



# Tapteal Greenway

Conservation-Education-Recreation on the Lower Yakima River Since 1995

## Tapteal Talk

### Prez Sez

By Mike Lilga

The Tapteal Greenway generally comprises the Yakima River corridor from Benton City to Bateman Island and Columbia Point. A goal when we started the Greenway was to complete a continuous land trail for this approximately 30-mile stretch. While the water trail is remarkably easy to define, the land trail has taken some time. Now, a major land connection is taking shape.

First with shared vision.

Then with shared success. Connect!

With place, self, nature.

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Working with the City of Richland, the Greenway's vision of a trail connecting the Horn Rapids development in Richland to Horn Rapids Park in Benton County following an existing dirt road paralleling the Horn Rapids Ditch has nearly come to fruition. We thank Joe Schiessl and Chris Waite for realizing this vision. The trail segment (yellow in the figure) will be within a new city parcel (not an easement) that will run from Twin Bridges Road to Snively Road at the city boundary. At Twin Bridges Road, the trail will connect to existing Tapteal Trail easements to the south (red in the figure) past the Horn Rapids development, skirting the 7HA ranch to Kingston Road. To the northwest, the trail will cross Snively Road near SR240 and connect to the Tapteal Trail segment through Horn Rapids Park (blue in the figure), officially designated this spring.

The Greenway board continues to work on closing the gaps, one between Kingston Road and WE Johnson Park, the other between Horn Rapids Park and Benton City. We'll keep you apprised as we make these regional trail connections. In the meantime, enjoy the warm winter weather and some beautiful scenery with a walk along your new trail at Twin Bridges Road!



## Proposed Shrub-steppe Legislation

*By Scott Woodward*

*“The legislature finds that the loss of plants and bushes associated with shrub-steppe in urban growth areas has a negligible impact on the environment and natural ecosystems.”*

This is what our local State representatives, April Connors and Mark Klicker, are advocating. They have introduced **HB 2316 - 2025-26**. For your information, both are real estate professionals.  
<https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/202526/Pdf/Bills/House%20Bills/2316.pdf?q=20260114090027>.

Before you dig in, watch this piece. <https://youtu.be/NfhM9vLQD-0>

At a glance, it appears that the target of this legislation is to eliminate any mitigation for shrub-steppe habitat destruction done in the name of development. The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife has clearly designated the shrub-steppe as a Priority Habitat Species. See link below:

<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&p=e1eb91e96e5c82401cd8d8e1842fc6092b38b7127d9a9589dc1d429b77af903eJmItdHM9MTc2ODM0ODgwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=2ba7063e-b561-6ded-0182-1063b4a66cfc&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93ZGZ3LndhLmdvdvi9zcGVjaWVzLWwhYmI0YXRzL2Vjb3N5c3RlbXMvc2hydWJzdGVwcGU>

Some of our local examples that would not exist according to this legislation include Amon Creek Natural Preserve, Chamna Natural Preserve, Badger Mountain Preserve, and Candy Mountain Preserve. There is an active group of Conservation entities taking a closer look at this legislation. Tapteal Greenway is currently considering our participation.

***HB 2316 - 2025-26: The legislature finds that the loss of plants and bushes associated with shrub-steppe in urban growth areas has a negligible impact on the environment and natural ecosystems.***

Answer: Losing shrub-steppe can lead to significant ecological and economic impacts. The shrub-steppe is home to a diverse range of species that rely on its unique habitat. When the shrub-steppe is lost, these species may face extinction, as they cannot survive in the absence of the shrub-steppe ecosystem. Additionally, the loss of shrub steppe can disrupt local ecosystems, leading to changes in plant and animal communities, which can affect the overall health of the region. The shrub-steppe also plays a crucial role in maintaining local water quality and providing habitat for various wildlife species. Without shrub-steppe, these functions may be compromised, leading to further ecological degradation and loss of biodiversity.

***HB 2316 - 2025-26: Shrub-steppe is typically considered an ecosystem in undeveloped areas where wildlife is present. The presence of plants or shrubs that can be found in the shrub-steppe on property does not make that property a functional ecosystem.***

Answer: How much of a property covered by shrub-steppe habitat makes it a PHS property? No bill data was presented on that. Who will determine that? The loss of shrub-steppe habitat is magnified in areas like the Yakima area, where approximately 90% of the original shrub-steppe has been reduced, fragmented, or degraded. This loss has significantly reduced the ecological value of the remaining shrub-steppe, making it an endangered ecosystem. HB 2316 - 2025-26 would trade historically significant habitat for rapid, non-historical development.

