

# **Habitat Acquisition Trust**

**Good Neighbours Project/**

**Habitat Stewardship Project for Species at Risk**

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**2015 Landowner Contact Evaluation**

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**Prepared for: Habitat Acquisition Trust**

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## **1. Program Description**

In 2015, Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT) conducted two programs that included site visits to property owners: the Good Neighbours Urban Forest program and the Habitat Stewardship program for Species at Risk. During these visits HAT provided homeowners with the knowledge and resources to care for trees and/or endangered species, as well as tools for managing their property in environmentally responsible ways. The program included select events and demonstrations in which the public was invited to share knowledge and get involved in caring for neighbourhood trees and species.

HAT conducted a total of 53 site visits in 2015. Of this, eight visits focused specifically on Species at Risk through the Habitat Stewardship Program; the majority of visits were focused on the Urban Forest Program and property assessment. Habitat Stewardship Program visits primarily focused on increasing knowledge of and habitat for bats, Western Painted Turtle, Sharp-tailed Snake and Blue-grey Tailedropper. Three of the 53 site visits were to community groups or neighbourhood gardens.

During landowner visits, HAT staff toured participants' property and helped to identify species of interest, important ecological features and recommended actions and behaviours that could contribute to the overall ecological health and sustainability of the land.

After visits, HAT commonly provided landowners with pamphlets highlighting native species and tips for removing invasive species. At times they would also follow up with email or delivery of bat boxes as necessitated by findings during their property visit.

This document reviews the efficacy of the landowner engagement as part of HAT's Good Neighbours Urban Forest and Habitat Stewardship programs by reporting on the results of telephone surveys carried out with 28 of the 53 participants who received site visits from HAT in 2015.

## **2. Program Evaluation Methodology**

Twenty-eight participants from HAT's Good Neighbours Urban Forest and Habitat Stewardship programs were interviewed by telephone between February 3, 2016 and February 20, 2016. This sample represents 53% of the 53 total program participants.

Participants were called using contact information provided by Habitat Acquisition Trust. In instances where only email addresses were available, participants were emailed and invited to participate in a phone interview. Participants were asked a series of questions to assess their experience in three areas: general trends in program participants, behavioural changes as a result of HAT's visit, and HAT's profile and efficacy of engagement techniques. A full list of interview questions is located at the end of this document. Interviews generally lasted between seven and 10 minutes, although a few went as long as 20. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept anonymous and confidential, and that the survey was being conducted by an independent contractor, not a HAT employee, so feedback could be provided freely.

Phone interviews were semi-formal to encourage candid conversation and open sharing of information. Questions were asked in the order that felt most natural to the context of the conversation. Detailed notes were kept during interviews and were analyzed for the writing of this report.

