



Mason Gulch Landscape Management

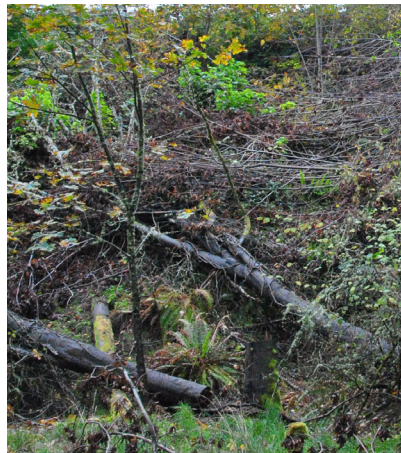
Mason Gulch consists of 39 acres of forested open space in North Tacoma. Steep slopes surround small creeks and wetlands found at lower elevations. This area provides many environmental benefits including *stormwater management, water quality protection and wildlife habitat.



History

Creek flow is plentiful in Mason Gulch, and was used from the late 1800's to the 1920's as a water supply for North Tacoma residents.

In 1926, the Tacoma Public Utility Water Department purchased the property intending to further develop the water supply, however a hydrologic report in 1964 demonstrated this would be too complex due to the geology, springs and unstable soils.



In 1966, the North End Wastewater Treatment Plant was built at the mouth of the gulch and currently uses some of the creek water for processing sewage.

In 2014, the properties making up the gulch were transferred to the City of Tacoma's Environmental Services Dept. with the intent to manage the site responsibly with a focus on vegetation to benefit both *stormwater runoff quality and quantity.

*Stormwater runoff is rainwater or snow melt that has not soaked into the ground. It carries pollutants from streets and lawns to lakes, streams, and the Puget Sound without being cleaned. Too much stormwater run-off can cause flooding.



The Plan

In 2015, the City began a public process to create a landscape management plan to address the declining state of Mason Gulch. Previous logging, recent tree cutting and landslides have upset the forest balance. The goal was to ensure this plan was reflective of the current conditions, best available science, regulation compliance and public interests. The result was a permitted 20-year landscape management plan built on the concept of achieving a target ecosystem to maximize the nature-based services that Mason Gulch can provide.

For More Information

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Management Goals

- Achieve a sustainable forest ecosystem
- Improve slope stability
- Maximize stormwater benefits
- Protect public safety and infrastructure
- Develop a volunteer stewardship program

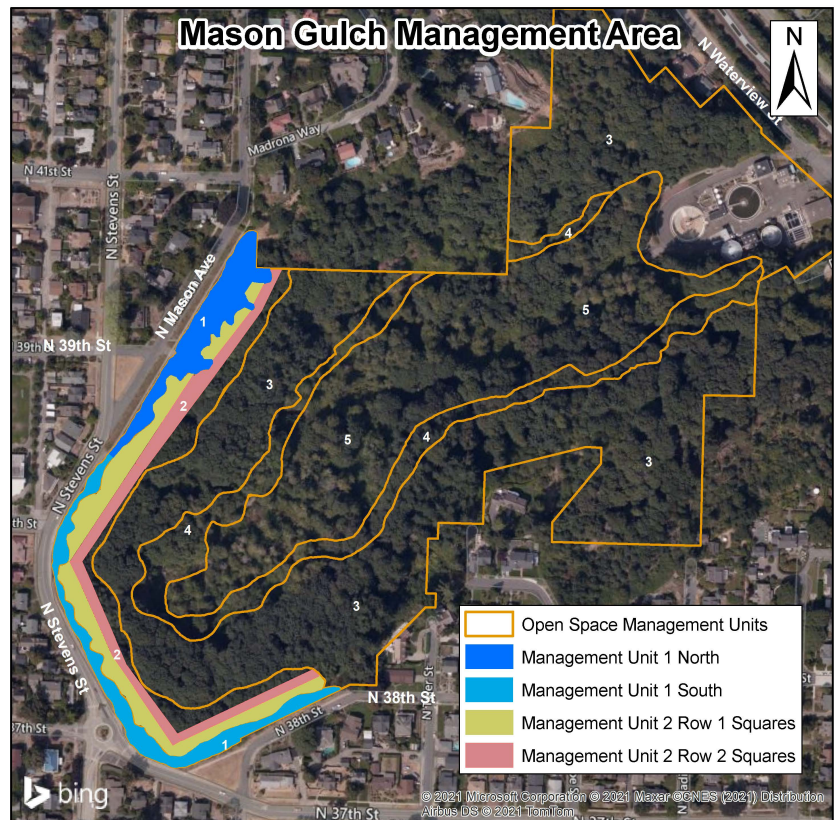
Restoration Overview

Restoration began on Mason Gulch in 2016 with the removal of noxious weeds. Restoration efforts continued on the northern half of Management Unit (MU)1 in 2017, and in the southern half of MU1 in 2019. All of MU1 has steep slopes. Restoration activities included invasive species removal, installation of natural erosion control materials, and planting 7,853 native species across the entire MU1 1.7 acre area from 2017 to 2019.

MU2 is steeply sloped, and dominated by big leaf maple trees, many of which were previously cut, resulting in the growth of multiple stems, often having structural damage and disease. The dense big leaf maple canopy, and lack of native seeds, has precluded the growth of once prevalent evergreen trees in this area. The goal is to re-establish a healthy tree canopy dominated by evergreens, which do not lose their leaves and absorb water year round.

Restoration in MU2 occurs in rows of approximately 25 ft x 25 ft squares in a checkerboard pattern. Every other square in the top row was restored in 2019, and every other square in the second row in 2020. This included reducing multi-stemmed big leaf maple trees to one healthy stem to allow for increased light to reach the forest floor. This approach will help maintain slope stability while newly planted conifer trees and other vegetation become established.

Restoration is performed by Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) crews employed and supervised by the City of Tacoma.



Next Steps

The third row of squares in MU2 will be restored in 2021. Previously planted areas of MUs 1 & 2 will be monitored and maintained. Volunteer restoration will continue in Management Unit 5.

If you're interested in volunteering at the bottom of Mason Gulch, please email Aris Efting at aefting@cityoftacoma.org.

