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Renton couple earns Washington “Wildlife Steward of the Year” for transformation of dumpsite to environmental showcase

A Renton area couple has been awarded Washington State’s “Wildlife Steward of the Year” (under 50 acres) for the remarkable transformation of a former dumpsite to a massive wetland and bog restoration and model farm.

Owned by Max and Erin Prinsen, Shadow Lake Bog---one of King County’s last intact bogs--is located around a small horse farm. The 49-acre wetland bog features an interpretive center and an environmentally friendly, 800-foot boardwalk that allows interactive access to the site.

Nominated by the King Conservation District (KCD), the award is part of a joint recognition program by the Washington Association of Conservation Districts, the Conservation Commission and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The award program is funded through the Washington State Ecosystems Conservation District.

KCD previously recognized Shadow Lake Bog as its “Wildlife Habitat Farm of the Year” in King County.

Shadow Lake Bog began as a one-acre farm nearly two decades ago. It is now a 49-acre working farm and interactive educational experience that is toured by 3,000 visitors annually.

“While the Prinsen’s have taken modern land stewardship to a new level, this is a reminder that all landowners can do their part—in their own backyard or acreage—to preserve and protect our environment and watersheds,” said KCD Chairman Matt Livengood.

Formed by a glacial depression, the peat bog rises from the banks of Shadow Lake into an upland forest surrounded by large older trees. Runoff, rainwater and Artesian springs from this area form the headwaters of Jenkins Creek, which is a major tributary of Soos Creek--an important salmon spawning stream supporting Fall Chinook, Coho and Winter Steelhead.

Over the years, the Prinsen's efforts have included the removal of 110 tons of dump debris and an ongoing program that focuses on replanting native plants and creating an amphibian pond. From the replanted area, a path leads to the boardwalk where visitors can see the bog, while preserving its beauty. In another restored area, a staircase rises to a viewing tower that overlooks the amphibian pond. A skywalk connects the viewing tower to the Richter Interpretive Center.

Shadow Lake Bog provides shelter for over 200 bird species, including eagles, owls and peregrine falcons. The amphibian refuge is home to three species of frogs and two species of salamanders. Deer, elk, black bears and bobcats are also observed regularly at the site.

The Prinsen's efforts and personal financial commitment at Shadow Lake Bog have spawned S.H.A.D.O.W. (Save Habitat and Diversity of Wetlands), a 501(c) (3) organization that is dedicated to the continued preservation of the site. To further this mission, the organization continues to secure generous contributions from the public and private sectors, including a recent \$15,000 donation from the Starbucks Corporation. For more information on S.H.A.D.O.W., visit www.shadowhabitat.org.

Much of the technical support for Shadow Lake Bog has come from the KCD. KCD offers a free program of services that helps urban, suburban and rural landowners manage the natural land and water resources on their property. KCD is hands-on, site specific, action and results oriented. It also initiates community outreach activities that include workshops, education programs, site visits, farm plans, and consultations on land, water and wildlife management. For more information KCD programs and services, visit www.kingcd.org

Since 1949, the KCD has been educating and assisting landowners, schools, scientists, consultants and agencies in recognizing problem situations and correcting them, and showing them how to avoid creating problems. The program promotes conservation through technical assistance, demonstration projects, and educational events such as public workshops.

Conservation districts, formed as an outgrowth of the "dustbowl era" in the 1930's, are the only entities with the sole mission of serving the natural resource issues arising from private land management.

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