### 3. Evaluation Findings & Interpretation

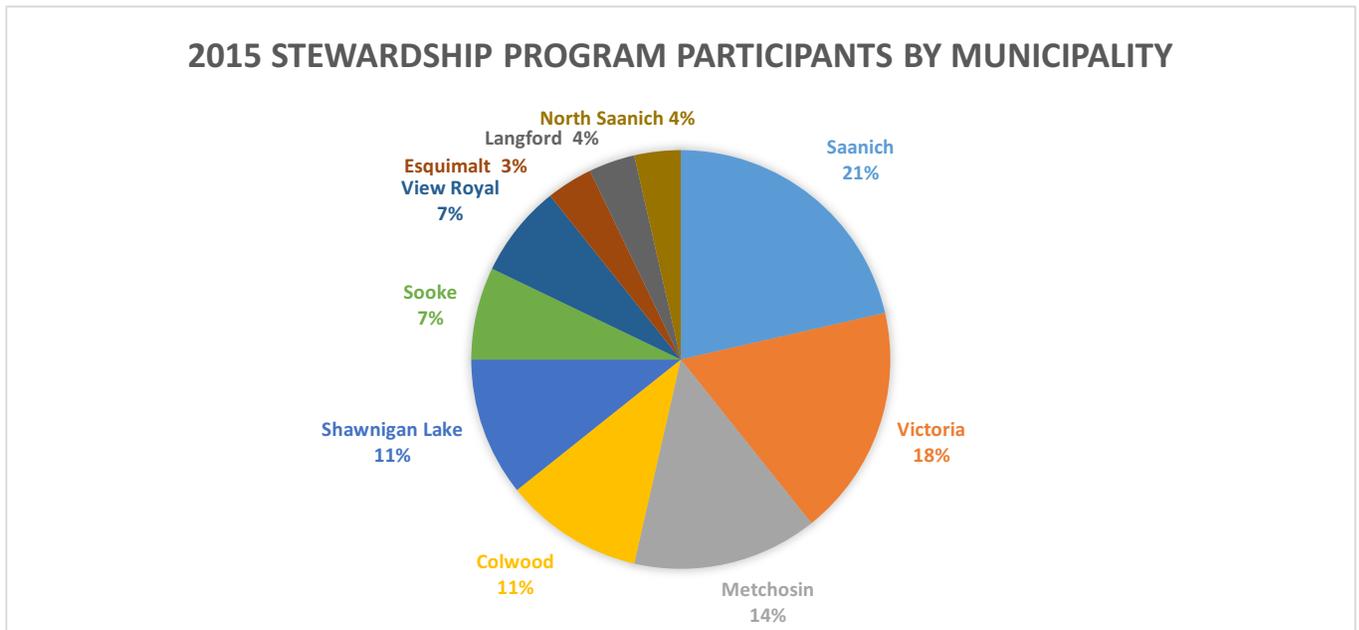
#### 3.1 General Trends

HAT was successful in increasing participant knowledge regarding identified environmental issues and concerns. Nearly all participants interviewed reported gaining new insight and information about the issues affecting their property that brought them to be in initial contact with HAT.

##### 3.1.1 Municipality

Participants were asked to identify their municipality. The majority of participants were located in the municipalities of Saanich, Victoria, Metchosin, Colwood and Shawnigan Lake.

Most notably, participants located in Victoria spoke to urban property management and referenced dealing with smaller and more condensed plots of land. Participants located in rural municipalities often expressed managing larger land parcels and were commonly dealing with broad scale land and species management.



### 3.1.2 Environmental Concerns

- ◆ ***Can you tell me about the environmental issue(s) or concern(s) that brought you to be in contact with HAT?***

Program participants provided a variety of responses. Most notably participants highlighted:

- Preserving biodiversity
- Invasive species management
- Garry oak ecosystem protection and preservation
- Bat management
- Promoting native plant and insect growth

The majority of participants (42%) expressed concern for supporting native plant systems, and were looking for advice and recommendations on invasive species management. Of these twelve participants, five had either picked up a pamphlet or had received information on HAT's services from a public event and were seeking a general property consult to learn about what species were on their land. Three participants specifically mentioned concern for Garry oak conservation on their property.

The second most noted concern from participants was bat management. Most often participants had noticed bats on their property and were seeking further information and support from HAT in their management.

### 3.1.3 Before/After HAT Visits

- ◆ ***On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being low and 5 being high), would you please rate your knowledge of the environmental issue(s) you mentioned before being contacted by HAT? b) And what would that be after HAT contacted you?***

Participants were asked to rate their knowledge of their noted environmental issue(s) or concern(s) prior to being in contact with HAT, and then again after the property visit.

All but two program participants indicated an increase in knowledge that was attributed to HAT's visit to their property. In these cases, both participants expressed that they already held a substantial amount of information regarding their property, land management and identified environmental concern. They noted that the site visit was affirming, provided confidence and was encouraging in and of itself.

On average, participants' knowledge increased by a score of 1.5, when rating their own knowledge on a scale of 1-5. On average, participant knowledge was initially at 2.5, and on average, raised to 4.

