

MT. HOOD & THE GORGE



Visitor Communication
Trailhead Ambassador Program

TRAVEL



OREGON

1.15.2019



CONTENT:

- What is Trailhead Ambassadors?
- What was the problem?
- What was our solution?
- Success
- Next Steps

WHAT IS TRAILHEAD AMABASSADORS?



- Started in 2018
- Trained volunteers stationed at our busiest hiking trailheads during the high season (April – September) to provide useful information to visitors about trail access, trail safety, and trail/hiking preparedness to visitors

WHY DID WE START THE TRAILHEAD AMBASSADOR PROGRAM?



Hiker finds 30 bags of dog waste near Mirror Lake

by KATU Staff | Thursday, July 6th 2017



Man dies in fall along Eagle Creek Trail at Punchbowl Falls

by Keaton Thomas and KATU.com Staff | Wednesday, August 3rd 2016

Pictured: The three-year-old boy who survived after falling off a 50-foot cliff next to a popular hiking trail while his brave mother, 37, died trying to save him



WHY DID WE START THE TRAILHEAD AMBASSADOR PROGRAM?



“Hood River County has a well-deserved reputation as an outdoor playground, but visitors should take their safety seriously,” said Hood River County Sheriff Matt English. “Too many Search and Rescues and tragic accidents each year are caused by reckless, irresponsible behavior.”

"I don't expect one entity to completely fund the amount of recreational response services we need in Hood River County but we are looking for a commitment from the stakeholders that are promoting and benefiting from the tourism that is the driving force behind this issue," said English.

WHY DID WE START THE TRAILHEAD AMBASSADOR PROGRAM?



- Increasing congestion on our trails, year after year
- Increasing number of search and rescue issues each year
- Misuse of trails: trash, dog poop, social trails
- Lack of visitor disbursement to our outlying communities

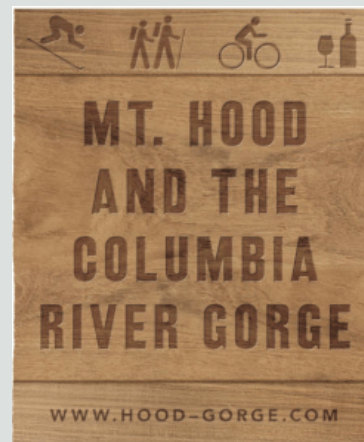
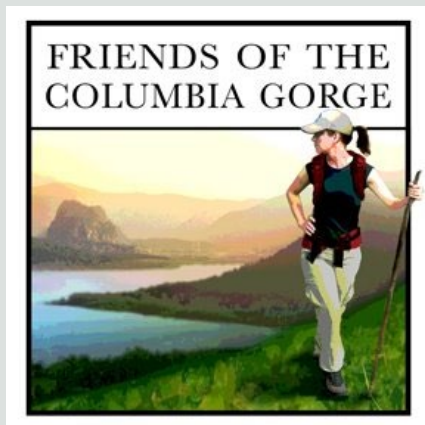
WHY DID WE START THE TRAILHEAD AMBASSADOR PROGRAM?



- We needed to be a part of the solution, since tourism was part of the problem.
- We needed to be stewards of our land, of our recreation destinations.
- We knew our marketing channels do not reach all 3-4 million visitors that come to our region.
- We needed to go to the visitors, on-site, with practical information that could impact their experience in an immediate way.
- We needed to help disperse traffic.



SOLUTION: WHO ARE THE PARTNERS?





