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### Friend of the Environment Volunteers to Save a Park and Creek Tributary

 by [Wes Dvorak](#)

**December 18, 2009** - Choosing a Community Day activity that preserves a park with a tributary of the Salmon Creek, just north of Portland, Oregon, was a "natural" for Randall Pearl.

Randall, senior network planner-IP, loves nature and outdoors activities enough to have moved 10 years ago from his urban New Jersey home to scenic Vancouver, Washington.

"My wife and I love hiking, kayaking and snow-shoeing, so this area has a lot more to offer us than Trenton, New Jersey, where I grew up," Randall said. "Here you can drive a short time and be in real wilderness country."

Randall Pearl takes a weed whacker to invasive plants at Pleasant Valley Park near his home in Vancouver, Washington. The invaders displace native plants and upset the ecology of the park, which includes a tributary of the nearby Salmon Creek.

Randall wants to keep it that way, and volunteers to make it so. Since moving to Washington, he has been on the board of directors of the Friends of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, a member of the Clark County Habitat Conservation Ordinance stakeholder's group and is currently a board member of the Salmon Creek Watershed Council. He has worked on numerous habitat restoration and enhancement projects with organizations like Fish First, Friends of the East Fork and Clark Public Utilities.

His project leadership on a habitat restoration project at Pleasant Valley Park earned him and his wife, Mary Kay, a Certificate of Merit from the Clark County Commissioners five years ago.

It was at Pleasant Valley Park that Randall used his Community Day time to remove invasive plants that have spread throughout this 29-acre preserve. A Washington State University project is enhancing about 12 acres of parkland, which includes a tributary to Salmon Creek, and that's where Randall volunteered his time.

"The park is just a five-minute walk from my home so I've adopted it as my restoration project," Randall said. "It's suffering from invasive, non-natives like Himalayan blackberry, Japanese knotweed and garlic mustard plants that increase erosion, impact the food supply of birds, mammals and fish, and generally upset the whole ecology."

Randall said that blackberry bushes might sound nice but, in fact, they grow tall and thick with sharp thorns. They tend to spread at a rapid rate in wet Washington weather to create a "mono-culture," forcing out native species, he said.

Wielding a weed whacker with a steel blades like a circular saw, Randall removes the thorny blackberry and other invaders to allow native plants and trees purchased with money from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant to thrive.

Randall hopes the trees will help shade and cool pools created by a pure, fresh-water spring in the park, and develop them into breeding habitats for salmon to safely raise their young. Eventually, the salmon and offspring return to the Salmon Creek.

"Salmon Creek got its name because there was a time when you could pitchfork fish out of the water, but now Steelhead and Coho salmon are endangered species there," Randall said. "When I heard the company was offering time off for community activities, this was the first thing I thought of," Randall said. "The public parks are really strapped for budget, and rely on volunteers like me."

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