Following last year's findings, participants fell into three general categories:

- A. *Newcomers*: Participants who were seeking general consultation for their property. They did not express strong environmental issues or concerns, but had their interest piqued by an introduction to HAT. Newcomers were generally very interested to learn more and were also cautious about the level of commitment expected of them.
- B. *Adopters*: Participants who had a strong foundation of knowledge regarding their property and environmental management, but were looking for expert advice on how to take their management to the next level. Often times these participants knew what they wanted to achieve and were seeking support in how to operationalize their vision.
- C. *Experts*: Participants who held an extensive amount of knowledge regarding local ecology, land management practices and large scale environmental issues. These participants were seeking affirmation of their property management plans and were looking to share ideas on technique and practice.

Many newcomers from outside of the Victoria municipality expressed a desire to have more regular contact with HAT and regretted that they were not able to attend general meetings more often due to distance. It may be beneficial for HAT to consider alternative mediums or forums for participants in rural areas.

### **3.2 Changes in Behaviour**

#### **3.2.1 Remembering Recommendations Made:**

- ◆ *Do you remember some of the suggestions that HAT staff made during or after their visit to your land? Can you share a few with me?*

All participants were able to list suggestions HAT staff had made during their site visit. These included:

- Removing invasive species (English ivy, holly)
- What native plants work well as replacements for invasive species in particular locations (example: clover for grass)
- Planting native species
- Leaving leaves on the ground instead of raking or mowing in Garry Oak meadows
- Leaving leaves on the ground to help fertilize clay based soil
- Installing bat houses
- Inserting logs in ponds and creating sandy beach areas for western painted turtles

### 3.2.2 Changes Pursued

◆ ***Have you pursued some of the activities suggested by HAT staff or HAT's information package?***

Sixty-seven per cent of participants had begun to pursue activities suggested by HAT.

Of those that had pursued activities, top actions mentioned were (ranked) invasive species removal, planting native plant species, installing bat houses and monitoring for species at risk.

The majority of participants who had pursued HAT's suggestions noted that they had not fully pursued all activities mentioned by HAT. Some had plans to complete the suggestions in the future, while others did not.

◆ ***Have you decided to pursue any of these changes within the next 12 months?***

Seventy-nine percent of participants have plans to pursue activities suggested by HAT in the next 12 months. This included the 67% of participants who had already begun incremental activity. Many participants were waiting for their plans to be finalized and for weather to improve. Planned activities include:

- Invasive species removal
- Installing bat houses
- Installing owl houses
- Planting native species
- Building fences around Garry Oaks
- Inserting logs for painted turtle monitoring

### 3.2.3 Barriers to Implementation:

◆ ***Is there anything preventing you from making the changes suggested by HAT? What would make it easier for you to pursue the changes you would like to make?***

Primary barriers to implementation were:

- *Time:* Participants had been unable to find time to gather the supplies or materials needed for their planned activity. Top time pressures included children, domestic animal care and professional work commitments. Many participants referenced having been recently retired and travelling for significant portions of the year.
- *Weather:* Participants were keen to describe plans they are looking to implement in the coming months. Many commented that they had used last summer as time to absorb the information passed along by HAT, and were now waiting for the end of rainy season to begin planting.

