Clatsop County’s coastal prairie has been shrinking, and its value to wildlife diminishing, for many years. The same landscape that beckons to elk and butterflies, hawks and voles, beckons to humans too, for everything from livestock grazing to golf courses and oceanfront homes. By conserving properties in the Clatsop Plains, North Coast Land Conservancy is attempting to set aside part of the coastal prairie for native wildlife. But little of it is in its native condition. The presence of Scotch broom, for example, has added nitrogen to the soil, setting the stage for invasion by blackberries, non-native pasture grasses and other weeds that change the essential character.

At North Coast Land Conservancy we’ve been pretty successful at turning degraded streams and ponds back into healthy homes for wetland plants and animals. And forest ecologists now have a good handle on how to take land that’s been repeatedly logged and turn it toward becoming a mature rainforest again.

But restoration of coastal grasslands remains a mystery, one we at NCLC are eager to solve. So we’re experimenting on plots of land in the Clatsop Plains—the series of parallel dune ridges running north to south between the Columbia River and the mouth of the Necanicum River—to see what techniques work best for turning degraded grasslands back into thriving wildlife habitat.

In their natural state, coastal prairies are covered in native grasses and wildflowers—and not much else, thanks to blowing sand that continuously disturbs the landscape. Just because there are no shrubs or trees in the dunes doesn’t mean they are devoid of life. On the contrary, coastal prairies host the greatest variety of wildlife of any habitat type in North America, according to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. But Clatsop County’s coastal prairie has been shrinking, and its value to wildlife diminishing, for many years. The same landscape that beckons to elk and butterflies, hawks and voles, beckons to humans too, for everything from livestock grazing to golf courses and oceanfront homes. By conserving properties in the Clatsop Plains, North Coast Land Conservancy is attempting to set aside part of the coastal prairie for native wildlife.

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HOW DO YOU RESTORE A PRAIRIE?

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Join us for a Wild Evening in Astoria

Friday, October 23, 5 - 7 p.m.
The Loft at the Red Building, 20 Basin Street, Astoria
$10 in advance (or at the door if available)

We’re planning a gala evening celebrating coastal conservation and release of the landmark book The Wild Edge: Freedom to Roam the Pacific Coast (Braided River), a dazzling photographic journey from the deep ocean to the summit of coastal-fronting mountains from Baja to the Arctic. Lead essayist Bruce Barcott will read and share images by photographer Florian Schultz following an introduction by NCLC’s Katie Voelke, one of the heroes of coastal conservation profiled in The Wild Edge. Enjoy food and drink and buy signed copies of the book. Proceeds benefit NCLC’s conservation work on the Oregon Coast. We expect the event to sell out; for advance tickets, visit NCLCtrust.org or call Lynette at 503-738-9126.
CONSERVATION IN THE CLATSOP PLAINS

The land between the Columbia River and the Necanicum River south of Gearhart consists of a series of parallel north-south dunes known as the Clatsop Plains—open, rolling, grassy plains that were devoid of shrubs and trees until settlers began farming and building houses in the mid-1800s. Groundwater trapped in swales between the dunes created wetlands, lakes and streams, and the landscape evolved to include native prairie on the dunes and forested wetlands along the streams, which flow alongside or into Neacoxie Creek and empty into the Necanicum Estuary. The lands here serve as an important corridor for migrating birds and other species and are essential habitat for the threatened Oregon silverspot butterfly. These dunes and wetlands are the focus of what we call our Neacoxie Wildlife Corridor Conservation Initiative, one of five such initiatives that target connectivity of key habitat types or ecological values in the region we serve.

Thanks in large part to NCLC, which owns or manages more than 700 acres here, and landowners including Oregon State Parks, the National Park Service, and the Oregon Military Department at Camp Rilea, much of the Clatsop Plains prairie and its connecting forests and wetlands have been conserved. Our focus here is now on stewardship. Some of those efforts are detailed in this issue of the newsletter.

GET OUT. GET MUDDY. INVITE THE BUTTERFLIES HOME

We Need YOU to Help Plant Violets

WE PROVIDE the tools

YOU WEAR boots, gloves, and clothes for the weather

Friday and Saturday
November 20 & 21

E-mail Stewardship Director Melissa Reich (melissar@NCLCtrust.org) for details and to let her know you (or your group) are coming

The early blue violet plays a critical role in the life cycle of the Oregon silverspot butterfly (see page 3). We’re calling on every able-bodied citizen to help us plant nearly 16,000 violets in one weekend in the dunes between Warrenton and Gearhart.
NURTURING OUR NATIVE VIOLET TO WELCOME SILVERSPOTS, THE CLATSOPL PLAINS NEED PLENTY OF THESE

It’s not a rare plant: If you live on the North Coast, you may see early blue violet (also known as hookedspur violet, or *Viola adunca*) growing in the gravel of your driveway. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t special. The Oregon silverspot butterfly lays its eggs only near the dried stems and leaves of this violet, which becomes the only food that the caterpillars then eat before they transform into butterflies.

