



Article

Walking, reading, and writing the trails of Tualatin Hills Nature Park

Talitha May

Portland State University, USA

E-mail: tdm@pdx.edu

Abstract

Located in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, and nestled in the heart of Beaverton, Oregon, the Tualatin Hills Nature Park (park) is a 225-acre wildlife preserve that attracts over 200,000 yearly visitors. Considering the park attracts a large audience, this text rhetorically analyzes possible narratives the park's interpretive nature walk signs may communicate. The discourse of descriptive signs suggests ambivalent human and non-human animal relationships in addition to a walking, reading, and writing pedagogy that embraces embodied knowledge over Platonic abstraction. Because every-day park signs mediate public understanding and interactions with the non-human animals and environment of the park, they merit rhetorical analysis. Local photographs of the park invite readers to walk textual trails of the nature park and create their own narratives.

Keywords: Tualatin Hills Nature Park; interpretive signs; narratives; rhetoric; writing

Introduction

Located in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, and nestled in the heart of Beaverton, Oregon, which is the state's sixth-largest city, the Tualatin Hills Nature Park (park) is a 225-acre (91-hectare) wildlife preserve that attracts over 200,000 yearly visitors. The park consists of 1.5 miles (0.6 hectares) of wheelchair-accessible, paved trails, and 3.5 miles of well-maintained, flat, intersecting and looping dirt trails. Bordered by Nike World headquarters, a light rail, heavily trafficked streets, and an apartment complex, the diverse terrain of the park consists of wetlands, a prairie meadow habitat, a big cedar grove, and

an oak, fir, and pine forest, which collectively is home to numerous amphibians, birds, fish, insects, mollusks, mammals, and reptiles.



Figure 1. *A Collection of General Entry Signs and Nature Walk Interpretive Signs*

Park signs

To guide visitors, park officials have posted three different types of signs in addition to their general entry signs: two huge wooden bulletin boards, general regulatory signs, and at least twenty-three interpretive nature walk signs. With one located at the entrance, and second to the far west of the park, the two bulletin boards post numerous notices such as the park's rules, notices of guided nature walks and yoga, volunteer opportunities, letterbox activity clue sheets, several seasonal, plastic-sleeved informational pages, and more. During the last week of June 2024, for instance, the informational pages discussed oakmoss lichen, western yellow jackets, and lupine.

In addition to the bulletin boards, the park has numerous regulatory, caution, do not enter, and “reserved for nature education program” signs interspersed throughout the park. Beginning at the entrance of the park near the park's Nature Center, which is a nature store, mini-library and park informational hub, twenty-three interpretive nature walk signs dot the park's trails. The colorful, mosaic-like interpretive nature walk signs vary in size, but all angle toward viewers for accessible reading. They feature detailed line drawings, richly descriptive colloquial and technical text, as well as and binomial nomenclature of specific plant and animal species. Finally, along the trails are approximately seventeen interspersed memorial benches with commemorative plaques, one of which is dedicated to the currently active Beaverton Optimist Club and others to the memory of local community loved ones who have passed away.

Considering that the park attracts over 200,000 yearly visitors, the combinatory signs and memorials form a public pedagogy mediating both the public's understanding and interactions with the animals and environment of the park. Ecolinguist Arran Stibbe (2012) argues that “the discourses we use to construct our conceptions of animals and nature have important consequences for the well-being of the animals and the ecosystems that support life” (p. 16). As such, a guiding question of this text asks what do the signs at the park

cumulatively teach the public?

At least in my academic field of rhetoric and composition, the scholarship overlooks park signs as discourse for rhetorical study; nonetheless, the accessible discourse aimed at park visitors merits attention because discourse shapes our views of the world. As Michael Bruner and Max Oelschlaeger (1994) argue, for instance, “ecophilosophical discourse generally flies in the face of the prevailing social paradigm, and offers its ethical insights and ecological panaceas in a language that is not accessible to the lay publics, it appears to be null and void from the beginning” (p. 384). Considering that such inaccessible discourse may bury important insights, it is worth examining what the park signs, written in plain language, convey to the public — what are the narratives shaping our relationship to nature?

Methodology

Rather than push for a singular narrative of what the park signs may communicate, my findings suggest but one narrative among many. Different visitors will have varied perspectives because walking, reading, and writing resist fixity. If entering the park from the parking lot, all visitors will begin their walks on the Vine Maple trail, but then veer onto different trails. Some walkers, for example, may either diverge north onto the Oak trail, or turn south onto the Big Fir trail, or even continue west along the Vine Maple trail, with each experiencing changing landscapes and the rhythms of micro-seasons depending on the time of year. Even the time of day can influence the landscape in different ways, thus rendering the familiar unfamiliar.

Although visitors may read the same interpretive nature walk signs, albeit in different sequences, their interpretations will vary. Furthermore, the signs themselves may have multiple meanings. Jacques Derrida (2004) argues, for example, “we can never be sure exactly what is meant by a written text; it can have many different meanings as opposed to a single unifying one” (p. 147). Such variability among trail choices, readings, and texts seems to widen our perspectives of the park and mirror the park’s ecological diversity. Interspersed throughout this text, my field photographs of the park invite you to gather your own meaning(s) as well.

Although my photographs are rhetorical frames in which I have left some things out and others in, the photographs are similar to writing insofar as they resist fixity and invite your unique interpretations. The photographs in this text span several seasons; however, most of them are daytime photographs unless otherwise noted — including more evening photographs would have yielded an entirely different narrative. Throughout the text, I use the terms “park” and “nature” interchangeably with both referencing the environment and non-human animals. In my discussion, I use the term “animal” to signify “non-human animal”, “more than human”, and “other than human”. I also use the terms “visitors”, “walkers”, and “humans” interchangeably rather than the term “trail user”. Although the term “visitor” somewhat implies a separation between the park and humans, the term “user” implies a transactional relationship wherein a user is “a person who has or makes

use of a thing” (Oxford). Let’s go for a walk.



