

Pollywog Park: Timeless- by Claudia Hewston

The word “Timeless” can be used to describe something that cannot be affected by the passage of time or changes in fashion, but if time never stops and change is inevitable, can something ever truly be timeless? Pollywog Park, so named by some students years ago, lies in the furthest Northwest corner of the K. William Harvey Elementary School property in Ronan. I walked through it for the first time guided by Lauren Hadley an AmeriCorps FoodCorps member hosted by School district 30. We trudged along stepping over clumps of grass, twigs, and other debris, ducking low or to the side, avoiding the overgrown branches of native Hawthorn or Woods Rose bushes. Stacks of branches could be seen huddled around tree trucks; grand palaces built by some of the school children. We crossed several rickety bridges as we made our way along the perimeter of the park. But through all the turmoil caused by the passage of time, we were both grinning ear to ear.

Lauren had reached out to the Montana State University (MSU)- Flathead Reservation Extension Office (FREO) several days prior to this walk with a vision. Being an AmeriCorps member Lauren recognized the limitations time had placed on her grand ideas and was seeking to build resiliency into some of her projects. She had been through the park numerous times before and envisioned restoring the park to its former glory. Supported by numerous teachers in both the Ronan Elementary and High School along with several community members she proposed what she envisioned. As the Director of the MSU FREO 4-H Mentoring Program, I hung on every word, and fell in love with Lauren’s vision. Having a background in Wildlife Biology and a passion for outdoor education we started to move forward with her plan. But other organizations have also shown interest in helping restore the park, Sarah Klaus with the Lake County Conservation District for instance plans to help create a Pollinator Pasture plot in the sunniest corner of the park, demonstrating solarization techniques and providing resources for interested community members. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) Cultural Committee has also given their blessing for several highly valued native plants to be planted including Bitterroot and Camas. While the CSKT Tribal Forestry Department, Forest Development Program Manager, James Lozeau, has graciously offered to supply additional native plants for the space. The hope, to later have a self-guided tour with signage emphasizing the importance of native plants, traditional roles they may have had, along with their names in both the Salish and Kootenai.

The project is still taking shape and already it has unearthed stories and memories held by the community. Former K. William Harvey Elementary students said, “I remember when they first built that park, it’s a pretty cool spot, hopefully my son can go play there at some point” Or “Isn’t that the park we used to go to for our High School Natural History Class?” says former Ronan High School Alum. These are the things that have allowed Pollywog park to withstand the passage of time and remain timeless. It has existed for countless generations in the hearts and minds of the community as a place they went and perhaps first started to explore the natural world around them. It is the hope of those involved with this project to revitalize the memories of this space and to restore it for future generations as both a reflection of what was and what it will continue to be.

Thank you again to all those who have been involved with this project thus far. For those looking to become involved please join us for our Community Garden Days, Sundays from 2-4pm, or follow our Facebook Page [Pollywog Park](#) for future updates.

