

The Mountain Exhibit Interpretive Plan

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in fulfillment of the University of Washington's Museology thesis requirements*

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Table of Contents

Introduction 5

Impetus for the Plan 5

 Site Overview 5

 Situational Context and Need 6

 Project Purpose and Goals 6

Inventory 7

 Methodology 7

 Findings 9

Recommendations..... 11

 Big Idea 11

 Target Audience of the Exhibit 11

 Organization of This Section..... 12

 Section 0. Discovery Rocks 13

 Section 1. Pacific Northwest Nature Walk 15

 Section 1. Salmon Lifecycle 17

 Section 2. Photosynthesis Tree 18

 Section 6. Mural 22

 Section 7. Lava Cave 24

 Section 10. At the Summit (Mailbox Peak) 26

 Section 12. Climbing Wall 28

Conclusions30

 Implementation Timeline 30

References31

 Images 32

Appendices34

 Appendix A. Discovery Rocks Materials 34

 Appendix B. Nature Walk Printables 42

 Appendix C. Salmon Lifecycle/Waterfall Mockups + Printable Sign..... 43

 Appendix D. Photosynthesis Tree 45

Appendix E. Flashlight Bucket Sign	46
Appendix F. At the Summit Sign	47
Appendix G. Climbing Wall.....	48
Appendix H. Visitor Survey	49

Introduction

In the Spring of 2025, the Seattle Children's Museum (or SCM) submitted a proposal to the University of Washington's Museology Department soliciting graduate thesis students to design an interpretive plan for its central exhibit, the *Mountain*.

Built in 1995, the large, realistic mountain exhibit is located at the center of the Museum and is viewable to the public via the upstairs courtyard deck at the Seattle Center Armory. Its visibility to both passersby and incoming visitors positions the *Mountain* as the physical introduction of the Museum to the public eye. It is thus a major asset to the SCM's marketability and plays an important role in encouraging community members to visit the Museum. With this in mind, the exhibit is due for a refresh: with minimal updates since its creation, several of its features are outdated and/or misaligned with the Museum's target audience.

To support the SCM in aligning the exhibit with the Museum's twenty-first-century identity, the following document outlines potential physical and interpretive changes to the *Mountain* exhibit. Along with the institution itself, the Museum's visitors are the primary beneficiaries of this plan. As such, recommendations in this plan are grounded in the following principles:

- the SCM's mission, vision, and purpose
- the updated educational framework for the exhibit
- the developmental stage of the SCM's target audience
- visitor interests
- place-based education strategies

Impetus for the Plan

Site Overview

The Seattle Children's Museum was founded in 1980 and is located on the ground floor of the Armory at Seattle Center. Featuring 17 exhibits throughout its 14,000-square-foot space, the Museum aims to nurture the intellectual, creative, and physical development of children from birth to age 10 through regionally inspired exhibits that encourage interactive, exploratory play. The Museum describes its mission, purpose, and vision¹ as follows:

Interpretive planning is the deliberate and systematic process for thinking about, deciding on, and recording in a written format or plan educational and interpretive initiatives for the purpose of facilitating meaningful and effective experiences for visitors, learning institutions, and communities

(Butler et al. 2016, 38)

¹Seattle Children's Museum. (2026). "About the Museum". <https://seattlechildrensmuseum.org/about/>

Our mission is to engage children, and the people who are for them, in playful, creative, hands-on exploration and discovery.

Our purpose is to encourage kids and adults alike to embrace active, lifelong learning. We create and maintain museum spaces, events and programs that are inclusive, engaging, playful and fun for ALL of the region's kids and families.

We envision a region where children, families, students, and educators have a wide network of facilities to support them in learning, engagement, play and quality time together. We will strive to be an essential part of that network.

