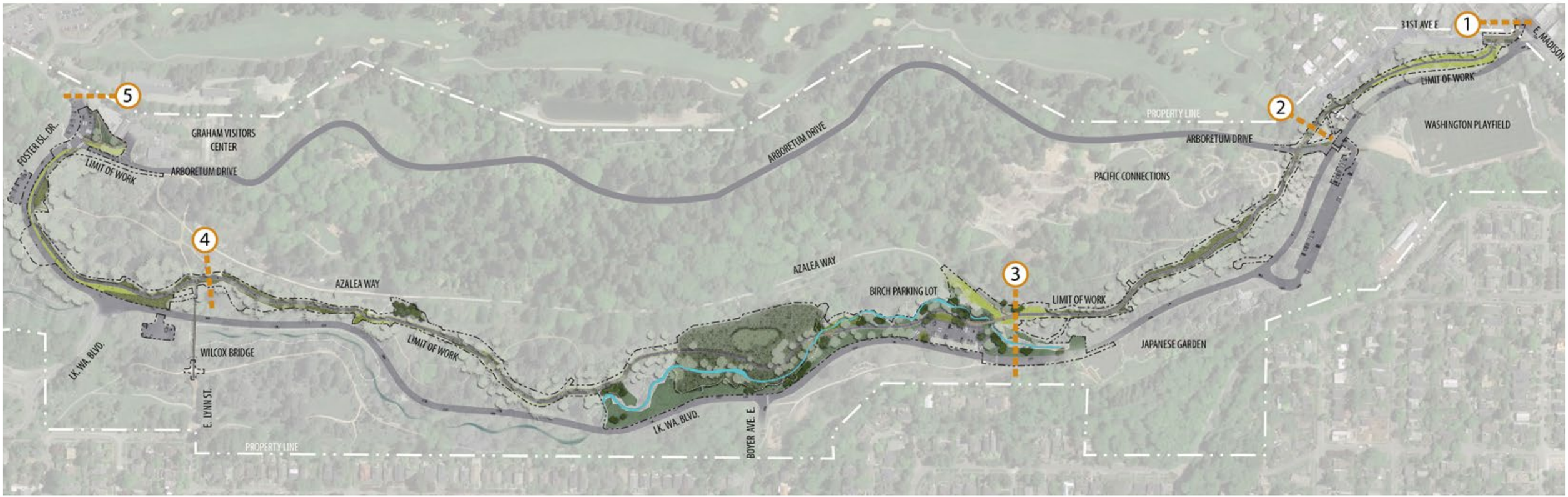
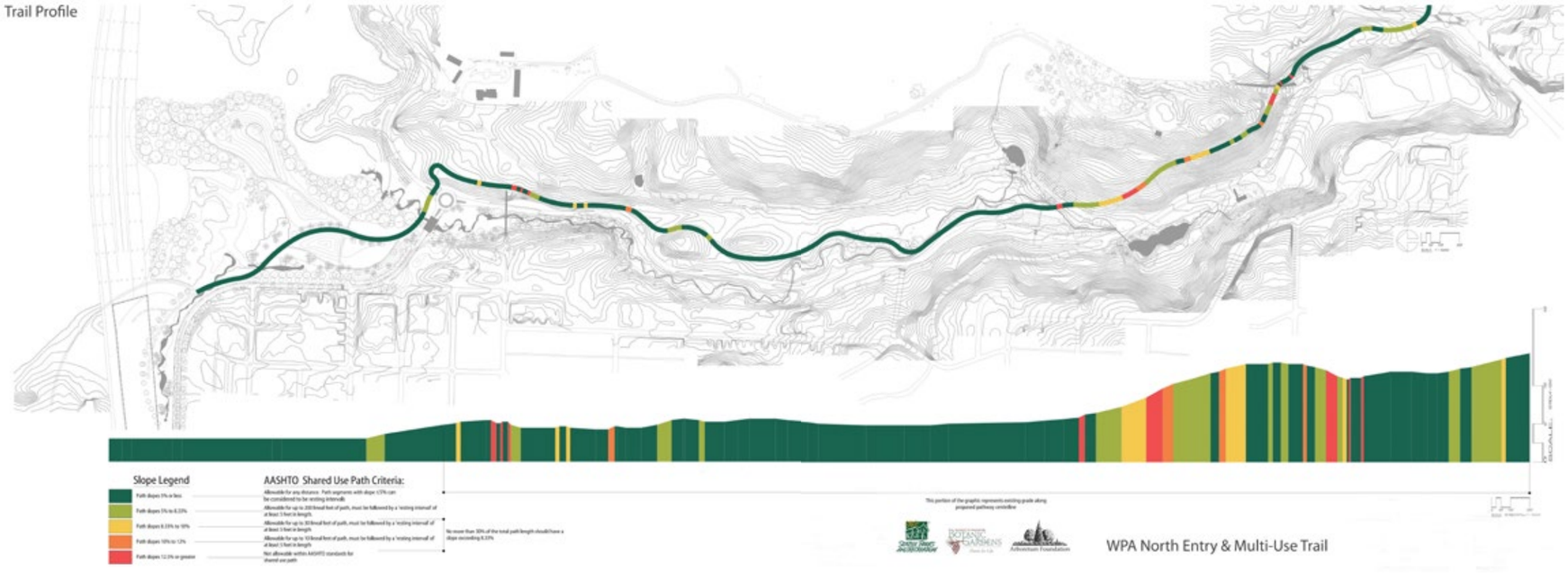


