



## HYLAND FOREST PARK: Off-Trail Play Area Pilot Program

### Nature Play

A wealth of knowledge has arisen in the past decade, revealing the importance of independent, unstructured interaction with nature for children's healthy development, and the current lack of such interaction that defines most children's lives. Studies have revealed that children who engage in play in natural settings and with natural elements show, among other benefits, **increased concentration, self-discipline, ability to cope with stress, and confidence**, as well as **decreased symptoms of ADD/ADHD, behavioral disorders, obesity, and Type II Diabetes**.

In response to this information, and the nation-wide trend toward increasing access to nature for kids and rethinking the standard for what a 'play area' is, Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District is developing a **Nature Play pilot program**, which includes the District's first 'Off-Trail Play Area' in Hyland Forest Park.

### Guidelines

Off-trail play activities will be confined to an acre-and-a-half section of the 30-acre park. The area will be contained within the bounds of existing trails and defined by visible markers, with regulatory and interpretive signs posted at the perimeter. Children will be encouraged to play in the area however they see fit, using the materials available to them in the forest. Some examples of appropriate play activities include building a fort, looking for insects, making a mudpie or playing hide and seek. Activities that are *not* allowed include destruction of vegetation and excessive excavation. Other **standard park rules will apply**, including prohibition of fire, drugs and alcohol, paintball guns, off-leash dogs, litter, construction of bike jumps, and camping.

### Management

In order to ensure the success of this pilot program, Natural Resources staff are working with other departments to establish a set of guidelines for implementation and management. This includes anticipating possible issues and creating a proactive plan for addressing them, as well as responding to any unforeseen issues that arise. Frequent staff presence at the off-trail area is planned in the initial phases of the program, with the various tasks of **patrolling** the play area for misuse, **informing and educating** kids and adults about the area, **inspecting the site for safety hazards**, and surveying the site to obtain a general idea of how it is being used in order to generate recommendations or changes for future similar play areas. Violation of park rules and/or misuse of the area will be addressed by Rangers or Park Patrol Officers.

### For more information:

Visit THPRD Website: <http://www.thprd.org>

Contact Melissa Marcum, Natural Resources Department: 503-629-6305 x2953

### Resources

Finch, Ken. (2009). "A Parent's Guide to Nature Play." Green Hearts, Inc.

<<http://www.greenheartsinc.org>>

Louv, Richard. (2006) *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Algonquin Books: North Carolina