



**Westmoreland Park Nature-Based Play
Workshop Summary
March 17, 2012**

Introduction

An emerging body of research strongly suggests that children are growing up disconnected from nature. This disconnect can have alarming impacts – more time in front of screens, increased depression, increasing obesity and diabetes, and near-sightedness.

Nature-based play can provide important connections for children and adults to the natural environment. Playing in natural environments improves language skills and collaboration; improves imagination and creativity; supports positive social development; and enhances balance, agility, and overall health.

Portland Parks & Recreation received a grant from the Metropolitan Regional Government (Metro) voter-approved 2006 Natural Areas Bond Measure to explore providing nature-based play in Westmoreland Park. This workshop is designed to help you understand nature-based play and to give you and your child (if you brought one) an opportunity to explore different activities and experiences.

Outreach for the workshop included:

- Fliers to 200 households around the park
- Posters in storefronts in Sellwood, Moreland, Brooklyn, and Woodstock business areas
- Electronic notification sent twice to more than 1,000 addresses
- Signs and posters in Westmoreland Park
- Sign in Brooklyn Park
- Sign at Sellwood Boys and Girls Club
- Notification in online version of *The Bee*
- Press release
- Shared visibility with Trackers NW

Attendance

- Approximately 65 contacts were collected from the sign-in sheet. This represented 1-5 people depending on how many family members/friends attended.
- It is estimated that more than 250 children, youth, and adults participated in the activities.
- 25 comment forms were received.

Comment Summary/Observations

- The comments reflected in the forms represent the opinions of the individuals who completed the form and are not generalized to the larger community.
- The partnership with NW Trackers was beneficial to increase visibility and broaden our audience. It should be noted that it may also have introduced some bias in the types of people attracted to those types of activities.
- The event was very well received by those who participated.

- Respondents generally preferred more naturally-oriented activities, but there was good indication that a mix would be best.

Participants moved through various activities. Adults were encouraged to let children lead the way and observe what they were drawn to:

- How did they use the different elements?
- Did they respond to the activities differently than a traditional playground? How?

Building Area

- Loved tactile natural materials, exploring building shapes – landscapes
- They were most interested in this
- Pretty good exploration area – getting along together building
- Random activity, some kids seem to think the materials are strange, but a few start using them
- They loved building with natural materials, but they were overwhelmed by all the people
- Focus on creating ways to climb – many different ways to climb – 10 yr old created balancing challenge
- Wanted to build a “house” for imaginary fairies/princesses
- Very disorganized, need guidance, unapproachable people drinking coffee and not engaging
- Good for cooperative play, planning, and executing a plan. How to share resources
- May be dangerous with those big blocks, otherwise great!
- The kids really engaged in the moldable dough/sand stuff, but they liked everything about this area
- Swinging ropes in circles around head
- Child was grumpy when they arrived, but gradually warmed up to the building happily
Then she snuck off 2 times to eat contraband Oreos
- The kids didn’t need any rules or instructions. They immediately started playing with the materials; little ones were banging things with all sorts of materials, but never hit each other!

Water Area

- I like the water plants with the water
- Little ones liked pouring on a small scale, and the older ones enjoyed doing more complicated engineering
- Great!
- Kids enjoyed making boats, and pipes for water – got instant feedback on whether their design worked. Allowed different ages to collaborate
- Making water move in different ways, changing the flow
- They liked watering the plants
- Kids loved pouring water
- Mess is good. kids pouring water, watching it flow
- Love water!
- Built sailboat float
- Building ways for water to flow

Design Area

- Forts, different levels (high-low structures)
- Drew a “ninja” and “pirate” related to trackers camps he will attend
- Love play dough and little rocks

- Clay popular – wood sticks, thanks
- Snow castle – mermaid house. Built a slide decorated with sea glass – ramp up to slide was tree park
- They liked redistributing the supplies. Rocks and “play dough” esp. popular
- Great!
- There are some great opportunities for collaboration here
- Strong interest in sand table
- Immersed in building for at least 20 minutes
- Fun to manipulate the sand, difficult to make what they are dreaming

Nature Nook

- Small space to crawl into
- She liked the nature nook – said she would hide, eat snake, and play games
- Not sure which area this was

What is your general overall impression of these activities and nature-based play?

- Very positive
- Love nature-based play, my kids always have the best time and keep busy the longest with natural materials
- It’s great, the kids loved it. My 7-year-old daughter expressed that she would love a “really wild” playground
- My children love it, the more the better
- Positive
- Good, but may not be usable all year long, only a few months of the year
- Love it! We spend hours creek walking, and building dams on the beach to bank the flow of water would be great to have a park
- We were expecting to be outside experiencing “nature play,” not in a building
- Great, but recognize that certain playground activities will be good to incorporate – climbing, sliding, swinging, sand, and water
- Fun!
- Great!
- Imagination is so important, even in adults – nature-based play feeds into this with a sense of cause and effect and wonder. Comment – something to remember – if you build natural canopies, that is so helpful
- Great, very creative!

The nature-based play area in Westmoreland Park will be designed to reflect the needs and preferences of the community.

1. In this park, I would prefer (choose one):
 - 0** traditional play equipment (swings, slides, climbing structures)
 - 11** natural play elements (sand, water, rocks, logs)
 - 14** elements of both
2. When my children (grandchildren, nieces/nephews, friends etc.) are using a play area, they prefer to (check all that apply):
 - 13** feel like they can connect to and explore nature
 - 18** engage in creative play
 - 10** spin, climb, and swing on manufactured equipment
 - other** climb, swing, slide, build (3), sand

Please check/indicate your preference regarding the following design elements:

3. Manufactured Equipment

Strongly prefer - 1 Prefer - 1

No opinion - 2
Both - 1

Natural Elements

Prefer - 7

Strongly prefer - 12

4. Lawn/Playground Surfacing

Strongly prefer - 1 Prefer - 1

No opinion - 4

Prefer - 6

Planting

Strongly prefer - 12

5. Maintained

Strongly prefer - 0 Prefer - 4

No opinion - 3

Prefer - 12

Wild

Strongly prefer - 4

6. Prescriptive

Strongly prefer - 1 Prefer - 0

No opinion - 2

Prefer - 9

Imaginative

Strongly prefer - 11

Please tell us about yourself!

I am age 16-24 (0), 25-34 (7), 35-44 (10), 45-59 (5), 60-79 (2), 80 & over (0)

I am female (20), male (2)

How many children do you have living with you under age 18? 34

Regarding residence, I own my home (16); rent my home (7)

I identify as: (please check all that apply)

Latino (1)

African American/Black (0)

Asian/SE Asian/Pacific Islander (2)

Native American/Alaska Native (0)

Caucasian/White (21)

Other (1)