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ruskranchnaturecenter.org**

**Board of Directors  
Kimberlie Lehman, President  
Marilyn Ormsby, Secretary  
Michael Spring, Treasurer  
Terry Davis, Member  
Patricia Downing, Member  
Executive Director**



**The Mission of 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, and preserve and conserve nature and wildlife.**

**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 interconnectedness. 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.**

December 9, 2014

Dear Foundation Boards and supporting organizations,

Here is an update on things that have happened this year for the nature center and our progress toward building the Nature Discovery Center.

The soccer club is actively fundraising to move forward with the fields. We have leveled out most of the lot so we can build one field. We received a grant from the Fourway Community Foundation, and the soccer team contributed, to make it happen. We are currently applying to the Rotary Club for Duck Derby funds to get the first field finished.

After three times applying, we were finally approved for all of the lots to be removed from property taxation! This year with board help, we were able to pay all of the property taxes that were applied before that approval. So happy about this finally!

We again partnered with Evergreen Elementary School to sponsor the Bugs R Us program to present to all 450 kids at the school. Thanks to the Oregon Community Foundation, we had a "Youth Employee" over the summer for part time help with the plants. And this year we initiated an internal financial review process. This is in lieu of an actual audit, since we just are not yet big enough to afford one. We invited some community members who are nonprofit executives to review with us. When the final assessment by the board is complete, the financial review is available upon request.

We had over 1500 visitors this year, twice as many as last year! And revenue was up partly due to increased visitors and partly to our milkweed seed and plant sales. Revenue from donations, earned income and events, (excluding grants and loans), has grown approximately 20% each year for the past three years. During that time the Collins Foundation and the Oregon Community Foundation have assisted the nature center with grants to help pay for administrative coordination.

We interviewed and selected an architect for the planned Nature Discovery Center building, and we are convening a community steering committee to help guide us over the next two years to get it built. A grant from the Carpenter Foundation helped to fund a preliminary drawing and the involvement of local high school seniors in the design.

The Natural Playground made significant progress, (thanks to the Rusk family, the Illinois Valley Family Coalition and previously the Fourway Community Foundation and Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation). We hope to finish all the major features in the spring. There are details and "polishing off" needed for each feature - things like terracing the Hobbit Hill and providing more water recycling in the water play area. We hope to acquire families or small civic groups to adopt specific features. And we are developing a small Hummingbird Garden around the exterior of the Butterfly Pavilion for 2015.

## Current playground and garden features and planned upgrades:



**Slide and tunnel** – create terracing and plantings of drought tolerant, low-water ground covers, create “door”, continue removing rocks.

**Water play & pump area** – create water recycle process and interpretive signage to help kids learn water conservation.

**Bird & squirrel observing station** – clear large weeds and build feeder station beyond existing observation “blinds”.

**Children’s garden and frog town area** – create more permanent planting/potting table, kid size.

**Puppet theatre** – re-fresh paint, build shade structure and place benches.

**Trails** – finish kid trails inside the playground area.

**Playhouse** - We are sponsoring a workshop to build a cob playhouse in the playground this coming spring. This will be a clay structure with peeled pole roof rafters.



**Butterfly & Hummingbird Garden** – extend fence to keep out deer and create plantings of flowers and shrubs to attract birds and butterflies. The Hummingbird garden will allow us to attract more visitors while waiting to get the Nature Discovery Center built.

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## Current process and planning for Nature Discovery Center:

**Architect** – Carlos Delgado of Ashland has been selected. He has the experience we need and is well qualified in designing sustainable energy efficient structures.

**Permitting** – Core Conditional Use Permit acquired, building and utilities permitting still to go.

**Master Plan** – Includes Business Plan, Interpretive Plan and Marketing Plan, available upon request.

**Financial Review** – Reviewing completed, next step is board assessment.

**Interpretive Planning** – Initial planning concepts completed with community input. Exhibit designer still needed.

**Graphic representation** – initial drawing completed with high school involvement; next step architectural drawings.

We expect the Nature Discovery Center to bring significant revenue into the community and make the organization self-sufficient.

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*As always, we are so very grateful for your generosity and vision in getting this dream rolling!*

*Warmest Regards,*

*~ Patty Downing, On behalf of the Board of Directors of Rusk Ranch Nature Center*

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