

2024 INVASIVES CHIPPING PROGRAM REPORT

Program Administered by Transition Salt Spring and the Native Plant Stewardship Group

HISTORY

For fourteen years, a program on Salt Spring Island to drop off invasive plants for chipping has thrived, organized by the Native Plant Stewardship Group. The intent of the program has been to:

- Provide an alternative to burning invasive plants
- Reduce the fire risk of these inflammable species
- Attempt to eradicate invasive species from the island
- Build community awareness about fire risks and the dangers of invasive plants.

With funding from a variety of sources, including Fire Smart money from Salt Spring Fire Rescue, a drop-off location has been provided on two or three days every year for Salt Springers to bring their invasive plant cuttings, where they have been chipped and delivered to several farms on the island.

This project has taxed the resources and energies of the NPSG, which provides countless hours of volunteer labour and organizing every year to make this a success, and the group questioned whether they could take this on again in 2024.

2024 PROGRAM FUNDING

In alignment with the Transition Salt Spring focus on reducing fire risk and increasing public awareness about it, TSS jumped in to add their support for the program. After several meetings with SSFR, it became clear that the FireSmart funding they had expected for this year to fund the majority of the program would not be forthcoming and additional funding would be needed.

To help cover the hard costs for two days of drop-offs, chipping and chip delivery, TSS applied for a CRD Grant In Aid, which was awarded for \$2500. Additional donations from the SSI Garden Club (\$500) and the SSI Conservancy (\$500) completed the outside funding, which was not enough to cover the costs of the program. A new plan to collect fees for drop-offs was created to augment the funding.

The fees were published in advance of the chipping days and on signs at the events:

- Car Trunk \$5 - \$10
- SUV \$5 - \$25
- Trailer \$15 - \$40
- Pickup \$15 - \$40
- Box Truck \$50 - \$150

2024 PROGRAM BUDGET (See finalized budget below)

Based on the funding and estimates for user fees, two days were identified for drop-off events at donated locations: Saturday, May 25 at the Community Gospel Hall and Sunday, June 9 at Fulford Hall. Good as Wood, a local chipping company run by Ben James, offered \$150/hour for

a chipper, truck and two workers, so two of these teams were booked for each day. Two additional workers were hired @\$30/hour for each day. An additional delivery truck was hired for the second day @\$80/hour from Mark Whitear. There were expenses of about \$124 for food and \$405 for the promotional costs of the events by TSS. On Day 1, the user fees totaled \$2,111.56 and on Day 2, the fees were \$760.00.

Countless hours of volunteer time from the TSS and NPSG teams, including heroic work by the TSS Communications Lead in promotion; donations of the drop off sites by Fulford Hall and the Community Gospel Hall; a reduced hourly fee from Good As Wood; and benevolent reductions in invoices made these events successful.

With 135 vehicles dropping off invasives over the two days, the program netted \$1,832.00, which helped to offset the expenses in labour and promotion by TSS.

CONCLUSIONS

After initial setbacks, the 2024 Invasives Chipping Program flourished, with great potential for the perseverance of an annual event.

- A **great turnout** for drop-offs - we estimated 100 vehicles over two days based on past numbers and got 135
- Wide **support for the drop-off fees** - near universal acceptance by users and seemingly no impediment to participation
- Growing possibilities for **chip delivery locations** - more farms showed interest in receiving chips, including Burgoyne Valley Community Farm, and the potential exists for a program to use them for berms near forests to reduce fire risk
- Other **funding sources** - FireSmart funding may be available in coming years, many sponsorship options were not pursued, potential donations from additional groups exist and CRD could fully fund this.
- Ideally an **ongoing organizer** will take this up, either as:
 - A community initiative by CRD; or
 - An ongoing program of a non-profit or non-profit consortium
- The **large amount of volunteer time and paid staff time** with TSS resulted in the creation of a model that could be simply executed by a coordinator in future years.
- **Partnership with the Fire Department** is possible and should be integral to the intent and messaging of this program.
- A **workable financial model** has been created that could support the cost of a coordinator, if taken up by another group.

FINAL NOTES

Transition Salt Spring and the Native Plant Stewardship Group can no longer take the lead on this program and want to pass the opportunity on to another group.

Some notes for the next Coordinator:

- Our Day 2, Sunday, numbers were much reduced. Possible reasons:

- we announced the second day quite late so most people came to the first
 - Sunday may not be a great day - although we did have some comments that Sunday is preferred.
- However, our Day 2 expenses were much lower, as we were able to let the additional truck and one worker leave quite early, and one of the chippers was released a few hours early.
- Cash was King, with the vast majority of users having it or being willing to go get it. E-transfers didn't come through successfully, and our Square was only used several times, most times unsuccessfully (user fault).