Mission
The Mission of the Rusk Ranch Nature Center is to benefit the community and to provide opportunities for the public, particularly young people, to appreciate the natural world and instill a sense of stewardship toward the earth and its inhabitants.

Vision
We envision Rusk Ranch Nature Center as an inspiring place for interactive nature programs & exhibits and outdoor recreational activities, enhancing quality of life and fostering community pride. Rusk Ranch Nature Center awakens children of all ages to the adventure, discovery and awe of our natural world. The center supports the mutually beneficial relationship between the human community and nature, restoring wetlands, creating habitat for wildlife, and providing protected areas for endangered species. A multitude of discovery opportunities are offered for children and families. The public is invited to enjoy the wonders of nature through indoor and outdoor interactive displays and experience the deep value of our interdependent living communities. Rusk Ranch Nature Center is a multi-use, park-like facility, available for a diversity of activities; a place where people can spend the day; a place that is developed, supported and used by the community. The center attracts many thousands of visitors yearly, both national and international, who bring sustaining revenue to the organization and to the region.

Values
At Rusk Ranch Nature Center we value the healing power of nature and nature’s ability to nurture creativity, to inspire a sense of belonging, and to build community by showing us our deep inter-connectedness. We value the long term wholeness of recognizing that people and nature are inseparable. We strive to nurture whole families, multi-age groups and children who are aware and nature/place intelligent.
Butterfly Pavilion

The pavilion opened for the first time in June 2011. In late 2011, despite the fact that the organization had been advised by a Land Use Consultant who formerly worked at the planning department, the nature center was informed by the county that the original location of the Pavilion, on lots designated as Woodlot Resource zones, was inappropriate. Since these zones are primarily for timber raising, the pavilion, considered a “business”, was not allowed. RRNC, following a recommendation from the county planning department, then submitted a Conditional Use Permit application, and $2000 fee, to place the Pavilion and natural playground on the two lots near to Highway 199. The CUP was submitted in early 2012. RRNC was notified that the CUP was accepted in late May of 2012. However, while the application was accepted, permitting would not be issued by the planning department until certain criteria had been met. One of those criteria involved an extensive application for DEQ sign off with a fee of over $1500. For these reason the Pavilion and natural playground could not open up on RRNC property during the 2012 visitor season. So while work continued on the preliminary landscaping for the playground, the Butterfly Pavilion was hosted by Dillon’s Nursery on Hwy. 199 to be able to take advantage of the visitor season and continue the small revenue that the pavilion brings in to the organization. The DEQ application was completed and the funds for the fee acquired in late 2012 and it was submitted early January 2013. It was returned for further information and re-submitted mid-January. RRNC is now waiting to get the DEQ document back in order to submit the requested criteria to the planning department, along with a $275 fee, and hopefully receive the permit to continue by May 2013.

In 2012 revenue from the Pavilion went to pay for community presentations, for utility costs, for property maintenance, programs, insurance, the Americorps Vista program, permitting and county taxes. In addition we set aside several hundred dollars to reopen the pavilion for 2013. There are children’s nature exploration programs planned for next year, as well as a project to encourage milkweed gardens throughout the county. Initial parts of the Nature Discovery Playground, including the outdoor Nature Puppet Theater are also planned to open in 2013.

More than 800 visitors came to tour the Pavilion from May 30 to September 1 of 2012. One retirement group visited and one children’s group.

Soccer

The Illinois Valley Youth Soccer Club donated significantly to assist with permitting fees for the CUP and DEQ applications. Work on the fields is halted until permitted is granted.
**Nature Discovery Playground**

The playground work began in early 2012 with brush clearing by the Americorps NCCC team. Extensive hand clearing and some dozer work was done to clean out invasive plants (broom and black berry bushes) and also poison oak. Limbing up helped to open the area and reduce fire hazard. A second team continued this work, helped place the new water pump, built the Nature Puppet Theatre façade and set up the new greenhouse for the Pavilion next to the playground. A third team is planned to finish building planter boxes and landscaping to be able to open in Spring 2013. The playground will have a few exhibits completed by then (puppet theatre, sand box, climbing wall, teepees) and RRNC will continue the work on the playground over the coming year.

**Garden**

During 2012 the garden was used to plant local milkweed starts and also some swamp milkweed. The past two springs RRNC has collected wild milkweed form all over the county for fresh leaves to feed caterpillars. The starts, plus the seed being planted this winter, will provide enough local milkweed on site so that collecting from other parts of the county will not be necessary. The milkweed garden will also invite wild butterflies to lay eggs. Seed stores are being collected, both for planting and for community distribution, and potted native plants (mostly milkweed) are also being grown. In early 2012 the new deer fencing was erected at the original Pavilion site and has been useful in deterring deer invasions and the resulting decimation of outdoor flower planting. A small team of local volunteers maintains the garden and original greenhouse (now being used to grow milkweed and other butterfly plants), with weeding, pest reduction, mulching and feeding the plants.