Trail Profile



WPA North Entry & Multi-Use Trail

AZALEA WAY

BIRCH PARKING LOT

3

C

LIMIT

C

B

B

A

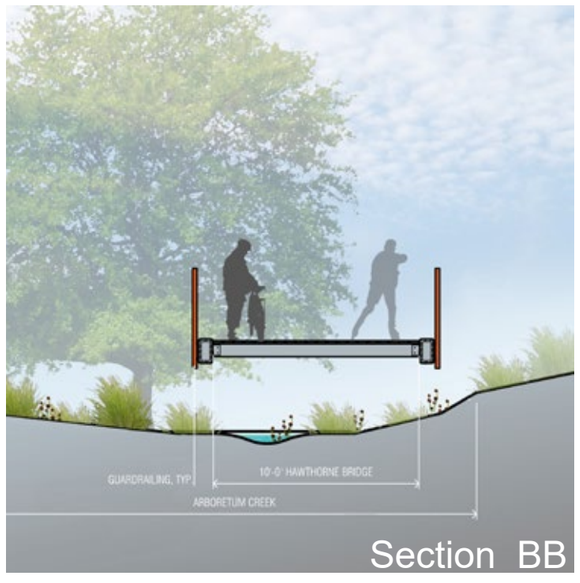
A

2

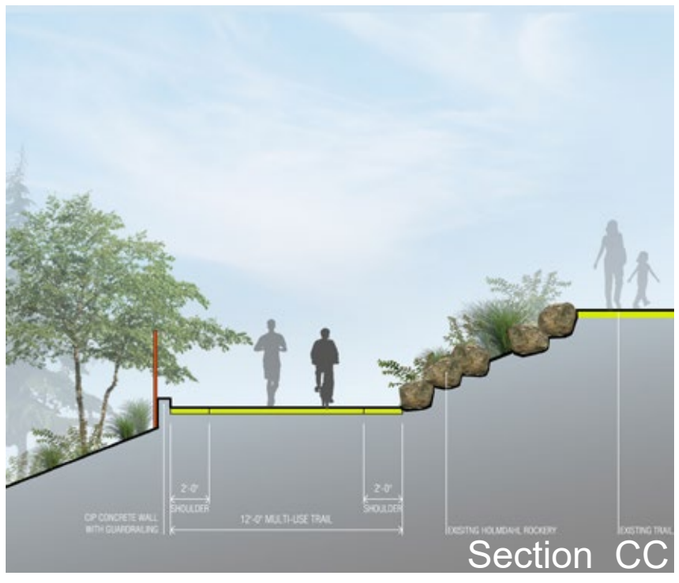
LK. WA. BLVD.

BOYER AVE. E.

Section AA



Section BB



Section CC

Historic south entrance to the arboretum, previously only for cars but dotted with unofficial, unpaved paths marking pedestrian activity. The new trail provides an official entrance for pedestrians and cyclists, accessible in all weather, while honoring the ceremonial gateway.

Washington Park Arboretum is one of the largest nationwide, but had many inaccessible wetlands and lacked paved paths. Several bridges constructed along the trail reduce wetland impacts, provide visual connection to the daylighted creek, and allow access and wildlife passage.

