Our design for the Heron Meadow invites people to interact with the ecology and wildlife on Vashon Island. Through native habitat restoration and stormwater management, this wetland meadow becomes a space for native species to thrive. Locals and visitors can step into the site and discover and explore this native ecology; fostering a relationship between the two. Based on the schools and arts center near the site, we envision Heron Meadow as an outdoor classroom. This is a place where people are welcome to come for a little while, and keep coming back. Heron Meadow becomes a place to learn and linger.
As we zoom into a .45-mile radius, the importance of educational areas in Chautauqua Elementary School, McMurray Middle School, and Vashon High School becomes obvious. Pathways to Heron Meadow can be drawn and used to connect people to the site so that it can be used for educational purposes.

Within a two-mile diameter, we can see the wealth of green space close to Heron Meadow, as well as the crucial arterial that moves throughout the Vashon Highway. This site is well connected, and greens spaces abound on Vashon. Heron Meadow draws visitors with its unique qualities and must meet the needs of the surrounding community. This includes people from the Vashon Roasterie as well as visitors at the Vashon Center for the Arts.

The location of Heron Meadow so close to educational facilities makes it a crucial learning space for children. This has informed both our outdoor classroom concept and how people may move throughout the site. Heron Meadow programatically becomes a space for learning. Through observing, playing, exploring, connecting, appreciating, and gathering, human users can learn about the ecological users with whom they share the space. Learning about our relationship with ecology can help build a reciprocal understanding that will inspire children to protect and conserve the unique Vashon ecosystems.
Entrance Area
We use the original north entrance as our main entrance area. Several types of structures like platform steps and a pavilion are designed to make the entrance more attractive.

Ecological Pond
The pond is located at a low point in the meadow to provide habitat and stormwater management. Structures like explorer platforms can be used for outdoor exploration.

Open Meadow
We designed our path along the meadow edges so that the open meadow has enough space for public activities. Across the site, we use boardwalks in areas that will be wet during the rainy season.

Western Edge

Nature Maze
In the maze, children can continue their exploration. There is a boardwalk across the maze that guides students and other visitors into the meadow from the southeastern corner.

Pollinator Garden
The garden is located at the southwestern corner and provides habitats for native insects and flowers.

Mural Wall
Native birds are painted on the mural wall.

Alder Grove
This area is a social gathering space with benches and art structures.

Site Plan Design and Key Areas
Graphics by Yingjie Luo
Site Ecologies

Wildlife

Many animals already exist on the site, thriving as year-round residents as well as migratory spring/summer residents. The section below shows different ecological zones and possible traces of wildlife as they might move through the site. Birds like the Violet-Green Swallow and the Steller’s Jay may only appear in warmer months, while Sharp-Shinned Hawks and Black-Tailed Deer may be more frequent visitors throughout the year.

Plants

Through the same ecological zones, native plantings build vital habitat for wildlife and support the fragile Judd Creek watershed ecology. Wetland plants, such as willow and skunk cabbage, bolster the wetland to filter water and protect salmon. Deciduous natives also tell a seasonal story of the site for visitors, who will come to know the changing colors of autumn to winter and so on from year to year.

 Movements through Zones with Relative Plants & Species

Graphic by Lena Owens & Group
Entrance

The entrance to the meadow is an essential part of the experience. In its current state, the meadow has elements of great interest that need to be enhanced and utilized in designing the space. The milk barn is a great asset of historical significance, and the lower land next to it has potential as a rich wetland environment. To harness both of these characteristics, multiple entry points with various hierarchical designs encourage curious individuals to take alternative entrances. The main entrance is located next to the milk barn, making use of its aged wood texture.

View of Pavilion and Seating Area

Graphic by Saeed Al-Shidhani
Pavilion Design
Throughout the meadow, paths are meant to function only as guides, and breaking away from linear walkways to explore is encouraged. The design of the pavilion achieves a similar goal. The pavilion defines a path that is designed to flow with the site’s topography and includes a number of openings. The pavilion space therefore helps focus and guide visitors at the entry area and then, upon entering the site, they are free to explore.

Succession
The pavilions are also designed to serve functional purposes. The Covered Structure adjacent to the Milk Barn acts as a covered exhibition space for events hosted by the Vashon Center for the Arts. The Dynamic Structure is a place to learn about the site and its native wildlife. The third part of the entryway is a series of benches that open up to the view of the meadow and all of its features.
Seasonal Changes

By only utilizing native plants and trees, the Ecological Pond will serve as an example of the natural forces and changing colors of life throughout the year. As the year progresses, plants change form and color, creating a different experience for every season. Water level in the pond is dependent on the amount of rainfall and will also change, and the pond is able to accommodate these differences.

Playground

The Ecological Pond is a biodiverse space where wildlife and plants coexist. This environment is a great place for young visitors curious about life and nature. The pond is designed with stepping logs that can serve as a playground. Through these spaces and the larger platform with educational elements, kids can learn more about the environment and the meadow ecosystem.
Connection
The nature maze boardwalk provides a connection for children to move between the schools that are close to the site and the Blue Heron Arts Center that provides after school programming for children. This connection provides a safe and dry path through the site that children can take instead of walking on Cemetery Road, which lacks sidewalks. This vital path ties the site to the rest of the community and brings people directly into the path of nature along their walk. Maybe they will discover something else along the way, too.

Exploration
Here in the southeastern corner, Heron Meadow is at its wettest. Through natural elements, children are able to orient themselves while also exploring and playing on their own. The nature maze is a place that is physically legible but also provides independence for children to move on their own. Different elements can be used to keep children above the water and offer different opportunities when the ground is wetter. The shelter provides respite from the rain or sun and is a good meeting place and landmark.
**Pollinator Garden**

The goal of the pollinator garden is to create a space with ecological, educational, and recreational function. The hierarchy of the garden is emphasized by the rock planting beds, which are different heights. Paths crossing the pollinator garden guide people to different parts of the site. Outdoor classes as well as volunteer work could happen in the garden.

**Mural Wall**

Walking along the western edge of the meadow, visitors can view the mural wall painted with native birds. This design includes a woodchip path along the mural wall to allow visitors to get closer to wall and its beautiful bird paintings. To help play its educational function, there are benches for outdoor classes along with QR Codes on the wall, which link to information about the native birds.

**Section of Site’s Western Edge**