Figure 2. *Golden-Crowned Sparrow Serenade*

Ambivalent relationships

The bulletin board, regulatory, and interpretive nature walk signs suggest an ambivalent relationship exists between humans and the park insofar as humans and nature mutually harm yet benefit from one another. Upon entering the park, park rules presuppose that humans threaten not only each other, but also the park. Several signs located in the parking lot, for instance, warn visitors to not leave their valuables in cars, which suggests a site for theft. Certainly, just a few miles away in Portland, the local Forest Park trailheads are often dotted with sparkling glass of auto windshields. Aside from theft, signs presuppose humans might litter, build fires, bring “predator” dogs — even the friendly ones — who “disturb” wildlife, and extract wildlife, property, and plants (Why No Dogs?; Rules). One sign even singles out a specific species in italics: “*Please do not pick or dig up any plant in the Nature Park, and especially not a trillium*” (Wildlife Preserve Area).

Moreover, signs suggest that humans generally threaten species to “extinction”. Prior to the city establishing the park, for instance, visitors had even “trampled into oblivion” the “fragile understory plants” of a shady grove of old Western redcedars (Big Cedar Grove). Aside from the shadowy understory, the park signs repeatedly characterize nature as “sensitive”, ranging from Oregon white oaks, wetland habitats, plants and soils of the lily pond, wildlife, and lichen, which are susceptible to pollution. As such, the park signs

advise visitors repeatedly to stay on the trail so “wildlife can go about their lives undisturbed by human visitors” (Wildlife Preserve Area). Characterizations such as the lily pond being “the most pristine and natural” of the park’s ponds that “has the most to lose if we allow it to be disturbed” and the “pure white” petals of trillium further add to the overall sense of the park’s sensitivity (Lily Pond; Wildlife Preserve Area).

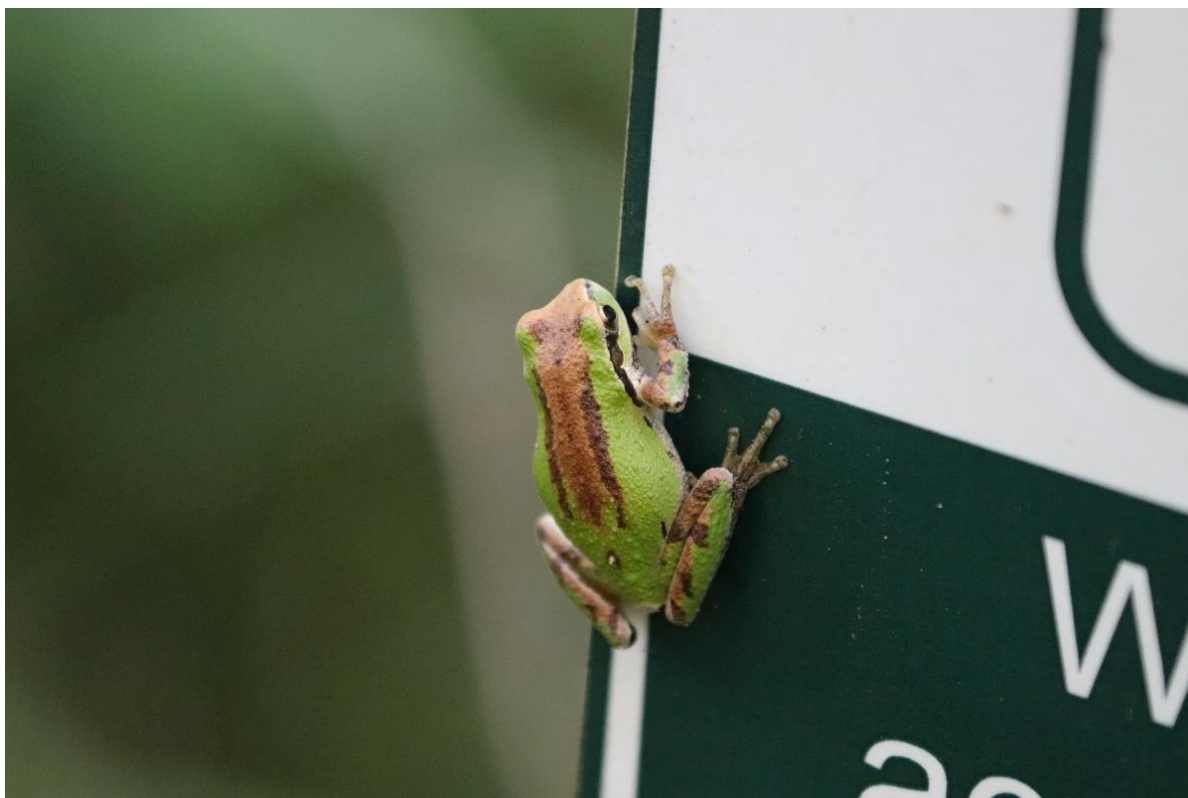


Figure 3. *Pacific Tree Frog on Bike Sign*

Despite human threats and its sensitivity, the park nonetheless poses multiple dangers to humans. Signs caution visitors of the presence of numerous poisonous plants ranging from corn lilies, Pacific yew berries, nettle that bear “microscopic syringes that inject a witch’s brew of mild toxins”, and poison oak that can make some visitors “violently allergic” (Beware of Leaves). Although one sign attempts to help visitors identify poison oak with a detailed description and a line drawing of its three leaflets, the sign acknowledges that poison oak’s various forms make it difficult for humans to identify, so “the best advice is simply to stay on the trail” to avoid poisonous plants (Oak and Pine Forest).

Nonetheless, staying on the trail does not guarantee safety — especially from animals. Visitors, for example, may encounter rough-skinned newts, whose “moist”, “vulnerable”, and “bright orange” skin “exudes a poison” (Wildlife Preserve Area). If encountering amphibians whose deadly neurotoxin tetrodotoxin was not enough, three caution signs warn visitors of “incidents” on the Big Fir trail and Douglas fir forest area in general, of barred owls who have “swooped down on trail users” (Use Caution). Presumably, during breeding season, territorial barred owls have attempted to chase humans away from the



Figure 4. *Poisonous Beauty (Corn Lily)*

Note: Also known as Indian hellebore, this lily “is one of the most violently poisonous plants on the Northwest coast, a fact recognized by all indigenous groups” — even eating a small portion will result in “loss of consciousness, followed by death” (Pojar & Mackinnon, 2014, p. 113).

area to protect either their eggs or owlets. Despite the owl caution signs, online news sites (Steele, 2016; Urenda, 2021) have reported only a couple of barred owl visitor interactions that occurred in 2016 and 2021.¹ In addition to purported diving owls, visitors must also be wary of wasps such as Western yellow jackets and gall wasps; nonetheless, a sign allays fears with “don’t worry, gall wasps don’t sting” (Oak Apples). Finally, trail walkers must also be aware of further untold toxins of the park. In one of my email missives with a park nature and trails supervisor (personal communication, June 25, 2024), for example, the supervisor wrote that visitors have purportedly picked and eaten snowberries and bittersweet nightshade, which are toxic.

