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In 2019, the Beacon Food Forest welcomed 338 new volunteers who volunteered at our Community Work Parties for the first time. This impressive number is testament to the unabated interest in sustainable solutions for urban life. People of all ages and backgrounds continue to visit the BFF as volunteers and foragers, co-creating the more healthy, beautiful, wild and connecting public spaces we know are possible.

Despite these impressive numbers for monthly work party volunteers, the Beacon Food Forest continues to be organized and stewarded on a daily and weekly basis by only about two dozen core volunteers, Food Forest Collective board members, and one part-time staff. As development of Phase 2 of the site is now in full swing (we planted the first trees in November), we are looking for more helping hands to plan and lead work parties, give tours, and stay on top of all the weeding!

This year, we tried new formats —like teacher and tour guide trainings, and classes co-led by students —to empower neighbors and educators to visit and utilize the food forest on their own time and in sync with their particular interests and needs.

In the past months, our board and volunteer committees also purposefully re-connected with the vision and principles that have been at the heart the BFF project from the beginning. We wanted to make sure to ground ourselves in our shared values as the project continues to grow, so we wrote a new Vision and Mission Statement. And our Education Committee planned a BFF-based urban Permaculture Design Class!
In 2019 we completed the major earthworks and infrastructure for Phase 2! After a strong beginning in 2018, the Seattle Conservation Corps (SCC) stepped in again to do the heavy-lifting as well as the technical work needed to fine-tune the ADA accessible pathways, garden plots, compost bins, and gathering area. Together, SCC and the BFF volunteers built the remaining urbanite walls that give shape and structure to the new P-Patch plots and circular education plaza.

Over the course of two full days of work, volunteers installed the rest of the watering system for Phase 2 by digging trenches, laying pipe, connecting fittings, and constructing 17 new hose bibs. This was a great collaboration amongst long-time volunteers and brand new ones.

SCC completed their work in late July, and we expressed our deep gratitude for all their help in making this community dream become a reality. In September we amended the new P-Patch garden plots with compost and sowed a cover crop of Austrian winter pea. This will help cover the soil in winter and add nutrients when we till it under in spring.

The Plant & Pruning Committee refined a list of trees to be planted in Phase 2 based on community input, bioregional adaptation, disease resistance, productivity, and cultural significance. In fall we planted over two dozen fruit and nut trees, including persimmon, quince, pomegranate, apple, hardy almond, mulberry, jujube, autumn olive, and fig.

Of course, just like the first phase of BFF, Phase 2 will continue to develop and evolve. Next we look to additional infrastructure projects like a new, larger ADA-accessible tool shed, an ADA-accessible vine trellis, and continuing to plant the forest so that it grows up to be diverse, fruitful and productive.
Special Work Parties

While many of our core volunteers and monthly work parties focused hundreds of hours on completing the construction of Phase 2, the rest of BFF tended to overwhelm us with weeds. Fortunately, we hosted eight auxiliary work parties totaling 209 volunteers who kept the weeds down while also helping with Phase 2 construction. These included Wing Luke Elementary and Solid Ground after school programs, employees from Dropbox and CDK Global, and classes from The Northwest School, who returned multiple times.

BFF also participated in Seattle Works annual Day of Service on June 8th, hosting 22 hard working volunteers who spent much of the day helping build walls and pathways as well as weeding the Helix giving garden and the maturing Phase 1 Food Forest.

To keep all interested volunteers in the loop about workdays outside of our monthly Community Work Party, we created a “BFF Special Work Parties” email list through which anyone can announce when they’ll be working at BFF and could use some help.

We also offered a series of Summer Stewards trainings. This new format empowers community members to steward the Food Forest and get their weekly dose of garden therapy on their own time. Needing extra hands to keep our plants watered in the summer, we trained 27 new volunteers to each care for a specific section of the Food Forest, either as an individual steward or taking turns with other volunteers.
Community Work Parties

As every year, we offered a big Community Work Party and shared lunch on the third Saturday of each month except December. Between 49 and 101 volunteers showed up to steward the food forest. Our core group of about 10 task leaders taught newcomers many different skills:

- Creating soil through sheet mulching
- Pruning fruit trees
- Digging and planting a rain garden
- Moving blue berry bushes to more advantageous locations
- Constructing mason bee houses
- Improving ADA-accessible pathways by building retaining walls and finishing gravel
- Identifying, controlling and removing the noxious weed shiny geranium
- Constructing a swale on contour to capture and retain water for three new loquat trees

Huge thanks to those volunteers who brought home-cooked dishes to share - we love our well-deserved community lunches!
2019 was our seventh year with plants in the ground at BFF. The plants again endured some record-breaking weather in the Seattle area! The 3rd warmest January followed by 2nd coldest February, and November saw less rain than summer. We gave extra care to and also transplanted some plants that were not thriving due to these weather extremes and other reasons (location, improperly planted, crowded by neighboring plants, weakness, and some of pests and diseases).

