

2006 ANNUAL REPORT



“Promoting greater community awareness, understanding and enjoyment of the local natural environment and fostering stewardship through educational programs and activities.”



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Annual Report 2006 was produced by North Mountain Park staff
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OVERVIEW

This annual report summarizes the accomplishments of the North Mountain Park Nature Center, a division of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Department. The mission of the Nature Center is to “promote greater community awareness, understanding and enjoyment of the local natural environment and to foster stewardship through educational programs and activities.” This mission is accomplished through a combination of community programs and events, school programs, interpretive signs and exhibits, restoration, and monitoring. While the majority of programs and activities take place at North Mountain Park, Nature Center staff also extends the reach of their efforts to other Ashland parks and school locations.



*Back row from left: Karin Onkka, Linda Chesney, Dorinda Cottle, Molly McLaughlin
Front row from left: Kari Gies, Sherrill Deckelman, Jennifer Brinson*

Staffing

During 2006, positions within the Nature Center included two full-time co-directors, who oversee the roles of stewardship and education coordination, a full-time administrative assistant, a part-time receptionist, and a part-time interpretive coordinator. In addition, the Nature Center hosted two consecutive 11-month AmeriCorps volunteer positions.

Oversight

Ultimate policy decisions for the Nature Center, as with all of the Parks Department, rest with a five-member elected Parks Commission. Staff supervision falls under the Recreation Superintendent. Helping to provide guidance to the Nature Center is a Steering Committee made up of citizens from the community at large.



Students from the Ashland School District took part in the fall Field Programs at Lithia Park where they studied water. This was just one of many programs in 2006 that took place off-site.

VOLUNTEERS

During 2006 at the Nature Center, 2,763 individual volunteer hours were logged. These hours represent a wide variety of tasks within the Nature Center, outside in the Demonstration Gardens and Natural Area, and at other park locations and events. Numerous school and community groups also volunteered at the park, helping with restoration and trail maintenance. In addition, a growing pool of individuals came to the Nature Center during 2006 to fulfill mandatory community service hours.

Service inside the Nature Center

Volunteers filled a variety of roles within the Nature Center during 2006. Some of these key roles included helping out at the reception desk, maintenance of the Resource Room, processing of the extensive digital photo collection, accessioning the collection of exhibit materials, and helping to prepare materials for the school programs. Others volunteered as needed to help with a variety of office-related and organizational tasks.

Garden, Natural Area and Monitoring

Volunteers put in hundreds of hours during 2006 helping out in the Demonstration Gardens and the Natural Area, at the new park site across from the Nature Center, and at Lithia Park. Many of these hours were logged by members of the Ashland Garden Club who continued to maintain the Heirloom Garden in front and alongside the Nature Center. In addition, volunteers logged numerous hours throughout the year helping out with the many bird monitoring programs at North Mountain Park.

Instructors

Volunteers continued to play a significant role in the presentation of school field programs. The fall program topic, Plants of the Rogue Valley, attracted a record 34 volunteer instructors. Volunteers were also utilized in the teaching of a variety of community education programs; keeping program costs down.

Events

Volunteers again played a very significant role in all of the events sponsored by the Nature Center. This year, the Bear Creek Salmon Festival, Rogue Valley Earth Day and the Naturescaping Garden Tour could not have been so successful without their commitment.

Volunteer Recognition

All volunteers were invited to a recognition potluck in June. In addition, volunteers who contributed 25 hours during 2006 received a punch card valued at \$10, good for any Ashland Parks & Recreation program; while those contributing over 40 hours were able to choose between a Nature Center hat or T-shirt.



Local volunteer at the face painting booth during the Rogue Valley Earth Day celebration.

NATURE CENTER



North Mountain Park Nature Center signs - Installed in 2006

The Nature Center increased its hours of operations this year by being open Saturdays from Memorial Day through Labor Day. In addition, the number of visitors to the Nature Center increased significantly during 2006, partly due to the placement of several directional signs throughout the city.

Visitor Services

The Nature Center continued to serve as a visitor center for tourists and locals alike by offering information at the reception desk a variety of brochures of local hiking and biking trails, dog friendly locations and other park facilities. The completion of the Nature Center brochure has helped orient visitors to what they can see and do at North Mountain Park. In addition, updated bulletin boards both in and outside the Center provide information related to upcoming programs, new developments and volunteer achievements.

