

Columbia County CZ Trail Project Interpretation and Education

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Introduction

Interpretation refers to a program designed to provide informative and educational material to people on a variety of topics directly related to a specific area or region. These topics are usually related to the areas natural and cultural resources, but can include other topics such as local industry, economic activity, and folklore. This information can be presented utilizing a variety of media such as signs and displays, brochures, guided walks and tours, web sites, information kiosks, and K-12 curriculum guides.

Interpretive Themes

When developing an interpretive program, it is important to carefully select a few primary themes and keep to them. Some programs try to do too much and end up diluting messages and missing opportunities. There are literally hundreds of topics that could be interpreted relevant to the CZ Trail corridor, so packaging topics thematically will help focus peoples attention to a few carefully selected primary messages called 'Interpretive Themes'.

Following are recommended themes for developing an interpretive and education program for the Columbia County CZ Trail.

Wildlife, Plants and Habitat

There are abundant opportunities to teach people about various habitats and the wildlife and plants that utilize different areas. Examples include wetlands, streams, open meadows, and forested hillsides. These types of areas provide unique and special habitat that is better suited to the specific needs of some plants and animals over others. Many people enjoy having the opportunity to learn about different plants, habitat characteristics, and wildlife they can see and observe in specific areas.

Human History and Culture

Human use and occupation of the Lower Columbia region extends back thousands of years. Over time people living in and traveling through the area have camped, hunted, fished, harvested plants, timber and other forest products, built trails, railroads and roads, established towns, and engaged in commerce. The Chinook people, other tribes, and all their ancestors inhabited the Lower Columbia Region. It is the location of their creation stories, folklore and history. More recently, Euro-American immigrants settled in the region. These fur traders, explorers, lumbermen, railroaders, and homesteaders were dependent on the regions resources. These themes and stories are of great interest to

residents and visitors to the region and there are many locations in the corridor where these stories could be told and brought to life.

Logging, Railroads and Lumbermen

Educating people about past logging practices, including logging railroads and lumbermen, is an obvious choice for interpretive and educational programs. The CZ Trail is built on a former logging railroad and it offers abundant opportunities to educate people about how and why the railroad was built, engineering practices (to include tunnels, trestles, and grades); logging camps, logging equipment and practices, lumbermen and lumber companies, etc. The value of these stories is that they are directly related to the resource at hand. The messages can relate to specific places and events.

Current Land Use (Industry, Recreation, and Economic Activity)

Current land use and economic activity in the region is also a topic of interest to residents and visitors alike. Major subjects include: current forest management and practices; restoration projects; recreation; and local economic activity. This topic provides an opportunity to include business and economic interests in trail planning, management, and stewardship.

Geology

The location of the CZ Trail corridor provides an excellent opportunity to educate people about the geology of the region including the development of the Coast Range mountains, the Columbia River Plateau, and the Missoula floods.

Interpretive Methods

Site Selection

The success of interpretive efforts is strongly influenced by the location chosen for the effort. Good site selection will insure that there is a compelling story at that specific site directly related to the subject matter of the interpretive material. By planning and coordinating location sites, interpretive theme's can be fully explored without over producing or cluttering the landscape.

Several questions should be asked when considering sites:

- What are the best sites for telling the selected stories?
- Will sensitive natural and/or cultural resources be affected by attracting visitors to the site?
- Why are visitors there? What are they interested in learning about?
- What construction is involved? Will it require a side trail or clearing?
- How accessible is the site?
- Are there safety hazards?

Signs and Exhibits

The purpose of interpretation is to enhance a person's experience of a site and to introduce its stories. To be most effective, signs and exhibits should be unified, uncluttered, and compatible with the site.

The development and use of a common and consistent 'family' of signs (i.e., recognizable as one system) creates a sense of unity among the sites and various interpretive media used. Uniformity in colors, text style, size and the use of a common layout style help achieve this goal. Other tips to consider when developing interpretive signs are:

- Utilize high quality graphics to add interest and variety to interpretive materials.
- Keep text to a minimum
- Provide enough graphics to support the subject
- Do not overload the panels – each panel should tell one story
- Keep it visually simple and uncluttered. Visitors want to experience the site, and they will ignore long, complex messages

Brochures

Brochures are an inexpensive and effective way to provide interpretive and educational material and they offer a great deal of flexibility in their design and use. For example, a series of brochures could be produced on different subjects and made available through the mail, at local businesses, at trailheads, or on a website.

Like signs, brochures should be kept simple and utilize high quality graphics to support the subject matter. Do not attempt to put too much information into brochures or people won't read them.

Guided Walks and Tours

Developing a program to bring in speakers and guest lecturers to lead guided walks or to speak at organized events, meetings, and other occasions is an excellent way to provide interpretive and educational material. Interpretive walks along the trail could be organized on numerous subjects such as bird watching, forest management, plant identification, or wildlife photography to name a few.

Website

Developing and maintaining a website about the trail could include a section devoted to providing interpretive and educational materials. This site could:

- provide detailed information on the natural and cultural resources of the CZ Trail region
- contain brochures and fact sheets that are easily downloaded

- provide links to other relevant websites

Information Kiosks

A series of information kiosks could be designed and located at trailheads and other prominent areas in the trail corridor. These could be used to provide information on rules and regulations as well as to provide interpretive or educational material.

Partners In Interpretation

Numerous opportunities exist for partnerships to form for the purpose of organizing and implementing an interpretation and education program centered around the CZ Trail.

These include the following:

- local historical societies in both Scappoose and Vernonia
- two school districts
- the Scappoose Bay and Upper Nehalem watershed associations
- two Chambers of Commerce
- natural and cultural resource experts at the Bureau of Land Management and Oregon State Parks
- Forest managers at the Weyerhaeuser and Hancock timber companies
- Audubon Society