OBTAIN PLANTS THROUGH A NPSOT PLANT RESCUE EVENT

WHAT IS A PLANT RESCUE?

A Plant Rescue allows volunteers to legally collect plants from private property scheduled for development. Plant Rescues can provide plants for invasive species restoration efforts, for propagation, for educational purposes, or for use in your own yard. Plant rescues can be small and relatively easily organized, or they may be large, involving dozens of people, and require substantial planning and organization. It is up to the organizer to decide how to run the rescue project, and this document will teach you what issues to consider when planning a Plant Rescue.

FINDING PLANT RESCUE LOCATIONS

It helps to have partner organizations to identify locations for plant rescues because the more eyes and ears you have, the more opportunities you will find. Some permitting authorities provide automatic notification of development permit applications to individuals who register as “interested parties”. In other cases you may learn of potential rescue sites from friends, botanists, butterfly and bird enthusiasts, or simply through your travels near your home as you watch “For Sale” and later, “Sold” signs appear on nearby property. A “For Sale” sign is essentially an open invitation to the public to inspect the property, and you will find the seller’s agent’s name and contact information on the sign.

The organizer must approach the property owner to obtain permission to collect plants. The owner may be encouraged to allow a Plant Rescue in order to improve the public profile for their development. Plant Rescues can be performed with no cost to the developer and without any direct assistance from them, but their permission is necessary for a Plant Rescue to occur.

Once a potential site is identified and the property owner indicates they are willing to support a plant rescue, at least one well-qualified individual should thoroughly walk the property to determine if there is a sufficient quantity/quality/variety of transplantable native plants. The site may also need to be assessed for parking potential, for locations for staging plants as well as for allowing volunteers to rest and obtain food and drinks. Most plant rescues are performed with no utilities or facilities on-site. Although the rescue site may be located in a developed area, the rescue site itself is typically undeveloped. Most plant rescues are short enough (2-4 hrs), and small enough (<100 people) that it is practical for volunteers to leave the site to reach a restroom facility.

PLANNING THE PLANT RESCUE EVENT

Once you have identified a suitable rescue site, you must decide how small/informal or large/formal the effort should be. Depending on how well you know the property owner and how many participants you have, you may also want to sign a contract with the owner to protect them (and you) from legal responsibility for any accidents. An individual Participant Liability Waiver (see example) is required for any NPSOT-sponsored activities.

To have a successful plant rescue, you will need people, food/drinks, tools, and lots of empty pots and trailer space. A key step, especially for a large plant rescue, is identifying volunteer partner organizations. These can be native plant enthusiasts, butterfly watchers and birders, fitness or outdoor clubs like the Sierra Club, and even traditional charitable organizations like fraternities and sororities. Larger organizations maintain a calendar and require notice months in advance of events. Be sure that you have good communication with all participants, or at least with the leader of each participating volunteer organization. This enables you to

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make last-minute changes that are sometimes necessary to accommodate the owner’s project schedule or to reschedule due to bad weather or other events.

It is critical to clearly mark off the site with survey stakes and survey tape or other markings so that volunteers do not stray outside of the boundaries defined for collection. Many sites are heavily wooded and visibility is limited, in which case the entire perimeter should be marked. On some sites the boundary of the area to be excavated is marked with a silt fence, inside of which bulldozers will scrape all plants not rescued.

Tools can be provided by participants or the organizer. In many cities there are organizations that make tools available for free to community groups working on beautification projects. Check with the city or state Parks Department, Parks Foundation, Forest Service, an environmental organization like Keep Austin Beautiful, or rent tools to make sure you have enough. All tools should be labeled with the owner’s name and painted with bright colors and/or marked with reflective tape.

To help plan the number of pots you’ll need, as well as staging room, water needed, trailer space, and space in rehabilitation facilities, consider that one volunteer can rescue around 20 one-gallon plants or 5-10 five-gallon plants in one hour. Even fairly small plants (1-2 ft tall) may need a 5 gallon pot to allow collection with an intact root ball, so plants collected are typically fairly small, but they will rarely fit in a pot much smaller than one gallon.

To reduce cost, volunteers can be asked to provide their own food and drinks. Water can be carried in jugs, or in used plastic 55-gallon drums that can be purchased for $20 from local car washes or salvage yards.

Especially for larger events, you will find it helpful to distribute the major tasks (providing pots, tools, trailers, water, food, drinks, etc.) to several different individuals so that the organizer is not overburdened.

**THE BIG DAY: THE PLANT RESCUE EVENT**

Send out final confirmation of the event the night before the event. Set up sign-in table (if needed) first, and assign volunteers to direct cars to park efficiently. Clear the plant storage/staging area and set up watering equipment. Set up food and drinks for volunteers (tables, chairs, tents).

Ask the plant experts who attend the rescue to mentor the less experienced volunteers. Without guidance, volunteers will waste time digging too-large plants that are doomed to die due to root damage. Many plants, such as Mountain laurels and native persimmon trees have long, fragile roots and cannot be transplanted unless they are less than six inches tall. The more experienced collectors should help identify the most valuable plants that are most likely to survive. Ask experts to put a pot on top/beside each plant that is a good rescue candidate.

**CARING FOR RESCUED PLANTS UNTIL REPLANTING**

Once the plants have been rescued, they should be watered ASAP on-site if possible, and transported to locations where they can be stabilized, monitored, and cared for. Look for partners with available greenhouse or nursery space, especially for those plants rescued in hot weather.

After the plants have stabilized and show signs of new growth, they can be donated to schools, the local parks department, or to other groups or organizations that wish to promote native plants.

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PLANT RESCUE PLANNING CHECKLIST

- Identify legal owner of property
- Owner involvement and approval
  - Clearly stake out and/or tape off entire boundary of rescue area
  - Identify off-limits areas (poison ivy, too steep, unstable, etc.)
- Determine access limitations, if any, and quantity and location for parking.
- Method for on-site communication (cell phone, 2-way radio)
- Announcement: Date and time (start and end), printable map with directions to site
- Pre-registration (if required, do NOT provide location until individual is pre-registered)
- Check-in staff, table
- Sign Waiver of Liability (example provided)
- Detailed instructions
- Scope of natives (the opportunity)
- Any restrictions on rescued plant disposition?
  - For personal use
  - For local city parks, etc.
  - For resale?
- Rescuer equipment and materials (shovels, pails, water, etc.)
- Safety issues, e.g. weather; possibility of cancellation
- Volunteers identified
  - Check-in staff
  - Parking directors
  - Plant identification experts
- Plant collection and removal area
- Trucks and/or trailers for transportation

SOURCES FOR PUBLICITY

State Newsletter, chapter websites, blogs, etc.
Local newspapers and other media
Organization newsletters
Long term collaborations are important

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WAIVER OF LIABILITY

Obtain from state office.

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EXAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENT

• Organizer contact information
• What types of plants are available
• Where may the plants be used (non-profit, city/county, school, personal?)
• How to dress (long sleeves for thorns, hats, gloves, etc.)
• What to bring (drinks, food, sunscreen, etc.)
• Safety issues, e.g. weather; possibility of cancellation

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