Parks’ caretakers are finding more people living in them

A BALANCING ACT | Forest stewards in Seattle are increasingly having to choose: Protect the environment or show compassion for those who have made the green spaces their homes.

Susan Zeman, a forest steward, yanks out ivy at Cheasty Greenspace in Seattle last month. “When there’s encampments, we’re out of the place,” Zeman said. “It’s a public forest that we want to remain public, but we also want to respect people’s desire to live in peace and dignity.”

Henry Kissinger was a forester, and he once said that the world is a garden, and that to allow it to become overgrown with weeds and thorns was to lose it. The same philosophy applies to a city like Seattle, where the parks department is tasked with maintaining the balance between conservation and public use.

The challenge is amplified when it comes to homeless encampments, which have been growing in size and number over the past few years. The city’s parks and recreation department has been working to find a solution, but the issue remains complex.

Seattle Parks and Recreation director Delilah Smalls recently said that the city is running out of places to put homeless camps. The department has been trying to find new sites to house the encampments, but has been met with opposition from residents and neighborhood groups.

One proposed solution is to create more homeless shelters, but this is a difficult task given the limited availability of space in the city. Another proposal is to create more permanent housing options, but this is also challenging due to the high costs of building and maintaining such facilities.

In the meantime, the city is working to provide services to the homeless, such as healthcare and job training, in an attempt to help them transition out of the encampments.

The issue of homelessness in Seattle is a complex one, and finding a solution that works for everyone is a tall order. But with the help of dedicated city officials and community members, progress is being made towards a balanced approach.