Gathering Ground is inspired by themes of reciprocity, responsible interaction with nature, and a desire to serve the humans and non-humans who love the Heron Meadow.

The Indigenous practice of peeling cedar planks from living trees becomes a formal touchstone that inspires many of the design’s shapes and ideas.

A series of “beaver dam analogs” (BDAs) creates a shifting environment of braiding side-channels in the meadow’s creek to further restore the original wetland. The re-imagined visitor center, elevated boardwalks, and ADA gravel paths make the wetland ecosystem visible and accessible without encouraging unsustainable foot traffic.

The south of the meadow becomes a home for school children and outdoor education with nature pads in the wetland and an outdoor “wave shelter” for year-round learning.
Three Central Concepts

Three concepts framed our design throughout the process:

• One is species interactions, where we hoped to encourage relationships between species that are key to healthy ecosystems.

• Another is accumulations, which we thought of as materials gathered intentionally, by humans or other species.

• The third is the cedar harvest, a practice of the Coast Salish people (including the Sqąqabásh people who inhabited Vashon-Maury Island), which models a respectful reliance on natural resources.

Aesthetic of Accumulation

• We were inspired by examples of accumulations on site, including brush piles and artist Britt Freda's mural, featuring a pile of bird eggs.

• We thought about how repeated interactions between species can lead to accumulations of materials such as willow branches in beaver dams, twigs and moss in bird nests, and fields of flowers after repeated pollinations.

Vashon Harvest

Vashon librarians Laurie and Rayna described the Indigenous Coast Salish practice of offering songs to the cedars, taking only what is needed so that the trees might live on, and making use of each component. The cedar harvest inspired the peeling and splitting forms found throughout our designs.
Site Programming

We focused our design on providing for three main user groups:

- Vashon Nature Center visitors, coming for restoration projects, environmental education programming, or simply to enjoy being in nature.
- Vashon Center for the Arts visitors, coming to see a performance in the meadow, enjoy a snack on picnic benches, or stroll along the paths.
- Other species, including birds, trees, flowering plants, insect pollinators, beavers, salmon, and amphibians.

Users | Goals
VNC | VCA | Species

Section A: North of Site
Image by Robby Lai

Northwest Entrance
Image by Allie Rowe

Section B: South of Site
Image by Allie Rowe
We chose native plants to be consistent with our ecological goals.

In the northwestern corner, we aimed to draw people in with seasonal color.

In the alder circle, we chose successional trees to eventually replace the short-lived alders.

In the meadow, we propose a mix of native grasses.

On the green roof, we chose plants that are good at absorbing water and can also withstand drought.

The bioswale and south pollinator wetland plantings follow what has already been planted and nurtured by the folks at the Vashon Nature Center, plus some additional flowering plants in the south pollinator wetland.

On the south facing hill in the north, where Garry Oaks have already been planted, we propose flowering plants common in Garry Oak Prairies.

Around the BDA we propose a few plants that beavers really like (for food and dam materials) and a few they dislike (to prevent clearcutting).

Our wooden structures are made of black locust because it is flexible, rot-resistant, and an invasive species that can be sustainably harvested.

Plant and Material Strategies

- We chose native plants to be consistent with our ecological goals.
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- Around the BDA we propose a few plants that beavers really like (for food and dam materials) and a few they dislike (to prevent clearcutting).
- Our wooden structures are made of black locust because it is flexible, rot-resistant, and an invasive species that can be sustainably harvested.
Grading Strategies

- On the west side, we’ve moved contours to create gently sloping, ADA accessible paths on either side of the central bioswale.
- We’ve created a larger flat area on the top of the hill in the southwest. We’ve kept the contours steep in the southwest corner because our raised boardwalk will help people traverse this area, without requiring fill to be added to the wetland.
- On the east side are changes to help restore a healthy wetland habitat using a beaver dam analog technique. In the NE corner is a shallow pond, a small berm to the east to control flooding, and braiding channels moving south.

Grading Plan

BDA Restoration

Currently the water flowing into the Heron Meadow moves quickly through a straight ditch and does not have much time to infiltrate into the ground. It is also surrounded by invasive reed canary grass. Our goal was to help this area become more ecologically rich by slowing down the water and spreading it into a complex wetland with braiding channels, while also drowning and shading out the reed canary grass. The Beaver Dam Analog (BDA) technique can help us achieve this goal.