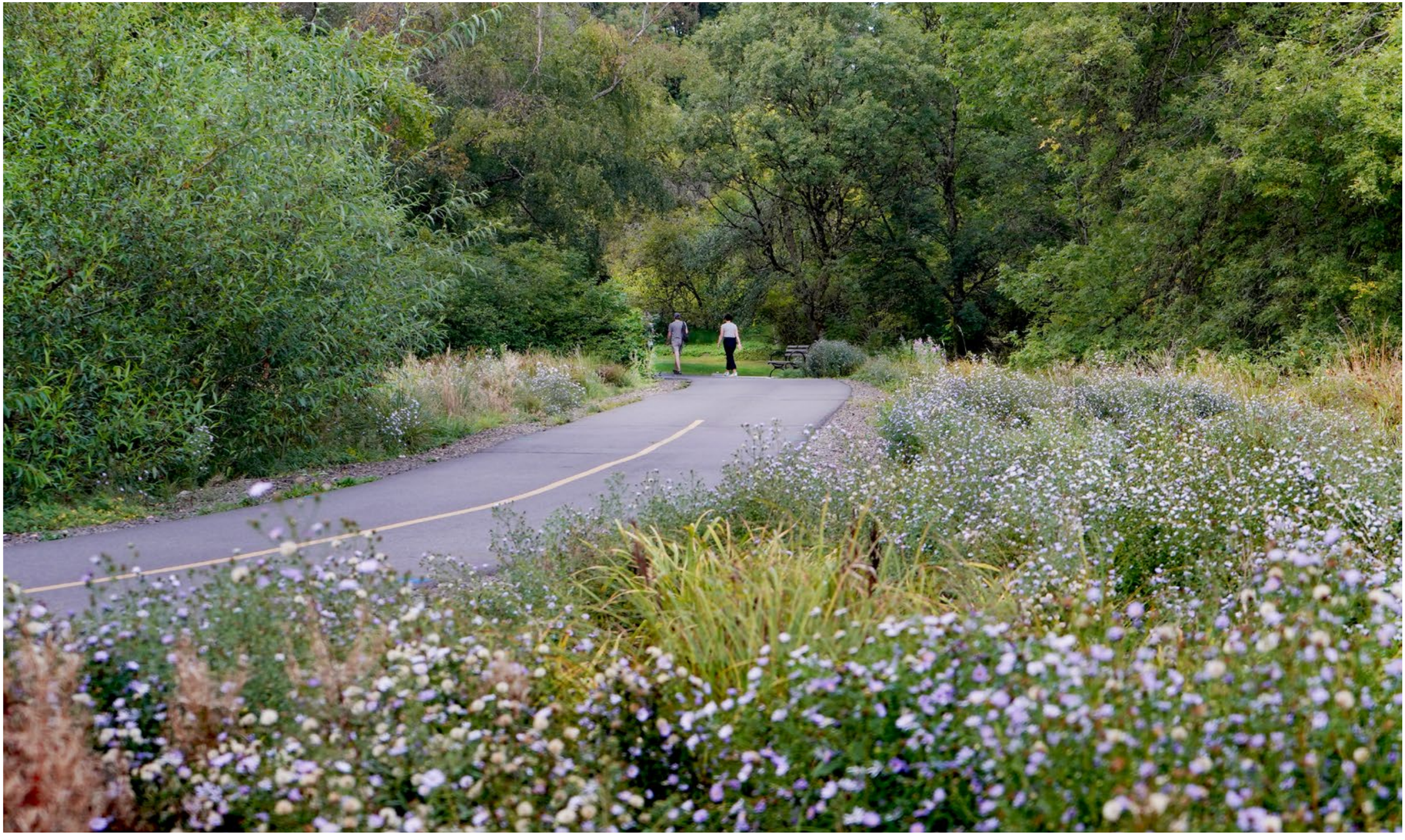
Annual visitors have steadily increased since the trail opened. Coupled with the closure of Arboretum Drive to vehicles, the affectionately nicknamed “Arboretum Loop Trail” is now a local favorite for runners, providing a 2.2-mile paved loop.

High-speed cyclists and commuters use Lake Washington Boulevard while casual, less experienced riders use the trail. Informal rockeries tie in the character of the arboretum’s historic rockeries, minimizing grading and disturbance to existing plant collections while reducing tree removals.

Although not certified under a rating system, sustainability drove materials selections. Using weathering steel for bridges and railings instead of standard galvanized or painted steel prevented zinc and paint from entering the stream. Irrigation piping was HDPE instead of PVC.

The trail winds through a large wetland with perforated pipe and a graded base material allowing free water movement under the trail to not impact the hydrology of the wetland. Salvaged logs from tree removals became habitat and nurse logs.

Not your typical wetland restoration project, the new plantings are now part of the overall “collections” of the University of Washington. Collaboration with the university identified key species for inclusion such as Symphyotrichum subspicatum var. subspicatum (Doulgas Aster), pictured here.



