

## 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Prairie Appreciation Day

Few people remember when Thurston County was comprised of prairie. The grasslands supported large numbers of elk, mule deer, western meadowlarks, and gophers, the stately Oregon white oak, and flowers such as blue camas and golden paintbrush. Development and invasive weeds such as Scotch broom destroyed all but tiny scraps of the prairie. **The Nature Conservancy** stepped in to restore the largest remaining fragment, a 1000-acre preserve in Littlerock, WA, known as "Glacial Heritage". Volunteers came from all over Western Washington to manually remove the Scotch broom.

Now that much of the broom has been removed, the prairie flowers are responding. When in bloom, blue camas covers the prairie so completely that when Lewis and Clark first saw it, they thought it was a shallow lake! Other flowers such as shooting star, pussy toe, and the endangered golden paintbrush spangle the blue with highlights of pink, white, and yellow. Birds seldom seen in western Washington, such as western meadowlarks and western bluebirds, have returned. Several species of raptors fly overhead. After many years of hard work, you can now see the prairie much as the Indians did.

Large mounds dot the prairie. There's a lot of argument on just what created them, but because they're comprised of glacial "flour", they're probably remnants of a melting glacier.

During Prairie Appreciation Day you can enjoy a long walk around the perimeter (about five miles) or take a much shorter, interpretive tour. Along the interpretive route are prairie related booths staffed by volunteers, professionals, and experts in various aspects of prairie ecology. Many of the booths include activities geared to children, so bring the kids and grandkids if you like. Should you get tired, or just want to see the preserve in relative comfort, a tractor pulled hayride is available.

### Things to know:

\* The entrance road into Glacial Heritage is not paved, and can be rough and muddy in spots.

Please observe the 15 mph speed limit while driving past the neighboring homes.

\* There are no facilities other than porta-potties at the site, so please bring your own food, water and snacks.

\* Dress for the weather which may be cool, windy, rainy or all three!

\* Dogs are not allowed on the preserve, so please leave them at home.

For those folks who require wheelchairs, the Mima Mounds Natural Area Preserve is totally wheelchair accessible. Located three miles from Glacial Heritage, it provides handicapped accessible trails, with interpretive signs and excellent views of the mounds and wildlife.