Our site proposal looks at prairie landscapes both as a precedent typology and as a symbol of generosity. Western Washington prairies were once abundant in the South Puget lowlands, south of Vashon. Modern prairies make up just 3% of the total original native prairies in Western Washington. We promote four themes of generosity with our team’s design: sanctuary, connections, biodiversity, and access for all that visit and dwell on the site.

Because the meadow is so well loved already, we approached the site with a light touch, responding to the programs, features, and ecologies that already exist. Our proposal includes a boardwalk that loops around the site, nature play elements, an amphitheater and other performance spaces, a prairie restoration and management plan, and a new wetland in the northeastern corner of the site.

We are also proposing a new entrance in the southwestern corner of the site. This underutilized area will be a new welcoming point for visitors entering from the west side. The boardwalk, which was inspired by the stream once used as a pathway around the island by the Sqababsh peoples, is ADA accessible around the entirety of the site.
Generous Grounds Key Concepts

Sanctuary
• Welcoming diverse communities through multilingual signage and multicultural art and programming.
• Providing an abundant ecological and cultural space for a diverse set of species.
• Creating spaces where people can rest surrounded by local flora and fauna.

Connections
• Connecting people, especially children, to nature programming.
• Creating spaces for community arts events.
• Creating spaces for informal connections, play, and discovery between users.
• Promoting grounds for interactions between humans, birds, plants, stormwater, and the land.

Access
• Prioritizing ADA accessible paths.
• Using boardwalks to increase access to wet meadow and wetland areas during the rainy season.
• Multilingual signage to support wayfinding for users who don’t speak English as a primary language.

Biodiversity
• Prairie test plots support species under assault from climate change and development.
• Prairie and meadow planting types provide forage for a variety of birds and pollinators.
• Wetland vernal pools provide habitat for vulnerable native amphibians.
Accessibility as Generosity

Our boardwalk promotes accessibility for people who are disabled or have mobility limitations. It also allows the site to be accessible in the rainy season when parts of the meadow and wetland can be very wet and difficult to walk through. The boardwalk supports a variety of different connections in the site, while also allowing for moments of sanctuary and refuge. There are benches, small rooms, decks and gathering spaces throughout.
1. New Southwestern Entrance
The new primary entrance to the site is connected to the parking lot for the Vashon Center for the Arts. Visitors come out onto the boardwalk to see the meadow spread before them.

2. Berry Picking Boardwalk
Berries hug the boardwalk, attracting both humans and birds.

3. Terraced Seating by Youth Play Area
Terraced seating coming off the boardwalk near the play area, giving parents an opportunity to sit and enjoy the sun while also keeping an eye on their children.

4. Seating Facing Meadow View
Benches along the boardwalk allow visitors to sit and rest while taking in the view of the meadow, looking for birds, or waiting to meet up with friends.

5. Bird & Mural Observation Deck
This deck allows people to sit and look at the mural, while also observing the birds that live in the canopy next to the boardwalk.

6. Path Through Wetland
The boardwalk follows the mural wall, increasing access to the mural and allowing visitors to see it from an optimal distance.

7. Connection to Wetland Entry Room
At a low point, the boardwalk intersects with a path that takes visitors through a small vegetated “room” and into the newly restored wetland.

8. Covered Deck with Meadow View
This covered deck can be a small outdoor classroom or rainy season gathering spot.

9. Boardwalk Meets Meadow Grade
Where possible, we designed the boardwalk to have a low grade so that it would feel integrated with the landscape.

10. Outdoor Gallery
This clearing within the vegetation creates a “room” where people can do performances or hold other events.

