

October 6, 2007
2007 Co-op Conference
Oxen to Engines

Welcome to the 2007 Co-op Conference!

I am happy to see you here today. I know many of you. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Kyleen Stone. I am the Assistant Director at Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. I am standing in today for Tim Wood, our director, who will be joining us later.

Two things you should know first off:

1. You are here for a reason
2. We are going to take good care of you

Before we launch into the fun, let me take care of some housekeeping, and then I'll quickly walk you through our agenda.

- Restrooms
- Bandanas, name tags
- Today at Collier, tomorrow at Running Y, and dinner cruise tickets generously supported by the Friends of Collier

Agenda review

As I mentioned, I am the Assistant Director at OPRD. I like to say that I'm in charge of everything fun; I oversee our planning, marketing, grants and recreation programs. You all fall into my recreation programs category, that also includes hosts and other volunteers, plus interpretive programs, trails, bicycle recreation, water recreation, ADA, and park policies and procedures. It really is a fun job. And I don't have to tell you, fun is a serious business!

Somewhere along the line, we in America began to tell ourselves that "fun" is not important. That its frivolous. That we have serious things to be afraid of and there is no room in the well-lived American life for fun until we've worked ourselves to death, acquired a bunch of stuff and then lived in fear protecting our stuff. I am from a generation that has been told that children must first attend to their studies; learn computer skills so we can compete in this dog-eat-dog world; go to the library and read books all summer; compete; don't "waste time", program our days.

I am not here to say that children shouldn't have some structure in their lives, or that they should neglect their studies, or that they shouldn't read or learn computer skills. But I am here to tell you that "fun" is not frivolous. It is necessary. And we need to build it back into our vocabulary so that people program it back into their lives. We learn best when we are having fun. The work that you all do in your programs help children to learn in a new and stimulating setting that is inherently interesting and fun for them. It also helps

older adults like me learn new things, remember old learnings, and generally feel connected to the places where I live or that I am visiting.

Parks work is quickly becoming nationally recognized as some of the most important work we can do for children. How many of you have heard of Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods*? If you have not read it, I urge you to find a copy and give a look. It's a book that explores the loss of unstructured outdoor play from the modern children's experience. It has implications for the work we do.

Time in nature is not "leisure" time; its an essential investment in our children's health and in our own. American parents have become too accustomed to the media mantra that dismisses us as selfish strivers who care more about our Lexuses than our children. But if anything, most parents have an acutely tuned sense of responsibility – to the point where they consider relaxation and leisure, for themselves or their children, a self-indulgent luxury. By taking the nature experience out of the leisure column and placing it in the health column, we are more likely to take our children on that hike – more likely to, well, have fun.

Instilling self-discipline is an essential value in parenting, but so is the nurturing of creativity and wonder. Think back on your most powerful memories as child. Are your memories steeped in nature? Things you "discovered"? Places that soothed you? Or stimulated you?

I remember the time when I was a first-grader and I came home from school to find a huge king snake stretched across our driveway and I wondered if I stepped over the snake, would it lunge up and eat me? It took all of my courage and imagination that day to solve the problem of how to get by that snake. I spent a great deal of time examining it. Is it poison, I wondered? I peered down at it. It was very thick. Could I, in fact, lift my leg high enough to clear it? Would I hurt it if I bumped it? Where did it come from? I hatched a plan to poke it gently then run really fast. I was very scared. Sweaty and full of adrenaline. I poked, ready to run, and nothing happened. I poked harder, still ready to run. Still nothing. Oh, my gosh! I worried suddenly. Is this massive beast dead? Noooo. I stood frozen in horror and then the snake moved a little. I wasn't afraid any more. Just fascinated. I watched it slither off into the grass, and then, once I felt the driveway was sufficiently clear, I went in the house.

I also remember the willow tree that blew over, that my dad casually tossed onto the creek bank behind our house. The tree took root into the bank and formed the perfect neighborhood playhouse. Us kids had a blast in the cover of that tree. We built things inside with branches and sod and any materials we could get our hands on. We met back there every afternoon and each weekend. We had great adventures that extended over to the vacant hillside where I played "Little House on the Prairie." Imagine my disappointment and horror when the "city" came a long and destroyed our play area because of their liability concerns.

I don't remember much about being five years old; I do not remember what television program I watched after the snake encounter or in the evenings after I came in from the treehouse. I remember when I was outside, in nature, learning and discovering.

So what are our kids remembering? You can rest well at night knowing that you are providing the programs and settings that will bring Oregon's children back outside.

Our work is pivotal in relieving personal and social issues related to our increasingly sedentary culture.

The work you all are doing through your co-op associations and at your parks is shaping our views about how we interact in this natural world.

- Through you, we are learning that mushrooms are fun, interesting and healthy. **Looking** for mushrooms adds an even more memorable and interesting dimension to the learning.
- We learn how watersheds work.
- We recognize and **know** bats and birds and wildflowers and waterfalls.
- We know the difference between the first inhabitants of this land called Oregon and the first official "Oregonians." Both worthy of understanding.
- We watch and participate in farming and gardening as it was done in the 1800s.
- Your programs have taught *my* children to learn how their community and daily activities differ from those of 150 years ago. How the Willamette Valley changed from a "fur" economy to a farming economy. How to turn wheat into flour.
- We learn Oregon's role in the Civil War and some play out major battles from the war to learn even more.
- Your work has brought to life the golden age automobile memories and vision of Sam Hill and Samuel Lancaster and their pinnacle viewpoint Vista House.
- Your work has taught us that Chinese people once lived in here in large numbers and we get a glimpse into what it was like to be Chinese here in the 1800s.
- Your work has showed us how we dredged for gold, how that affected our economy and what it did to our environment.
- You have taught us how early Coast Guardsman used wood-hulled boats to conduct dangerous coastal search and rescue efforts.
- Your lighthouses still provide a beacon and guidance for us as we easily imagine what it must have been like for generations of early seafarers along the rugged and treacherous Oregon coastline.
- You have helped define the Christmas holiday seasons for families throughout Oregon; be it a fun day creating arts and crafts at the CCC-era south falls lodge or making an annual pilgrimage to Charleston to enjoy spectacular lights dancing in stunning Oceanside gardens.
- Because of the work and energy some of you have invested into your passion, I have imagined myself as a 19th century farmgirl, curled up with a Jane Austen book in the Hughes house during a February storm, looking down on the sixes river as it empties into the ocean.
- Your work will soon teach us about early grain mills and our long-time relationship with water for everything from fish to power. We'll soon learn about a small

southern Oregon mining town and stage coach stop, long since abandoned, and the wetlands that surround it.

- And here, in Klamath Falls, your work is teaching us about one of Oregon's most defining industries.

Your work teaches us, inspires us, enlightens us, opens our hearts, entertains us, feeds us, makes us sweat, makes us smile, makes us cry, makes us work, and helps us rest.