

# MAGNUSON PARK, Unnaturally Natural:



From engineered roots to natural systems.  
From a biological wasteland to critical wildlife habitat.  
From a concrete runway to a federally protected wetland.  
From a naval air station to a city park.  
From an expansive vision to a tangible reality.

The Magnuson Park project reshapes over 160 acres of northeast Seattle's largest park.



HISTORIC DISTRICT

North Headwaters

Active Recreation

Entry Ponds

Marsh Ponds

Promontory Ponds

Shore Ponds



LAKE WASHINGTON

A LANDSCAPE IN DRAMATIC TRANSITION: Seattle's Sand Point Peninsula teems with new habitat and active recreation reclaiming a site once dominated by a naval air station.



Sand Point Naval Air Station  
1957



Magnuson Park  
2011



**TRANSFORMATION:**

A landscape which many visitors interpret as natural has emerged from under the tarmac.



2006



2008



2012

**FUNCTION AND EXPERIENCE:** A system of five ecologically distinct yet interconnected wetland systems are integrated with constructed park amenities, including trails, fields, roads and parking, forming a singular, powerful experience for park visitors.

Lake Washington

**NORTH HEADWATERS:** Three emergent ponds provide habitat, buffer and backdrop to the adjacent sportsfields that hydrate them.

**SHORE PONDS:** Deep, open Water ponds with large “emergent shelves” maximizing marsh edge and providing outfalls to Lake Washington.

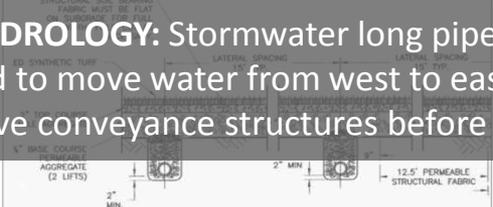
ACTIVE RECREATION

**ENTRY PONDS:** The most western reaching ponds in the system provide ideal shorebird and dragonfly habitat and are a gateway element in the park.

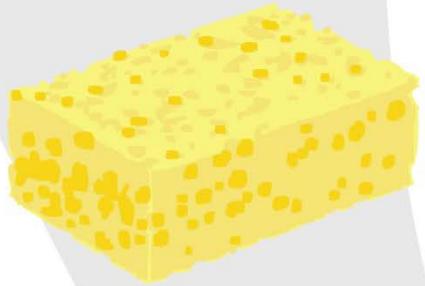
**PROMONTORY PONDS:** Up to 14 feet deep with a static water level the ponds provide valued open water habitat for waterfowl.

**MARSH PONDS:** Over 40 shallow, daisy-chained pools designed to maximize pond edge and emergent vegetation communities’ ideal for amphibian habitat.

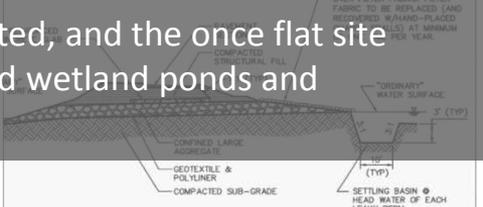
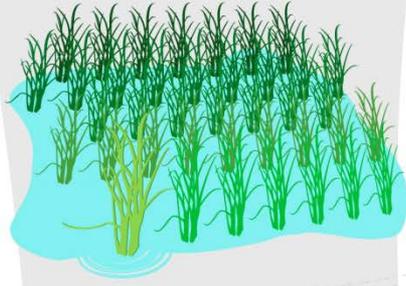
**NEW HYDROLOGY:** Stormwater long piped under the flattened airfield was daylighted, and the once flat site regraded to move water from west to east through a web of over 50 interconnected wetland ponds and innovative conveyance structures before entering adjacent Lake Washington.