We continually add organic matter and compost around most plants - much of our compost we produce on site - to feed the plants and soil life and continue to break up areas of heavy clay soil. We add arborist wood chips as a top layer around plants and on many pathways to suppress weeds, increase breadth of soil organisms, and assist the soil in retaining moisture in our drier months. We also installed a rain garden and re-designed two of the apple guilds, adding more evergreen structure, more berries, and more nectar and pollen for pollinators.

We were challenged by volunteers’ limited capacity to water plants in summer, with many areas getting water only once per week. Fortunately, this summer saw about 1” of rain in July and August and none of our plants seem to have died from drought this past year. Shiny Geranium, a classified noxious weed, was spotted on site for the first time. We’ll continue to monitor and remove it as needed. Plants that are prolific on site - Mints, Angelica, Douglas Aster, Cardoon, Lupine, and several of the plants that were used for Pollinator studies, including Tarweed - will be reduced and seed heads removed to decrease further spread.

As for harvest, we saw that foragers continue to skip Gooseberries and Aronia berries, as well as the lesser known plants like Jerusalem Artichokes and Cardoon which are quite prolific at BFF. We also need people to harvest more mint which has spread too much in some areas. Our Shipova trees fruited for the first time! All three Quince trees fruited. Asian Pear next also had lots of fruit this year.

Phase 2 planting started in December, volunteers putting in 23 new trees - Mulberries, Chinese Haw, Hardy Almond, Plum and Apple varieties, Jujube, Toona, Asian Pear, Quince, and Fig.
Native Guild & Wetland

What started as a much needed clean up and restoration of a 1,500 square foot wetland in 2016 has grown to a Pacific Northwest native plant guild of over 5,500 square feet. In 2019 we accomplished the following:

450 square feet of native grass/sedge land was added to the existing prairie guilds. This included a variety of bulbs and graminoids. Additional bulbs, grasses and sedges were added to both the wet and dry prairie guilds.

Carex vulpinoidea and Deschampsia cespitosa were added to the existing willow buffer to provide additional protection from invasive weeds. Buffer shrubs were also planted on the north side of the native guild along the 15th Ave sidewalk.

The berry guild grew so vigorously that it had to be pruned back a bit.

We are expecting good yields next year!

Additional shore pines were added to the conifer guild and cattails was replaced with hard rush to simplify future maintenance and to increase the amount of hard rush available for craft work.

The native guilds were weeded once a month resulting in less than 1% weed cover. Each work party included training in species identification, planting and/or wetland management and water table measurements were taken monthly.

A propagation workshop was conducted and we will have several dozen black huckleberry and salal plants for fall 2020 planting.

Though we have some additional planting scheduled for spring and fall of 2020, we are entering the maintenance phase for the native guilds when the vast majority of our work will be weeding, pruning and harvesting.
Helix Garden Update

Our Helix Giving Garden continued to be a daily attraction for visitors and neighborhood residents during the summer of 2019. Twelve planting beds loaded with peas, beans, summer squash and several kinds of greens drew people to search and pick constantly. Seventy tomato plants of five different varieties began to ripen in July and continued to be picked through October. Chard, Kale and Tatsoi, Mizuna and Bok Choy were still being harvested in December! Yes, climate change is extending our growing season. Wet springs and warm, dry summers have also increased the growth of many uninvited plants, AKA weeds. This meant that we were always falling behind in weeding and so thankful when special volunteer groups would come help us!

It is difficult to gauge the exact output of produce from the Helix since it is open for harvest 24/7. Our observation during the summer was that at least ten people per day visit and pick some vegetables. Over a 4-month season the Helix is harvested from about twelve hundred times. We notice that most pick at least a pound, often two pounds of veggies. This would amount to a conservative estimate of at least 1,200 pounds of vegetables shared from the Helix this year.

Our peas and beans were easier to pick this year thanks to eight new trellises designed and erected by two of our core volunteers. These fence-like trellises along the edges of our beds helped guests pick from both sides without searching through and sometimes damaging the vines.

Many thanks to our friends at the Jefferson Horticulture Facility and the Seattle Giving Garden Network for sharing starts of many of the summer greens appropriate to the cultures of our neighborhood!
While all our on-site events and meetings are open for anyone to attend, we’re always aiming to actively go out into the community, not just have them come to us. Creating an Outreach Coordinator (OC) staff position in 2018 has greatly increased our capacity to do so.

