

Botanical Garden aims to save native plants

Behind-the-scenes conservation efforts serve long-term needs

By Maggie Wolf
Special to The Tribune
Salt Lake Tribune

Article Last Updated: 06/11/2007 12:10:12 AM MDT

Gardening Behind the showy landscapes of Red Butte Garden in Salt Lake City grows a concerned effort toward native plant conservation.

Cooperating with local, state and federal agencies, Red Butte Garden directs plant surveys, long-term monitoring and seed collection for some of Utah's rare, endangered and threatened plants. Keeping a close eye on these plants is a labor-intensive and time-consuming project, but the information gathered is critical for the survival of these species.

Rita Dodge, director of conservation at Red Butte Garden, uses many resources to accomplish varied tasks, including all-important volunteers.

"We have about 30 volunteers helping the conservation program," Dodge says. "I could use even more trained volunteers, especially to help monitor plant populations in other places around the state. I don't really have enough budget or time to travel so many places."

Recently, Dodge visited a local site to monitor the rare Wasatch shooting star (*Dodecatheon dentatum Hooker*, var. *utahense*). This variety of shooting star grows only in eight locations in Big Cottonwood Canyon.

"I contacted local rock climbing clubs and recruited volunteers to help us find these plants," Dodge says. "They grow up on ledges and cliff faces, in spots where only experienced climbers can reach." Other monitored species are similarly checked annually or semiannually to record plant population increases or declines.

Red Butte Garden cooperates with the Center for Plant Conservation (CPC), a consortium of 34 botanical institutions in the United States. Each institution assumes responsibility for rare, endangered or threatened plant species within its geographic region. Red Butte Garden assumes responsibility for 13 plant species, coordinating the necessary tasks and seeking funding for ongoing conservation research.

"Only four of our plants are fully endowed, so the others are funded through other means," Dodge says. A donation of \$10,000 endows one species; the CPC will pay for the monitoring and research of these plants.

"Our volunteers are valuable two ways," Dodge says. "The work they do, of course, is highly valuable. We don't have enough staff to complete all the tasks like gathering, cleaning and cataloging seed. But also, their volunteer time helps me when I apply for grant money, since many grants will only match a dollar amount I can provide." Volunteers' time, travel expenses and out-of-pocket costs can tally to appreciable amounts.

"But if someone wanted to endow one of these species outright, that would be great," Dodge says, smiling.

Dodge directs several conservation projects at Red Butte Garden: monitoring the White River and Graham's penstemon populations, Wasatch shooting star monitoring and reintroduction, participation with the Seeds of Success project (a cooperative effort among the CPC, the Bureau of Land Management and other agencies), propagation of Tobias saxifrage (for reintroduction in Idaho forests) and seed collection of oil shale endemic plants.

* MAGGIE WOLF is an assistant professor for Utah State University Extension in Salt Lake County. E-mail her at maggiew@ext.usu.edu.

On the Web:

* Learn more about the Center for Plant Conservation at www.centerforplantconservation.org.

* Learn more about Utah's rare, endangered or threatened plants at dwrcdc.nr.utah.gov/ucdc and www.natureserve.org.

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