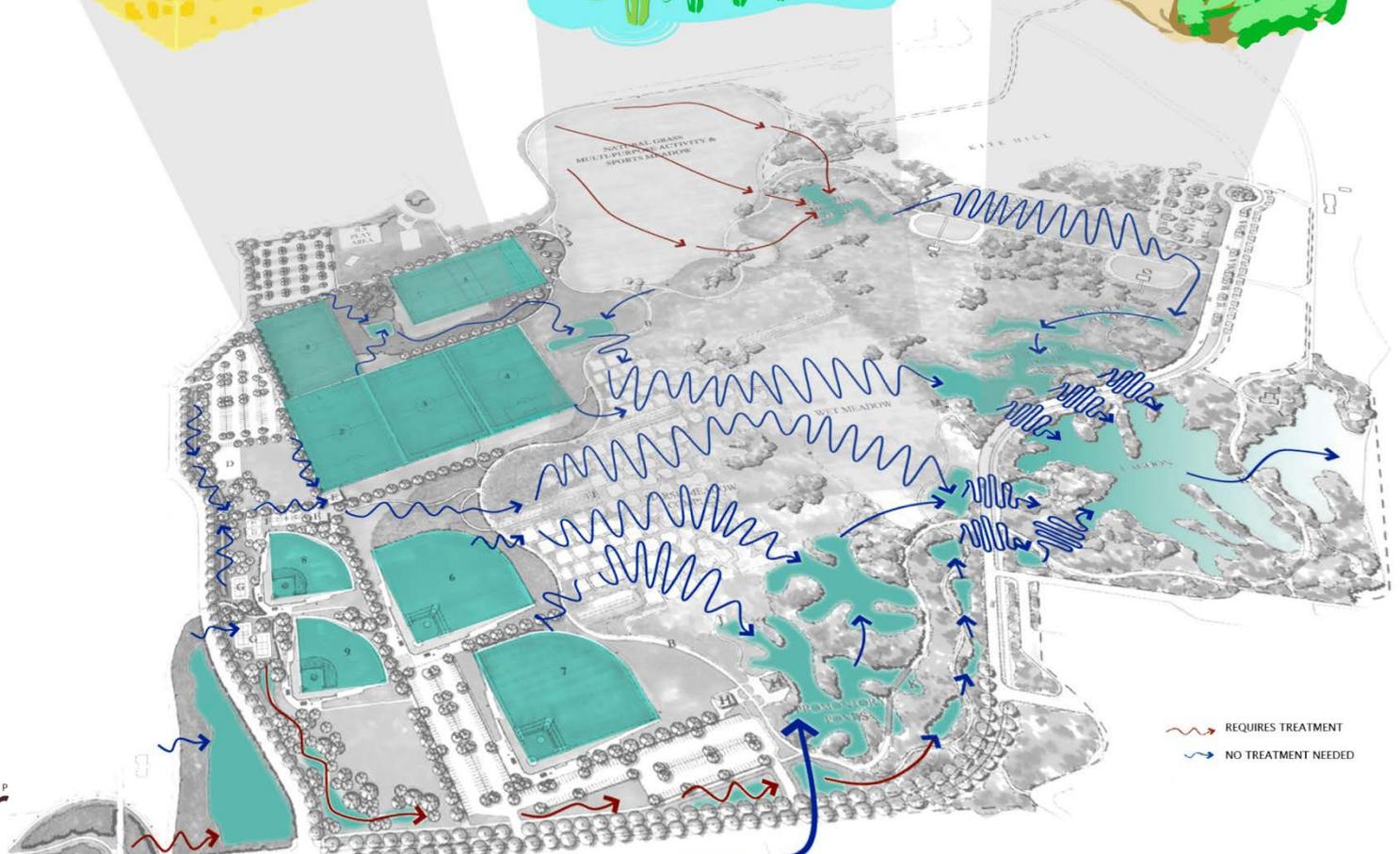
**Synthetic Turf Field Drainage a.k.a. THE GIANT SPONGE**



