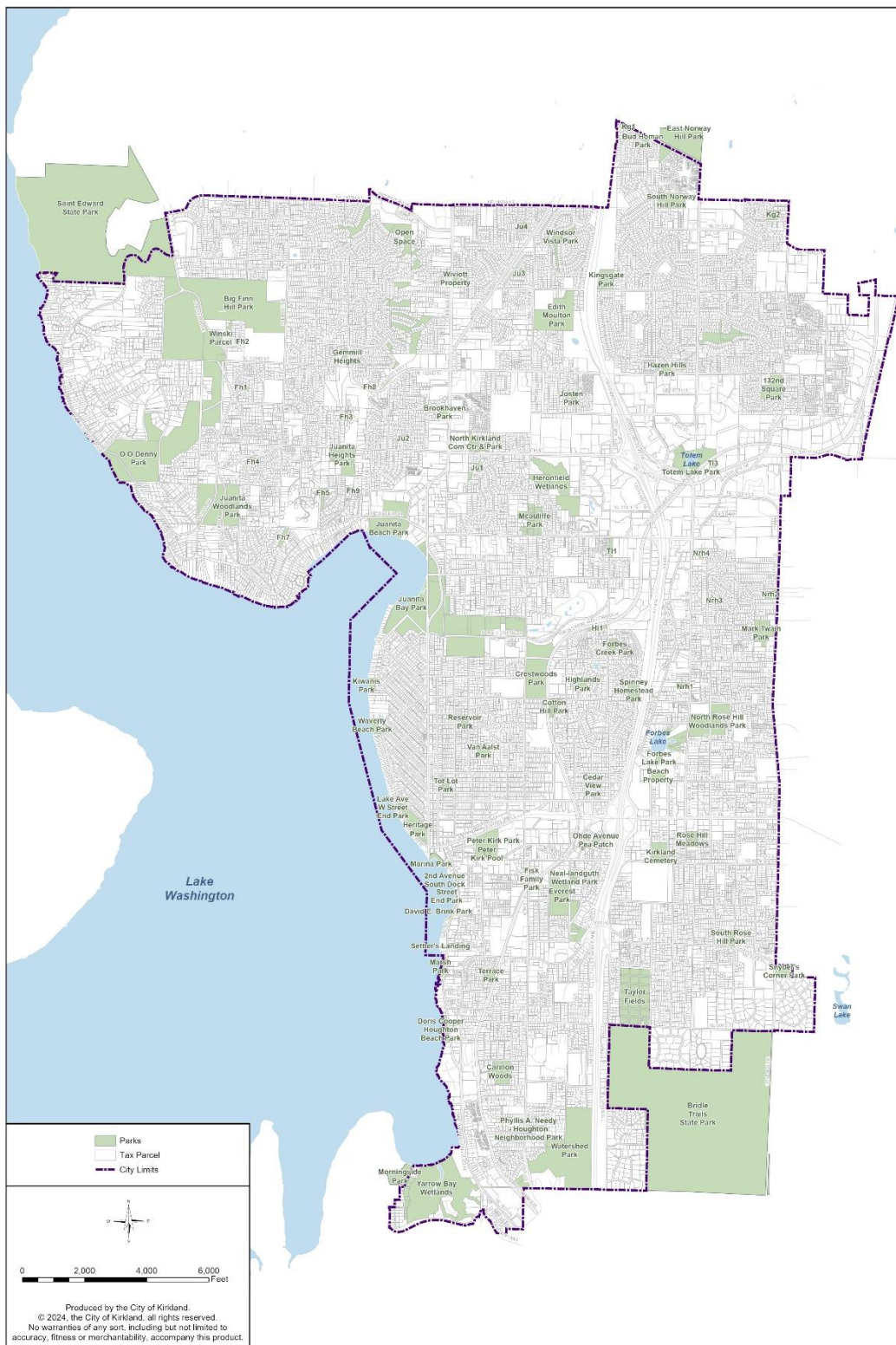
The Parks and Community Services Department manages the North Kirkland and Peter Kirk Community Centers, the Kirkland Teen Union Building, and Heritage Hall. The Department oversees the daily operation of the Kirkland Cemetery and the seasonal outdoor Peter Kirk Swimming Pool and manages leases on the Forbes House and the Kirkland Performing Arts Center. Demand for athletic facilities is met in part by the City's agreement with the Lake Washington School District, which allows use of sports facilities and some indoor gymnasiums. The Department offers a wide array of activities and events that encourage and promote positive and healthy lifestyles for all ages and abilities. Recreation services include community building special events, aquatics activities, senior programs, youth and preschool programs, camps, adult and youth sports programs, health and wellness activities, and enrichment classes.