Even though the park threatens humans in numerous ways, the park signs suggest that the nature park and humans have a mutually benefiting relationship — one of which is human stewardship. The first interpretive nature walk sign, for instance, instructs visitors on how they may “create a healthy backyard habitat”, which includes planting Pacific

¹ It is worth noting that one news story (Steele, 2016) mentions owl “swooping” whereas the other story (Urenda, 2021) takes on a more sensational and inaccurate title mentioning “owl attacks” when instead, owls simply flew toward visitors.

Northwest native plants that can provide food and shelter for animals (A Habitat Garden).



Figure 5. *Rough-Skinned Necton on the Run*



Figure 6. *Barred Owl*



Figure 7. *Morning Glance*

Visitors can also perform something as small as brushing their shoes on a shoe scraper upon entry to protect the park from stowaway seeds of potentially “new invasive weeds” (Stowaway Seeds). Aside from visitors contributing to stewardship, a regulatory sign at the entrance points to how the Tualatin Parks and Recreation District (TPRD) and the local Tualatin community protect the park with “voter-approved funds” (Why No Dogs?). The TPRD provides nature education programs and “foster[s] natural habitat” by “eliminating non-native plants” such as the “weed” species of Himalayan and evergreen blackberries (Upland Forest). Moreover, the TPRD plans to bring “natural understory vegetation back to the grove” (Big Cedar Grove). Aside from TPRD’s efforts, a memorial bench commemorates “contributions” of the Beaverton Optimist Club as well. Aside from the TPRD and optimists, a 2007 neighborhood grant funded the Oak Woodland Restoration Project to remove “overtopping trees from the largest oaks [...] allowing them access to full sunlight” (Oregon White Oak). Such was similar to how, historically, the indigenous Kalapuya peoples burned small trees to prevent them from overtopping and crowding white oak trees, which “grow about one inch diameter every 14 years” (Oregon White Oak).

In addition to recent and historical stewardship, the park likewise benefits humans — the park offers community health warnings and remedies rather than just poison. The Lichens Like Clean Air sign, for instance, warns visitors that if the lichen species Methuselah’s beard “disappears” in the park, it indicates “that Beaverton’s air quality is declining”. In terms of remedies, another sign asserts that many modern medicines originate from plants. In fact, chemists have discovered the “powerful cancer medicine,

taxol, in Pacific yew bark” (Wildlife Preserve Area). The sign asks visitors to reflect upon “how many valuable cures do you think might lie undiscovered in the thousands of small and little known species that humanity threatens with extinction?” (Wildlife Preserve Area). Aside from medicine, another sign points to further benefits: “this Nature Park is not just for people. It is also for the plants and animals. Letting them live by preserving their habitat benefits humanity as well, if we take a broader view” (Wildlife Preserve Area). The sign, however, is somewhat problematic because it does not explain what a “broader view” might entail. Moreover, the term “letting” implies an unequal relationship between humans and nature insofar as humans *allow* plants and animals to live.

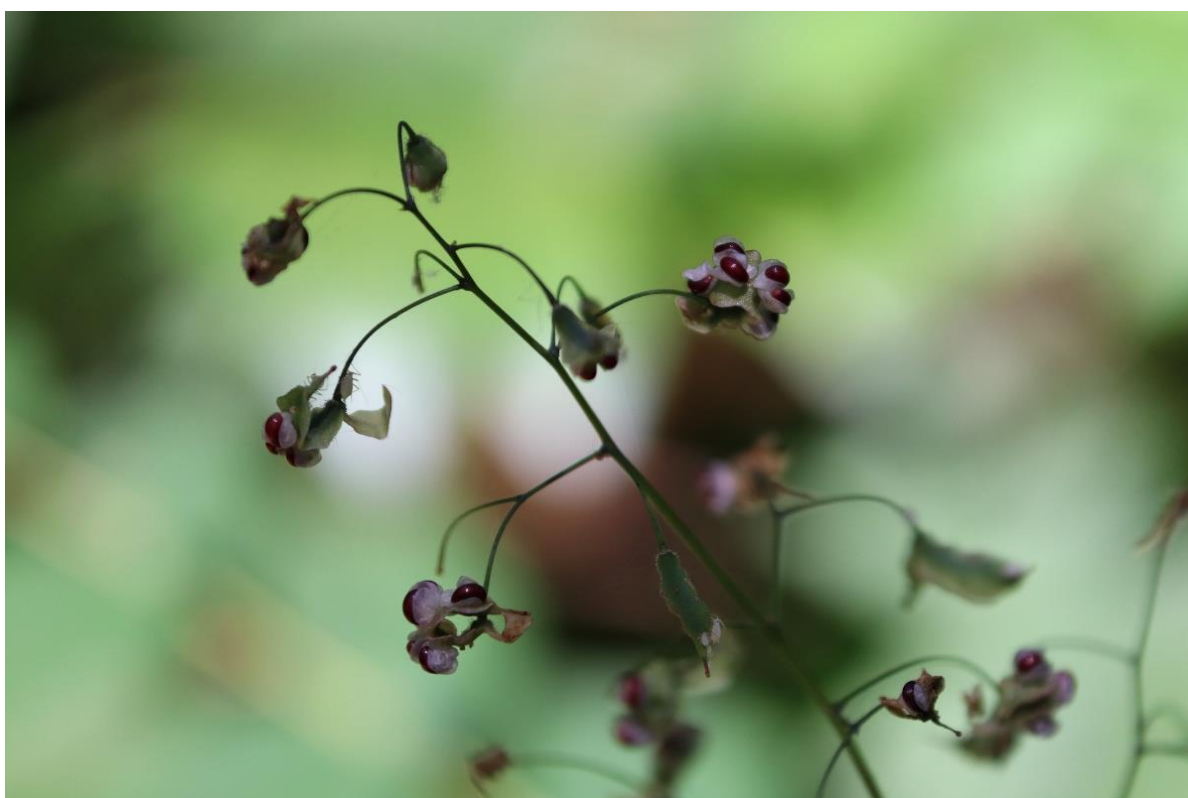


Figure 8. *Seeds of an Inside-Out Flower*

Note: Wasps and ants sometimes disperse seeds of the inside-out flower (Pojar & Mackinnon, 2014, p. 312).