A project to reinvigorate the violet population on the northern Oregon and southern Washington coast—the northern end of the Oregon silverspot butterfly’s range—has been under way for more than a decade. It culminates Nov. 20 and 21 when we invite the community to help us plant thousands of violet seedlings on three of our prairie properties between Warrenton and Gearhart (see story at left). The National Park Service and Willapa National Wildlife Refuge will also be planting a portion of the 16,000 native violet seedlings raised for this purpose.

FROM SEEDS TO SEEDLINGS

Collection of violet seeds begins, from plants growing wild in the Clatsop Plains.

Several generations of violets are grown for their seed at a conservation nursery in Corvallis.

Stewardship interns transport 16,000 seedlings to our Circle Creek Habitat Reserve in Seaside.

AT HOME IN THE COASTAL PRAIRIE

The Oregon silverspot is a butterfly of the grasslands: of coastal meadows, such as those on Cascade Head north of Lincoln City and Mt. Hebo in Tillamook County (where this photo was taken in July), and sand dunes such as the Clatsop Plains. Once common from northern California’s Del Norte County to Grays Harbor, Washington, the Oregon silverspot’s numbers have dwindled as its habitat has shrunk.

Habitat restoration efforts are under way to welcome back the butterfly. This insect needs open space with plenty of nectar plants for adult butterflies to feed on, plants such as thistle (in the photo above) as well as yarrow, pearly everlasting, goldenrod and aster. But first it requires early blue violet plants, on which its larvae feed (see story at left). Our efforts to conserve and connect habitat in the Neacoxie Wildlife Corridor and restore the prairie include participation in a collaborative project to give a boost to the Oregon silverspot butterfly.

THANK YOU TO OUR PRAIRIE PARTNERS

LISTENING TO THE LAND 2016: WATER

Water defines life and landscape on the Oregon Coast, whether it’s falling from the sky, flowing down forested canyons, mingling in an estuary, or rolling in gray swells. We’re embracing water as the theme for our 2016 Listening to the Land speaker series, which kicks off in January. In its seventh season, Listening to the Land will explore the impact of water on geology, water’s role in our climate, groundwater and its role in the unusual plants that populate the fen, the rainforest and its iconic salmon, and the marine reserve newly established off Cape Falcon. The series, free and open to the public, is produced in partnership with our friends at the Necanicum Watershed Council, with support from event host Seaside Public Library.

Watch for flyers listing this year’s speakers, dates and other opportunities to engage with North Coast Land Conservancy this winter, including hands-on stewardship days. To sign up for our monthly e-newsletter, announcing these upcoming events, visit our website at NCLCtrust.org.

Photo: Sand Lake estuary, Tillamook County

DONOR VOICE: Betsy Ayres

I moved here after college because this is the place on the planet that really speaks to me. This planet’s survival—which includes people that I care about very much—is rooted in the health of the planet itself. Land conservation is the surest and most immediate, local way that I can see to try and make a difference. It’s like that Mark Twain quote: “Buy land, they’re not making it anymore.” There are more people all the time, but not more land or water or air or habitat for wildlife. It’s the perpetuity thing that really hooks me into supporting NCLC: these properties, these habitats we’re conserving, will be there forever. They’ll be there for my grandchild’s children. That’s really important to me.

Now that I’m retired, I have a steady income, so I make automatic monthly donations; there couldn’t be an easier way for me to donate, even though I often make additional memorial or tribute gifts. I really like things that make my life easier, and that does! And from my experience working for non-profits, I know that monthly giving makes program planning so much easier.

Cannon Beach resident Betsy Ayres is well known for her community advocacy. She has served as a Head Start center manager and as a member of the Cannon Beach City Council and Planning Commission. She joined the board of North Coast Land Conservancy in 2010.

LAND: THEY’RE NOT MAKING IT ANYMORE

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FUNDING WILL SUPPORT COASTAL EDGE INITIATIVE

A $58,000 grant from Meyer Memorial Trust is helping NCLC launch its new Coastal Edge Initiative. This project seeks to conserve tracts of forest land between Tillamook Head and Nehalem Bay, creating corridors of ecological connectivity of unprecedented scale on the Oregon Coast. The money will help cover added planning, outreach, communications, and fund-raising costs over the next two years.