SOLUTION: THE INVESTMENT

- \$24,500 in Yr 1 | \$15,000 Yr 2 from RDMO
- \$2,500 from USFS each year
- \$4,000 from Friends of the Gorge each year
- Significant staff time from RDMO and Friends of the Gorge

OUTCOME: THE PLAN

- Hired a part-time coordinator
- Local media outreach
- Recruitment through partner communications channels
- 3 x 4-hour trainings in Portland and Cascade Locks
- Volunteer Handbooks and Online resources
- Weekly partner calls
- Bi-weekly newsletter to volunteers
- Volunteer Facebook Group



THE ROLE OF A TRAILHEAD AMBASSADOR



- Serve as a friendly, informative welcome committee to the Mt. Hood & Columbia Gorge trails
- Provide useful information about trail access, safety and trail/hiking preparedness to visitors
- Serve as “eyes and ears” for regional partners and agencies to better address the needs of visitors

TRACKING

- Volunteers were asked to track the following:
 - # of visitors engaged with
 - # of unprepared visitors
 - # of visitors who changed course of action
 - Other trail/visitors notes for land managers

TRAILHEAD: Multnomah Falls DATE: 4.22.18



We stopped trying to count people at 11:00. Way too busy talking so many people had many varied questions. TOO MANY TO COUNT

	Tally Marks	Total #
# of Visitors Engaged With		
# of Unprepared Visitors		
# of Changed Course of Action		

So many people had many varied questions. TOO MANY TO COUNT

This is not counting people just here to see M.F. waterfall itself. This is people intending to hike

Notes On Interactions

* Many people unaware they could not hike here. Many re-directed - almost everyone we talked with!

* NEED A DETAILED MAP SHOWING BURN AREA AND HOW TO GET TO ALTERNATIVE HIKING SPOTS.

* NEED A BANNER - That says "INFO" or "FRIENDS of the GORGE"

* This is such a busy site, it is very difficult to keep tally! We talk to one group and another is waiting. ALSO, WE TALK WITH ONE and 5-6 others are

LISTENING IN - COULD USE A 2nd PERSON HERE!

* NEED ZOO MAPS - WHICH THE USFS HANDS OUT at their booth in the LOBBY - WE HAVE ONE COPY - WHICH EVERYONE asks for.

FEEDBACK FOR LAND AND DESTINATION MANAGERS

The trail was busy - it seemed they had 474 people use the trail during the 6 hours on Saturday and we had over 300 today (I believe). Not sure you have any influence on getting the toilets serviced - they were well used by the time we left. Overall, a very good program. Thanks for your leadership.

There was some litter along the trail on Saturday when my boyfriend and I were out, including some banana and orange peels. So I'm going to try to educate folks about not even leaving biodegradable items, and I'd recommend other THAs do the same. On the bright side, a lot of people on Sunday took the trash bags and said they'd pick up litter

- The loop trail has a landslide on it, it's not impassable but it is dangerous and it is suggested people don't chance it. We suggested just going up to Lancaster Falls and back.