Heritage Hall

Urban Forest

The urban forest provides shade, beauty, and habitat for wildlife, cleans the air, stores carbon, abates stormwater, and more. In 2024, the City received updated tree canopy cover data for 2021 and citywide tree canopy cover was assessed at 38 percent. This is a loss of 89 acres or 0.8% of canopy cover compared to 2017 data. From 2017 to 2021, Kirkland's parks experienced a 0.4% decrease in canopy coverage. In 2023 as part of another data collection project, the City inventoried over 50,000 public trees in Kirkland, including all trees located in the public rights-of-way, 10 city facilities, 16 open spaces, the Cross Kirkland Corridor, and high-usage public parks. This data will inform decision-making, prioritization of resources, expansions of canopy, and monitoring of urban forest health and resilience over time. See Figure SCE-4 in the Sustainability, Climate, and Environment (SCE) Element for a map of Kirkland's tree canopy.



Topic Areas

PROS Plan

The Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan is the City's guide and strategic plan for managing and enhancing Kirkland's park and recreation system. The PROS Plan is prepared by the Parks and Community Services Department and the Kirkland Park Board. To remain eligible for certain State and County grant funding, the City is required to update the PROS Plan every six years. The PROS Plan was updated in 2022, and while there is some overlap with the Parks Element, the PROS Plan is a functional plan with a greater focus on implementing the policies in this element.

Level of Service

The PROS Plan includes multiple level of service (LOS) metrics for parks, recreation, and open space. One of these standards is investment per person, updated in 2021 through the Park Impact Fee Study. This standard ensures that each person receives access to a constant amount of parks and recreational facilities as the community grows. The City provides this value by capital investment in parks and recreational facilities that are most appropriate for each site and which respond to changing needs and priorities as the City grows and the demographics and needs of the population changes. This standard allows the City flexibility in determining the precise mix of facilities that the City builds to meet the needs of its current and future residents. Other level of service metrics include the GRASP® Model and park acreage per person guideline. As part of the PROS Plan, the City used the GRASP® Model to conduct a walkability gap analysis using a half mile travel distance, a suitable distance for a 10-minute walk. Where possible gaps have been identified, further analysis was used to show each area's overall population, median household income, diversity index, etc. Areas with greater population, lower income, and/or greater diversity may be prioritized for park improvements. See the PROS Plan for more information and the level of service standards and guidelines.

Goals and Policies

Goal PR-1: Acquire, develop, and renovate a system of parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces that is attractive, safe, functional, connected, sustainable, and accessible to all segments of the population.

Policy PR-1.1: Encourage and support active and ongoing participation by diverse community members in the planning and decision-making for parks and recreation.

The City should involve community members in park and recreation facility planning, design and recreation program development to solicit community input, facilitate transparent decision-making, facilitate project understanding and build public support. Park planning should pursue opportunities to partner with community members and neighborhood groups to improve,

maintain and monitor local parks, natural areas, and trails. The City should identify underrepresented and/or underserved populations in the community and work to improve their capacity to participate in park planning and decision-making.

Policy PR-1.2: Acquire additional parklands necessary to adequately serve the City's current and future population based on the PROS Plan. Prioritize underserved populations to provide parks that are within walking distance to ensure that parks are equitably distributed throughout the City.

The City should provide parks, open spaces, trails, and facilities in accordance with the PROS Plan level of service standards and guidelines. To provide equitable park distribution, the City should prioritize park acquisition in underserved areas where households are more than one-quarter mile from a developed park and in areas of the City facing population growth and residential and commercial development (see Figure PR-2).



Figure PR-2: Walkable Access to Outdoor Recreation

Policy PR-1.3: Identify innovative methods to provide publicly accessible urban parks and related amenities such as linear parks, playgrounds, plazas, public parklets, or exercise stations in Kirkland's Urban Growth Centers.