Additionally, the Museum describes its institutional goals² as the following:

- Set the stage for young children to build competency through engagement, interactions, physical challenges and hands-on experiences
- Renew a deep commitment to fostering literacy, art, language, numeracy and communication skills for kids from birth to 10 years old
- Connect to Seattle's varied and diverse neighborhoods
- Create and renew exhibits that have justice, equity, inclusion, diversity, visibility, access and anti-racism built in
- Build relationships with the early learning community in and around the region

Situational Context and Need

Since 1995, the *Mountain* has served as the SCM's most central and visible exhibit. In recent years, the museum has sought to modernize aspects of the exhibit by aligning its interpretive and physical elements with the SCM's current mission, purpose, and goals. To support this endeavor, staff at the SCM recently developed an educational framework of key ideas, outcomes, and characteristics for the exhibit and its surrounding exhibit zone (**Table I. Educational Framework**). The new framework is predicated on the Museum's mission, purpose, vision, and institutional goals and emphasizes place-based education, relationships to nature, and a decolonized approach to enjoying the outdoors responsibly. The SCM tasked the UW Museology thesis team with supporting the implementation of the framework by suggesting recommendations through an interpretive plan.

Project Purpose and Goals

The purpose of this plan is to support the SCM's institutional identity by recommending interpretive strategies for the *Mountain* exhibit. In addition to grounding the recommendations in the Museum's updated educational framework, the plan will support the SCM's exhibit-specific goals for engaging today's generation of visitors through play-based learning opportunities and developmentally appropriate interpretive text. The rationale for such changes is further explored in the Analysis section of this report.

² Seattle Children's Museum. (2026). "About the Museum". <https://seattlechildrensmuseum.org/about/>

Table I. Educational Framework			
Area	Key Ideas	Key Outcomes (Visitors will. . .)	Key Characteristics
Mountain	• We share outdoor spaces with other people and other living things. • Everyone can find ways to enjoy and be inspired by the outdoors. • As part of nature, we have a responsibility to help take care of it for others to enjoy and for other living things to thrive.	• Be curious about the natural things they encounter in the world around them. • Make choices that help care for nature. • Feel more comfortable/confident being in and with nature.	• Indigenized/decolonized approach to enjoying the outdoors responsibly (mutual responsibility, being part of—not dominating—nature). • Ensuring accessibility to experiences to promote increased outdoor accessibility. • Based in the local environment, which also includes urban nature.
Mountains to Sound Zone	• We humans are part of nature. • We can find nature all over, including in the city. • We have a responsibility to take care of the nature around us. • Being in nature can be fun, inspiring, and beneficial.	• Feel more comfortable/confident interacting with nature. • Value nature in/around their lives. • Take respectful and responsible actions regarding nature/the environment.	

Inventory

The graduate team conducted a needs inventory of the current exhibit to identify opportunities for aligning its offerings with the educational framework. The scope of the inventory included an in-depth look at the physical design and interpretive elements of the current exhibit, as well as an analysis of visitor engagement.

Methodology

The graduate team employed several methods to understand the physical design and interpretive elements of the current exhibit, including site visits, discussions with SCM staff, and a review of the original design plan provided by the SCM. This phase of the analysis additionally supported an understanding of visitor engagement in the exhibit and was supplemented by observational analysis and

