

## Colman Park Natural Areas: Past Efforts, Vegetation Survey and Recommendations for Future Stewardship



Photo courtesy of Charles Anderson Landscape Architecture

### Executive Summary

Colman Park, located on Lake Washington in the Mount Baker neighborhood of southeast Seattle, is a 24-acre natural area that is predominantly forested. Lake Washington Boulevard winds its way down through the park to the lake; both it and Colman Park were part of the comprehensive plan submitted to the City of Seattle by the Olmsted brothers in 1903. Three ornamental bridges were constructed in 1909, and the Olmsteds completed plans for paths and plantings at Colman Park in 1910. Today, Colman Park is an important site for passive recreation and wildlife viewing, providing trails, lawns and benches in a native forest setting. While formal areas of the park were maintained over the years, natural areas were left to their own devices, becoming gradually infested with invasive plants. The Friends of Colman Park organized in 1993 to improve and expand natural areas in the park, and to increase community and school involvement. In 1996 Starflower Foundation began assisting Friends of Colman Park, concentrating on reestablishing native vegetation in several zones near Lake Washington and along the main trail through the park, and assisting area schools with educational activities in the park.

Removal of non-native plants and re-planting with natives began in some management zones 1997 and 1998, and others in 2000. From 1997 through 2006, more than 100,000 native plants were planted in ten different management zones at Colman Park. In addition, a large amount and variety of native plant seed was sown. An average of 570 person-hours a year were spent doing

maintenance on the project, primarily consisting of hand-removal of non-native plants. Maintenance hours decreased towards the end of Starflower's involvement with the project, with 350 person-hours scheduled for maintenance in 2007.

In the spring of 2007, Starflower Foundation partnered with Seattle Urban Nature to assess the composition of the plant communities in the park. Data was collected using the line-intercept method on 41 transects that spanned each of the ten management zones. In addition, Starflower Foundation assembled comprehensive planting and seeding lists for each management zone.

A total of 203 native species were planted and/or seeded in Colman Park by Starflower Foundation from 1997 to 2007. During the 2007 survey, a total of 191 species were recorded: 133 native, 53 non-native (of which 19 are considered potentially invasive) and five that were not identified to species. Potentially invasive species found were mostly seedlings. Fourteen of the 19 potentially invasive species found showed an average percent cover in zones where they were found of less than 1%, four an average percent cover of 1%, and three an average percent cover between 2 and 5%. A total of 88 species that were planted and/or seeded were not located during the survey.

Based on the survey's findings, Section VI of this report includes recommendations for managing invasive species, improving structural diversity and increasing conifer regeneration developed for future stewards of the area. Of note is the importance of encouraging the development of a structurally diverse, species-rich conifer forest on the site. Care should be taken that invasive species do not regain a foothold. Also, young conifers should be encouraged by periodically clearing competing plants around them and mulching with woodchips.