**Marsh Ponds a.k.a. THE RICE PADDY**



**The Leaky Berms a.k.a. THE BURRITO**



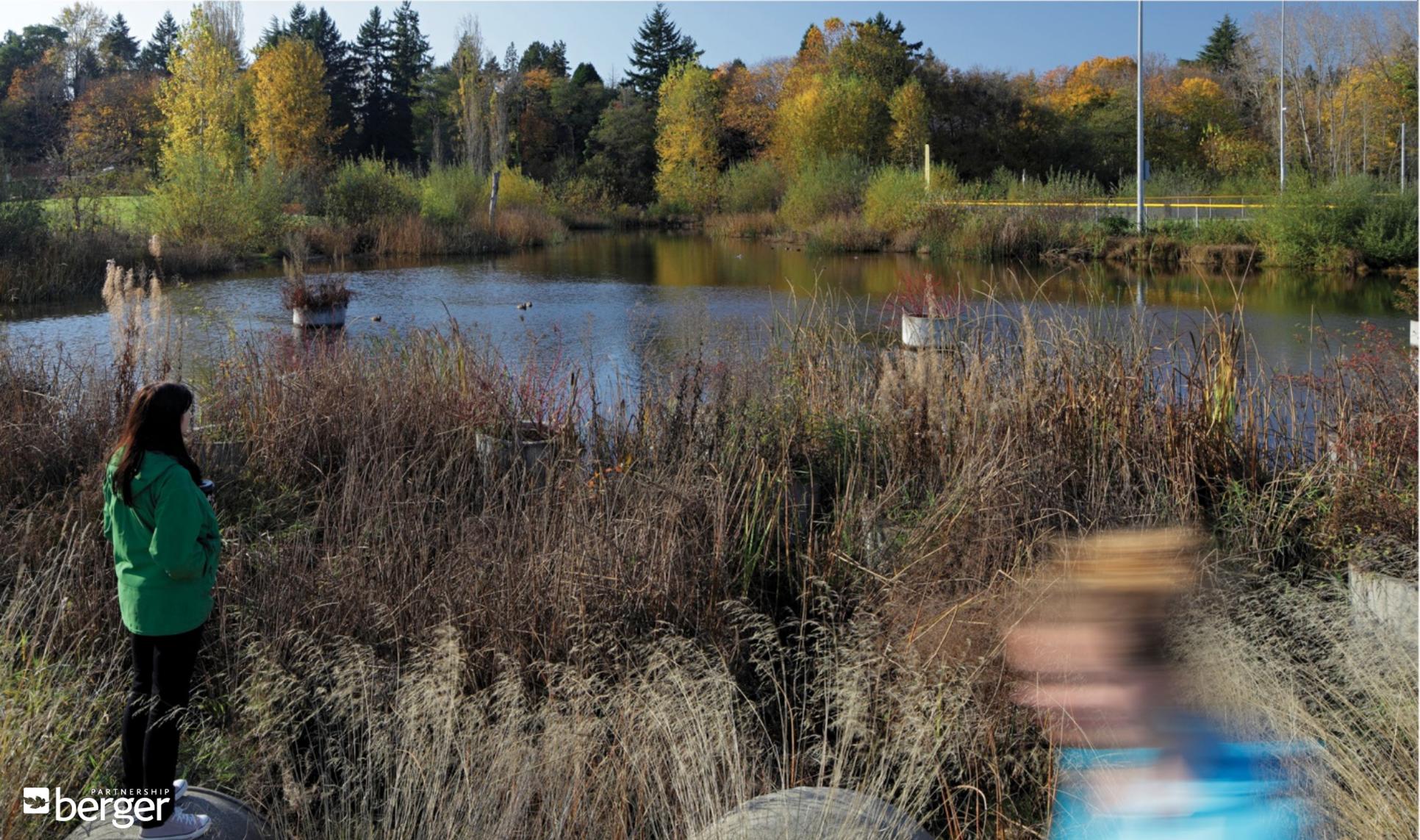
**NEW TOPOGRAPHY:** The site was reshaped with the wetland headwaters and berms as high as 17 feet above former grade, providing accessible overlooks of habitat areas while buffering sights and sounds from adjacent sports fields and parking areas.



**INCREASED ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL CAPACITY:** The park welcomes human activity as part of its ecology, immersing visitors in nature through upland overlooks shaped to recall historic munitions bunkers and lowland walkways routed through the wetlands.



**TENDRILS OF WETLANDS** from the system's headwaters weave between sports fields with distinctly human elements—utility pipes, repurposed tarmac and salvaged tunnel liner weirs—reminding visitors of the unnatural character of this thriving habitat.



**INCREASED ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL CAPACITY:** The park welcomes human activity as part of its ecology, immersing visitors in nature through upland overlooks shaped to recall historic munitions bunkers and lowland walkways routed through the wetlands.