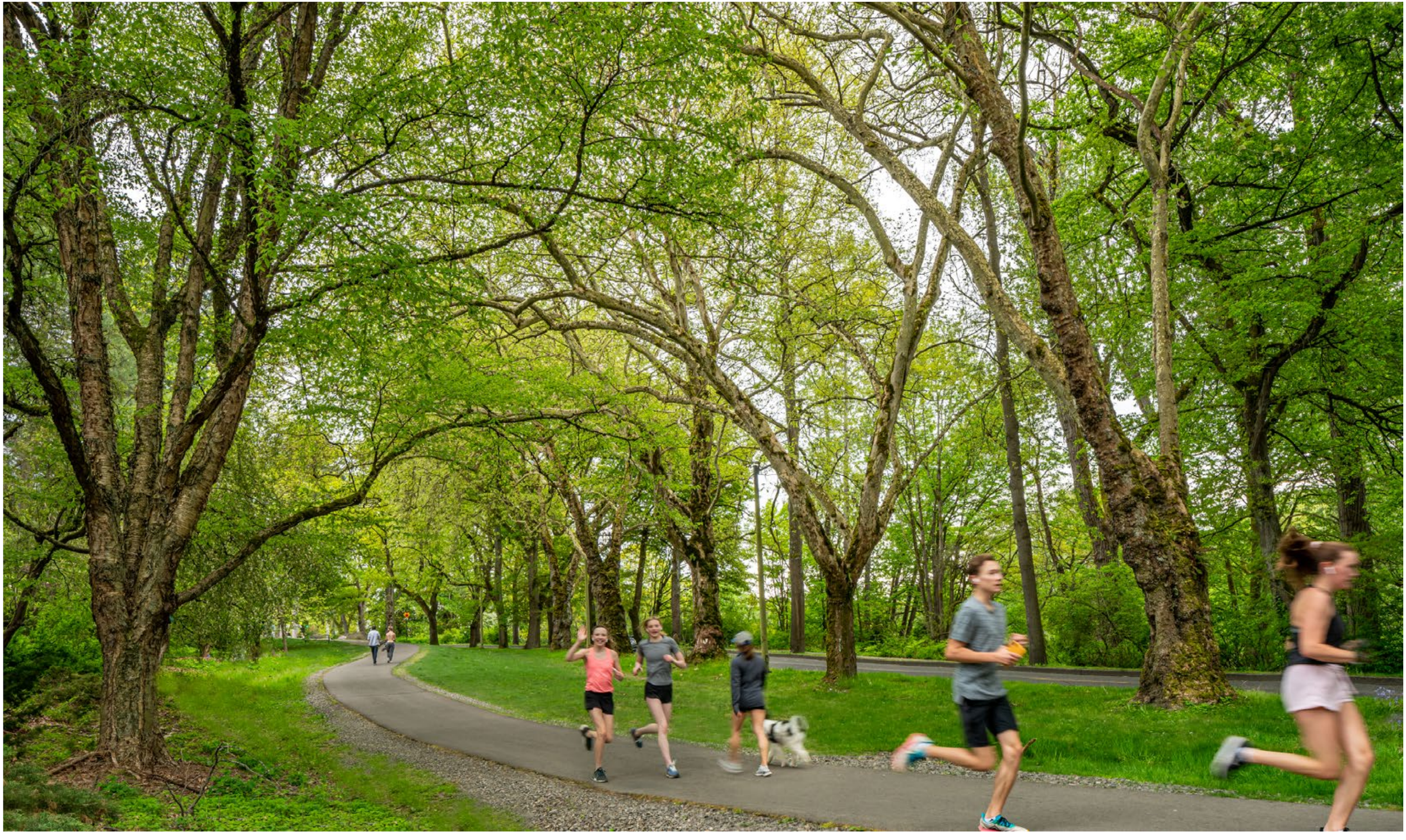
Diverse wetland meadow plantings provide essential pollinator habitat and maintain open vistas, part of the original 1936 Olmsted plan. Douglas asters, Sedges, Mallows, Camas, Pacific Hair Grass, and other species compete with each other to settle into their preferred micro-habitats.

Previously treated as mown turf, seeded with non-native species, the wetlands were ecologically barren, low functioning, often inaccessible. Transitioning to meadow species created diverse habitat. First year (middle photo): Native Equisetum species emerge. Third year (right photo): Well-established plants thrive.

Collaboration with Ray Larson, the UWBG Curator of living collections, identified plants historically native to Seattle and Arboretum Creek but rare or absent now. Woodwardia fimbriata (Giant Chain Fern) pictured here was one such plant, contract grown for the trail.

Commonly regarded as a weed, Equisetum arvense is historically important to Native Americans and was used in soils onsite to outcompete non-native weeds. The birch collection educates about issues associated with non-native birch species such as bronze birch borer.

Using air spades around existing trees, including this 80-year-old cherry tree, made grade transitions work and reduced tree removals. Here, the connection to popular Azalea Way was important to the trail's success and respected the original Olmsted-designed grades.



Winding pathways maintain the character of the arboretum and make it seem like the trail has always been here.