

Habitat Acquisition Trust

Good Neighbours Project/
Habitat Stewardship Project for Species at Risk

2014 Landowner Contact Evaluation
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Prepared for: Habitat Acquisition Trust
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1. Program Description

In 2014, Habitat Acquisition Trust undertook two projects that included visits to property owners. As a part of the Cordova Shore, Hagan and Tod, and Colquitz Watersheds Good Neighbours Projects, HAT visited landowners to discuss watershed health, land care, and techniques for increasing habitat for species at risk. During property visits, HAT staff toured participants' properties with them and helped to identify species of interest, important ecological features, and helped identify behaviours or activities that could contribute to the overall ecological health of the land and watershed.

Twelve of the 59 total visits also dealt specifically with species at risk, through HAT's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species At Risk. These visits were primarily focused on increasing knowledge of and habitat for Sharp-tailed Snake, Blue-Grey Taildropper, Western Painted Turtle and bats.

After visits, HAT staff provided most landowners with prescriptions for land care through informational follow-up packages, emails, and at times delivery of birdhouses or bat boxes that supported their findings during the property visit. In instances where HAT staff identified species at risk habitat, instructions for creating habitat and monitoring for these species was provided, and in some cases habitat structures were installed during or after the visit, for example asphalt shingles were placed in order to increase habitat for Sharp Tailed Snakes.

This document reviews the efficacy of this landowner engagement project by reporting on results of telephone surveys carried out with 27 of the 59 participants who received visits from HAT staff in 2014.

2. Program Evaluation Methodology

Twenty-seven participants in the Stewardship Program were interviewed on the telephone between December 15, 2014 and February 20, 2015. The sample thus represents 46% of the 59 total program participants.

Participants were called using contact information provided by Habitat Acquisition Trust and asked a series of questions aimed at understanding their experience in three areas: retention of key program messages, changes in behaviour as a result of the visit, and HAT's profile and efficacy of engagement techniques. A full list of questions used can be found at the end of this document. Interviews generally lasted between 7 and 10 minutes, though a few went as long as 15. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept anonymous, and that the survey was being conducted by an independent contractor, not a HAT employee, so feedback could be candid.

In order to elicit the richest information from the interviews and to keep the process from feeling too formal for participants, questions were asked in the order that felt most natural in the context of the conversation. Before ending each interview, the list of questions was reviewed to ensure complete data was gathered. Detailed notes were kept during interviews and were analyzed for the writing of this report.

3. Evaluation Findings & Interpretation

3.1 Key Messages

The project was successful at conveying key messages to participants; nearly all (92%) of those interviewed reported an increase of knowledge about their watershed and/or Species at Risk as a result of the HAT visit.

3.1.1 Watershed

When asked, 18 of 27 respondents correctly identified their watershed. Many indicated that the land care specialist had to do some work to determine which watershed they lived in during their visit, as a number of participants live in watersheds with creeks that run primarily through culverts, particularly in the Gorge Waterway.

- Of those that correctly identified their watershed, 68% said that they did not know this information before their visit with HAT.
- A number of respondents in urban areas, particularly around Colquitz and the Gorge made comments like, “I think they figured out that we were in the Gorge watershed,” but could not say with certainty which watershed they lived in.
- Notably, six respondents said that they were unclear exactly what “watershed” meant or signified.

