

A Wild Life Protects

Wildflowers

BY AMY JENSEN | 03.2020

For the Swift family, memories of their mom include a myriad of happy times spent outside. Flower walks, birding, camping and appreciating historical sites; their mom Carol Swift could always find inspiration and a laugh outdoors. One of her favorite places to visit was Todd Lake – lying at the base of Broken Top Mountain and boasting stunning views of the Cascades. Todd Lake is the highest elevation lake along the Cascade Lakes Hwy outside of Bend, sitting 6,150 feet above sea level. The area is home to more than 160 species of birds and plays host to a diverse and stunning array of wildflowers from June until August.

When ovarian cancer took Carol's life in 2014, the family struggled to find the right way to honor her. Their father Bert recalled a time with his late wife: walking the perimeter of Todd Lake together, hand in hand, enjoying the enchanting scenery, and soaking their sneakers while walking through the wet meadow.

"Look at all the erosion on the side of the lake. It's just terrible!" their father noted. Carol could have never know that her response would have the effect that it did when she snapped back,

"Well, what are you going to do about it, Bert?"

The Swift sisters: Roberta, Stephanie, Cathy and Jennifer decided together with their father that the best way they could honor their mother, was to give that question an answer. Inspired and dedicated, the family set off on a mission to do the best they could to help restore and protect Todd Lake.

The predominant concern regarding the ecology and geology of Todd Lake lay along the shoreline. The shore includes narrow meadow land along both the south and west side of the lake, and there is a large meadow that lies at the north end of the lake. Prior to the commencement of the project in 2017, there were many competing human-made trails scattered all along the shoreline. Although it's enjoyable and beautiful to walk around freely in a wildflower meadow, there are diverse and fragile ecosystems functioning right beneath your feet which are easily destroyed by human contact. Could they build some sort of boardwalk? Protecting the native flora and fauna – keeping our wild places wild – now that was a project the Swift sisters knew would honor their mom.

A dear friend of the family, Susan Gray, approached the Forest Service with their project idea. The Forest Service took project plans through their approval process, and were able to provide expert, researched-based plans for how to best minimize impacts while enhancing habitat at the lake. The sisters rallied support in a Facebook group, and local sisters Roberta and Stephanie Swift were introduced to our team at Discover Your Forest. As with many projects involving a national agency, the sisters had to be patient and flexible with their goals. Teamwork and partnership between different entities culminated in an official go-ahead in 2017 from the Forest Service – 2 years after they were initially approached about the project. The family was thrilled and ready to start work!



CAROL SWIFT | TODD LAKE



In 2017, many materials for the project were purchased by Carol's family in her memory. The Forest Service provided the planking material, as well as staff time. For the remainder of the help, the Swift sisters turned to their community. In June, there was an initial work day to get the trail ready for a boardwalk and completing some legwork. Through word of mouth and social media, the sisters gathered about 25 people to help that first weekend. October can bring diverse weather in Bend, and in 2017, it brought rain and snow. Volunteers braved the cold, gathering around a propane fire pit with food and warm drinks supplied by the sisters. This first trail work weekend was possible because of many moving parts: the Forest Service staff who built sections of the boardwalk ahead of time, the Youth Core who lugged the materials out to the site, the assembly line of volunteers – ultimately leading to more than 100 feet of boardwalk being completed the first work weekend alone – despite drizzle and snow.

By the second year, the Todd Lake Trail Team had figured out some shortcuts and had gathered more resources from friends and family. Forest Service Trails Program Manager at the time, Marv Lang, was the agency lead on the project. Seeing the success and potential behind the project, Marv applied for a matching grant and ultimately was able to double the donation value! Despite having fewer hands on deck for installation, they had done this before. Instead of tediously rolling all the materials to their new home, a Forest Service staff member had the idea to paddle it out across the 45-acre lake on a Stand-Up Paddleboard attached to a kayak. Staff members also created a special wheelbarrow to carry the materials and simplify the process. Their ingenuity and creativity saved them time and energy as they met their weekend goals after just the first day. The family was inspired and excited as they began to see notable changes to the ecology around the lake. Only two years into having the boardwalk in place, the trail decommissioning was already starting to work. Meadow wildflowers and grasses were popping up - bringing color and joy into previously eroded areas.

The groove continued in 2019, where the team was able to take a step back and look at their accomplishments. With Marv's retirement from the Forest Service, new liaison Michael Brasfield stepped up to coordinate and implement the final phases of the project. The boardwalk was now 540 feet long, stretching across the meadow and protecting the shoreline from human tread. This project signified cooperation and shared effort spanning agency and motivations. Moreover, It cemented their mother's final lesson: that you can do anything you put your mind to, if you work together.

As they tell stories of their mom, stories of the project and stories of life since then, the sisters regularly look to each other with a grin of pride. "There's a palpable difference at the lake. It's amazing to be able to go there now and experience the improvements. People really seem to appreciate the boardwalk and thank us for our work" they say with joy. Family and friends of Carol meet up for work days at the lake, and remember an adventurous woman who hiked into her 70's and was an amateur naturalist with a "tree fruit" collection. Carol's life inspired a project that will protect and improve a sacred space in Central Oregon for decades to come, for the benefit of both human and wild visitors.

If you would like to contribute financially to support the needed maintenance of the boardwalk, please go [HERE](#).

The success of this project hinged on the cooperation and passion of some very special people. A huge thank you to:

Bert, Stephanie, Roberta and the rest of the Swift family
Marv Lang: former Trails Program Manager for the Deschutes National Forest
Michael Brasfield: Trails Department, Deschutes National Forest
Jessica Larson: Trails Volunteer Coordinator, Deschutes National Forest
Discover Your Forest Staff
David Alward & all the other volunteers who donated their time and energy



▲ TODD LAKE | PC: ROBERTA SWIFT