11. Ramp to Wetland
Where necessary, handrails provide support to Heron Meadow visitors.

12. Wetland Observation Deck
The wetland boardwalk and deck allows visitors to access the southeastern corner of the site in the winter months.
Nature Play Elements

1. Slide Entrance
2. Slide
3. Material Maker Space
4. Stump Trail
5. Log Friendship Circle
6. Sculptural Play Garden
7. Wild Meadow Zone
8. Willow Hut
9. Meadow Plantings

Deschampsia caespitosa
Polystichum munitum
Festuca rubra
Symphoricarpus
Grove Amphitheater Elements

1. Wood deck
2. Amphitheater-style Seating on Existing Hill
3. ADA Amphitheater Seating
4. Northwest Entrance Meadow / Noise Screening
5. Multilingual / Sculptural Wayfinding

Successional Planting = Big Leaf Maples

- Festuca roemeri
- Deschampsia cespitosa
- Lupinus albicouls
- Camas quamash
- Lomatium trunculatum
- Balsamorhiza deltoidea
- Blechnum spicant
- Carex inops
North Entrance Elements

1. VNC Office, Lab, and Toolshed
2. Covered Outdoor Classroom
3. East-West Sidewalk and Entrance
4. Propagation Station
5. Prairie Restoration Test Plots
6. Garry Oak Room
7. Yardwaste Composting Area
8. Street Parking
9. Curbed Street Greenway
10. Loading zone
11. Entrance
12. Gravel Driveway
13. Stump Trail
14. Mower’s Entrance
Education and Stewardship

The prairie-oak restoration plan assists in the Heron Meadow’s adaptation to climate change. The phasing plan takes an adaptive management approach to prairie-oak restoration, which supports the Vashon Nature Center’s focus on outdoor education and ecological restoration. Student volunteers will have the opportunity to learn about an endemic and ecoculturally significant ecosystem and steward its re-establishment on site.
Prairie-Oak Plant Palette and Species Diagram
Image by Jocine Velasco
Wetland Restoration
Cleansing Water | Protecting Habitat

Much of the Heron Meadow site has been recently restored to high quality wetland habitat. However, the northeastern corner of the site is a degraded wet landscape where the water is channelized. We propose using dams and topography to create a series of pools. After the water enters the site, it moves southwards from one pool to the next. When the pools begin to overflow, the water spills over into a channel along the western edge of this proposed wetland system.

Much of the water coming onto the site is roadwater runoff, which can carry a number of pollutants: organic pollutants from petroleum products and inorganic pollutants including heavy metals from cars and road materials. By extending the amount of time the water spends in the wetland on the site, many of these pollutants have time to settle out, and by choosing plants, like willows, that can remediate those pollutants, we can improve the quality of the water that has moved through the site so that it is higher quality when it leaves the site than it was when it entered.

The pools are also important habitat for native species. In the summer months, this area can be an educational opportunity and a laboratory, but it is also habitat. In a future where climate change brings unexpected rainfalls, this proposal offers land managers an opportunity to manipulate the waterflow using dams to protect the vernal pools when species are in a sensitive phase of their life cycle by directing the water to the deeper channel along the west of the wetland and allowing those species that require vernal pools to thrive.

This design provides opportunities for visitors to get close to the wetland. However, the vernal pools are blocked off by a deeper channel to their west. As a result, when there are heavy rains, people do not have access to this sensitive area, protecting its habitat value.
In the summer months, this area is a laboratory, providing both habitat and educational opportunities.

**Water Flow Diagram**
Image by Claudia Sackett Hennum

**Summer Wetland**
Image by Claudia Sackett Hennum
Moe’s Story

At the young age of 7, Moe began to visit the Heron Meadow and a lifelong love story of girl + meadow began. When she was a little girl, she would spend time at the nature play area, get her hands dirty at the materials maker space, and race her friends down the hill to the willow hut. When she became a teenager, Moe became fascinated with prairie restoration and began to volunteer at the VNC Lab. She loved to experiment at the test plots.

From this experience, Moe learned the valuable relationship between plants and birds and so began her love of bird watching. She would spend her mornings at the bird observation deck spotting her favorite species. It was there that she met the love of her life, Ray, a fellow birdwatcher. The two loved the Heron Meadow so much that when the time came for them to wed, they held their ceremony at the Outdoor Gallery.

The two love birds eventually started a family and quickly their daughter Nico also became a part of the meadow. You could catch the three of them dancing to their favorite musicians at the Grove Amphitheater with their fellow community members. Moe and Ray grew old together and would still spend their time walking around the meadow admiring the ecotones and enjoying the sculptural art.