Exhibits

Two new installations were displayed in the Nature Center this year. During the spring, an exhibit on "Water of the Rogue Valley" highlighted the increasing demand on local water resources and ways that citizens can use water wisely. A very popular secondary exhibit was the on-screen Bird Cam, which showed a live feed of the inside of a nest box being utilized by a family of swallows.



An visitor to the Nature Center enjoys the Native American Umma, or house, exhibit

The fall exhibit installation featured local plants and their uses throughout history, including a hands-on display about plants that have been used in medicine, or amulet bags. All of the exhibits were utilized to a great extent during the spring and fall school programs at the park.

DEMONSTRATION & HEIRLOOM GARDENS

The Demonstration Gardens were designed and planted by volunteers. They serve as a model for citizens interested in creating wildlife habitat and in practicing sustainable gardening techniques at home. Volunteers care for the gardens through the “Adopt-a-Garden” program and through Drop-in-Garden days. The Heirloom Garden was designed and is managed by members of the Ashland Garden Club. Based on the American Victorian Garden this garden is designed in a more informal style reflecting the Pacific Northwest pioneer era. The Demonstration gardens are utilized by both the community and the school programs offered at the park. In addition, many visitors enjoy the gardens simply for the sense of peace and tranquility they provide.

Interpretation

New this year for use in the gardens is a set of laminated spiral bound booklets available on the Nature Center’s front porch. The booklets were developed to interpret the various areas of the Heirloom Garden. In the Demonstration Gardens, the small engraved plant identification signs were recently inventoried and updated.



Hands-on Cob Bench Demonstration during Earth Day 2006 at North Mountain Park

Cob Bench

Another new feature in the garden area is a cob built bench located next to the sand play area. AmeriCorps volunteer, Jennifer Brinson, coordinated the project which was highlighted on Earth Day when many event participants helped in the construction of this sustainable building demonstration project.

Seed Saving

Saving seeds from the plants in the Nature Center’s garden areas has now become a tradition. Volunteer gardeners help to collect seed during late summer and fall and process and package it during the winter months. The labeled seed packets are available for sale to park visitors who are interested in growing plants which are adapted to our local climate and growing conditions. The seeds are also utilized by students in the school and community programs and made available to service organizations for garden projects.

NATURAL AREA



Volunteers at North Mountain Park help spread mulch.

The North Mountain Park Natural Area, 14 acres of floodplain riparian habitat, was utilized daily during 2006. In addition to a variety of school and Service Learning programs, numerous park visitors utilized the Natural Area for their daily walks, birding adventures, photographic opportunities, and to explore the park using the new family Discovery Kits. In 2006 grounds maintenance assistance from the Park's Department allowed Nature Center staff to focus more selectively on projects such as the ethnobotanical trail, composting site and Beach Creek restoration.

Restoration

The Restoration work that began in 1999 continues with efforts shifting to the Riverwalk open space across the street from North Mountain Park. Emphasis was on vegetation propagation, planting and management, and control of invasive species. Community volunteers and students continue to provide a large percentage of the restoration workforce. A seasonal employee, who was hired for spring and summer, contributed significantly to restoration efforts in the Natural Area, primarily controlling invasive blackberry vines.

After the damage from the Bear Creek high flow that occurred just before New Year's 2006, repairs were made to the area with the assistance of volunteers. Trails were repaired, debris removed and some irrigation lines re-installed.

A section of Beach Creek, just upstream from the upper pond (Willow Pond), has undergone improvements in 2006. With the help of several student Service Learning groups, blackberry removal began during the summer and early fall. During the November restoration planting work party over 100 native trees and shrubs were planted along both banks of the creek in the area described above. After an early winter storm event caused erosion along a portion of the south bank, soft armoring was installed with volunteers from Crater Connections utilizing live willow bundles and rebar.



Volunteers from Crater Connections

NATURAL AREA CONTINUED

Monitoring

Monitoring efforts at North Mountain Park help guide the adaptive management approach to restoration efforts and engage volunteers in an exciting, meaningful way, while also contributing valuable scientific data to regional and global monitoring programs.

Photo monitoring of the park's habitat restoration areas continued in 2006 (as it has since 1999). Now, on a once a year basis, photos are taken by Nature Center staff to document changes as viewed from permanent, established photo points.