How Beaver Dam Analogs Work

1. BDAs, made of woven sticks, are installed in incised streams.
2. Dams divert flows, widening the channel.
4. Beavers take over, creating a complex wetland. A higher water table supports willow and alder.
5. Beaver dams create protected pools of slow, cooled water, supporting salmon spawners and juveniles.
Flow + Flooding

- This diagram shows where we propose installing BDAs and changing the grade to encourage water to flow in a particular way.
- We propose a shallow pond in the north to settle out pollutants, drown out reed canary grass, and support amphibians.
- We propose BDAs to create braiding channels. During low flow periods, we expect the water to remain in these channels. During high flow periods, the water might flood a larger area.
- The small berm we’ve added in the north would help prevent flooding into the northern neighbor’s property. Flooding extends into the southern neighbor’s property, requiring their collaboration. However, flooding already occurs there and seems compatible with the current forested land use.

Seasonal Changes

- These images to the right are sections cut through two channels as they are diverging downstream of a beaver dam, in two seasons. You can find the location of this section in the diagram on the page to the left. In these images, we are looking north, and you can see the wetland boardwalk to one side.
  - In summer, the flow stays within the channels. In the winter, the channel widens to the furthest extent of flooding.
  - We propose planting willows and cottonwood around the channels as fodder for beaver dams.

Cedar Harvest Iterations
Boardwalk Concept and Forms

Components
- Twigs fence
- Nest seatings
- Nest structures
- Plants grow on the structure
- Willow weaving path
- Flowers
- Colors | Seasonality
- BDA

Interspecies Accumulation
- Beaver Dam Analog
- Beaver | Salmon
- Twigs Nest
- Birds | Tree

Cedar Harvest

Forms

Images by Robby Lai
Northwest Gate

- Twigs | Fence | Accumulation
- Gate | Connection
- Nest structures | Seatings | Bird Blind
- Interaction | Play

Northeast Boardwalk

- Peeling Down | Steps | Interaction
- Peeling Up | Seating | Interaction
- Seating | Steps Benches BDA
- Peeling Up | Steps | Interaction
- Model | Form
- Section

Images by Robby Lai
Cedar Harvest | Grow | Color

South Boardwalk

Willow Arch

Woven Fence

Peeling Form | Seating

Vignette

Plan

Plants | Flowers | Color

Images by Robby Lai
Visitor Center & Wetland Walk

A Home for the Vashon Nature Center

- The new visitor center sits on the footprint of the historic milk barn and reclaims its boards for cladding while updating the structure with a more functional layout, green roof, and ADA access.
- A generous deck expands out to an elevated boardwalk while Garry oaks “burst” through the deck to shade the space.
The Wave Shelter

Covered Space in the South Meadow

- The wave shelter provides much-needed covered space for outdoor education in the south meadow.
- Knife plates join glu-lam timbers into a series of ribs clad in cedar boards.
- The sloping surface encourages climbing, offering a grand view of the meadow and an exciting slide back down.
Phasing

Phase 1

**Beaver Dam Analog Wetland Restoration**

1. Solarize reed canary grass (RCG).
2. Re-grade floodplain: create new channels and dig out RCG root mass.
3. Install BDAs.
4. Continually adjust BDAs as needed: reinforce, add, or remove BDAs; install a pond leveler if flooding is problematic.
5. Replant floodplain to support beavers. Include native evergreens to help shade out RCG, and add layers of cardboard and 4–6” mulch to prevent RCG return.

Phase 2

**South Meadow**

1. Construct SE to SW boardwalk, pads, and hopping stumps.
2. Add nature play elements to SW entrance.
3. Construct wave pavilion on hill.

Phase 3

**Grading Changes and Accessible Circulation**

1. Re-grade south hill and alongside bioswale.
2. Install ADA gravel paths.
3. Construct boardwalk connectors and archways.
4. In disturbed meadow areas, replant mix of native grasses.
5. Install entrance plants and Alder Circle understory.

Phase 4

**Milk Barn Renovations and Wetland Boardwalk**

1. Renovate milk barn into new VNC visitor center.
2. Construct deck gathering space, boardwalk over wetland, pads, and hopping stumps.
3. Plant green roof.
4. Plant Garry Oak Prairie wildflowers.

Images by Robby Lai, Allie Rowe, and Colin MacDonald