Bias and the utility narrative

To reiterate, my impressions of the combinatory park signs presuppose that mutually harmful and beneficial relationships exist between humans and nature. At the same time, however, upon my first few visits to the park, the signs and the paved trails gave me the impression of a human/nature binary. Repeated signs, for instance, caution visitors to remain on the trails, albeit to protect nature, and 1.5 miles (0.6 hectares) of trails are paved. These paved trails divide the path from the forest floor despite the encroachment of peripheral moss and luminous silver ribbons of Pacific banana slugs and Pacific sideband

snails. After visiting the park several times, however, I have realized that I over-naturalized my trail expectations and initially held onto essentialist notions of what natural trails should look like.

During my first few visits, the interpretive nature walk signs gave me the impression that I was a tourist wandering through a museum, clutching my camera, and observing animals from a distance who dart across trails, hide in the peripheries, or walk along the trail. Furthermore, fast food litter forgotten on memorial benches, and occasional soda cans discarded in the shaded understory, conveyed that some humans consider the park as a “thing”/object for use and themselves as separate visitors. Although not remotely in the same vein as littering, even when considering a park sign that discusses the undiscovered medicinal value of plants, for instance, the sign reduces nature’s only importance as having human utility. Ecologist Matt Candeias (2021) argues that such reductive utility narratives are dangerous because “it teaches people that plants exist [just] for our benefit” (p. 244). Certainly, upon having occasionally seen litter gives such an impression of utility and disregard.



Figure 9. *Spotted Towhee Leads the Way*

Plant and animal agency

Despite my initial essentialist and ableist reactions to the paved trails, which provide access to visitors who would not have otherwise had access to forested areas, the park signs nonetheless largely suggest that plants and animals have agency outside of human

relationships. All of the interpretive nature walk signs, for instance, are written in the active voice. Animals and plants are active subjects who are both “agent[s] of material processes” and “sensors” with “mental processes” (Stibbe, 2012, p. 151–2). Just consider, for instance, a few material processes among many others that dot the trails: caterpillars “feed”, wasps “lay eggs”, a northern flicker “pokes around for ants”, “newts, salamanders, and frogs depend on the pond for breeding and migrating ducks stop to feed”, blackberries “run rampant in the hot sun”, rough-skinned newts “metamorphose”, beetles “leave patternless, spaghetti-like carvings” on ash trees, downed trees “provide shelter”, red-tailed hawks “perch on power lines”, frogs “darken or lighten their skin” to blend into their environment, ducks “nest in the Cascades”, and so forth (Prairie Meadow Habitat; Oak Apples; Oak and Pine Forest; Lily Pond; Upland Forest; Wildlife Preserve Area; Beetle Graffiti; Winds of Change; Prairie Meadow Habitat; Pacific Tree Frog; Diving Ducks). These processes demonstrate animals and plants as “actively living their own lives for their own purposes” (Stibbe, 2012, p. 152).



Figure 10. *Pileated Woodpecker Strategizes*

Note: Males have red on their cheeks whereas females have black.

Though not as predominant, the signs also demonstrate animals and plants as sensors, who engage in mental processes such as “thinking, feeling, seeing, hearing, etc.” (Stibbe, 2021, p. 149). Consider, for instance, how plants near the corn lilies “like their feet wet”, a “woodpecker listens”, “yellowthroats like to live in thickets”, “many songbirds tend to mistake” sounds, and “lichens like clean air” (Corn Lily; Beetle Graffiti; Upland Forest;

Lichens Like Clean Air). When considering dominant cultural narratives of nature as things for human use, the signs invite visitors to not only consider animals and plants as fellow beings, but also cultivate their affective capacity to slow down and subsequently notice and observe animals living their lives.



Figure 11. *Soft Bullfrog*

Walking and coming to our senses

Because the park privileges walkers, visitors can slow down, sit, linger, and meditate. Although bikers and joggers are permitted to access the park, bikers must yield to walkers, ride exclusively on paved trails, and dismount on bridges and boardwalks. Bridges and boardwalks do get slick and icy, so dismounting is for their benefit as well. Those who violate these rules are subject to “exclusion” or a fine — Park Patrol enforces these rules with just a working phone call away. The park encourages walkers to pause and sit on conspicuously placed large tree stumps and memorial benches. One bench plaque invites visitors: “Let’s Take an Old-Fashioned Walk.” The term “old-fashioned” suggests that walking belongs to the past — it is little wonder that Rachel Carson (2002 [1962]) says “in the modern world there is no time” (p. 6).

Slowing down, sitting, reading signs, and lingering brings to bear what Geoffrey Craig and Wendy Parkins (2006) call an “ethics of time” in which we can cultivate inclusive “time for the self and time for the other” (p. 47). Slowing down to read the signs allows “the capacity for dialogue, the capacity for opening up to the other” (Han, 2018, p. 64). Even

individual walkers have an internal conversation with the signs when reading. Walking and sitting also allow visitors time to, as the common saying goes, come to their senses rather than retreat inward as René Descartes would. As Frédéric Gros (2023) explains, “when we are walking, it isn’t so much that we are drawing nearer, more that the things out there become more and more insistent in our body. The landscape is a set of tastes, colours, scents which the body absorbs” (p. 10). Gros (2023) suggests that walking seems to heighten our senses and help us understand that our bodies are coextensive with the environment — the boundaries we define between us and the environment become blurry and arbitrary.