Staff and volunteers continue to monitor birds at North Mountain Park through several established monitoring programs. Rogue Valley Audubon Society partnered with the Nature Center in the 5th season of Project FeederWatch, a nation wide program directed by Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The nest box monitoring in the spring utilizes local volunteers to maintain and monitor use of nest boxes at North Mountain Park. As of 2006, the Nature Center's spy cam went online, thanks to the support of Ashland Fiber Network, enabling visitors to the Nature Center's website to view the rearing of tree swallows.

Biologist Gail Rible retired from running the mist netting and banding station in 2006. Klamath Bird Observatory (KBO), who has been supporting the effort for the past few years, is now contracting with the Nature Center to run the station. Additional funding is being sought to expand their involvement.

North Mountain Park is also used as a monitoring site by other organizations and individuals involved in research projects. This year Aaron Maxwell, a graduate student at Southern Oregon University, completed a monitoring project of aquatic species in Bear Creek and its tributaries. He presented his findings in a community education program in October when salmon were running in Bear Creek. The Bureau of Reclamation is conducting an instream flow study throughout the Rogue River Basin using North Mountain Park as a site. The study will address stream flow needs to protect coho salmon habitat. A final draft of their report will be available in June 2007.



Tree Swallow Nest Box at North Mountain Park

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS/EVENTS



Hands-on Tule Canoe class in Lithia Park

One hundred six community education programs were offered during 2006 in the areas of natural and cultural history, and sustainability. Program formats included lectures and demonstrations, hands-on workshops and classes.

Program attendance increased again in 2006 and participant pre-registration has improved as the public has become better acquainted with the Ashland Parks and Recreation Guide and the on-line registration process. The number of programs offered off-site increased in 2006 as the Nature Center staff utilized more public venues throughout Ashland. (See table of Community Programs.)

Community Events

The Earth Day attendance increase in 2006 prompted a venue change for 2007 to ScienceWorks in Ashland. Ashland Parks and Recreation will continue to sponsor the event, serve on the planning committee and administer the contract with the event coordinator.



Earth Day 2006 at North Mountain Park

The Nature Center again collaborated with Rogue Valley Audubon Society and

Klamath Bird Observatory to host International Migratory Bird Day in May. Attendance increased again in 2006 as publicity for the event improved.

The theme of the 3rd annual Naturescaping Garden Tour in June was "permaculture". The event drew approximately the same numbers as last year and the sustainability focus was well received. The Nature Center will not be coordinating a tour in 2007 as scheduling this labor intensive event between Earth Day and Salmon Festival had been putting a strain on volunteer and staff resources. Competition from many other Annual Garden Tours has also posed a challenge. A Naturescaping lecture and/or workshop will replace this event.

The October Salmon Festival was a huge success this year. Great publicity and perfect weather combined to push attendance to over a thousand. An improved planning committee of committed partners helped to strengthen the event and ease the burden of responsibility from Nature Center staff and volunteers.

COMMUNITY ED PROGRAMS LISTED

Winter

Guided Winter Bird Walk
Basic Tree Pruning
Pre-School Puppet Theatre (3 shows)
Project Feeder Watch (3 programs)
Oil and Gas in Our World
Crafting Gourd Bird Feeders
Fire-Starting From Scratch
Klamath Wildlife Refuge
Spring Into Action-Planning a Garden
Geology of the Rogue Valley
The Road Less Traveled

Spring

Project FeederWatch (3 programs)
Container Small space Gardening
Open House for Volunteers
No Lawn! Then What? Sustainable Landscapes
Garden Orientation for Gardening
Herbal Body Care for Girls
Trees For All Seasons
Spring Nature Walks in Hald-Strawberry Park
Wonders of Worm Composting
Field Study Volunteer Training (2 trainings)
Pre-School Puppet Theatre (3 shows)
Rogue Valley Earth Day
Restoration Work Party
Amateur Astronomy
Spring Nature Walk in Oredson-Todd Woods
International Migratory Bird Day