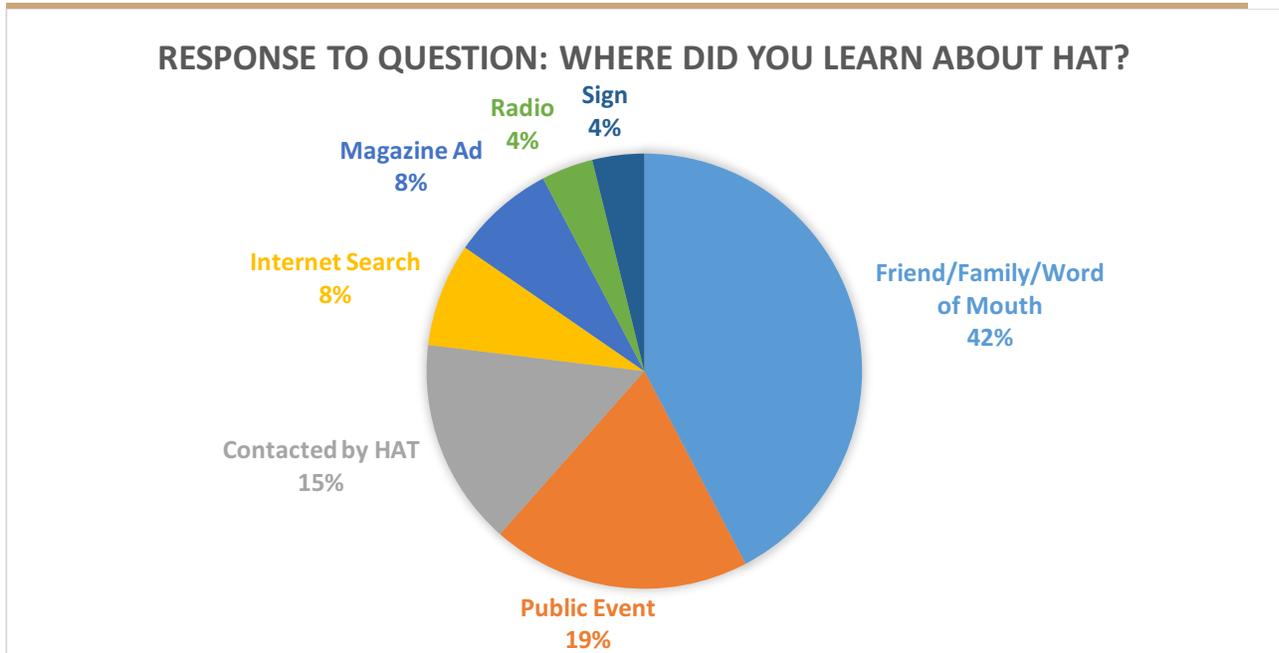
Similarly, participants who were dealing with bats were waiting for the hibernation period to end before beginning monitoring.

- *Physical limitations:* Eighteen per cent of participants reported that physical limitations were inhibiting them from pursuing changes suggested by HAT. In most cases, participants were still planning on implementing changes but had built out timelines to cover incremental actions of the next 2 – 5 years. In particular, invasive species removal (English ivy and Scotch broom) were mentioned as physically challenging.
- *Financial limitations:* Eighteen per cent of participants reported being limited by financial circumstances. One participant expressed feeling challenged in deciding which suggested changes, in this case native plants, to purchase first – weighing both cost and probability of survival. The same participant commented that it was hard to keep momentum when their financial situation only allowed for minimal changes year after year.
- *Preference:* A handful of participants stated that they would not be going forward with all or some of HAT’s suggested changes due to personal preference (enjoyed a particular invasive plant on their property), family preference (disagreement over implementing changes within the household) and/or neighbour’s preference (in one case a neighbor strongly opposed the aesthetic of a bat box). Two participants referenced not having installed based bat boxes due to them being much larger, heavier and more cumbersome than expected. A consideration for HAT would be to provide variety in the size of bat houses where possible for participant consideration.

### 3.3 HAT’s Profile/Efficacy of Techniques

◆ ***Prior to being contacted for this outreach project, had you heard of Habitat Acquisition Trust, or HAT?***

All but four participants had previously heard of HAT. These four participants had been contacted by HAT about doing an assessment of their property. Of the remaining participants, the majority had either known about HAT through word of mouth or from exposure during a public event, such as a native plant walk or public market stall.



◆ ***What information or service provided by HAT was most useful to you?***

HAT’s personal property visit was mentioned numerous times by participants as the most helpful aspect of the program. In particular, participants spoke to the benefit of having staff physically on site. Being able to identify plants and speak to potential opportunities for change and/or species monitoring was described as much more valuable than theoretical discussions or readings on the subject. Many participants from the ‘adopter’ group described it as helping them to get to the next step in making their visions become operational.

