

FUNGUS AMONG US

Fall is upon us and the hot, lazy days of summer are but a memory. It seems that the natural world is shutting down, and tucking itself away for as long winter's nap. But this is the season for mushrooms, and a rather good one at that. Autumn rains and a cooler forest floor invite our wild fungi to send fruiting bodies to the surface which we know as the mushroom. There has been over eighty species identified in the Natural Area, which is just a small part of the 16,000 species know worldwide. These plants are considered to be the most evolutionary advanced of the fungi family (a dubious honor!). Like other fruit, their main mission is to propagate the species, and not just to fill the plates of gourmets.



Under every mushroom there is a larger web-like system of fine threads or mycelia that tap into the nutrients of all the debris on the forest floor, working with other critters to cleanup discarded waste. Rot is their cup of tea. Little credit is given to the tireless workers of the decomposition cycle, but "soil building" is very important if you think about it. These plants can be picky where they grow and fruit, preferring certain soil types, host plants, and lighting conditions. Some even distinguish as to the age of the host plant.

Mushrooms are unable to produce their own food and while many species are parasitic, some species actually produce plant hormones that stimulate trees to grow. Other types attack and kill their temporary host. The spores that they produce are numerous and are very small (smaller than dust), and thus can be dispersed by the wind. Unlike seeds there is no food or embryos onboard, just genetic material wrapped in tough stuff. The spores can survive the long periods under unfavorable conditions they need to find a suitable place to grow.

There is no mushroom collecting in the Natural Area. The general policy is to take nothing except pictures and leave nothing except footprints. Many forest animals consume mushrooms, and a heavy human harvest of mushrooms before they have a chance to mature and drop their spores can diminish populations in the long run. Serious commercial harvesting of wild mushrooms is discouraged in many places, since it can make more room for inedible and poison species if edible species are collected before the spore are dispersed.

Being the month of Halloween it would be remiss not to mention the dark side of this fine fungus. Mushrooms can grow very fast given the right conditions and appear mysteriously overnight in strange shapes such as fairy rings. As a result in certain cultures they have acquired a supernatural reputation, associated with cold, dark, dank, dangerous, and evil. The synonym "toadstool" couples the German word for death "tod" with a reference to the poisonous toad. European folk tales refers to toadstools as where poisonous toads sit on poisonous mushrooms. While only one in a hundred species are fatal, many species have bad side effects, so look but do not touch.

Between every two pines is a doorway to a new world

POOP PROJECT

The Association is about to embark on a new project, using part of the generous REI grant that we received this Fall. The effects of dog-walking in the Natural Area are fairly well understood (see Lights and Shadows February 2010). It is a problem in many places around Spokane; it's what dogs leave behind. The volume of dog walkers has been on a steady increase in the Natural Area for several years now, and with Camp Caro parking closed for the winter the trailheads at 8th Ave on the west side and Siesta Court on the east side are receiving much more dog walking volume. Neighbors have been complaining! A major part of the mission of stewardship of the Natural Area is to minimize the effects of human visitation.

We plan to install several dog poop bag dispensers at trailheads soon as part of a "Leave No Dog Trace" project. We hope dog walkers will help us here by cleaning up after fido, and remember to keep them on a leash when in the Natural Area. We are working with Spokane County Parks and SCRAPS (Spokane Co. Regional Animal Protection Service) to buy or build dispensers that use regular grocery store plastic bags as a economic way to tackle this problem, and we could use recycled bags for a greener solution. We would also like to distribute some flyers around surrounding neighborhoods, the source for the majority of the dog walkers. The responsibility of keeping the Dishman Hills natural belongs to all that use it, so please help us with this project.

ASSOCIATION NEWS

We are a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to saving nature areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton, 747-8147, if you have questions. Our board meets every month on the third Tuesday. Our next meeting will be November 16th. We will meet at the Moran Prairie Spokane County Library, 6004 South Regal St. Visitors are always welcomed.

The following are our September donors that have consented to be listed: Nancy Cashon, Lois Hansen, Eris Heggem, Barbara Morkill, Karen Nelson, Lee Smith, Bernadine Van Thiel, and one anonymous donor. Thanks one and all!

There is no doubt that tough times are hitting our community, and donations, as well as total contributions, are running significantly behind the same time last year and the year before. Please try to continue to give us the resource to accomplish our mission to save our

Please use this form when sending **CONTRIBUTIONS or DUES**
All contributions are tax deductible.

Send contributions to: DHNAA
3415 S. Lincoln Dr.
Spokane, WA 99203

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