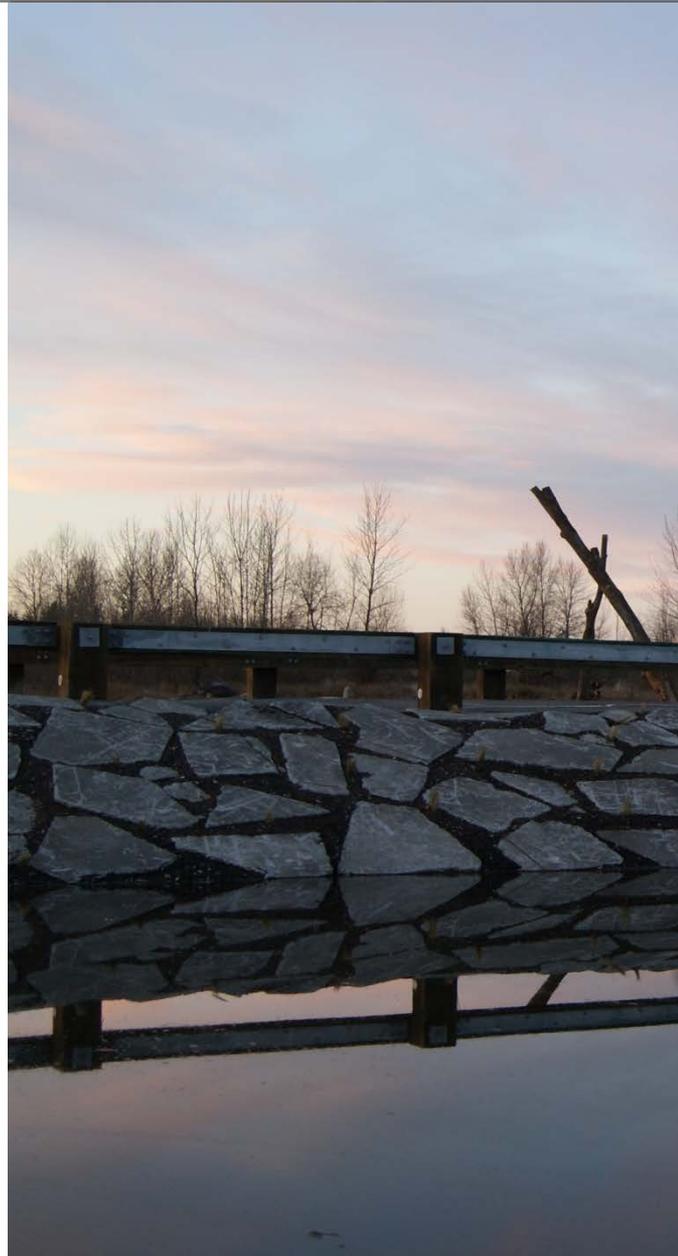
**MARSH PONDS:** A grid of ponds align with the geometries of the former runways, shaped to maximize shoreline emergent vegetation ideal for the native Pacific Chorus Frog while discouraging its primary predator. Monitoring confirms this strategy a resounding success.



**PROMONTORY PONDS:** The deepest ponds on the site are a favorite of park visitors, providing habitat to waterfowl and now home to a family of beavers who have dammed the outlet, increasing pond area by over 25%.



**MATERIALS:** The site's past is celebrated through a "military palette" of galvanized steel, aluminum, concrete, found objects, and salvaged materials.



**RUNWAY CENTERLINE:** The 400-foot-wide airstrip that once transected the site is memorialized with giant steps to an overlook berm, salvaged granite steps descending into the pond, and linear planting (beyond), inviting interaction while interpreting the site's past.