Participant responses:

*“What to put in and where to put it – plant wise. What will thrive and be the most natural for the area and the light.”*

*“Just the visit – actually coming out and looking at everything. Was more than theoretical – very specific!”*

*“I was amazed at how quickly they came out, how knowledgeable they were and how willing they were to work with us. Fantastic and truly impressed. Gave us quite a bit of help!”*

Several participants were impressed by the support and encouragement received from HAT. They described their experience with HAT staff as “friendly” and “open”, and expressed being able to ask questions without feeling rushed or judged by their level of knowledge. Additionally, a significant portion of participants referenced receiving pamphlets and/or email follow up to their discussions with HAT, and that it was helpful in maintaining their momentum.

◆ ***Do you feel that the HAT staff was knowledgeable about the issues affecting your property [and Species at Risk]?***

This question was met with animation and enthusiasm from most participants. All participants confirmed that they felt that HAT was knowledgeable about the environmental issues affecting their property. Three participants recalled questions that staff could not answer on the spot and were impressed that in each case they received a follow up email with responses.

◆ ***Would you feel comfortable contacting HAT Staff with any questions you may have about managing your property?***

All participants responded “yes” to this question. In most cases participants responded with “definitely” and “absolutely”.

*“Absolutely. I think of them as the go-to people for environmental sustainability in this kind of habitat!”*

Four participants mentioned confusion as to who to contact at HAT with further questions. In one of these cases, the participant could not recall if HAT was to follow up with further information or if they were to reach out and request the materials. The participant was not upset, but was hopeful that their property information could be recalled.

This points to an opportunity for HAT to clarify to landowners how and who to contact in their organization with further questions. These participants had noted confusion from reviewing the website when seeking information on who to contact with their specific questions. An important consideration for HAT is participants’ various levels of computer literacy. Providing both email and phone contact information to participants would ensure flexibility.

◆ ***Do you have any other comments or suggestions for HAT?***

The majority of participants had felt that all of their comments had been provided through the process of conversing with the interviewer. Many wished to express their appreciation and support for HAT:

*“I really support HAT; I think they are a fantastic resource for the Capital Region. I wish they had more funding!”*

*“I wish some good luck and public support!”*

One participant had an interesting suggestion for HAT to consider:

*“I wish they had means to do more of it! It would be great if they could work with schools - bringing bat houses and owl houses on school properties and working with the children”*

In three cases, participants requested the interviewer pass along personal questions for follow up by HAT. In these instances, the interviewer reiterated being an independent contractor, not a HAT employee, and that the survey was confidential and anonymous. The interviewer then did provide the opportunity to record the participant's question along with their personal information as a separate follow up document to be submitted to HAT. These follow up questions were sent as a separate document and submitted along with this report to HAT.

#### **4. Survey Biases**

All participants interviewed for this survey were participants in the landowner engagement project. Many expressed personal connections, both newly forged and long standing, with HAT. These connections are certainly a strength of the program and also are likely to influence the responses of participants. In a few cases where participants did have follow up questions or comments for HAT, they were very clear to express that they did not have unmet expectations or negative associations of the program or staff, and that they were extremely appreciative of the services they had received.

Lastly, this survey was conducted in the winter. Most participants had their site visit with HAT in early summer 2015. Many of the participants were slow to recall their experience at the outset of the conversation, but recalled more details throughout the duration of the interview. Few respondents had reference materials on hand during the time of their call. Thus, there may be instances where the survey serves as a trigger for participants to recall a richer portfolio of suggested changes than reported.

## 5. Summary

HAT's 2015 Good Neighbours/Habitat for Species at Risk program was highly successful in:

- Educating participants on the ecological make up of their property, native plant species, species at risk and broader plant identification
- Supporting participants in their efforts to enhance conservation efforts on their property
- Providing landowners a network of support for future engagement through introductions to HAT, various communities of support (i.e. native plant walks) and to online and print resources

The Species at Risk program participants reported mixed results in their ability to provide ongoing monitoring data to HAT. This was in part due to time of year and weather. However, there were unclear reports on what level of engagement was expected from participants, specifically from 'newcomers' and 'adopters'. Drawing up example reporting schedules and templates for participants could aid in their knowledge of how and when to monitor species of interest.

