

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Bicycle Skills Park update

Remember the Bicycle Skills Park? There was a groundbreaking in the Spring of 2007. There were only one or two youngsters at the groundbreaking. After that somebody drove a tractor around and 'cut' in a series of trails, most of them along the trails already existing from those who use the area 'as is'. At that time, Parks Committee Chair Scott Laird said that after that work the trails would be "ridden in." The cut-in portion just gave the water somewhere to sit when it rained and made a muddy mess, but then no one ever said the Skills Park would be used when the sun wasn't shining. Later last year some wooden 'features' were added, but they all washed away in the flood in December. The city, apparently from grant money, paid over \$5,000 to Ric Balfour to 'plan' out the park. Then, he left.

The Skills Park Committee, small but mighty as we only know of three members and most of the time two of them don't seem to be in the loop, then got approval from council to spend \$2,330 more to have Alta Planning & Design do more work on 'the plan'.

This year, when the growing season started, weeds reclaimed much of the Skills Park. Some trails have become inaccessible due to weeds that have grown six feet tall and obscure the trail.

Why are we bringing it up now? At the last Vernonia City Council meeting, council approved the next 'phase' of development of the Skills Park. This phase will cost \$931, out of grant funds, for a football field sized, bush enclosed 'technical features' area. Remember, after the flood the Vernonia Planning Commission and Columbia County Flood Relief started requiring a flood plain permit for any changes that might impact water movement, like rows of bushes, for example. When Laird was asked if the flood plain permit had been obtained for this phase of development his response was, "Not the design of it, but they've approved the initial concept." Apparently he hadn't thought of that because he said next, "I'll have to check that out." Asked when this phase of the work is to begin, Laird responded, "It hasn't been scheduled yet." So, will there be another year gone before there is anything out there?

We question the wisdom of building the Bicycle Skills Park when it may all wash away again, but mostly because there doesn't seem to be any real community support for it.



Ike Says . . .

By Dale Webb, member
Nehalem Valley Chapter, Izaak Walton League



The Izaak Walton League fishing derby was a good time for the youth of the area as we helped kick off Jamboree. The turn out was a little on the light side, but we had fun regardless. As usual, the fishing was slow, it always is at this time of year. I would like to thank our sponsor, *The Independent*, and Vernonia True Value and Vernonia Hardware for donating items used as prizes or auction items.

The highlight for me this year was a young mother and her daughter. I was making my rounds, checking to make sure people were waiting to start fishing at 5:00, when I encountered the mother on the west dock. She had already caught a trout and knew it wouldn't count in the derby, but said she didn't know how to catch the fish that would count in the derby. Of course I had to give some pointers so I told her that the fish were probably right under the dock they were standing on, so if they used a small hook and a small piece of worm they might do well. The daughter heard me make the comment about the fish under the dock and was soon on her belly looking between the cracks in the boards. "Mom! There's a fish", were the next words out of her mouth. Next the mother was flat

on her stomach looking between the cracks and saying she could see four fish. I wished I had taken my camera; this was just priceless to see. I will have to say, I have not seen a young gal that had the fishing skills and know-how of this young mother before. It wasn't long before her daughter had a fish on the end of the hand line she was dangling under the dock. The bait? An egg, worm and a little peanut butter! That's a new one for me!

I would like to recognize one of the original charter members of our chapter, Ralph Berger-son. Ralph was the driving force behind the formation of our chapter back in 1968. (Many of you probably remember Ralph as the local branch manager of U.S. Bank.) Our chapter was formed due to a common cause, the pollution of the Nehalem River by the Empire Light Rock Company, which was illegally discharging a by-product of its production of cinder blocks into the headwaters of Castor Creek, which in turn flowed into the Nehalem River. A blanket of gray silt would cover the river bottom as it moved mile after mile down the river. Local sportsmen banded together to fight the pollution, but it soon became apparent that they needed an organization behind them, to have a chance. That organization was the Izaak Walton League. With the formation of the chapter these local sportsmen had some weight behind them, a 60,000 member strong weight. Back in late 60s there wasn't much in the way of environmental laws and getting agencies to do anything about the pollution was like trying

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