***HB 2316 - 2025-26: Shrub-steppe is a conduit for wildfire.***

Answer: True, but without context, this is a blatant attempt to mislead citizens. To argue that by eliminating an increasingly rare habitat, the causes for wildfire will go away is foolish at best. Start with the basics for context. Humans were responsible for 88% of all wildfires in the U.S. In 2023, fireworks sparked over 27,252 outdoor fires across the U.S. The 2025 Palisades Fire in Los Angeles County is suspected of having started New Year's firework celebrations. It's not the habitat that's at fault; it's us. So, how do we fix it?

(continued on the next page)

## Shrub-steppe Legislation (continued)

Wildfires are a natural part of many ecosystems. Wildfire management strategies must evolve with increased human excursion into native habitats. To paraphrase the USGS and USFS, our investments in habitat management, improved building codes, early warning systems, and resilient infrastructure will be crucial in reducing wildfire impacts.

A simple checklist of solutions can go a long way to keep a community safer. Ignition-Resistant Homes, Land Use Planning, Evacuation and Readiness, Vulnerable Populations, Smoke Ready, Prevent Ignitions, Response, Hazardous Fuels Management, Recovery and Rebuilding, and Funding all have an interlocking role in wildfire safety.

<https://wildfirerisk.org/reduce-risk/>

The house committee hearing on this bill is scheduled for 10:30 am on Tuesday, January 20. Tapteal Greenway strongly opposes this bill and has submitted written testimony. If the bill moves out of committee, there will be additional opportunity for public comment.

Action you can take:

1. You can express your opinion by contacting your representatives via this link: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary/?BillNumber=2316&Year=2025>
2. Write a letter to the editor of your regional news source.
3. Spread the word via your clubs or organization.

## See It ~ Say It

By Scott Woodward

Our parks need your help. The simple math says it all: Tri-Cities and Benton County Parks are understaffed and underbudgeted. We love our Parks and Preserves; in some cases, we love them to near-death. Off-lease dogs, dog excrement, motor vehicles, illegal camping and fires, excessive speeds on trails and paths, habitat destruction, and trail use conflicts have created an enforcement nightmare. The limited number of Park Rangers literally cannot do it all. Regulations restrict their jurisdictional actions, and law enforcement has higher priorities, which often delays their response.



That leaves us with, if you see it say it, encouraging you to act when you experience an obvious violation of the rules regarding the Parks/Preserves. The recommended phone number of non-emergency dispatch is a start. Before you call, make sure you can correctly identify the location. Simply stating the name of the park/preserve is helpful, but most dispatch operators need a crossroad location. If you are up one of the mountains, a trailhead location is a good start. Trail names may be of some use, and a Google map screenshot could prove useful. Other helpful tools for dispatch are a description of the violators, clothing, size, and vehicle description (photo of vehicles and license plates).

I am collecting incidents if you choose to text me your pictures to compile a database for use at a later date.

Above all, be safe out there and enjoy the wonderful outdoor opportunities we have in the region.

If you love our shrub-steppe ecosystem, you will like this eleven-minute video. Enjoy!

<https://youtu.be/NfhM9vLQD-0>



## TG Annual Celebration

By Mike Lilga

We had a thoroughly enjoyable annual celebration November 18 at the Richland Community Center. It was nice to be able to meet with Greenway friends, celebrate accomplishments of 2025, and look forward to evolving projects for the coming year.

We honored Kelsey Kelmel as Tri-City Conservationist of the Year for her work with the Native Plant Society, the Heritage Garden Program, and other projects. Congratulations and thank you so much Kelsey.

We also surprised our first ever Outstanding Volunteer, a new award given this year for the first time. "Outstanding" understates the volunteer contributions Dirk Peterson has made to the Tapteal Greenway over many years of involvement. Thank you, Dirk!

Come join us next year!



Congratulations, Kelsey Kelmel  
Tri-City Conservationist of the Year



Congratulations, Dirk Peterson – Outstanding Volunteer of the Year  
and the Tapteal Greenway Board of Directors

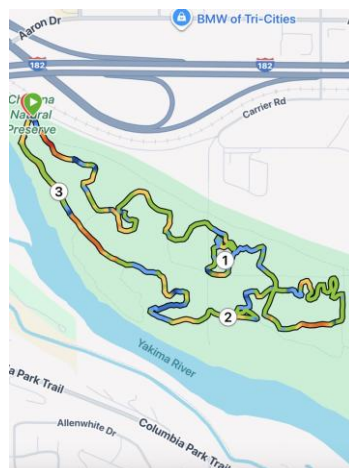
## Kim's Bad Knee 5K!