3.1.2 Environmental Concerns

◆ *What is one environmental issue or concern within your watershed?*

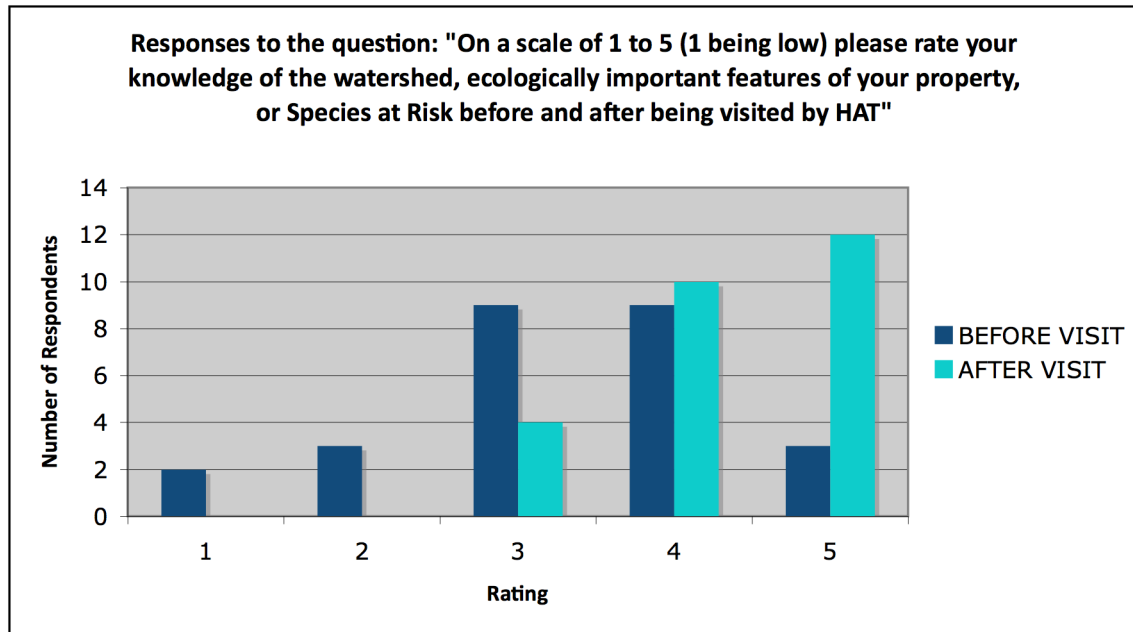
All but three respondents could name an environmental concern in their watershed. Those named included:

- Development
- Gary Oak protection and preservation
- Trail use and overuse in adjacent lands
- Runoff from automobiles and chemical fertilizers/pesticides
- Water quality in aquifers (wells)
- Water quality in creeks
- Muddy surges during storms from degraded creeks
- Climate change
- Habitat loss
- Invasive species

A large number of respondents discussed Gary Oak meadows and the preservation of that ecosystem as a focus of their interest. Three were not able to name an environmental concern specific to their watershed, but instead talked about what values they were trying to preserve on their land. (Implying that these participants sensed a risk to these values, even if they did not or could not frame their discussion in terms of environmental concern; all three of these participants had connected with HAT through a garden club.)

3.1.3 Before/After HAT Visit

Respondents were asked to rate themselves in knowledge of their watershed or Species at Risk both before and after their visit with HAT staff. The results of this survey question are below.



In general, participants fell into three categories:

1. *Newcomers*: those that approached HAT because they wanted to learn about the ecosystem of their property; often they mentioned Gary oak ecosystems, and expressed benefit from the networking aspect of the HAT visit (e.g. links with other resources, organizations, and educational material.)
2. *Adopters*: these participants had a good sense of ecological issues, concerns about their property, and were looking for a) assurance that their efforts were correct, and 2) more nuanced guidance from HAT. This group consistently benefited from species and valuable ecological feature identification. They generally expressed appreciation for validation of their efforts.
3. *Experts*: those that were well versed in ecology, ecological practices, and larger scale watershed issues. These participants mainly benefited from a collegial reassurance about their techniques and identification of longer-term goals for their property.

It may be beneficial for HAT to keep these three audiences in mind as educational projects are developed. Return visits to land as newcomers become adopters and adopters become experts could help continue to usher a more educated community of landowners and peer leaders.

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 but one interviewed could list some suggestions that HAT staff had made. These included:

- Removing invasive species (English Ivy, Scotch broom)
- Not over-watering lawn under Gary Oaks
- Talking with neighbours about invasive species at property line (hawthorne)
- Watching for sharp tailed snakes
- Planting native species

3.2.2 Changes Pursued:

- ◆ *Have you pursued some of the activities suggested by HAT staff or HAT's information package? (What have you done)?*

Most respondents (81%) had begun to pursue activities suggested by HAT.

Of those that had already pursued activities, the top activities mentioned were (ranked): Removed invasive species; Identified invasive species; Monitored for species at risk; Planted native species.

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

81% of respondents (including those who had already implemented changes) said they would likely implement some changes within the next year; particularly as the weather improved or they found more time. Planned activities included:

- Monitoring for sharp tailed snakes
- Monitoring for bats (informally)
- Removing English Ivy and other invasive species
- Replacing
- Native plantings to stabilize eroding banks/slopes
- Installing a birdhouse
- Planting native species (mock orange, sword fern, dogwood)
- Taking up landscaping cloth and rocks, replacing with mulch
- Preventing overwatering/over use of Gary Oak meadow habitat
- Monitoring health of species of interest (i.e. trillium)
- Propagating species of interest (i.e. chocolate lily)