Policy PR-1.4: Improve existing park sites to meet the active and passive recreational needs of community members. Prioritize underserved communities.

Park sites should be improved based on strategic plans, management plans, or other adopted strategies in the PROS Plan to ensure parks reflect local needs, community input, recreational and conservation goals, and available financial resources. The City should prioritize park improvement in underserved communities where households are more than a 10-minute walk from a developed park and in areas of the City expecting population growth and residential and commercial development.

Policy PR-1.5: Maintain and enhance Kirkland's waterfront parks to connect community members with the water, provide unique recreational experiences, and support tourism. Create new public access to the Lake Washington shoreline and develop connections between waterfront parks, including on private property.

The City should pursue opportunities to acquire additional privately held waterfront parcels as available, particularly sites that might create needed connections for a more continuous lakefront corridor or will provide lake access in underserved areas. Incentives should also be explored to encourage private developers to set aside publicly-accessible waterfront land. The City should also consider opportunities to retain and repurpose street ends to create water access points and explore opportunities for cooperative or joint use ventures.

Non-motorized small craft water-oriented activities/programs along the shoreline should be encouraged where appropriate and consistent with public interest and needs.



Paddlers enjoying Lake Washington

Policy PR-1.6: Ensure a network of active transportation trails within parks and between parks, nearby neighborhoods, public amenities, and major pedestrian and bicycle routes identified in the Active Transportation Plan.

Trail system planning and development should be coordinated with the City's Active Transportation Plan to provide a comprehensive network for those who walk, bike, scoot, skate, and roll.

Policy PR-1.7: Develop, enhance, and maintain signature greenways and trails that stretch across the community and that connect community members to the City's many parks, natural areas, recreation facilities and other amenities, while providing habitat corridor linkages.

- Kirkland Waterfront: The City should strive to create a continuous pedestrian and bicyclist greenway along the lakeshore through parks, neighborhood greenway improvements, and trail easements.
- Cross Kirkland Corridor: Develop or improve parks adjacent to the Cross Kirkland Corridor to provide additional amenities and create pleasant destinations or stopping points along the trail. The Public Works Department, in collaboration with other City departments, should continue to implement the Cross Kirkland Corridor Master Plan.
- Bay to Valley Connection: Build on the City's existing parks and natural areas along Forbes Creek and NE 100th Street to create an east-west trail that connects users from Juanita Bay through central Kirkland and into the Sammamish Valley.

- Green Loop Corridor: Consider protection and development of a greenway and trail corridor to connect existing parks, open spaces, trails, wildlife corridors, and natural areas to promote active recreation and environmental preservation in Finn Hill.

Policy PR-1.8: Prioritize active transportation and public transportation access to parks and recreation facilities.

Policy PR-1.9: Utilize strategic capital investments in parks, trails, open spaces, recreation, and art to encourage and support economic development.

Parks, trails, open spaces, and recreational amenities contribute positively to the City's economy by improving the community's capacity to attract and retain community members and sought-after companies. Kirkland's rich park amenities help promote a higher quality of life which in turn attracts desirable jobs and tourism.

Policy PR-1.10: Further activate City parks, spur economic development, and foster ten-minute neighborhoods by exploring opportunities for new uses, recreation options, and businesses in and adjacent to City parks and recreation spaces as appropriate.

For example, the City could explore allowing additional recreational rentals, cafes, and food trucks at City parks.



Juanita Friday Market

Policy PR-1.11: Increase the resiliency of Kirkland's parks, recreation facilities, open spaces, and natural areas to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing climate.

Climate resilience is the ability to prepare for, recover from, and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Strategies to increase resiliency include increasing the tree canopy in parks, providing wading pools and splash pads, providing shade structures, removing invasive species, planting climate-resilient strains of native species, managing water use efficiently at parks, establishing pollinator gardens, and installing heat pumps at recreation facility buildings.

Policy PR-1.12: Improve and enhance the Parks and Community Services Department's sustainability initiatives, in alignment with the City's sustainability planning.

See the City's Sustainability Strategic Plan and the SCE Element.