Most people haven't seen the map before hiking it

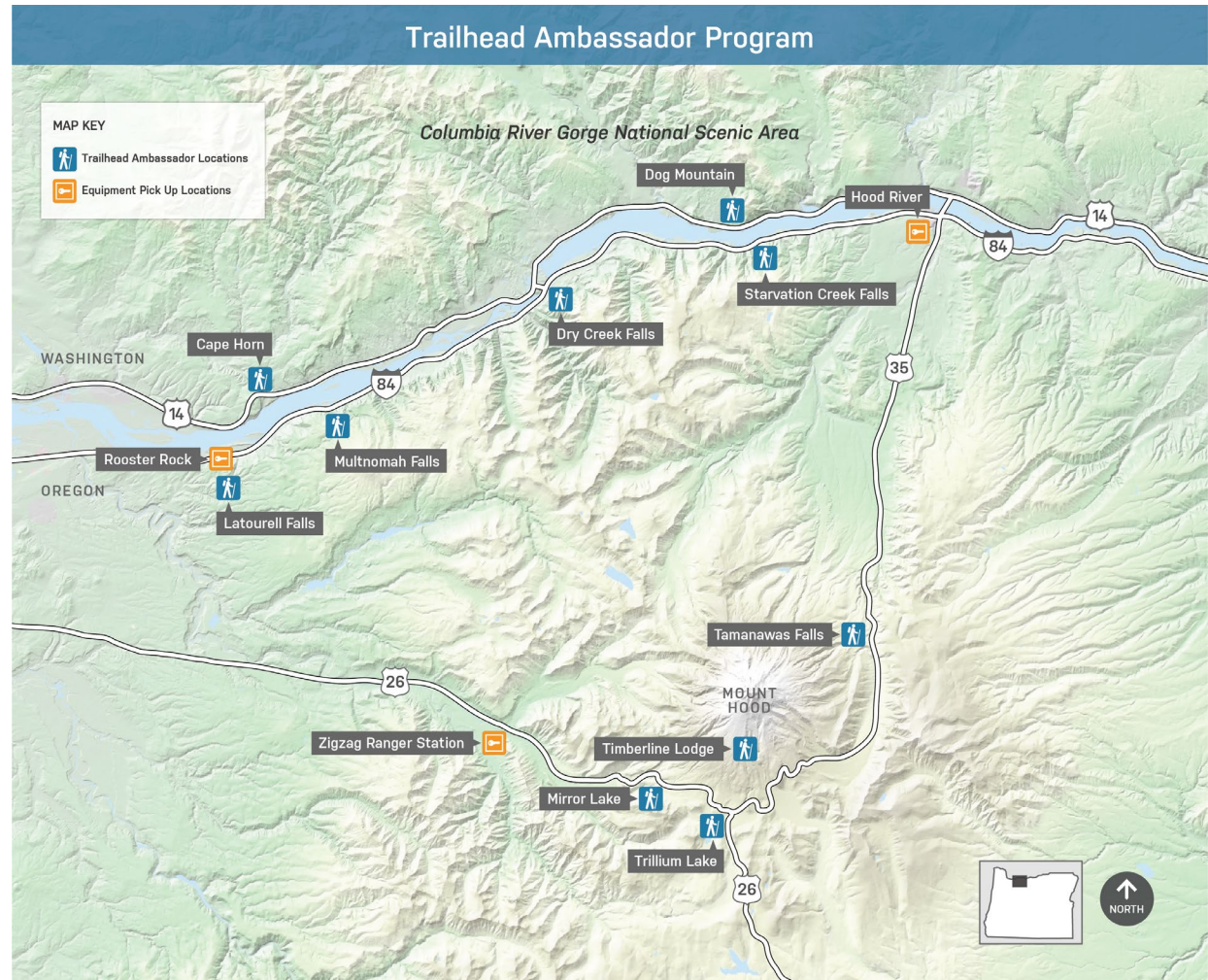
I was at **Starvation** **Creek** last week. Parking is more than just a problem there, it is extremely dangerous at times in my opinion. I know it was once a designated rest stop, but trucks pulling camper trailers CAN NOT negotiate that parking lot when it is full. Yet they continue to pull in there. We saw so many people get stuck, which creates a back up. Trucks with trailers and RV's should be routed to Viento Park. Is there a way to let ODOT know?

SUCCESS



SUCCESS: 10 TRAILHEADS

- Mirror Lake
- Trillium Lake
- Timberline Lodge
- Tamanawas Falls
- Starvation Creek
- Dry Creek Falls
- Multnomah Falls
- Latourell Falls
- Dog Mountain
- Cape Horn





SUCCESS: RESULTS

- **94** active volunteers
- **41** days at trailheads
- **308** shifts completed
- Almost **1,900** volunteer hours
- Engaged with almost **24,000** visitors

LESSONS LEARNED

- **This program was needed**
- Visitor experiences were improved exponentially
 - We plan to do some intercepts next year to track
- We couldn't fill every shift
 - Need to recruit more volunteers next year
- Each trailhead is very different, need to set volunteers expectations
- Regular communication was key
- **MORE MAPS**



NEXT STEPS:



- Already planning 2019 season
- Seeking additional sustainable funding
- Recruit more volunteers so we can add more trailheads
- Add options to hike trails with experts
- Get youth involved
- Corporate involvement opportunities
- Help expand the program throughout the state
- More data collection

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