3.2.3 Barriers to implementation of changes:

- ◆ *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?*

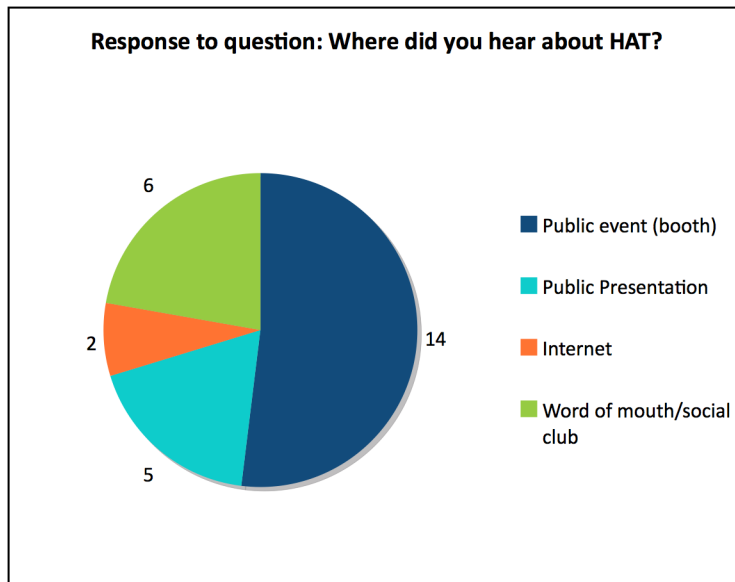
Primary barriers to implementation were:

- *Time*: Participants had been unable to find the time to implement changes. Participants identified family obligations and work as activities that occupied their time.
- *Neighbour/City relations*: Two separate participants described instances where adjacent property was screened by Himalayan blackberry or ivy. This prevented them from removing the invasive species because of concerns about what adjacent property owners would think or do.
- *Other distractions*: some participants identified other activities in the past year that had taken their focus from undertaking projects (children, work, elder care)
- *Preference*: One participant stated that he preferred a green lawn, so he would be watering beneath his Gary Oaks, contrary to recommendations; he did, however, mention that he would be monitoring the health of the oaks and trying to strike a balance between his desire for a green lawn and his desire to maintain their health
- *Financial limitation*: one participant cited lack of financial resources to complete project recommendations

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 respondents had heard of HAT before their property visit. Eight mentioned having seen HAT signs on neighbours' properties. Fourteen arranged their land care visit when they encountered HAT at a public event where HAT was hosting a booth or educational table. It was clear that consistent follow-up by HAT staff after such public events is an effective means through which to arrange land care visits. Two looked HAT up because they had recently moved to the area and were seeking advice about how to manage native plants and ecosystems. Six mentioned hearing about HAT through friends, or through a presentation at a garden club or other social group.



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

By far, the land visit was identified as the most valuable service, and within this, identification of specific plants and plant communities of interest; particularly invasive species.

“It was so great having a horticulturist walk around my land with me, it felt really good.”

“We were really happy just to have it registered somewhere that this is important habitat for Sharpies! Its so important to keep this habitat known, we are glad that they are keeping track.”

Several participants, during interviews, mentioned that they would like to refer back to the materials they were sent to remember what suggestions to implement, and that they would be referring to these materials to inform future decisions on their properties. A good number of them had the materials on hand during the telephone call.

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

Participants consistently answered “yes” to this question. Three participants mentioned they might be more likely to contact other groups or individuals (Gary Oak Recovery Team/David Manning/Pulling Together Saanich Volunteer group) for more information. Most did mention that their HAT visit helped them locate these groups or individuals in their community. This illustrates another function of the efficacy of this programming; HAT connects landowners to other groups who may offer more specific or relevant support for particular land features.

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

This question rarely had to be explicitly asked because most participants mentioned how knowledgeable the land care specialists were without being prompted. Even participants who had a high level of knowledge about their property before the visit discussed learning valuable information from the land care specialists. Less participants discussed having discussions with HAT Staff about their effect on their watershed than their effect on species composition and habitat for species on their own property. Two participants agreed that HAT Staff was very knowledgeable, even though the participants already knew most of the information that was shared.

“I had no idea that the cedar in my lower property was habitat-I was planning on cutting it down but [he] told me it was one of the most valuable parts of my land.”

“I wanted to install a bat box but they told me that my property wasn’t the right location for it. I’m glad I talked to them before I went to the trouble.”

“I loved seeing my land through a biologist’s eyes.”

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

Although respondents were encouraged to offer constructive feedback for HAT, the majority of responses were positive and could not offer any suggestions for improvement.

“I really like the kind of work they are doing where they inform people rather than browbeating them.”

“Keep up the good work...it’s really worth trying to keep our beautiful island beautiful!”