Summer

Nature Sketching
Water Studies for Home Schoolers (2 programs)
Watercolor Pencil Techniques
Landscape Sketching
Nature Walk in Upper Lithia
Making New Plants from Cuttings
Pre-School Puppet Theatre (3 shows)
Organic Garden Pests
N MT Park Volunteer Potluck
Mosaics for the Garden
Summer Solstice Family Herbal Celebration
Naturescaping Garden Tour
Star Thistle Pull
N MT Park Demonstration Garden Tours (2 programs)
Basic Geology of the Eastern Siskiyous
Sustainable Urban Homestead
Tule Canoe Crafting
N MT Park Nature Night Walk
Summer Workshop for K-12
CSI Ashland Creek Survey

Fall

Sustainability Film Series
Pre-School Puppet Theatre (4 shows)
Guided Tour of the Park
Seed Saving for Fun and Profit
Night Sky Viewing
Salmon Festival
Owl Prowl
Edible and Medicinal Herbs
Sustainable Landscape Design (3 programs)
Bird Banding
Plants of the Rogue Valley
Nature Drawing
Ashland Green and Solar Home
Ashland Cemetery Tombstone (2 programs)
What's Swimming in Bear Creek
Restoration Work Party
Introduction to Pine Needle Baskets
Backyard Birding Basics
Dancing Star Lanterns
Natural Holiday Wreaths (2 programs)
Project Feeder Watch (2 programs)
Holiday Crafts from Nature
Wonders of the Winter Solstice

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Through the Nature Center, the Ashland Parks and Recreation Department offers a variety of educational programs and student projects for grades K-12 and Southern Oregon University students. While the majority of programs are held at North Mountain Park, other park sites (including Lithia Park this spring) and various school yards are also used.

K – 5 Field Programs and High School Mentoring

This is the tenth year that Ashland elementary students have participated in programs with the Nature Center. This year's topics, following a three-year rotational scope and sequence, included WATER of the Rogue Valley in the spring and PLANTS of the Rogue Valley in the fall. A total of 73 classes participated in these programs during 2006. To prepare the younger students for their spring WATER program, Ashland High School biology students provided a day of mentoring. Four elementary classes took field trips to the high school where the older mentors taught them about aquatic insects, invasive bullfrogs, water quality, and a variety of wetland plants.



Compass & Survival class at EarthTeach Park

Middle School Programs

6th graders were again able to participate in the day-long COMPASS AND SURVIVAL program held at EarthTeach Forest Park in the Cascade Mountains during both spring and fall. In addition, the Nature Center brought a new program, WATER COMES TO AMS, to the middle school campus for all interested sixth grade classes. The combined 7/8 science classes were offered a chance to participate in a hands-on ETHNO-BOTANY program as part of the Park's series on Plants of the Rogue Valley.

Teacher Workshop

This year's workshop, which was held during August, focused on how teachers can utilize their schoolyard as an outdoor classroom. The Nature Center is interested in lending support to a variety of educational and interpretive projects discussed at the workshop, including the completion of the Geology Garden at Briscoe School, and bird displays at Walker School.

Southern Oregon University Student Projects

Two undergraduate students, and one graduate student, participated in projects with the Nature Center this year. From these projects, the effectiveness of the K-5 field programs was identified, as well as the interests of middle school students in recreation programs, and the location and status of the many pine trees planted as part of the Park's ongoing restoration.

SCHOOL PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Bellview School K-5th

TEACHER	TOPIC / TIME OF YEAR
Randy Boardman	Water / spring
Renee Gardiner	Water / spring
Susan Jesse	Water / spring
Candace Palmesano	Water / spring
Lindsey Tilley	Water / spring
Ingrid Hansen	Plants / fall
Dave Kitchell	Plants / fall
Rebecca Konefal	Plants / fall
Max Schmeling	Plants / fall
Joanne Luman	Water / spring; Plants / fall
Craig Martin	Water / spring; Plants / fall

Helman School K-5th

TEACHER	TOPIC / TIME OF YEAR
Michelle Cuddeback	Water / spring
Joe Dunsbrasky	Water / spring
Camille Siders	Water / spring
Kari Smith	Water / spring
McClellan	Plants / fall
Max Schmeling	Plants / fall
Gail Buettner	Water / spring; Plants / fall
Mia Driscoll	Water / spring; Plants / fall; High school mentoring
Lori Fleuter	Water / spring; Plants / fall
Gunner Gurwell	Water / spring; Plants / fall
Berit Larson	Water / spring; Plants / fall; High school mentoring
Valerie McCoy	Water / spring; Plants / fall
Karen Scott	Water / spring; Plants / fall
Mary Snowden	Water / spring; Plants / fall