**Wetlands**

With funding from Oregon Watershed Board in partnership with the local Illinois Valley Watershed Council, the wetlands restoration project began in 2012. A pond area, very natural in appearance, was opened up and over 80 wetland plants were planted. The NCCC team assisted along with local volunteers in these plantings. The road adjacent to the wetlands was ditched, a culvert placed under it and rocked in order to remove it from overflow from the wetlands area. Plans for the coming year include opening a second pond area, funding and building the walkways and interpretive signs and placing more plantings.
Community Outreach

RRNC contracted John Jackson of Bugs R Us, to present three workshops for the public on Bats, Bugs and Owl Pellets. Board President Terry Davis and Executive Director Patty Downing did slide show presentations as outreach and public education for the Rogue River Garden Club and the Illinois Valley High School.

RRNC offered information, seeds and plants at the Farm Festival and the Lions Labor Day Festival. RRNC also participated for the first time in the Labor Day Parade, with volunteers and children dressed as caterpillars and butterflies. A Nature Puppet Theatre show took place on September 1 at the Pavilion. Information, seeds and Elf House Kits were offered at two Holiday Bazaars.

The first new iteration of the Illinois Valley Moon Tree Run at the airport occurred in 2012 and the Kids Moon Sprout Relay component was coordinated and sponsored by RRNC.

RRNC became a National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat location.

Volunteers and Staffing

More than 3000 volunteer hours were logged by community and board members in support of the 2012 Butterfly pavilion. Another 5000 hours were logged by Americorps teams to prepare the Nature Discovery Playground, plant in the wetlands and also set up the Pavilion. This year a Volunteer of the Year certificate was awarded to Tabitha Nichols. The RRNC Experience Works state funded position ended but we contracted with the new Work Experience part of the Job Council for another free, though time-limited, position. The Collins Foundation funded an Organization Coordinator part time position and this resource supports our Executive Director staff position.

The Americorps NCCC summaries from the team’s final reports:

Gold 5 Team: “When Gold Five first arrived, they removed 20,000 pounds of brush in 15 acres of the Rusk Ranch Nature Center’s land. Additionally in that area, the team dug a trench to be used for simulated stream. Then, Gold Five refurbished 3 campsites, which a former team constructed. The team also built 2 picnic sites on the property, constructed ½ mile of trail, and restored 1 mile of trail and installed 5 helpful signs along the path. Halfway through the project, Members worked on making natural materials for the playground construction and for fencing. After the team peeled over 100 logs of wood, the group used it to build a small playhouse, an identical arbor to what a previous team constructed, and a large sandbox. Gold Five tended to a large garden, and built a large compost pile to be used during the summer time. The team managed to recruit a volunteer that assisted with the construction. Finally, Gold Five dug 32 holes and anchored 30 juniper posts with concrete in the dug holes. After that, the team put up 300 feet of deer fencing to protect the plants.”
Silver 4 Team: “Cleared a half acre of land of 2000 pounds of invasive vegetation, including blackberry, scotch broom, and poison oak. The team relocated the debris to burn piles and brush piles around the property. In addition, Silver Four cleared the same half-acre of land of 6700 pounds of brush and small trees and removed 100 pounds of trash. The cleared land creates a defensible space around the playground as well as clearly identifies the boundaries of the park. Silver Four also cared for 40 native plants in the existing greenhouse on Ranch property. A new greenhouse and wooden entranceway were erected and will become the butterfly pavilion when the Ranch opens in the spring. 48 eight-foot poles were relocated from the forest to Ranch property and stripped of bark. The team built 2 picnic tables, and hand-painted a decorative façade for the future outdoor puppet theatre. 10 cubic yards, or 12,000 pounds, of horse manure was spread over the interior of the intended playground space. 62 native plants were replanted into the wetlands area of the property. Finally, Members of Silver Four organized and staffed a fundraising event for the Rusk Ranch Nature Center.”

Nature Discovery Center

The Executive Director met with several local stakeholders as a preliminary to beginning the Steering & Advisory Committee for the Capital Campaign. Jean Robertson will be generating a preliminary drawing that RRNC can use for committee and campaign recruitment. Design and development cannot be planned until county permitting is complete. The board will be visiting other nature centers in 2013 to refresh the collective planning vision for the center.

Organizational Development

The Mission of the organization was refreshed and enhanced to more clearly reflect the actual activities and purpose. A Vision Statement was generated and the Values Statement was completed in early 2013.

Policy work for the organization included a refreshed financial policy and a new sustainability policy.

Board training included webinars on Date Your Donors, Social Marketing and Fiscal Sponsorship. In addition board members attended the Nonprofit Leaders conference with training in Nonprofit Financial Accounting and Strategic Planning. The Treasurer Diane Chirrick has also recently completed a certificate training in Nonprofit Accounting. The Board President Terry Davis acquired texts and has continued in self-directed study on permaculture gardening. Board Secretary Kimberlie Lehman has also been progressing in self-directed study on environmental education standards and best practices for nature center programs utilizing materials from EPA and the Association of Nature Center Administrators.
Funding, Sponsorship and Donor Support