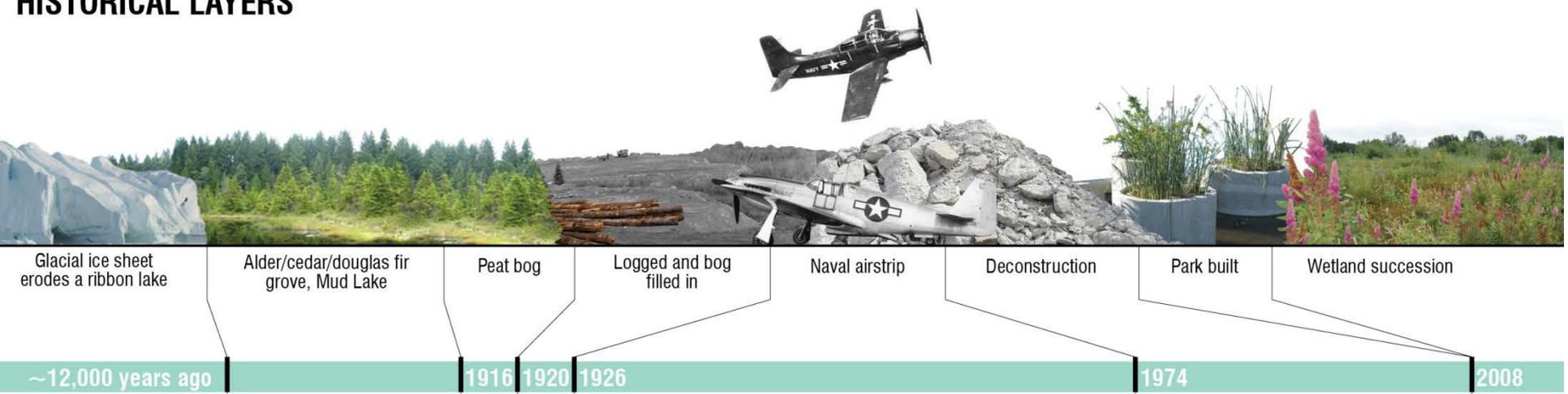


**CELEBRATING FEDERAL INFRASTRUCTURE:** The design maintains and highlights a federal survey calibration line weaving through the wetlands, marked with artist Perri Howard's "Straight Shot."



**RESULTS** - Honoring, not imitating the past: Acknowledging the site's changes over time and corresponding ecological performance, we see how creating a new habitat maximizes diversity instead of attempting to restore a vanished landscape.

## HISTORICAL LAYERS



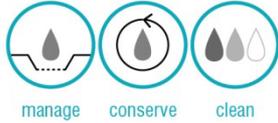
## NATURAL PROCESS VALUES



# RESULTS - Hyper-ecological performance: By design, the project maximizes and maintains, with ongoing management, unnaturally high wetland diversity on the site, resulting in ecological performance that exceeds pre-development conditions.

## ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION

### WATER



manage conserve clean

### CLIMATE



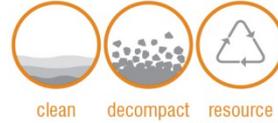
air quality change resilience temperature stabilization

### HABITAT



create protect enhance

### EARTH



clean decompact resource management

### VEGETATIVE



increase conserve

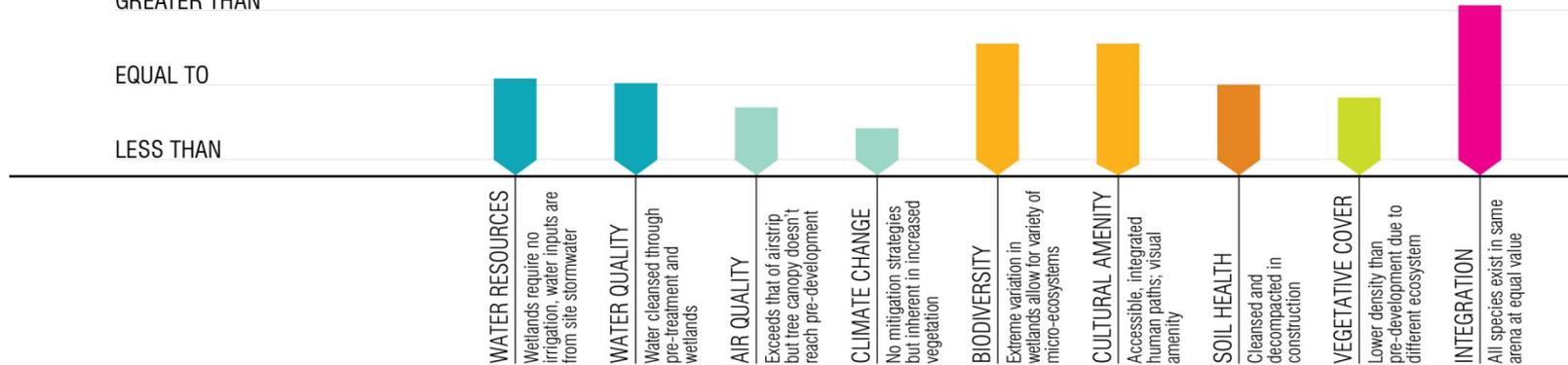
## Case Study

## PERFORMANCE Relative to Pre-Human Development Condition

GREATER THAN

EQUAL TO

LESS THAN



## INPUTS

### INITIAL



### ONGOING



**COMPLETE HABITAT!** The design provides refuge and escape for wildlife and humans alike. A glacial erratic stone deposited centuries ago, which surprisingly remained intact during the navy's operations, is a destination for the bold via a carefully placed snag.



**GROWING ADVOCATES FOR URBAN ECOLOGY:** The project is home to environmental programming and countless Day Camps, and athletes love the “natural” setting of their fields, fast becoming “sports naturalists” inspired by the ecosystem taking shape around them.



# MAGNUSON PARK, Seattle, WA