“I don’t want to make any suggestions because I know that they are strapped for funds. I wish them continued success, and hope that they can secure money to help them have even more staff to do their good work.”

4. Survey Biases

All of the respondents to this survey participated in a land care visit conducted by HAT. Their willingness to participate in the survey and their enthusiasm for the project were influenced by their personal connection made with the program land care specialists; as in other years, responses indicate that this personal connection may be one of the greatest strengths of the program. Participants who only received a land care package in the mail were not contacted, so the educational and behaviour change efficacy of that portion of the good neighbours project is not measured by this evaluation.

A few of the participants know the surveyor because they live in the same small community (Pender Island). This may also have skewed their results to provide the responses they anticipated the reviewer 'wanted' to hear.

Finally, the survey was completed in the wintertime, when many participants are less engaged in land care than during other times of year. Seven of the participants referred to their land care packages during the phone call, so there is evidence that they still have access to the information shared by HAT, and may use it when more active on their land. A few participants, during the call, remembered an email that they had received but filed away, and mentioned that they would be pulling it out to review the contents after the call. The survey in itself may act as a reminder of the visit and thus increase application of the suggestions.

5. Summary

The 2014 HAT landowner contact programs for watersheds and Species at Risk were highly successful in 1) supporting landowners in their land care efforts to preserve habitat and natural species assemblages; 2) helping landowners identify and value ecologically important features on their properties (e.g. biodiversity, habitat diversity, rare or threatened species); 3) introducing landowners to an organization (HAT) that can continue to provide support in making ecologically appropriate land care decisions.

Efforts to increase knowledge about watersheds and implications on larger watersheds of individual behaviour seemed to have mixed results. There was confusion about what the term watershed meant, and some understandable confusion about watershed identification in highly urban areas.

Respondents reported increase in knowledge about the important features on their land as a result of the HAT visit, and most remembered suggested actions. Barriers to implementation were more to do with life circumstances of respondents and the timing of the survey in relation to the land visit, than quality or availability of material from HAT. Relative to other years when this researcher has conducted an assessment of this program, more respondents mentioned a lack of promised follow-up after their land care visit. (e.g. delivery of a birdhouse, visit by species at risk biologist.) This may have had to do with a change in personnel at the organization this winter. Person-to-person contact and consistent follow-up is an essential to the success of these projects, but even those who did not receive second visits reported high value in the land care visit.

Species at Risk habitat creation and monitoring is very effective in increasing interest in watershed and species health and, more than other activities mentioned, appears to encourage participants to share their knowledge with neighbours and family members. The branding" of HAT's services through identifiable logos, landowner signs, newspaper articles and public talks appears to be both an effective means to raise the profile of HAT's activities and to encourage participation in HAT programs. The most effective avenue for gaining participation in this program, though, appears to be the good reputation and far-reaching networking that HAT does by participating in public events, public meetings, educational presentations, and restoration activities.

6. Recommendations

- 1.** Maintain commitment to in-person property visits with land care specialists as a centerpiece of engagement strategy.
- 2.** Continue to solicit participation at public events, maintaining interactive public education approach.
- 3.** There is medium retention of messages related to endangered species: continue hands-on habitat installation with the help of a species at risk biologist. Clarify monitoring expectations with those looking for species at risk.
- 4.** There is medium retention of messages related to watersheds: clarify communication goals regarding watersheds as a concept, and consider ways to emphasize these points with participants.
- 5.** Increased capacity to support follow-up activities and efficient project management could enable providing even more extended guidance for those landowners wishing to deepen their commitment and expand their activities related to ecologically appropriate land care.
- 6.** Consider establishing a network of property owners who have been visited by HAT in the past-possibly through social media.
- 7.** Maintain an awareness of the types of participants–newcomers, adopters, and experts– and continue to aim materials and stewardship guidance at these three audiences.

Appendix: Telephone Survey Questions

Participants' retention of key messages:

1. Which watershed, (water catchment area, or stream drainage) do you live in?
2. Before being contacted by HAT, were you aware that you lived in this watershed?
3. What is one environmental issue or concern within your watershed?
4. 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 concerning your watershed [or Species at Risk] before being contacted by HAT? b) And what would that be AFTER HAT contacted you?

Changes in behaviours and barriers to participation in the project:

5. 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?
6. Have you pursued some of the activities suggested by HAT staff or HAT's information package?
7. Have you decided to pursue any of these changes within the next 12 months?
8. 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?
9. For Species at Risk participants: Was a monitoring installation put in place (cardboard for Blue-grey tailed dropper, 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:

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