

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE SWORD FERNS?

Stand here and envision yourself in a sea of waist-high sword ferns. Sword ferns are thought to live for hundreds of years but have been dying throughout an expanding area of Seward Park. Smaller areas of sword fern die-off have also been reported on the west side of Puget Sound. A team of volunteer scientists—ecologists and plant biologists as well as citizen scientists—have come up with many hypotheses, but none has been supported by initial laboratory and field testing. The die-off remains a mystery.

The new bare regions are not regenerating. No new plants, weeds or native species have sprouted in the bare ground left by the dying ferns. As the ferns die, the understory structure of the forest disappears and the overall structure of the forest—its interwoven ecology—is compromised.

Seattle Parks and Recreation is actively working with experts to learn what causes, natural or unnatural, have caused this die-off. See a nearby park kiosk for more information.

Please stay on trail to help prevent spreading any possible pathogens.



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