Southern Oregon University Students Projects

STUDENT	TOPIC
Julie Heinz	Assessing the Effectiveness of the Environmental Education Programs at North Mountain Park
Rachael Baram	Ashland Parks & Recreation Survey with Ashland Middle School
Helena Verduyn	Monitoring Pondersa Pine Trees at North Mountain Park

Walker School K-5th

TEACHER	TOPIC / TIME OF YEAR
Debbie Burnett	Water / spring
Dan Hamnet	Water / spring
Lynette Kelly	Water / spring
Inge Kendrick	Water / spring
Meredith Pech	Water / spring
Lynn Sacks	Water / spring
Mark Sherbow	Plants / fall
Debi Blair	Water / spring; Plants / fall
Diane DeMerritt	Water / spring; Plants / fall; High school mentoring
Elisa Stevenson	Water / spring; Plants / fall
Craig Martin	Water / spring; Plants / fall
Chris Stokes	Water / spring; Plants / fall
Martha Wilhelm	Water / spring; Plants / fall
Shannon Wolff	Water / spring; Plants / fall; High school mentoring

Ashland Middle School 6th

TEACHER	TOPIC / TIME OF YEAR
Dick Streng	Water / spring
Susan Frey	Compass & Survival / fall, spring; Water / spring
Heidi Heidig	Compass & Survival / spring; Water / spring
Bonnie McCracken	Compass & Survival / fall, spring; Water / spring
Sheri Preskenis	Compass & Survival / spring; Water / spring



Ashland students took part in the Water program held in Lithia Park.

SERVICE LEARNING OVERVIEW

Service Learning programs are offered at North Mountain Park, and other Ashland Parks and Recreation sites, to students in grades 3 and up from either in or outside of the Ashland School District and for service groups such as scout troops and church groups. Service Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience and teach civic and environmental responsibility.



Service Learning group at North Mountain Park

2006 Service Learning Activities

In 2006 a total of 64 groups participated in Service Learning programs at North Mountain Park and other Ashland Parks locations. Their efforts contributed over 2,500 person hours to service projects such as native vegetation planting, controlling invasive species, building habitat piles, trail repair and storm drain stenciling.

Though there are many different interpretations of Service Learning, as well as different objectives and contexts, North

Mountain Park programs combine service objectives and learning objectives with the intent that the activity benefit both the recipient (Ashland Parks and Recreation Department) and the provider of the service (the school or service group). This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured hands-on educational activities. By engaging in Service Learning, participants make a connection with their community and gain a better understanding of their environment while helping to make positive changes.

For example, one service learning program offered by the Nature Center is "Birding at North Mountain Park." Participants learn to use binoculars, identify field marks and look for species, noting how they are utilizing habitat features such as native trees and shrubs at the park. The service component might include managing native vegetation in the park by applying mulch or helping to control weeds, thus improving wildlife quality and diversity.

Structure and Expectations

Programs are arranged by scheduling in advance with the Nature Center staff. The maximum group size is 34. The time required for the program is 1.5 - 2 hours with half of the group participating in the service activity and then switching off with the other group to participate in the hands-on learning activity.



North Mountain Park Nature Center 2006 At a Glance

Community Programs

Number of programs: 106
Number of programs participants: 1,400
Number of programs presented off-site: 19
Number of events: 4
Number of event participants: 4,300

School Programs

Number of classroom programs: 8
Number of field programs: 65
Total number of students served: 1,800
Number of teacher workshops: one 3-day workshop

