

READY TO DASH?

One of summer's dirtiest outdoor events comes to Eugene this July

By Stacey M. Hollis



PHOTO COURTESY THE DIRTY DASH

In a crowd of writhing bodies that slip, splash, squirm and somersault through nearly 4 miles of muck, it won't take long before you find yourself face down in a mud puddle the size of a small pond. Sound like fun? Welcome to Eugene's First Annual Dirty Dash!

People of all ages can come out Saturday, July 21, and make their way through a mud-streaked obstacle course that holds a surprise around every turn. Costumes are encouraged. But for those who aren't up to jumping slippery walls, climbing through mucky tunnels or walking thin planks placed

mines." And perhaps best of all, the ever-popular "beer chug" obstacle is being sponsored this year by Ninkasi. "So, for all those who can drink, there'll be a chug of beer," Malfatto says. "And for those who can't, we're going to have root beer."

The Dash will take place in the North Bottomlands area of Howard Buford Recreation Area, the site of such events as Faerieworlds and a recent Civil War Reenactment. "We're used to having thousands of people out there," says Dave Stockdale, senior parks analyst for Lane County Parks.

The Dirty Dash has been great to work with, they're flexible and great stewards of the land.

— Dave Stockdale

Not only will the race be held in such a prime spot for muddy shenanigans, but there's also been a great deal of "due diligence" done to ensure the safety of the natural ecosystem, according to Stockdale.

"We've made sure that water doesn't run off into the river," he says. "And we're establishing catch basins for mud to go when people wash off." Dashers can pass through stations that "wash you down to make sure there's no transfer of species or seeds going where they aren't suppose to be going." This

acts as a precaution against the spread of invasive species such as Scotch broom, which can crowd out native species, Stockdale says.

across sludgy mud pits, there's always great entertainment in watching hordes of stringy haired, mud-smeared dashers as they tumble their way through the gauntlet. The Dirty Dash might seem like some fantasy, but it really does exist, thanks to John Malfatto, creator of the event. Malfatto began this traveling, mud-slathered, obstacle-bedecked race three years ago. He wanted to give a broad spectrum of people the chance to participate. Instead of something more "hardcore" and competitive, Malfatto wanted to build a fun and family-oriented race. "It's more focused on involving anyone who'd want to run or walk, and just have a good time with friends," he says.

And while thousands upon thousands of muddy feet trampling all over the place may seem like an environmentalist's worst nightmare, it may be just what the eco-doctor called for. "It should serve the park well in some anticipated developments," Stockdale says. "Instead of spending county time and resources, we're going to use

human foot-traffic to create a six-to-eight-foot horse trail, so we'll kill two birds with one stone with that," he adds. A fee of one to one-and-a-half percent of the Dirty Dash's total revenue will be paid to Lane County Parks as a "natural areas fee." This money will be reinvested back into Buford to repair any damage incurred from the event. "They're keeping a pretty good tab on us," Dash creator Malfatto says, "but we feel like it's really worth it."

The best obstacle really is the slip and slide — John Malfatto

Initially held in Salt Lake City and Boise, Idaho, the Dash's first year saw such success that it's since expanded to ten locations across seven western states. This year will be Oregon's first chance to shine as one of four newly added locations. "We knew Eugene would be a good market and it's starting to prove that," Malfatto says. Four thousand participants have signed up for the Eugene race.

When asked his favorite obstacle, Malfatto names the 200-foot-long slip-and-slide. "It's the biggest inflatable slip-and-slide that we know of, made especially for the Dirty Dash." And it's had some updating: "We revamped it quite a bit," he says. "It's going to be a lot faster."

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New obstacles premiering this year include a mud waterfall and something Malfatto mysteriously calls "mud

For more on the Dirty Dash, go to www.thedirtydash.com/races/eugene.html

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