This project aims to restore native flora and fauna to Heron Meadow while creating opportunities for visitors of all ages to engage with and learn from the site. Interactive structures and natural sculptures invite guests to explore the new Vashon Nature Center (VNC) and meadow restoration while being shown the importance of environmental stewardship.

Initially inspired by the old growth forests that used to exist on Vashon, we wanted to design a site that brought restoration to the forefront. A space where the Vashon community could come to “watch the trees grow up.” Expanding on that idea, our concept aims to enhance the relationship of reciprocity between the VNC and the Vashon Center for the Arts (VCA) by combining restoration and art. We do this by taking the formal galleries of the VCA outside and turning them into wild gallery spaces formed by native planting. Built structures and other artworks made by local artists are intended to help “frame” the ecological restoration of the site, challenging the binary notion of “is it art, or is it nature?” In this way nature will frame the art and the art will frame nature, creating a harmonious space for locals and visitors to “come watch the trees grow up.”
VNC Visitor Center
Meadow Entry and Seasonal Pond

The new Visitor Center reimagines the entry to Heron Meadow by creating a new drop-off area on Cemetery Road and moving vehicular meadow access to the east side of the building. The Visitor Center (VC) is situated on the footprint of the existing milk barn and is expanded with ample new covered exterior spaces on all sides. The main covered walk extends along the west side of the structure and connects the improved sidewalk to the beginning of the Canopy Walk. Just south of the indoor facilities is the outdoor classroom and rain garden. Water from the rain garden flows east through a channel to the seasonal pond. This flow represents the headwaters of the Judd Creek watershed and teaches visitors the importance of being cognizant of the urban water cycle. To the east of the VC is a new covered work court for woodworking projects and staging area for meadow improvement projects. To the southwest of the VC is a formalized council ring and fire pit for small gatherings and presentations. Adjacent to the council ring is a stepped amphitheater that opens toward the Native Bird Mural in one direction and toward the Native Meadow in the other. In this area children are encouraged to run free while parents can relax and take in the view.
Eastern Edge

Retention Pond + Beaver Dam Analog

- By cutting into the northeast corner of the site and building up topography on the site edge, along with a strategically placed Beaver Dam Analog, water from the culvert on the northern edge of the site will be retained, creating an exaggerated wetland ecotone in the winter.
- Part of the dam will be lowered so that if the water needs to overflow, it will be directed into a Native Planting Swale.
- The Native Planting Swale is made up of plants like Black Cottonwood and Sitka Willow that will help to slow down and soak up the water as it moves through the site.
- The Swale also creates a backdrop for the Sculpture walk and the Wild Gallery Rooms.
Eastern Edge

Sculpture Walk + Gallery Rooms

• Gallery Rooms are made up of plants that will bloom throughout the year, ensuring some sort of color all year round.
• Western red cedars evenly spaced throughout the Gallery space will create a ceiling for rooms but not an impermeable wall.
• Eco-sculptures and commissions from local artists can be viewed in a variety of different spaces.
• Hidden pathways and Rooms throughout the proposed planting strip will create a sense of wonder and discovery - never knowing what is around the corner.
• Formal wildflower planting on the western edge of the gallery space creates a soft height transition into the taller shrubs and trees of the eastern side of the site.
South Entry & Nest

The south entry links the Visitor Center (VC) to the Blue Heron Center (BHC) and Vashon Highway via the Canopy Walk. The entry to the elevated walkway begins from the southern end of the Vashon Center for the Arts (VCA) parking lot. Here a raised crossing connects the Canopy Walk across the asphalt and brings plantings from the meadow across the road. The raised crossing will break up the expanse of parking and draw visitors towards the meadow. The beginning of the Canopy Walk rises over the large retaining wall and provides equitable access to the site while framing views through the trees toward the Native Bird Mural and the Sculpture Walk. At the tallest point, the Nest, a net play structure, connects to the ground and allows more adventurous visitors to climb down and engage with the site. Beneath the Canopy Walk is an informal trail that crosses the existing wetland swale by means of the stump crossing, a series of vertical tree trunks cut to different heights that visitors can move between. Along the edges of the bridge are benches and informational signs where visitors are encouraged to rest, observe, and learn about the Meadow. The curving canopy walk creates a loop between the VCA, the BHC, and the VC that encourages flow between these three zones while providing unique views of the Heron Meadow.

**B: North-South site section through the Visitor Center and Canopy Walk.**

*Graphic by Emilio Craddock*

**Perspective looking North from the Canopy Walk toward the Nest.**

*Graphic by Emilio Craddock*
Planting + Habitat Scheme

Plant Palette (below)

- Soft and light colored wildflowers bloom in the spring, drawing attention to the meadow and creating a habitat for native pollinators.
- As the transition into winter occurs, the site fades into winter-blooming soft, white flowers contrasted against evergreens and bright red and linear red osier dogwood.
- Blooming will occur all year long.

Habitat Scheme (right)

- Habitat zones were formed based on the existing ecology of the site. Those three zones are Meadow, Forest, and Wetland.
- The three zones are further broken down to create a variety of seasonal spaces and ecotones that people can interact with, including wildflowers, grass, seasonal gallery spaces, ponds, and swales.

Seasonal Plant Palette.
Graphic by Emma Petersen

PLANTING SCHEME

Graphic by Emma Petersen