In 2019, our OC, together with core volunteers, tabled and gave presentations about our work at the annual spring gathering put on by Sustainable Northeast Seattle, at Beacon Hill’s Kimball Elementary School’s family resource fair, at a fundraising event for the Community Alliance for Global Justice, and at a South Seattle networking and advocacy event for youth and adult climate action groups. Another uplifting exchange with youth activists happened at the YMCA’s Environmental Leaders Summit where we had the chance to discuss individual actions for the environment with young people from all over Western Washington.

Aiming to encourage community groups to utilize the site on their own time, we offered teacher trainings (see p.14) and collaborated with The Northwest School in developing a fieldtrip curriculum (see p.13). We also gave two tour guide trainings and partnered with urban forager Cheryl Wheeler to offer free summer foraging walks. Empowered by their increased knowledge of the history, design, and plantings of BFF, attendees are now more confident in introducing the space to their families, friends and visitors.

We also deepened our relationship with Franklin High School as many students from the Honor Society attended BFF work parties throughout the year.
BFF is always seeking to connect with other groups and individuals working to develop the Urban Commons and Sharing Economy in Seattle. During a local networking event this year we sparked a collaboration with like-minded groups and we are hoping to work towards collectively promoting the Commons in 2020 and beyond.

We were also happy to share our regenerative urban farming vision in an interview for an upcoming feature on ComeToLife.com, a platform dedicated to spreading positive news about initiatives for social and ecological regeneration.

We also received a special visit from Marisha Auerbach this August. She taught the Permaculture Design Class where the idea for BFF was born! Impressed by how far the project has come, Marisha captured footage of BFF to be included in her online PDC through Oregon State University—learning and teaching coming full circle!

7,072 VOLUNTEER HOURS were recorded in 2019. This includes all our work parties and some meetings but does not take into account all the hours that core volunteers put in to plan and prepare these activities and do administrative tasks behind the scenes.

We owe a huge thanks to new P-Patcher Rafaela Victoriano and her family. They contributed a lot to our community space by weeding, creating signs for P-Patch plots, improving pathways, and building community by reaching out to other P-Patch plot holders.

Mil Gracias!

Tours of BFF continue to be in demand. In 2019, we welcomed a number of nascent food forest designers (see p.13) as well as landscape, agroecology, and environmental anthropology classes from South Seattle College and Seattle University. We met with REI product designers looking for inspiration from urban re-wilding projects and a South African visitor wanting to introduce community gardens in South African mining communities.
Northwest School Field Trips

BFF’s partnership with the Northwest School is founded upon shared values: teaching in a social justice framework, the school challenges its students to think about the many ways they can contribute to a better, more sustainable world.

When faculty teaching food justice and food systems contacted us about how their students could “get dirt under their nails” we encouraged them to attend our Community Work Parties to become familiar with the tools and tasks at the food forest. This enabled teachers to lead their students in some activities without needing BFF core volunteers to supervise. In the Spring, Jenny Cooper, Director of Environmental Education and Sustainability at the Northwest School, brought a group of fifty 7th graders and seven faculty members on a field trip to the Beacon Food Forest for a mini work party. This fall, those same students came back to the site as 8th graders.

Teachers developed a comprehensive field-trip curriculum for BFF that involves student teams rotating through work stations so that they can experience a variety of tasks, from compost prep to digging up gravel, to weeding and moving woodchips. Students also brought back ideas from BFF to the school’s own urban farm where students grow vegetables and care for chickens. BFF’s covered compost system inspired students to build lids for their own compost station.

Field trips to BFF will continue in 2020. The BFF Pollinator Team is even in conversation with Jenny Cooper about assisting students to create a bee enclosure on campus and learn hive maintenance with us at BFF.
Consultations for other Food Forests

We continue to be contacted by sprouting Food Forest projects from around the US, Canada, and abroad. As one of the first large-scale public food forests in the country, the Beacon Food Forest continues to be a source of inspiration and information to community gardeners and permaculturalists near and far. In 2019, we offered advice and information about our model of community building and urban farming to new food forest projects in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Tennessee, Iowa, Montreal, the Netherlands, and right here in Duvall, on Bainbridge Island (Bainbridge Island Food Forest), and in Kent (World Relief’s Paradise Parking Plots community garden for refugees).