Figure 12. *Eyes in the Cedar*

It is not surprising then that the interpretive nature walk signs foster in visitors a heightened awareness of their senses and collectively ask walkers to touch, smell, look, and listen. If visitors touch the stamens of “charming” Oregon-grape blossoms with a pine needle or twig, for instance, they can emulate a bee dusted in pollen gathering nectar, and subsequently satisfyingly see stamens instantly snap inward (Oregon-grape). Another sign informs walkers about how through touch, they may distinguish sedges, rushes, and grasses from one another (Upland Forest). Other signs ask readers if they can “smell a lovely scent” of cottonwoods, smell the “skunky smell” of skunk-cabbage and “notice the change in the smell and feel of the air as [they] step out of the shady forest into the meadow” (Corn Lily; Prairie Meadow Habitat). Visitors can also carefully listen for the songs of red-winged blackbirds whose songs sound like “pumpkin EATER, pumpkin EATER!” and listen for

“long rattly-sounding” call of a belted kingfisher (Red-winged Blackbird; Belted Kingfisher). Moreover, walkers can even try saying “PISSSSHT” a few times loudly, by forcing air through clenched teeth” to attract songbirds who might mistake the sound for an alarm call of fellow songbirds (Upland Forest).

Signs not only ask visitors to look for woodpeckers, but also acknowledge the difficulties for visitors to see some species of plants and animals. Visitors, for instance, must “look close” to spot yews (Wildlife Preserve Area). Pacific tree frogs and bullfrogs are similarly difficult to find because “they sound more distant than they are” and can change color to blend into the environment (Pacific Tree Frog). Finally a sign at the Cedar Mill creek riparian habitat asks visitors to “Look and listen closely to the water, plants, and animals. Every part of this ecosystem is connected. How do they interact? What do you hear? What do you see? What has changed since your last visit?” (Cedar Mill Creek Forest). This line of inquiry relies on embodied knowledge and connects visitors with the dynamic park — rather than simply exist as visitors, people who walk the park come to understand that they too are a part of the “ecosystem” (Cedar Mill Creek Forest).



Figure 13. *Bullfrog Pause*

Even if visitors are unable to smell cottonwoods, see and hear common yellowthroats, or taste “delicious berries”, the concrete, vivid descriptions and detailed line drawings nonetheless model for walker-readers how to foster more attentive encounters with nature (Upland Forest). Conversely, experiencing the snapping action of the Oregon-grape for oneself also brings to bear an added dimensionality to the text. The textual descriptions

coupled with experiencing the park seem to mutually reinforce one another. In other words, the signs cultivate awareness and, in turn, our sensory experiences with the park bring vitality to discourse. As philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2024b) suggests, “narrating and listening foster each other” (p. 6).

Stibbe (2021) asserts that ecolinguistics tends not “to concretely, specifically and vividly represent the natural world in ways that bring it into the minds of the readers” (p. 161). Fortunately, the park signs, however, demonstrate a high pattern of salience, which is “a linguistic or visual representation of an area of life as worthy of attention through concrete, specific and vivid depictions” (Stibbe, 2021, p. 160). Rather than reside on the level of vague abstractions, which negate the present, the signs adopt concrete language, which helps visitors re-educate themselves and keep their bellies to the ground. As such, visitors can not only *touch* like bees, but *feel* like Pacific banana slugs and garter snakes.

Under the five-trunk maple tree

Not only do the interpretive nature walk signs foster sensate knowledge, but the park’s letterbox scavenger hunt as well. The bulletin board provides clue sheets for a letterbox scavenger hunt that encourages a close reading of the park — visitors transform into players. To initiate the scavenger hunt, visitors obtain a letterbox clue sheet from the bulletin board at the park’s entrance. The clue sheet guides walkers to five different habitats of the park to find hidden, weatherproofed letterboxes that contain ink pads and stamps. Upon visiting the snags and logs, Cedar Mill creek streamside, Forest, Pond/Wetland, and the Streamside habitats, players can read brief, yet informative descriptions of each and then stamp their clue sheet. Four of the clue sheet descriptions ask observational questions, and all five ask players to look at animals or plants at each location.

Upon completing the activity, players can visit the Nature Center to win a prize, which in early July was a small, blank, unlined “nature notebook” courtesy of Friends of the Tualatin Hills Nature Park. After engaging with what Han (2024b) might characterize as the “*alertness of an information hunter*”, players can then engage the “*inwardness of a narrator*” with their journals (p. 32). The cover of the little notebook has the word “I” above a centered heart surrounded by the abstract icons of an owl, tree, bee, map, leaf, sun, and binoculars. The cover suggests that although writing consists of abstract symbols, writing has the capacity for saliency. In other words, “language can never capture the totality of our experience or even partially render it in a way that is adequate”; nonetheless, the senses can shape how and what we write resulting in salient discourse if we, in a Nietzschean sense, can develop the capacity to “write with our feet” (Sartwell, 2000, p. 5, as cited in Yagelski, 2011; Nietzsche, 2001, p. 21). As Friedrich Nietzsche (2001) explains, “I do not write with hand alone: / My foot does writing of its own. / Firm, free, and bold my feet engage / In running over field and page” (p. 21). Although I have visited the park many times, it was not until I had completed the child’s activity of play that I gained a new perspective under the shade of a maple tree with five trunks. Surely, I must have seen the

unique maple tree before hidden near the streamside; nonetheless, I finally became aware of my re-encounter and inattention alongside the importance of play regardless of age. The blank pages of my prized little notebook invite me to sketch, reflect, remember, and write my own narrative.



Figure 14. *Prairie Snacker*

Secrets of the park

Cultivating sensate awareness can help visitors navigate some secrets of the park and initiate investigations of their own outside the context of the letterbox activity. Park signs, for instance, point to how visitors can learn how to identify uncommon species of trillium, notice the unusual Ponderosa pines that might be a new species, see “secretive” warblers of the underbrush, find hidden caches of food from squirrels, and perhaps catch sight of “shy” foxes and minks (Upland Forest; Wildlife Preserve Area). I have once experienced the surprised joy of seeing a wasp nest and even a mink sitting on a nurse log. With cultivated awareness, walkers can also go beyond the signs and develop their affective capacity to read the forest floor and create new narratives for themselves. Walkers can veer onto the Chickadee Loop, for example, to see a rare bouquet of Pacific bleeding hearts and listen to the delicate, haunting call of a Swainson’s thrush.

They can lean close to the deep wrinkles of a Douglas and smell fragrant sap. Moreover, walkers can learn how to notice the translucent white petals of ephemeral ghost pipes, which are parasitic plants (not fungi as commonly believed) that lack chlorophyll.

