

Nature's Shoreline Buffer

'What joy awaits you when the breeze has found you out among the trees.'

—William Wordsworth

Where Oak Harbor's Past and Future Meet

Look around and you will see that this open space forms a buffer between the city's upland development and its shoreline. For thousands of years this lowland was a saltwater estuary, a pocket where fresh and saltwater met, supporting a rich diversity of life. Today a remnant of that estuary remains here as Freund's Marsh.



The Original Saltwater Estuary

Today's Freund Marsh is a remnant of this early saltwater estuary that backed up from Oak Harbor Bay nearly to Scenic Heights. Early farmers also battled occasional flooding from the bay, so over time they raised the sand spit behind the beach. This view shows the bay at upper left, the town in the foreground and Highway 20 winding toward Scenic Heights in the distance. Courtesy Peggy Darst Townsdin

How Wetlands Work

You will cross bridges over drainage channels carrying runoff from our urban uplands. In the marsh, much of that water is absorbed by wetland plants and soils, filtering out pollutants that run off our streets before they reach the marine waters on which we depend for food and recreation. This lowland acts as a shock absorber, slowing storm water run-off and releasing it gradually. It helps recharge the underground aquifer where many of us get our drinking water and it provides rich habitat for the birds and other wildlife.

Wild Habitat Coming Back

A century ago pioneers built dikes, drained the shoreline estuary and farmed crops on this land. Gradually we have come to realize the benefits of a wetland buffer. As you walk east toward Freund's Field you'll enter restored marshland that is now returning to wild habitat. Look for newly-planted native trees, shrubs and grasses. Watch for native birds and wetland wildlife.

Farming Along the Shore

The Freund family farmed this land for generations from the late 1800s until the late 1990s, earning recognition as the oldest Centennial farm in the state still being farmed by the original family. To drain the land for farming they hand-ditched it in the late 1800s and later re-dug it in the 1930s with a home-made ditching rig built by Ralph Freund. The family raised carrots, potatoes, oats, wheat, red clover and Timothy hay, cabbage seed, coriander seed, corn and mangels, a beet used mainly as cattle feed. They also used the land as pasture and opened it to visiting parties of hunters. Photos courtesy Freund family

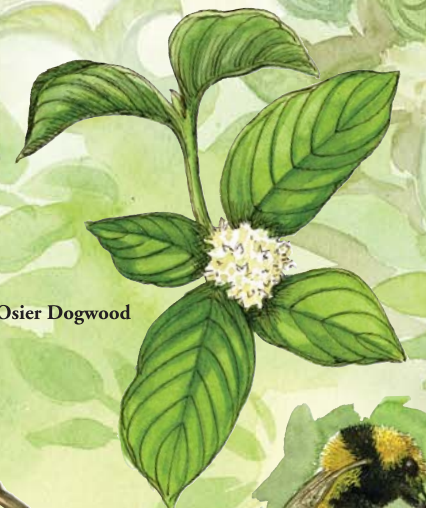


Common Grasshopper

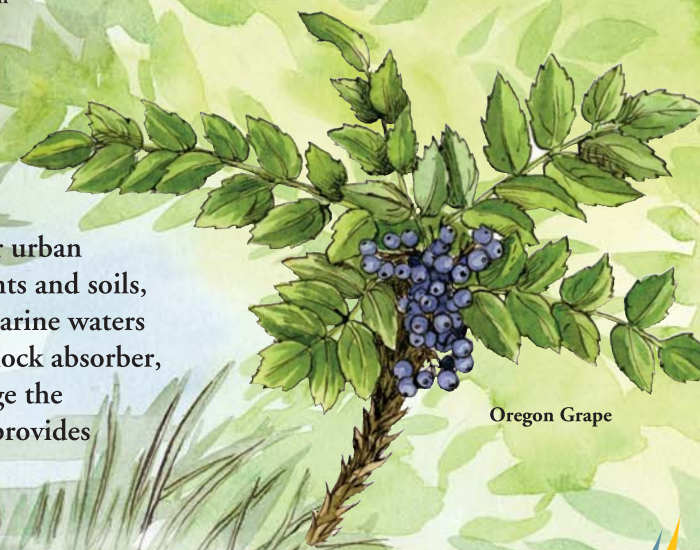


Bitter Cherry

Red Osier Dogwood



Bumble Bee



Oregon Grape



Cedar Waxwing



Red-winged Blackbird



Cattails



Common Water Strider



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