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## Wetland restoration celebration at April Hill Park

By Erik Vidstrand  
The Southwest Portland Post

Rain clouds parted just as festivities began for a long-term restoration project at April Hill Park. Held on April 9, over a hundred guests enjoyed educational exhibits, speeches, and tours of the wetland improvements.

The Robert Gray Middle School Marching Band came striding into the main field as the celebration kicked off.

Snuggled in the Maplewood neighborhood, April Hill Park is located at Southwest 58th Avenue and Miles Street.

The park has a large playing field, a small playground, and a port-a-potty, but the main attraction is the restored wetland which lies to the south and lower part of the main park.

The wetlands had been damaged by off-leash dogs and the spreading of invasive wetland plants and soils. According to neighbors and community activists, wildlife and water quality were threatened.

The park's wetland had also been neglected for years ruined by lack of trails and seasonal flooding.

In 2009, Portland Parks and Recreation prioritized a plan for a boardwalk, observation platforms, and natural areas. Due to the recession at the time, repairs could not begin right away.

The Friends of April Hill Park, under the guidance of Jill Gaddis, looked for other ways to help restore the habitat. In 2013, the group obtained a small



Mike Abbate, Portland Parks and Recreation director, and Metro Councilor Bob Stacey help local children with the grand opening ribbon cutting ceremony. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

start-up grant from Metro.

"We also received over 400 individual donations," Gaddis said. "Portland Parks and Recreation provided \$498,000 [from a voter approved bond measure] to help bring this project to fruition."

"The Friends of April Hill Park held silent auctions and an 'Arf-in-the-Park' fundraiser," said Gaddis. "We had many volunteers help with various tasks and projects."

Drummers of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde community welcomed the participants. They reminded everyone of the land that once belonged to several tribes: the Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, and the Multnomah - a band of the Chinook Tribe.

Cultural protection specialists shared baskets and traditional foods of nuts and roots of the native peoples.

Of course, no celebration is without political dignitaries. Metro Councilor Bob Stacey and Parks Director Mike Abbate both spoke.

"I'm much honored to be here," Stacey said. "Metro was just a small partner to help protect the wetlands. I believe this is the first time we have had a marching band join festivities!"

After the speeches subsided, Stacey and Abbate helped coordinate the ribbon cutting ceremony inviting children up to help.

Afterwards, guests wandered down the new path littered with fallen branches from a recent wind storm. The new wooden boardwalk seemed to float over the wetland. Frogs croaked, trilliums were in full bloom, and new fiddle necks popped up from the mucky mud.

Old cedars draped the pathways with their embracing foliage. Some of the children were warned not to leave the trail as they were tempted to wade in the shallow water.

Park officials hope that everyone, including dogs, can enjoy the beauty of the area,

while remaining on the footbridges and trails. The spirits of the native people would like that.



Visitors enjoy a serene setting overlooking the wetlands on the new boardwalks in April Hill Park. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)



Carol McCarthy (left) listens to a story by a Native American cultural specialist. (Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

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