Moreover, visitors can become lost in just examining the park's mushrooms. For such a ubiquitous presence in fall and winter, none of the interpretive nature walk signs discuss fungi; nonetheless, the Nature Park store does sell a folding pocket guide to local plants and animals, which includes a small section on fungi. Upon reading some online Google reviews of the park, who largely are struck by the park's beauty, visitors have gone beyond the signs to peer under lily pads, discover beavers, download plant identification smart phone apps, reference bird guide books, and more. Despite guides, books, and apps, the park resists full transparency and many of its secrets remain hidden.

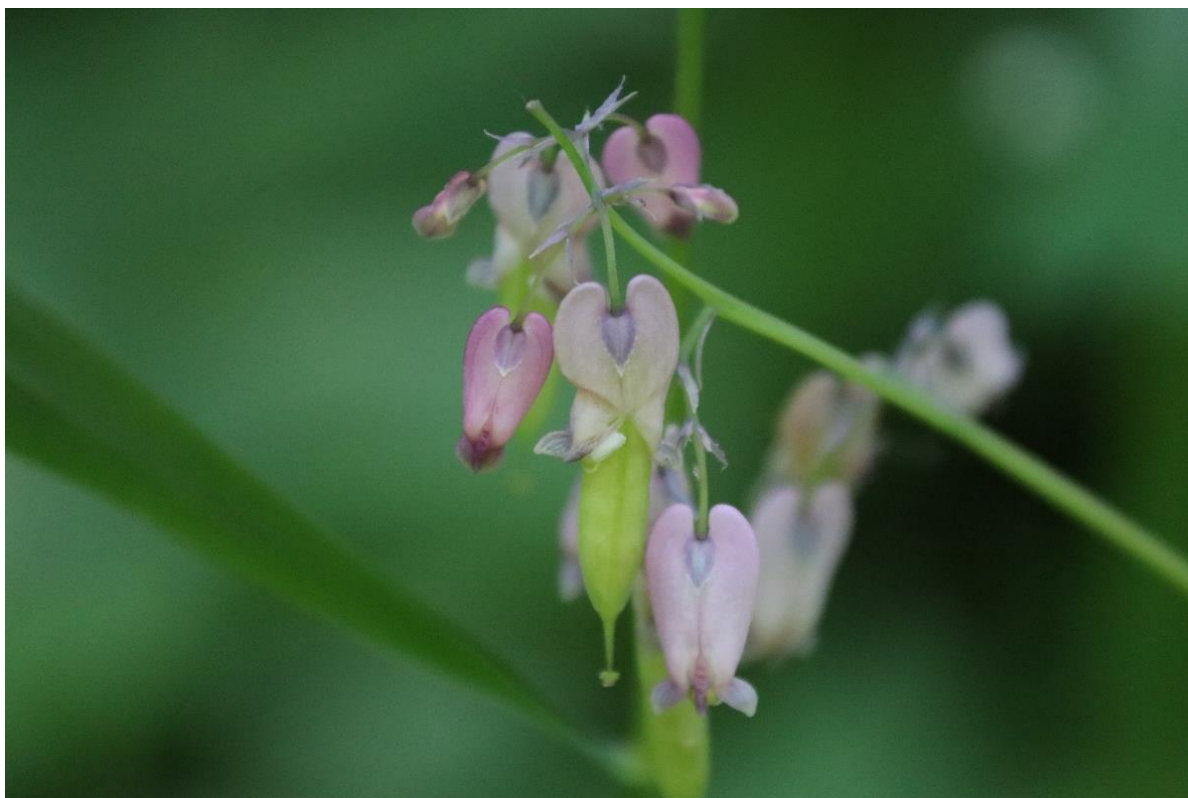


Figure 15. *Pacific Bleeding Heart*

Note: The Pacific bleeding heart creates seeds with “oil-rich appendage attractive to ants” who “disperse the seeds” (Pojar & Mackinnon, 2014, p. 313.) Endozoochory is dispersal from animals and specifically from ants is known as myrmecochory (Candeias, 2021, pp. 129, 137).

Phaedrus and Socrates under the plane tree

In Plato's (2020) dialogue *Phaedrus*, after spending the morning with an orator named Lysias, Phaedrus meets Socrates and invites him to go beyond the city for a walk. Socrates wants to hear about their time together and read Lysias's speech, so together Phaedrus and Socrates walk barefooted along the Ilisus river to find the right place to sit. Finally, they find the perfect spot and lie upon grass under a plane tree in which Socrates is struck by the beauty of their resting place. Socrates remarks, “Feel the freshness of the air; how pretty

and pleasant it is; how it echoes with the summery, sweet song of the cicadas' chorus!" (Plato, 2020, p. 163). Phaedrus remarks that it seems like Socrates is out of place and has never gone beyond the city walls. Socrates replies, "Forgive me, my friend I am devoted to learning; landscapes and trees have nothing to teach me — only the people in the city can do that" (Plato, 2020, p. 163). In fact, Socrates remarks it was Lysias' speech that charmed him into leaving the city.

Socrates seems to not have the affective capacity to learn the lessons of cicadas, or perhaps in our context, even the kingfishers of the park, who associated with the Halcyon in Greek mythology, "could calm a little area of sea to float its nest upon" (Belted Kingfisher). Contrary Socrates' narrow conceptualization of who or what we may learn from, Nietzsche (2001) argues that knowledge is not exclusive to books; instead, we can "think outdoors, walking, jumping, climbing, dancing, preferably on lonely mountains or right by the sea where even the paths become thoughtful" (p. 230). The park signs help visitors adopt such a Nietzschean view insofar as nature can help visitors re-evaluate their habituated ways of thinking and be open to new perceptions.



Figure 16. *Nestling Peeks*

Challenges to common sense

Many of the park's interpretive nature walk signs alert visitors to how nature can challenge their normative ways of thinking about nature. Fallen dead trees called "nurse logs" and standing dead trees called "snags", for example, are teeming with life — they are habitat

for mushrooms, insects, and birds. Furthermore, what visitors might mistake as grasses are instead sedges and rushes; what might seem to be clusters of moss are instead lichens (Upland Forest). Even the ponderosa, “unusual and relatively little-known” for the Willamette Valley might be a different species that is “well adapted to moist soil” unlike from those that grow in Eastern Oregon (Oak and Pine Forest). The park also challenges common folklore about moss only “growing on the north side of trees” (A Moss Has No Compass). Furthermore, one sign points to how kingfisher nests of “regurgitated fish bones” challenge our assumptions of what a nest can be with the cheeky inquiry, “is ‘nest’ too sweet of a term for such debris?” (Belted Kingfisher).