This survey demonstrates that participants gained knowledge about the ecological features of their property, as well as actions that could be taken to increase resilience and preservation of native plants and species. The most common barriers to implementing actions suggested by HAT were largely related to landowners' personal circumstances rather than effectiveness of the site visit or materials shared. A consideration for HAT is to increase availability and affordability of suggested plant species to landowners. Having the suggested native plants on hand for landowners to purchase would increase their momentum for implementing changes to their property. It could also benefit HAT if they were to facilitate the service for a fee. Alternatively, facilitating a network of landowners willing to share seeds and cuts of native plants could also help to mitigate barriers and increase networks for participants.

Echoing findings from previous years, there were reports of confusion and lack of follow up after site visits. Participants speculated that there may have been staff turnover and expressed confusion as to which contact to follow up with when referencing the website. Heightening person to person contact, having clear and visible contact information on HAT's website, and providing hard copy contact information during site visits is recommended.

HAT's reputation and visibility in the community and local media prove to be the most effective mediums for garnering new program participants. Maintaining HAT's brand presence at local events through signage, print and radio is recommended. Furthermore, participants were often triggered to contact HAT after meeting staff at native plant walks or groups, educational presentations and public meetings.

## **6. Recommendations**

1. Continue commitment to landowner property visits with land care specialists as the focal point of the Good Neighbours/Habitat Stewardship Project.
2. Maintain presence at public events, seeking opportunities for interactive educational opportunities.
3. Clarify lines of communication for participants: prepare materials and website with clear visibility of appropriate avenues for contact. Increase response time between receiving information requests (both electronically and from verbal commitments), following up with appropriate materials and information.
4. Define monitoring expectations for Species at Risk participants: continue hands-on property assessments and monitoring installations with biologists. Continue to provide thorough information and resources.
5. Consider establishing a network of Good Neighbours program participants via social media, particularly catering to those living in remote and rural locations. This forum could also be useful for arranging collective transport for participants wishing to partake in city held events.
6. Increase capacity for follow up activities such as site visits and personalized contact to accelerate adoption of suggested changes by participants. As demonstrated by this survey, encouragement, support and guidance are key motivators and critical for deepening participant engagement.
7. Maintain awareness of the varying levels of participant knowledge through tailored property assessments. Several participants expressed deep appreciation for being treated with respect and without judgement or expectation. These sentiments further the trusted relationship HAT shares with its program participants.

## **Appendix: Telephone Survey Questions**

### **General Trends**

1. Which municipality do you live in?
2. I understand that you participated in X program with HAT - does that sound familiar? Can you tell me about the environmental issue(s) or concern(s) that brought you into contact with HAT?
3. a) On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being low and 5 being high), would you please rate your knowledge of the environmental issues you mentioned before being contacted by HAT? b) And what would that be AFTER HAT contacted you?

### **Changes in behaviour and barriers to participation in the project:**

4. Do you remember some of the suggestions that HAT staff made during or after their visit to your land? Can you share a few with me?
5. Have you pursued some of the activities suggested by HAT staff or HAT's information package?
6. Have you decided to pursue any of these changes within the next 12 months?
7. Is there anything preventing you from making the changes? What would make it easier for you to pursue the changes you would like to make?
8. For Species at Risk participants: Was a monitoring installation put in place (cardboard for Blue-grey Tailedropper, asphalt shingle for Sharp-tailed Snake, logs for Western Painted Turtle). Have you been watching for these species?

### **HAT's profile and efficacy of engagement techniques:**

9. Prior to being contacted for this outreach project, had you heard of Habitat Acquisition Trust, or HAT?
10. What information or service provided by HAT was most useful to you?
11. Do you feel that the HAT Staff was knowledgeable about the issues affecting your property [and Species at Risk]?
12. Would you feel comfortable contacting HAT Staff with any questions you may have about managing your property?
13. Do you have any other comments or suggestions for HAT?