Policy PR-1.13: Evaluate the current requirements for common recreational space for new multi-unit residential development and consider expanding those requirements to all new multi-unit development that is a significant distance from parks or open space in order to provide residents with access to recreational opportunities within denser development patterns.

The Kirkland Zoning Code currently has common recreation space requirements for multi-unit residential development in certain zones of the City. The City should consider expanding these requirements to all new multi-unit developments that are a significant distance from parks or open space. Examples of common recreation space for residents of multi-unit developments include picnic areas, green space, playgrounds, community gardens, outdoor fitness equipment, fitness centers, sport courts, and dog runs.

Goal PR-2: Enhance the quality of life in the community by providing services and programs that offer positive opportunities for building healthy lives.

Policy PR-2.1: Provide a variety of recreational services and programs that promote the health and well-being of community members of all ages and abilities.

The City should design programming and services to meet the needs of diverse users, including people with disabilities. The City should involve recreation service users and/or target users when designing or updating programming.

Policy PR-2.2: Maintain and enhance Kirkland's community centers to provide recreational opportunities, community services and opportunities for community members to connect, learn, and play.

The City's existing community centers should be managed to provide a diverse array of recreational programs, services, and experiences for all Kirkland community members.



Senior Council members meeting at the Peter Kirk Community Center

Policy PR-2.3: Provide opportunities for safe aquatic recreation through the City's pools and lakefront facilities. Continue to provide scholarships for programs such as swim lessons to encourage participation at all income levels.

The City should maintain and enhance aquatics facilities and programs at existing outdoor and lake sites. The City should explore opportunities to develop an indoor aquatic facility, which could be part of an existing or multiuse facility and could be developed in a partnership with other organizations or agencies. Providing scholarships for those who historically lacked access to swim lessons is important and should be disbursed in accordance with PROS Plan policy.

Policy PR-2.4: Provide programming and services that support recreation, healthy lifestyles, and learning for community members of all ages.

The City should continue to expand and diversify its popular youth programs to meet the growing need for engaging, affordable, and safe recreational options for children. The City should partner with the Lake Washington School District, community partners, recreation providers, and sports organizations to offer both drop-in and structured programs in sports; art, music, and dance; and educational and environmental activities for youth. The City should build on existing partnerships to expand teen programming to include additional individual athletics, fitness, and alternative sports programs.

The City should also explore options to expand the quantity and breadth of adult programs offered, in partnership with other recreation providers and organizations. Finally, the City should continue to provide and expand opportunities for seniors to engage in social, recreational, educational, nutritional, and health programs designed to encourage independence, in partnership with community agencies.

Policy PR-2.5: Reduce barriers to participation and provide universal access to facilities and programs. Implement the ADA Transition Plan.

Future improvements to parks, recreation facilities and trails should be designed to be in compliance with the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and with universal accessibility in mind. The City will continue to implement the Parks and Community Services ADA Title II Transition Plan. The City should continue to develop and offer recreational programs for youth and adults with disabilities and support inclusion opportunities in all programs. The City should also continue to help ensure recreation programs and facilities are affordable for all through scholarships and other programs.

Policy PR-2.6: Establish and operate specialized recreational facilities (e.g., action sports facilities, off-leash dog areas, skateparks, community gardens, musical play features, splash pads water play elements) to respond to identified public needs, as appropriate.

The City should consider local needs, recreational trends, and availability of similar facilities within the region when planning for specialized recreational facilities. The City should consider providing facilities for alternative or emerging sports, such as skateboarding, mountain biking, ultimate Frisbee, pickleball, and climbing, to offer community members a more diverse range of recreational experiences.

Policy PR-2.7: Provide a Citywide system of sports fields and programs to serve field sport needs of the community, in partnership with the Lake Washington School District, local sports organizations, and other regional providers.

The City should enhance maintenance, investments, and safety of sports fields to better serve recreation users and extend playing seasons. The City should assess overall sports fields needs on a regular basis, based on existing inventories and local participation trends. The City should continue its active partnerships with the Lake Washington School District and other recreation providers and actively explore opportunities for greater joint use of facilities.



Pickleball Court at Everest Park

Policy PR-2.8: Provide and enable access to a Citywide system of indoor and outdoor sports courts, gymnasiums, and programs for Kirkland community members.

