

Time to get outside and explore

Moving Grays Harbor
By Maryann Welch

Thanks to all of you who completed the Bridge to Bridge Walk in Hoquiam recently. For the second year in a row the sun was brightly shining on the 40 walkers who collectively tallied 106 miles, eclipsing the 100 mile goal. It was gratifying to walk surrounded by so many Harborites committed to health!

Grays Harbor's recent stretch of dry, warm weather brought inspiration to branch out from my usual walking routes. Experiencing the beauty of several local trails has re-affirmed my love of walking. We are so fortunate to have the choice of easily accessed trails in a variety of settings ranging from city streets to deep forest.

Time in between appointments in Montesano spurred me to venture out to Lake Sylvia where there are almost 5 miles of well-maintained trails. I am happy to report that the trails are all in great shape after significant damage from the December storms and the State Park portion of the trails is better than ever. The main routes surrounding Lake Sylvia and Sylvia Creek are maintained by both the City of Montesano and the State Parks Department on their respective lands. The Mayor of Montesano, Ron Shillinger, tells me that the City's Sylvia Creek Forest Trail, a 2-mile loop, was not heavily damaged and was cleared in one day.

Above the lake from the campground there is a ¾ mile stretch of trail in the State Park that had been a deeply forested hike. Large sections of downed trees now provide sunlight to brighten the trail in many places, making

the walk a different experience. I was quite impressed by the work that has been accomplished to clear the trees from the trail, repair bridges, and build benches and handrails. Thanks to a grant from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) the State Parks Department was able to rehabilitate this lovely trail and restore it for all of us to use.

My walking buddy, Marnie, and I have been on the Preacher's Slough trail together several times, but always during wet times of the year. We recently decided to try this trail on a dry, sunny day. From the Preacher's Slough Road off of Highway 107, the trail follows an abandoned rail line 3.5 miles toward Cosmopolis, making the round trip a good 7-mile hike. We found the trail to be a bit brushy and ended up being covered in grass seed; however, for a change our feet were dry! The trail provides great views as it passes by the natural sloughs of the Chehalis River.

After finding the trail somewhat overgrown I was curious about the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) maintenance plans. A few phone calls led me to Birdie Davenport who manages natural areas in the Pacific Cascade area of DNR. She let me know that the trail is due to be mowed by the end of July. There is a limited budget for maintenance and FEMA funding was used to clear storm damage on this trail as well. This trail is a great outdoor resource for our area and Birdie welcomes volunteer involvement in maintaining it. She would be happy to hear from any interested parties and keeps a volunteer contact list for future work. If interested please contact her at 360-596-5144. Birdie is clearly enthusiastic about the Preacher's Slough area and shares that future plans for the trail include developing parking and a hand-carry launch for canoes and kayaks at the Cosmopolis end of the trek.

On a recent Sunday, Jim and I were headed to the Little League Field at Pioneer Park from the south end of Cosmopolis. With a 2-year old grandson, Jack, in need of a nap, we concluded that a stroller ride for him on the Basich Trailway would fit in nicely. Cosmopolis has improved it's sidewalks to make for an easy walk the length of 2nd Street to Lions Park and the beginning of the Trail. Sure enough, Jack went to sleep just before we reached the ball field! Along the way we encountered our good friend Jim Phipps on a return bicycle trip from the Dennis Company. He uses the trail often to accomplish errands by bicycle – even more lately with soaring gas prices! This was a graphic example of the importance of having infrastructure to support different modes of transportation.

There should still be a couple of months to take advantage of all this dry weather. I encourage you to make the time to schedule a walk and explore the wonderful resources we have here on the Harbor – you'll be glad you did. If you would like a list of some great trails, follow the Moving Grays Harbor link @ www.ghphss.org.

Maryann Welch is the recently retired director of Grays Harbor County's Public Health and Social Services Department.

If you have questions about this article or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area, contact the health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us or visit our web site at www.ghphss.org.