By Dan Hansen

Kim has once again stepped up to lead the twistiest, silliest 5K route ever dreamt up! It was held on Saturday, January 10 at 9:00 am in Chamna Natural Preserve. Eleven people and four dogs participated in this free annual tradition. They had hot cocoa and goodies and prizes too!



The Runners



The Route

## YEER Program Update

By Dirk Peterson

This is the fourth year that a group from our TG Board of Directors has worked with members of the Native Plant Society assisting with the YEER Program (Youth Environmental Education through Restoration) at Ray Reynolds Middle School. The first year the restoration planting was done at the Rattlesnake Slope trailhead by two busloads of seventh graders. Roughly sixty sagebrush have survived from that planting and some of them are now bearing seed. Subsequent plantings have taken place on the school grounds. The second year's planting was located in a fenced in area adjacent to a storage shed. It was tight quarters working in there with each class of 25 students, but a wide variety of plants have survived. Starting with the third year, the plantings have taken place in an undeveloped portion of the grounds next to the tennis courts. Although undeveloped, the grounds had been heavily disturbed, resulting in a challenging restoration site. Each class of students pulled the invasive species to prepare the ground for planting. The following month each class divided into table groups and in a small plot planted the native plants that they had learned about in science class. We were pleased that a variety of plants have survived from the third year, but it is too soon to determine survival from last fall's plantings. Although it is sometimes questionable as to the success of our plantings, we consider the opportunity to teach these young middle schoolers about their local shrub-steppe ecosystem a great success. And thanks to a wonderful science teacher, Mr. Brandon Hoeft, many students have opened their eyes to the world that they live in (or drive by).



A sagebrush plant chock full of seeds at Rattlesnake Slope



A wide variety of plants survived from the second year's planting



A small, but happy purple sage plant from the third year's planting.



Prior to our project the current restoration area had been heavily disturbed by the adjacent school grounds construction



Mikki Symonds, Native Plant Society, teaching students how to plant correctly



Students working together to plant their native plants



## Flooded, Again

by Dirk Peterson

Tapteal Greenway owns two parcels along the Yakima River located between Van Giesen and Hyde Road. The parcel closest to the bridge came to us courtesy of the 1996 flood. The residence on this parcel was destroyed by the flood and we received a disaster recovery grant to purchase the property (for \$500) and remove the structures. The adjoining parcel was acquired in 2006 through a BPA fish and wildlife program grant. We maintain both parcels as natural open space that is open to the public.

Last month's flooding put the parcels under about three feet of water. The flooding left considerable debris, including numerous large logs, on the property. Several years ago we planted twenty cottonwood trees near the shoreline. We placed fencing around the trees to protect them from beavers and deer. Only six of the trees survived, but we hadn't removed the fencing from around the dead trees. Many of these cages were flattened by the flood water and considerable debris was piled up against the fencing around the surviving trees. In several cases the top of the fencing was now rubbing against the trees causing damage. We decided to enlarge the fencing around the trees and prune any branches below about five feet to avoid having lower branches grow into the fencing. There is one last tree to work on.

We will wait for the ground to firm up before we get our tractor onto the property to help remove the large volume of woody debris left behind by the flood. There is also a fair amount of trash to be picked up, but that can wait for warmer weather.



View from the Van Giesen entrance with the property under three feet of water



Debris piled on top of and around the tree fencing



Removing piled up debris in preparation to enlarge the fencing



Newly enlarged cages around the surviving cottonwood trees



## Bye, Bye Bateman (Island)

By Scott Woodward

Following our very successful clean-up of Bateman Island, Tapteal Greenway hosted the final public event on the island. The Bateman Island Historical Stroll was led by TG board member Scott Woodward and assisted by his wife, Pamela. Approximately 80 souls endured the 2½ hour walk. The program path was laid out in chronological order, beginning with the geological background, followed by the first early human footprints on the island. There were ten stations in all, starting and ending with the Lewis and Clark overlook. Stops included visits made to the island by explorers William Clark and David Thompson. Also shared were the Native American fishing techniques, early settlements upstream and downstream of the island and 20<sup>th</sup> century attempts to live and farm on the island. The whacky, far-fetched development plan for the island included a concert hall, parks, an art museum and ball fields. Lastly, an explanation of why the causeway was to be destroyed.

Research for the stroll was aided by the East Benton County Historical Society, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the patience of my wife.

We would like to follow up with other Historical Strolls. Any ideas, please pass them on to us.

