



Volunteers pose at the work party.

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The trail was closed in February as a result. While planning for how to repair and reroute that trail, the wildlife refuge experienced another blow when approximately 75 unique bronze sculptures along the Art Trail at the old refuge headquarters site were stolen.

“It wasn’t done all at one time,” Ferrier said. “It was done slowly, over a period of a couple weeks.”

The refuge is managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the Willapa Complex and cared for by a dedicated nonprofit group. A group of volunteers with the Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge got together with staff members for National Trails Day on June 5 to wrap up final repairs and get Cutthroat Climb Trail ready to reopen the following day. The Art Trail also reopened June 6, although the art pieces have yet to be replaced.

“It’s one of the most beloved trails on the refuge,” Ferrier said. “We’re happy to have it back open for sure.”

The value of art

The wildlife refuge has not discovered the person, or people, responsible for the art theft, which happened in early March. Fish and Wildlife Service officers are still coordinating with the local police to investigate the vandalism, Ferrier said. They’ve also contacted local scrap yards to alert



A sculpture before the theft.

them to the theft in case the metal from the sculptures shows up there.

“We would love information, if anyone had it,” Ferrier said. “(The agency and supporters) were devastated. We just could not believe it.”

They estimated the loss to be about \$35,000, but that’s only based on the worth of the bronze itself. It doesn’t account for the sentimental or artistic value of the sculptures. A group of students from the University of Washington Public Arts Program designed, constructed and installed the pieces along the curving boardwalk of the trail. The pieces told stories of the waterway and the species that live there.

One of the most severely damaged sculptures was a piece titled “Upbringing,” created by Jacqye Jones, which provided a vertical view of the streambed and depicted several unusual species including



One of the sculptures stolen in March.



A remaining sculpture, minus its bronze pieces.

western pearlshell mussel, brook lamprey and tailed frog.

“It was far more than metal to many people,” Ferrier said, adding \$35,000 doesn’t capture “the value of what it will cost to replace the art.”

Many visitors come to the wildlife refuge each year to see the Art Trail, which opened in 2003 and was one of the first wildlife interpretive art trails in the U.S.

It possessed great distinction at the time, and has continued to be “a different way to see and appreciate art,” said Charlie Pelizza, president of the friends group. Artwork also provides a way for the public to interact with and learn about the natural environment that is different than brochures or interpretive panels.

While the vandalism was upsetting, the community’s positive response has been “the one heartening thing to come out of this,” Pelizza said. “The public has been

supportive.”

The Art Trail still remains an attractive site as well, winding along a tidal stream, through a beautiful forest and past an array of native plants.

“It’s still a beautiful trail as-is and we hope in the future to be able to interpret different parts of the trail with artwork,” Ferrier said.

Staff and board members are gathering ideas and reaching out to artists to participate in a full restoration of the Art Trail. Once they have landed on a concept for the new artwork, they can develop a plan for fundraising and applying for grants.

“It’s definitely a work in progress,” Ferrier said, though she is optimistic about what will be eventually developed. “No matter how many times I work with someone or work with different artists, I’m amazed by the ideas they can come up with.”