Seattle University & BFF: Hands-on Climate Resilience

In a special collaboration with Seattle U’s agroecology and environmental science classes, BFF educators and students co-facilitated three classes during Community Work Parties. The free workshop series demonstrated gardening techniques that can increase resilience to climate change, in participants’ own back yards and in community gardens. Seattle U’s students learned how permaculture techniques can contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. BFF is an example of how some of the big ecological issues of our time can be addressed through low-threshold community involvement in land stewardship. We then demonstrated the following techniques during our workshop series:

1) Sheet mulching created 500 square feet of new healthy soil, preventing the growth of weeds and other invasive species and supporting the health of native and edible plants.

2) 23 new native plants were added to several plant guilds. By supporting one another through their various structures and functions, they will create an ecologically balanced landscape that can support a diverse ecosystem of plants, insects, fungi, microbes, and pollinators. Healthy ecosystems can better resist and recover more quickly from any damage precipitated by changes to the climate, such as an increase in pests or diseases.

3) We also created a 300 square foot sloped and trenched rain garden. Flowering plants will feed pollinators and delight passers-by while the bioswale channels, absorbs and filters stormwater runoff. This prevents erosion and improves ground water quality.
In 2019 the Education Committee met monthly at the Beacon Hill Library and organized five classes for the general public. The classes were: winter and summer pruning, foraging and farming fungi, planning an herb garden, foraging medicinal plants at BFF, and a foraging and cooking class for hikers and campers in the northwest.

The committee also organized two new training formats: a teacher training that gave environmental educators ideas for field trip activities in the Food Forest, and trainings for new tour guides to increase the number of volunteers available to lead tours of the BFF site.

Much of the fall and winter was dedicated to planning a permaculture design course that will be offered in 2020.

The public classes reached a total of 85 of students. Of these, five students attended at no cost, and 21 attended at a “supported” $10 reduced rate [and 19 attended at the $20 “sustaining level”].

The Education Committee also worked to integrate anti-racism into classroom procedures. We now read a Land Acknowledgment at the beginning of each class and are seeking to recruit more educators of color of teach at BFF.
How Much Did We Share?

We estimate that a total of 2,821 lbs of fruit, vegetables and herbs were harvested at the Beacon Food Forest in 2019, mainly by neighbors visiting the site and collecting produce according to their needs. Our on-the-vine food sharing strategy continues to be successful in sharing public food on public land with virtually nothing going to waste.

In the future, we hope to develop a tracking system that allows us to record the exact harvest quantities and number of visitors on site, while continuing to keep the food forest and garden open to foragers 24/7.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Quantity (lbs)</th>
<th>Produce</th>
<th>Quantity (lbs)</th>
<th>Produce</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>Helix Garden (beans, peas, beets, kale, chard, collards, squash, tomatoes)</td>
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Financial condition

The following Income and Expense summary reports our financial activity in the fiscal year that ran from November 1st, 2018 to October 31st, 2019. We show income and expenses by the Food Forest Collective and those managed through our fiscal sponsor GROW. The latter has been our fiscal sponsor since inception and we have received and managed several of our grants through them. As we transition to our status as an independent not-for-profit over the coming year, their role in our finances will shrink.

The negative net income for the fiscal year period reflects delays in reimbursements to GROW from the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods and then to FFC and from GROW to FFC for our grant from the Bullitt Foundation. Each of those grant funds remained positive at the end of the 2019 calendar year.
Grants and Donations cont’d

Food Forest Collective Granted Federal Tax-Exempt Status

Our major financial news in 2019 has been that we transitioned to IRS tax-exempt status this year. We received our determination letter on February 5, 2019 and began our year-long transition from working with GROW as our fiscal agent to accepting grants and donations on our own behalf. We are deeply appreciative of GROW, especially Treasurer Michael McNutt and accountant Lance Larowe, for supporting us for the last eight years! Without their sponsorship we would not have been able to access over three hundred and fifty thousand dollars in public and foundation grants and private donations. Now, grants and donations will come directly to The Food Forest Collective, the not-for-profit corporate umbrella for the Beacon Food Forest.

Staffing

Through April 2019 Lavanya Madhusudan, as development and operations coordinator and Carla Penderock, as outreach coordinator, served as our staff at half-time each. Lavanya moved to another job at the end of April and Carla expanded her role and hours to three-quarters time. Both have been supported by the generosity of the Bullitt Foundation. We will need further such support to keep Carla and other staff assistance through 2020. Seattle is a very expensive place to live and work and we have learned that part-time employment is often inadequate and inequitable.

The board has asked Carla to continue with us so long as we can support her. She has been vital to building and maintaining our connections to the Beacon Hill Community, the entire city of Seattle and the Puget Sound region. Absent a continuing contact person and public face for BFF, our many volunteers might not be able to present a consistent community presence.
Continuing grants

City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods – Phase 2 Ground-Making Grant:

Work on our Phase 2 expansion continued throughout 2019 after a pause in construction during the winter months. Construction by the Seattle Conservation Corps was completed at the end of July while volunteer construction of urbanite walls and ADA pathways continued until Fall. We have been granted an extension until July 31st, 2020 for using our remaining grant funds to build and install ADA accessible planting beds, trellises and a tool shed. Design work for these continues through the winter.