Figure 17. *Prairie Flower Front*

Ecological time

Aside from challenging assumptions, the park signs and memorial benches help visitors reconceptualize time as apocalyptic to ecological. Zen teacher Kurt Spellmeyer (2010) maintains that the Western dominant cultural narrative of apocalyptic time has a “distinct beginning to an all encompassing end” (p. 4). Contrary to this teleological narrative, “ecology shows that life never stops — it never stops changing and branching off and interweaving once again” (Spellmeyer, 2010, p. 13). As such, ecological time becomes layered wherein past, present, and future seem interwoven and simultaneous. Although in reference to a collection of environmental essays that “uses ghosts”, so to speak, authors Heather Swanson, Anna Tsing, Nils Bubandt, and Elaine Gan’s (2017) notion of “layered

temporalities” aptly characterizes the sense of ecological time that the park seems to convey to walkers (p. M10).



Figure 18. *Ponderosa Night*

The park signs point to not only cycles of time, but the past, and the future. Open from “sunrise to sunset”, signs remind visitors of the park’s rhythms of time. Rough-skinned newts and butterflies such as the Sara orangetip, Western tiger swallowtail, Lorquin’s admiral, and mourning cloak have short, seasonal life cycles at the park (Prairie Meadow Habitat). Although most of the butterflies have spring and summer lives, mourning cloaks can survive mild winters. Born in ponds during the summer, rough-skinned newts metamorphose into adults the fall, migrate to the upland woods for the winter, then return to the ponds in spring to breed (Wildlife Preserve Area).

In addition to cyclical time, park signs draw attention to the past. The park’s forest is young because of mid-century logging and the stumps of cedar trees indicate that cedars were among the most valuable (Oak and Pine Forest). Since the 1950s, deciduous trees and shrubs have grown in the upland forest — a sign invites reads to look beyond their limbs “to pick out the scattering much taller white oaks, ponderosa pines, and Douglas fir. Seeing them, we can picture how this place might have looked like eighty years ago, with those taller trees standing alone and little but grass and wildflowers in between” (Upland Forest). In 1995, a windstorm toppled cedars, which encouraged the growth of understory plants. Other changes include how the park’s lily pond began as an oxbow and how its water levels fluctuate depending on the season. Although the pond might disappear in the summer, it



Figure 19. *Rough-Skinned Newt*

reassuringly returns each autumn (Lily Pond). Although the pond returns, within a hundred years, the Douglas firs will shade out the broadleaf trees and “shrubs like wildrose, oceanspray, and blackcap will vanish” (Oak and Pine Forest).



Figure 20. *Fluffed Spotted Towhee*

The park seems to be a palimpsest with “layered temporalities” — the entire park has traces of the past, present, and future. Decomposing nurse logs, for instance, provide habitat for animals and nutrients for seedlings, and even stumps have emerging shoots. Even the paved trails evoke this sense of time — I have often seen multigenerational families leisurely walk together and stop along on memorial benches. Moreover, I have observed individuals quietly sitting on the memorial benches, gazing away from their phones, surrounded by bird song and the sound of treetops rustling in the wind. Such reminds me, in the words of Byung-Chul Han (2024a), that “life receives its radiance only from inactivity” (p. 2).



Figure 21. *Bullfrog Shallows*

On writing with one's foot

The park signs not only collectively inform visitors of the park in general, but also serve as a form of public pedagogy. Walking becomes a methodology wherein the park invites visitors to slow down, pause, and linger. Ethical time helps walkers become attuned to sensate knowledge, which is a cornerstone of critique. Such prepares park readers to become writers who can, in a Nietzschean sense, write with their feet. Turning again to Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates tells Phaedrus of a story of an Egyptian king named Thamus and the God Theuth who were discussing the merits of writing. Theuth maintains that learning how to write will “make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memory” (p. 195). Thamus disagrees, however, and argues that writing will simply make people forget their innate knowledge, and give the “appearance of wisdom” (p. 196). In contrast to Plato's argument, the park fosters *rhetorical* writing and discourse based on sensate knowledge that is local and contextual rather than abstract and disembodied. Sometimes I recall the excessively vivid descriptions of John Muir's essay *The American Forests* and think about how his salient discourse heightened people's awareness of deforestation, which is still among our many ecological crises today. Discourse shapes our views of the world and how we interact with animals and plants — with our collective bellies to the ground, one sign/narrative at a time can hopefully help challenge and re-write the ecological crises of our broken time.



Figure 22. *Dark-Eyed Junco Daybreak*

References

- Candeias, M. (2021). *In defense of plants: An exploration into the wonder of plants*. Mango Publishing Group.
- Carson, R. (2002). *Silent spring* (40th anniversary ed.). Houghton Mifflin. (Original work published 1962).
- Craig, G., & Parkins, W. (2006). *Slow living*. Berg Publishing.
- Bruner, M., & Oelschlaeger, M. (1994). Rhetoric, environmentalism, and environmental ethics. *Environmental Ethics*, 16 (4), 377–396.
- Derrida, J. (2004). Deconstruction and the other (No Trans.). In R. Kearney (Ed.), *Debates in continental philosophy: Conversations with contemporary thinkers* (pp. 139–156). Fordham University Press.
- Gros, F. (2023). *A philosophy of walking* (2nd ed.). (J. Howe & A. Bliss, Trans.). Verso.
- Han, B.-C. (2018). *Saving beauty*. (D. Steuer, Trans.). Polity.
- Han, B.-C. (2024a). *Vita contemplativa*. (D. Steuer, Trans.). Polity.
- Han, B.-C. (2024b). *The crisis of narration*. (D. Steuer, Trans.). Polity.
- Nietzsche, F. (2001). *The gay science*. (J. Nauckhoff, Trans.). B. Williams (Ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Oxford English Dictionary. (2023). User. In *Oxford English Dictionary*. Retrieved July 10, 2024, from https://www.oed.com/dictionary/user_n1?tab=meaning_and_use&tl=true#16021844
- Plato. (2020). Phaedrus. (A. Nehemas & P. Woodruff, Trans.). In P. Bizzell, B. Herzberg, & R. Reames (Eds.), *The rhetorical tradition: Readings from classical times to the present* (3rd ed.) (pp. 161–199). Macmillan.
- Pojar, J., & Mackinnon, A. (2014). *Revised plants of the Pacific Northwest coast: Washington, Oregon, British Columbia & Alaska* (new ed.). Lone Pine Publishing.
- Spellmeyer, K. (2010). *Buddha at the apocalypse: Awakening from a culture of destruction*. Wisdom Publications.
- Steele, T. (2016, March 9). *Breeding owls swoop at Tualatin Hills Nature Park*. Koin News. <https://www.koin.com/news/breeding-owls-swoop-at-tualatin-hills-nature-park>
- Stibbe, A. (2012). *Animals erased: Discourse, ecology, and reconnection with the natural world*. Wesleyan University Press.
- Stibbe, A. (2021). *Ecolinguistics: Language, ecology and the stories we live by* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Swanson, H., Tsing, A. L., Bubandt, N., & Gan, E. (2017). Introduction: Bodies tumbled into bodies. In A. L. Tsing, H. Swanson, E. Gan, & N. Bubandt (Eds.), *Arts of living on a damaged planet*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Urenda, G. (2021, October 5). *Out for a jog? Look out for an owl attack*. Koin News. <https://www.koin.com/news/oregon/out-for-a-jog-look-out-for-an-owl-attack>
- Yagelski, R. (2011). *Writing as a way of being: Writing instruction, nonduality, and the crisis of sustainability*. Hampton Press.

