

Earth Walk Takes Big Leap Forward!

The nature trail at the Salem-Keizer Recycling & Transfer Station gets a major renovation

The nature trail at the Salem-Keizer Recycling and Transfer Station has given approximately 1,000 children a year the opportunity to learn about recycling and experience a short hike through the woods. The trail, known as the “Earth Walk,” was originally constructed by the Sigloh family in the mid-1990’s when they owned Capitol Garbage & Recycling.

Over the years, this well-used trail has had little in the way of maintenance. The old black/white signs were deteriorating and have been replaced. In recent years, the vegetation began to overrun the trail, including several areas of thick poison oak. Invasive Scotch broom had overtaken areas along the trail and this has been cut back. Numerous stretches have had Marion County’s Browns Island compost added and native species planted. Additionally, several new informational kiosks and signs have been added.

“Kids love the whimsical feel of the trail and we tried to maintain that in the new design.” said Bailey Payne, a waste reduction coordinator for Marion County. Along the trail students will see various creatures made from scrap metal, including a few that haven’t been visible for years because they’ve been covered with bushes.

Some highlights include:

Safety upgrades

Previously, groups as large as 75 children toured the recycling depot during regular operating hours. This presented a hazard because of vehicular traffic. Curious kids were sometimes tempted to climb onto recycling bins and touch the car battery, motor oil and other collection containers. Crossing the street from the recycling depot area to the entrance to the nature trail posed another safety risk because trucks often exceed the speed limit when entering and leaving. Crosswalks and new pedestrian crossing and speed limit signs have been installed.

New Trail Segment

On the hill above the recycling area a trail now winds up the side and follows a path down to a 140 square foot pad overlooking the recycling area, the scale house, and the garbage pit. Color stepping-stones made from recycled glass decorate this stretch of the trail. Signs teach visitors about the history of the transfer station and why recycling is important. A new display discusses the problems of contamination in the mixed recycling and includes a sample of the garbage that comes from the paper making process due to materials like plastic bags getting added and items that the Material Recovery Facilities missed. With this short addition, the trail is now 1/3 of a mile long.

Recycled Materials

Several new features have been added to show students that recyclables can be turned into new products.

- The trail begins with five large bales of plastic beverage bottles, computer plastics, buckets, recycling rollcarts, and dog food bags which were donated by Agri-Plas, Inc. and Garten Services. These help teach students how recyclables are prepared for shipment to manufacturers that ultimately recycle them into new products.



- The trail has a new path made from the old Aumsville Highway before it was resurfaced around 2005. A careful observer can even see the old yellow and white paint.
- The crosswalks and newly painted “RECYCLE” sign on the hill above the recycling depot contain recycled glass to make them more reflective.



- All of the newly painted kiosks and dinosaur statue are painted with recycled paint.
- The informational kiosk focused on glass has 120 gallons of tumbled recycled glass embedded into the trail and visitors are allowed to take home one piece of the colorful “beach glass” as a souvenir.

- The new picnic area features 10 six foot long benches featuring over 1,000 pounds of colorful recycled glass. They were made in Corvallis.



- The bridge over the seasonal waterfall, benches throughout the trail, and table in the newly constructed picnic area all made from recycled plastic bags.

- The newly constructed trail above the recycling depot features a look-out location that allows students to see the operations of the transfer station. The look-out area has rubber mats made from recycled tires in McMinnville. This area was not visible from the previous trail so this area provides students with a more complete understanding of how a transfer station works and it allows them to see all of the things in the garbage that could have been recycled.



- The Marion County Juvenile Department’s Alternative Programs works with children that have been in trouble with the law. The youth learn new skills, including woodworking, welding, sales, and gardening. The proceeds of their efforts pay restitution to the community. Using wood from old barns and telephone poles, the crews made 36 new bird houses, 16 mason bee houses and two bat houses that decorate the trail. The local Audubon Society provided information to ensure that the birdhouses were constructed specifically for the needs of a variety of species native to the area and that they were located in appropriate spots along the trail.



New Kiosks

The existing trail had 7 kiosks featuring information on cardboard, paper, compost, plastic, metal, glass, and scrap metal. Over 10 new signs and kiosks have been added to teach students about native and invasive species, wildlife, recycling processing, contamination of recyclables, how transfer stations work, where curbside recycling goes, household hazardous waste, things that are hard to recycle, how waste-to-energy facilities and landfills work and more.



Picnic Area

A new picnic area with 10 benches and a picnic table have been added so groups of up to 50 will now have a spot to stop for lunch. This new area overlooks the household hazardous waste collection facility and is next to a seasonal waterfall.

The improvements cost approximately \$25,000 and have taken several months to plan and carry out. A prison crew of nine men, led by Marion County Deputy Dennis Estrada, worked for five weeks on the trail. Deputy Estrada and our department's environmental engineer, Don Alexander, were the key individuals that made this possible. They both have a lot of experience doing this type of work and their vision of how to improve the trail was the key to this whole project.



If you haven't been out to visit the trail in a while, please come any day of the week between 8:00am – 5:00pm. A 24 page guide has been created to help give group leaders more background information. This guide is available in the recycling information booth in the recycling center and will also be on our website: <http://www.co.marion.or.us/PW/ES/disposal/skrts.htm>. Groups of 15 or more may be able to get a guided tour with a month or more advanced notice.

