

NEWS



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THPRD ROLLS OUT NEW NATURE MOBILE TO BRING THE MYSTERIES OF THE GREAT OUTDOORS TO UNDERSERVED CHILDREN

Most people know Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District, Oregon's largest special park district, as host to hundreds of basketball tournaments, swim meets, soccer matches, and activities too numerous to count. What they may not know is the district also offers mobile educational programs like the new Nature Mobile – a part of the Nature Connection Program, which was created to connect an underserved constituency with local natural areas and wildlife.

[The Nature Mobile is a brightly painted truck](#) that visits district residents who may not get the opportunity to explore the great outdoors or learn about all of the indigenous animals residing right outside. As soon as staff members throw open the truck doors, a whole new world of nature opens up for children ages 3 to 13. They can touch the pelt of a bobcat, an elusive animal that lives in the forests around Beaverton, or identify the flowers that grow around their local park. They'll find out why owls hunt at night; learn about the lifecycle of a dragonfly; and which animals use camouflage to hide. Using crafts and tactile activities like touching the fur of animals they've only seen on TV, children will learn and make connections to the natural world outside their door. Beyond that they will begin to appreciate their connection to nature and how it serves as a home to countless creatures.

"We've planned some really fun activities and gathered artifacts geared to spark the interest of kids who normally have no real contact or relationship with the great outdoors," says Elisa Joy Payne, THPRD program coordinator. "Our hope is that these

children create a connection to their natural environment, build respect for it and eventually the desire to protect and save it.”

During different school breaks, THPRD’s Nature Mobile will visit schools, low-income apartments, and parks while piggybacking on the school district’s free and reduced lunch program. Considering Title I schools have more than 50 percent of their children on a free or reduced lunch, a visiting entertainment and learning center is a welcome treat. THPRD sets up their mobile classrooms in apartment complexes, community centers and parks adjacent to schools year round but will make some special stops during winter break.

“Many of our Nature Mobile visitors lack opportunities to travel far from home. By offering them a look into a different, natural world, they can develop an understanding of their environment in order to appreciate and preserve it,” says Bruce Barbarasch, THPRD’s superintendent of natural resources. “And for most children, it couldn’t come at a better time to offset the doldrums during a long holiday weekend.”

Community organizations are encouraged to call THPRD’s Elisa Joy Payne at 503/629-6350 to inquire about both free and fee-based programs or schedule a Nature Mobile visit for their participants.

Formed in 1955, THPRD is the largest special park district in Oregon, spanning about 50 square miles and serving more than 200,000 residents in the greater Beaverton area. The district provides year-round recreational and educational opportunities for people of all ages. Offerings include a wide variety of classes and more than 200 park sites, 60 miles of trails, eight swim centers, six recreation centers, and 1,300 acres of natural areas. For more information, visit www.thprd.org or call 503/645-6433.

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