Appendix A

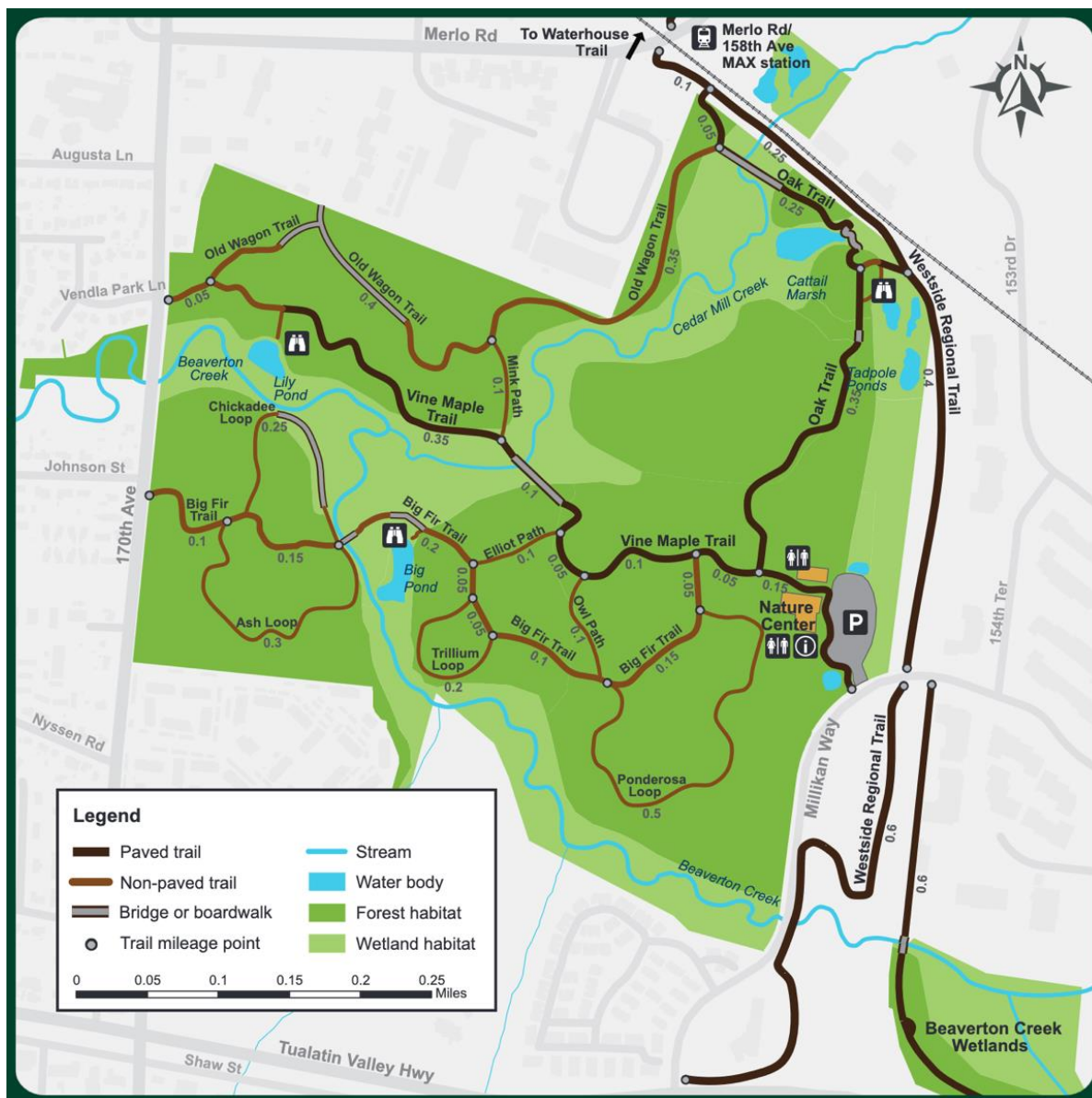


Figure A1. Tualatin Hills Nature Park

Note: From Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District. (n.d). *Tualatin Hills Nature Park trail map*. <https://www.thprd.org/pdfs2/maps/thnp.pdf>

Appendix B

List of interpretive nature walk and general signs

1. A Habitat Garden
2. Beware of Leaves
3. Oak and Pine Forest
4. Oak Apples
5. Corn Lily
6. Red-winged Blackbird
7. Oregon-grape
8. Lily Pond
9. Upland Forest
10. Wildlife Preserve Area
11. Beetle Graffiti
12. Diving Ducks
13. Ash Swale
14. Big Cedar Grove
15. Winds of Change
16. Oregon White Oak
17. A Moss Has No Compass
18. Prairie Meadow Habitat
19. Lichens Like Clean Air
20. Pacific Tree Frog
21. Diving Ducks
22. Cedar Mill Creek Forest
23. Belted Kingfisher

List of referenced general signs

- Welcome
- Rules
- Why No Dogs?
- Stowaway Seeds
- Use Caution