The City should maintain and enhance the City's partnership with the Lake Washington School District for use of their gymnasiums and athletic fields for organized recreation and sports activities. The City should consider installing basketball, volleyball, and/or tennis courts in future community parks or community centers and explore options to develop half-court basketball courts in neighborhood parks, as appropriate, particularly in underserved areas or where there is expressed neighborhood interest.

Goal PR-3: Protect, preserve, and restore the natural environment for current and future generations.

Policy PR-3.1: Preserve significant natural areas to meet outdoor recreation needs, provide opportunities for community members to connect with nature, and meet habitat and wildlife corridor protection needs.

The City should preserve high-value resources or connected natural resource areas through acquisition or other protection (e.g., conservation easements) as they become available. The City should prioritize particularly high value resources, or those that create important wildlife and recreation connections within the existing system for preservation. This should include greenways and other corridors that provide wildlife habitat connectivity.



Boardwalk over wetlands at Totem Lake Park

Policy PR-3.2: Restore and manage City-owned or managed natural areas to protect and enhance their ecological health, sensitive habitats, and native species.

The City should actively work to improve the conditions of City-owned natural areas through invasive species removal; planting of native species and planting of heat or drought tolerant species; restoration of urban forests, creeks, wetlands, and other habitat; and improvement of hydrological conditions. Management of natural areas should integrate with the City's urban forestry management planning.

The City should pursue opportunities to provide appropriate public access (e.g., trails, viewpoints, wildlife viewing areas, and boat landings) within natural areas to support passive recreation and environmental education.

Policy PR-3.3: Restore Kirkland's public shorelines on Lake Washington in accordance with the Shoreline Master Program to improve habitat, hydrology, and recreational opportunities.

The City should pursue opportunities to remove bulkheads and other impervious surfaces in parks along the Lake Washington shoreline that impede natural habitat functions and increase stormwater flows into the lake. When developing or improving waterfront parks, the City should consider opportunities to restore degraded shorelines, increase riparian vegetation and other habitat features, and provide for additional pervious surfaces and green infrastructure.

Policy PR-3.4: Protect and improve the City's natural systems or features for their value in providing ecosystem and infrastructure services and integrate green infrastructure at City parks to filter and absorb stormwater.

The City should manage forested areas to remove invasive species and encourage the establishment and succession of conifers, other native plants, and heat or drought tolerant species. Parks should be designed and restored to naturally capture and filter stormwater to improve watershed health.

The Parks and Community Services Department should partner with the City's Public Works Department to identify opportunities to coordinate park, greenway, green infrastructure, stormwater and active transportation planning and projects. Examples of green infrastructure include bioretention swales, street trees, stormwater parks, and urban forests.

Policy PR-3.5: Protect and enhance Kirkland's tree canopy to provide wildlife habitat, support community resilience, mitigate urban heat, provide shade, manage stormwater, conserve energy, improve mental and physical health, support sustainability goals, and support traffic calming. Prioritize historically underserved communities.

The City's tree canopy provides enormous benefits to community members, wildlife, and the environment. The City will continue to implement the Urban Forestry Strategic Management Plan and the Sustainability Strategic Plan (formerly Sustainability Master Plan) to protect and enhance the urban tree canopy.

Policy PR-3.6: Promote environmental stewardship and education through informational signage, materials, programs, and partnerships.

The City should enhance partnerships to create opportunities for educational programs and recreational opportunities in the City's natural area parks. The City should integrate interpretive signage that reflects Kirkland's history, culture, natural assets, and wildlife into parks and natural areas to support learning. The City should work with local tribes when developing and updating interpretive signage.

Policy PR-3.7: Work cooperatively with resource management and conservation agencies/organizations and community members to care for streams, enhance and protect urban forests and wetlands, improve fish and wildlife habitat, and provide limited public access.

The City should strengthen the Green Kirkland Partnership to extend its reach and ensure continued care of the City's natural areas. The City should work to enhance partnerships with agencies and organizations such as Eastside Audubon, King Conservation District, and local educational institutions to pursue additional restoration activities, wildlife monitoring, and environmental education.



Volunteers at McAuliffe Park