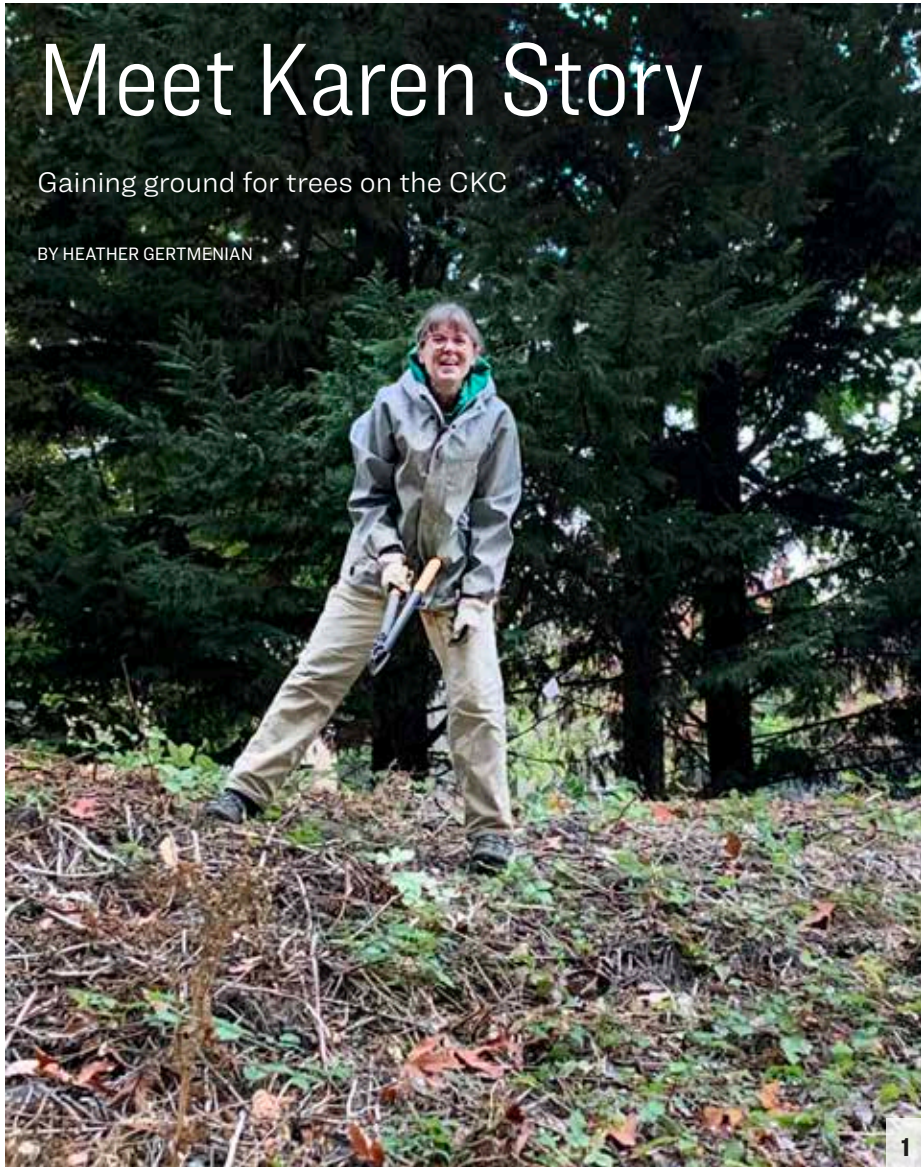


# Meet Karen Story

Gaining ground for trees on the CKC

BY HEATHER GERTMENIAN



December's dark drizzly days might bring some people down, but for Karen Story, it's a time of hope and renewal that has nothing to do with the upcoming holidays. For this Kirkland resident, it's planting season! And this December, she is extra joyful. Funds have been secured that will allow her CKC Habitat Restoration program to plant nearly 50 trees and shrubs along the Cross Kirkland Corridor (CKC) Trail.

Karen began volunteering with habitat restoration 15 years ago when she learned that Kirkland's urban forests were dying due to invasive plant species. Her Environmental Studies background, combined with her passion for preserving the city's trees, led Karen to train as a Steward with the Green Kirkland Partnership (GKP) — a unique alliance between the City of Kirkland, nonprofit partners, businesses and the community dedicated to restoring more than 500 acres of natural areas in the city. "These urban forests are beautiful. Kirkland has a lot of them, and they're a special part of Kirkland," says Karen. Her original focus was on projects in her Highlands neighborhood. She has contributed countless hours alongside other GKP volunteers resulting in the transformative restoration of Cotton Hill Park.

In 2011, the city purchased the former Burlington Northern railway corridor that runs from Totem Lake to the S.E. Kirkland Park & Ride. An avid walker, Karen noticed that invasive plants such as Scotch broom, holly, ivy and blackberry were taking over the green spaces along the 5.75-mile converted rail trail, choking off beneficial native species. "Scotch broom," Karen explains, "is not only a terrible allergen, but it's noxious. It poisons the soil, and it's a fire hazard." Something needed to be done. The CKC doesn't fall under Green Kirkland's purview; it's managed by the Public Works department. Although the invasive

plants were on Public Works' radar, the department was resource constrained. So, Karen jumped into action, suggesting the creation of a volunteer program. Public Works agreed, and the "CKC Habitat Restoration" program was born. First, Karen's volunteer group tackled the removal of all the Scotch broom along the entire six miles of the corridor, including plants up to eight feet tall. Next, her group cleared around the holly trees so Public Works could get in to do removal work. Finally, Karen was positioned to implement her next goal: planting more trees along the corridor.

In 2020, working with city staff, Karen identified a stretch of trail just south of the Rotary Club Pavilion for blackberry removal and tree planting. Despite the pandemic, her group was able to continue their restoration efforts by wearing masks, staying socially distanced and working outdoors. "It was such a godsend," admits Karen. "It allowed people to stay connected. It really kept my sanity." Their efforts are contributing towards Kirkland's goal to achieve a

healthy, resilient urban forest with a 40% tree canopy cover. The public benefits of trees include everything from cleaning our air and water, providing wildlife habitat and bird migration corridors to beautification and contributing to our health and well-being.

Karen's adopted section of trail will require a few more years of ongoing maintenance until it is fully established. During our dry summers, city trucks fill rain barrels, allowing volunteers to water the planted area until nature takes over in the fall. When the rains begin, the soil softens up, and volunteers dig up blackberry roots and cover the area with mulch. Late fall is planting time. Spring starts the cycle again. "Every year, we do a section. We're just marching our way northward," she says with a grin. Karen acknowledges that Kirkland Public Works performs a lot of CKC maintenance. "They're passionate about this too. Their resources are limited."

Her hope is that the CKC Habitat Restoration program can grow if more volunteers train to become

Stewards and adopt their own section, however big or small, to restore. Karen has worked with the city to send fliers to property owners, encouraging them to adopt the section of trail adjacent to their property. "Volunteers are crucial to make sure that we create the kind of beautiful trail environment we want," explains Karen. Also crucial ... Karen's tireless persistence despite the dark, damp days of winter.

CKC Habitat Restoration work parties are held rain or shine, two Saturday mornings each month, and tools are provided. Volunteers find it fun, satisfying and a great way to meet people while getting some exercise outdoors.

For more info, visit [ckcvolunteers.weebly.com](http://ckcvolunteers.weebly.com) or email [CKCTrailVolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:CKCTrailVolunteers@gmail.com).

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1. Karen Story.  
2. Karen working as a Cotton Hill Park Steward.  
3. Karen next to one of her shore pine trees two years ago.