



SLICE OF LIFE

The Missing Link

Sumner connects with its wild side through a new trail.

FOR YEARS, SUMNER, a town of about 9,000 residents in northern Pierce County, lacked means for its residents to connect with surrounding wildlife. The Interurban Trail coming down from Seattle stopped just short of the town's northern border, while the Foothills Trail from Mount Rainier stopped at the south end. The break in the trail was not only an obstacle for hikers and bikers trying to extend their outing, but also discouraging to locals who sought convenient ways to enjoy the natural life right in their backyard, including the White River and the Puyallup River.

"It was actually quite difficult to access the two rivers," says Sumner's communications director, Carmen Palmer. "We really wanted to put in access to the natural environment and encourage nonvehicular traffic."

The problem was first addressed by the City of Sumner in 1996, when a master plan was developed, then again

in 2008 when the plan was updated. At that rate it seemed the project wouldn't be finished until 2030. Nonetheless, today the trail is bustling with foot and bike traffic, thanks to Associate City Engineer Ted Hill and his team. How did they do it?

"Sheer tenacity," laughs Palmer. "We're never afraid to fill out grant applications. We worked in sections—funding a half mile or mile at a time." Funding was undoubtedly the most difficult part of the process, given that there are so many local projects in need. "We focused on the impact and got good at telling our story," Palmer says.

Last year, as the trail was nearing its opening, the team biked the entire trail, in search of any and every opportunity for improvement, such as areas to install educational kiosks, signage, and maps. Volunteers replaced damaged trees, while supporting employees from the local REI distribution center planted

native vegetation.

Now, starting near the Sumner Industrial Park, east of Highway 167, the trail winds through city, forest, farmland, and meadow until its terminus near the meeting of Traffic Avenue and Highway 410, with amenities such as picnic tables, barbecues, viewpoints, and restrooms along the way. Where the White River meets Salmon Creek, trail users can stop to watch the spawning salmon. Near the end of the trail, at the confluence of the White and Puyallup rivers, there is even a spot for fishing. A detailed map can be found on the city's website, ci.sumner.wa.us.

Although the trail is open to the public and nearly complete, there's a small section that isn't quite finished, still connected by sidewalks and bike lanes.

"It's kind of like a house," Palmer says. "It's never fully finished. We're always working to improve it."

—Andrea Harvey 