The Bullitt Foundation graciously extended its 2018 grant into 2020 to keep staff employed as long as we can in order to maintain our outreach and community relations work. Carla Penderock continues to be a primary contact for outreach to community groups as well as tours and special work parties by clubs and businesses.

This year we used our 2018 grant of $8,000 from The National Environmental Education Foundation to support four hands-on volunteer education and learning events in partnership with students and faculty from the Environmental Studies Department at Seattle University. The focus of these events was on building the resilience of public lands and teaching participants how to build healthy soil through sheet mulching, diverse plant guilds, and rain gardens to mitigate soil erosion and manage stormwater runoff.

No new grants were received in 2019.

Community Donations

One way that local businesses and individuals contribute and share ownership in the Food Forest is through donations. In 2019, we were fortunate enough to receive generous in-kind donations from the following businesses:

Essential Baking Company and Caffè Vita donate bread and coffee, respectively, on a monthly basis to feed volunteers at Community Work Parties. Lunch at our April work party was supplemented by Perihelion Brewery. Fonte Coffee also made contributions. Home Depot generously supplied us with much-needed new tools.
Board Activities

The Food Forest Collective (FFC) is the nonprofit corporation supporting the Beacon Food Forest. In early June 2018, we submitted our Form 1023: Application for Recognition of Exemption under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. On February 5, 2019, we learned from the IRS that the Food Forest Collective had officially received 501(c)(3) nonprofit status! Since it was August 2017 when we received our Articles of Incorporation from Washington State to be a state nonprofit, our 501(c)(3) status is backdated to August 22, 2017. We are grateful for the pro bono legal assistance for these processes and ongoing organizational questions which we received through Wayfind. Note that Wayfind and Nonprofit Assistance Center (NAC) have now merged to form Communities Rise.

In 2019, the FFC Board President was Elise Evans, the Secretary was Marco Downs, and Don Comstock managed our finances. Lavanya Madhusudan’s last day as our Development and Operations Coordinator was April 12, 2019. She left us with organized files of grant opportunities, nonprofit strategy, operations documents, and development work. Rising Sun Accounting continued as our contracted accounting service, which handles payroll, taxes, and other accounting tasks. Carla Penderock continued her role as Community Outreach Coordinator, with expanded weekly hours after Lavanya left the Development and Operations Coordinator role.

Erika Robertson worked with us from March through June as a Volunteer Management Consultant via the 501 Commons Volunteer Manager Corps program. Carla applied for this opportunity and we were lucky to work with them. This program ran from March through June, and Erika presented us with a volunteer program evaluation and organizational recommendations at the conclusion of her time.
Vision & Mission Statements

Our 2019 organization-wide retreat was held on May 11, at the Jefferson Community Center. We hired an external facilitator who guided our discussion around organizational goals, vision, mission, and strategy. This work was a continuation of last year’s FFC Board retreat. After further refinement in Board committee work, the FFC Board approved new vision and mission statements. This was a highlight of our year!

Our VISION: A world where every community participates in creating local food ecosystems.

Our MISSION: Community Grows Here. We cultivate a community dedicated to building equitable food systems for all people, and steward our environment for the benefit of all species.

- We believe in Caring for the Earth.
  We steward our local ecosystem by building healthy soil and increasing the diversity of plants and habitat.

- We believe in Caring for the People.
  We bring people together to grow and share food, learn from each other, and know their neighbors.

- We work to create a Fair Share for all.
  We are on land stolen from the Duwamish, Suquamish, Muckleshoot, and other peoples, stewards and co-creators of abundance with the land since time immemorial. We work to dismantle an unjust food system rooted in white supremacy and conquest by nurturing its replacement, already alive and ready to grow. Through open harvest and collaboration within and among communities, we work to create a fair share for all.

We orient ourselves towards equity as one of our guiding principles by reading a trio of equity questions out loud at the beginning of every Board meeting:

1) Who is not here, and what can we do to make participation in the food forest more accessible to them?

2) What decisions will we make at today’s meeting, and what implications do they have for racial equity?

3) How can we expand our thinking about what we currently do at the food forest to be more relevant to and inclusive of POC?
Content Credits

Thanks to all of the people who have shared their words and images throughout the Report.

All Photographs are by Jonathan H. Lee/subtledream.com, unless noted otherwise.

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