Service and Service Learning Programs

Number of service and service learning programs: 64

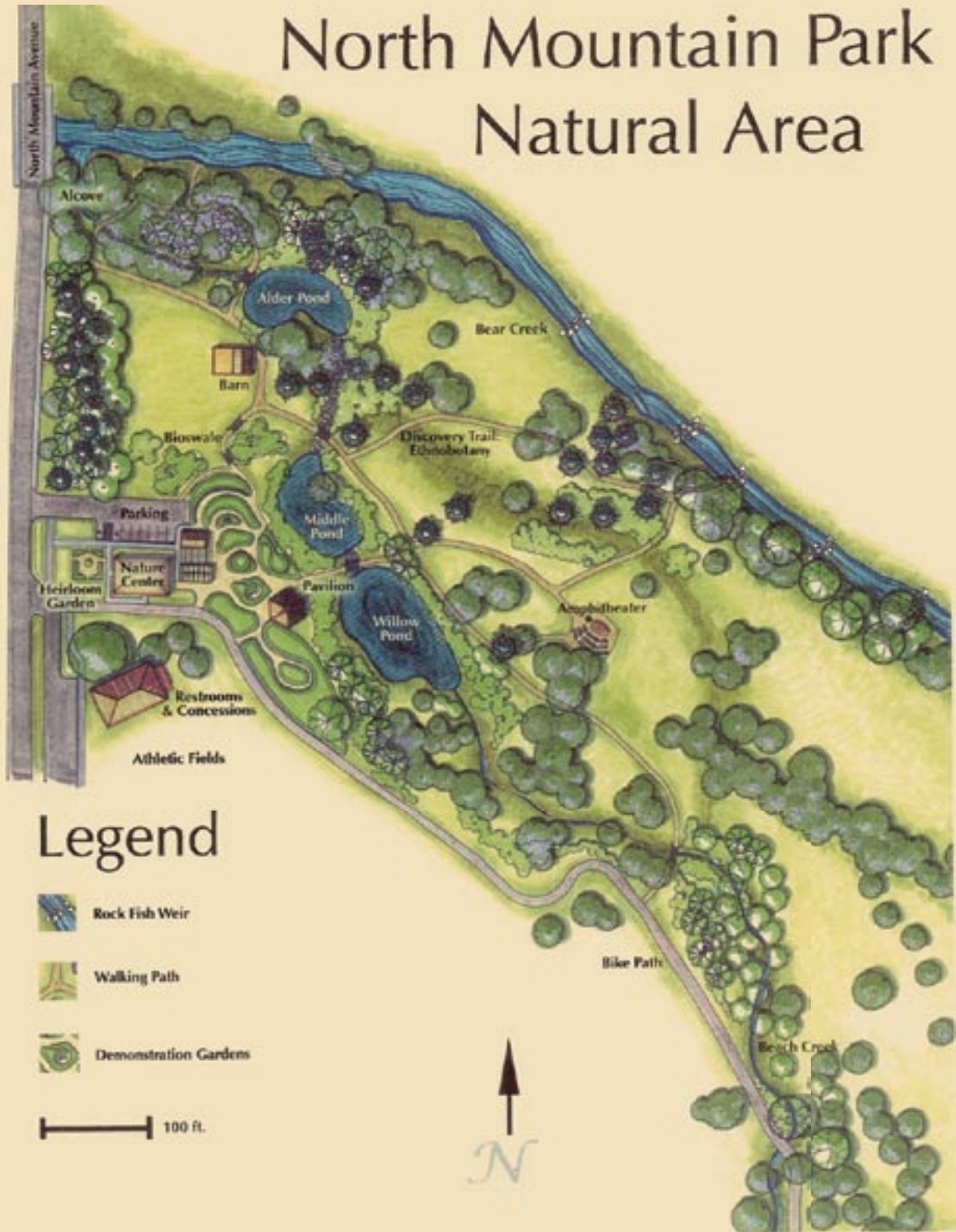
Volunteers

Number of individual volunteer hours logged: 2,763
Number of group volunteer hours logged: 2,500

Projects Completed

Construction of cob bench near sand play area
Placement of brown directional signs around town
Placement of dog paw signs along Mountain Ave.
Production and installation of 10 middle school interpretive signs
Production and installation of Car Camp sign in Lithia Park
Installation of Heirloom Garden card sets and brochure rack on front porch
Production of Nature Center brochure
Two new exhibit installations
Development of new Water and Plant programs for K-5
Development of new Waters of AMS for 6th graders
Development and presentation of teacher workshop, Using your Schoolyard
Extensive blackberry removal and replanting with willow along Beach Creek
Propagation and planting of over 400 plants for gardens and Natural Area
Inventory of all Ponderosa pines on site
Coordination of off-site invasive species control with volunteers
Development of Service Learning program on water
Receipt of grant for solar panel monitoring system (delivery pending)
Coordination of guideline development for Ashland Community Garden

North Mountain Park Natural Area



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