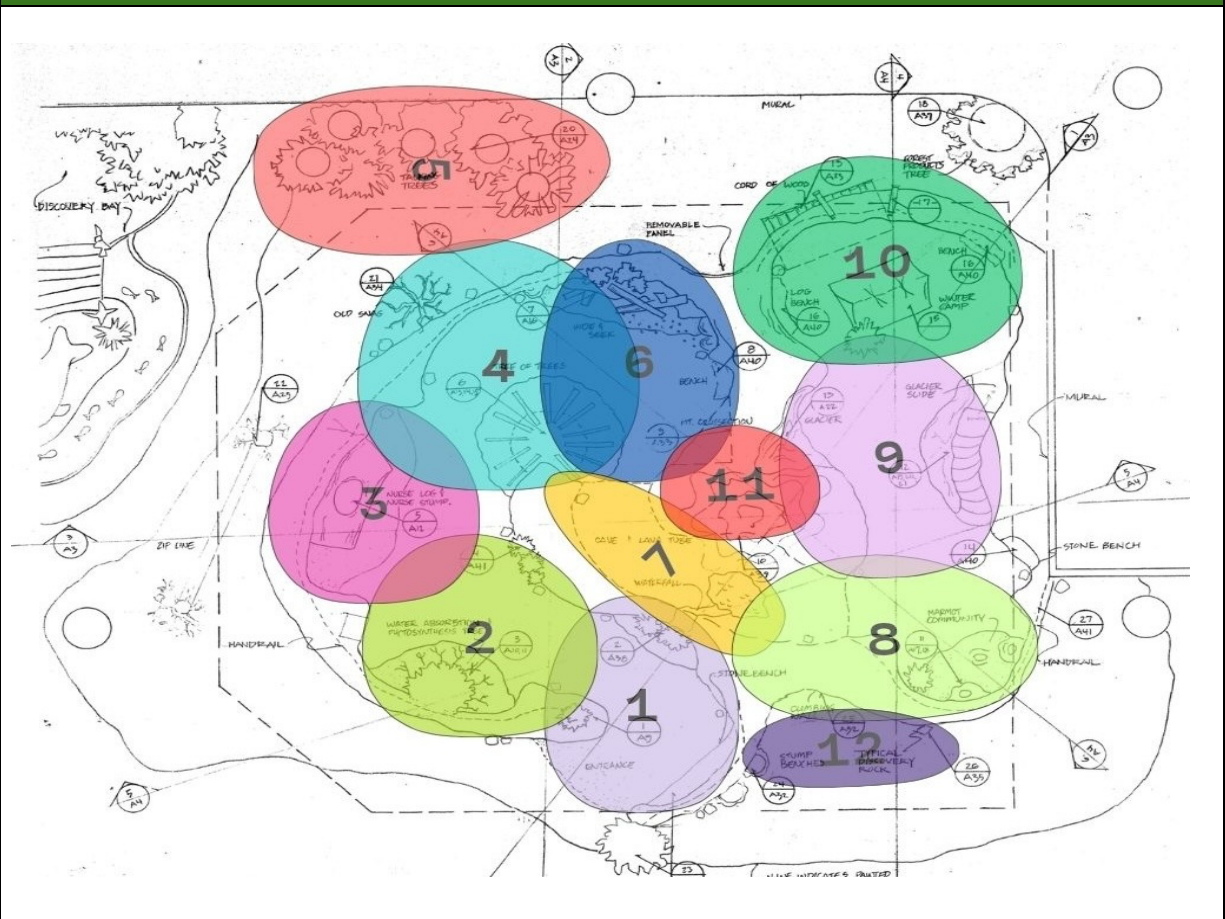
the administration of a visitor survey. A brief description of methodologies is outlined in **Table II. Exhibit Inventory Methodology**.

Table II. Exhibit Inventory Methodology	
Method	Description
Site visits	The team frequented the exhibit to familiarize members with the exhibit's physical and interpretive characteristics.
Observational analysis	The team conducted three hours of observations of visitors' interactions with the exhibit. Team members broke the exhibit into sections (referenced later in Recommendations) and observed how both child and adult visitors navigated its offerings. This allowed the team to identify popular interactives and underutilized spaces.
Fabricator discussion	In January 2026, the team toured the exhibit with the Director of Exhibits and Facilities, Joe Ferry. The team recorded a conversation in which participants discussed possible alterations to specific sections of the exhibit and explored the feasibility of various suggestions.
Review of SCM's documentation	Throughout the process, the team received resources from its project sponsor, Kacie Perez. These included the original planning map for the exhibit, inventory of objects, dimensions for interpretive panels, etc.
Visitor interest surveys	Using the ideas outlined in the educational framework as the foundation for instrument design, the team developed a brief, 14-question survey to gauge visitor interest in possible themes, activities, and types of play for the exhibit. Team members administered the survey in person at the Museum over a period of five weeks. A total of 55 visitors responded to the survey. Survey results informed the overall concept for the exhibit and helped determine which updates to prioritize.

Findings

The analysis identified the current exhibit's strengths and opportunities for improvement. **Table III. Update Inventory** (page X) identifies the individual sections of the exhibit that receive updates within the plan. The table below describes the weaknesses and opportunities for improvement within each feature, which are addressed through targeted recommendations. The sections correspond to the legend included in **Figure I. Map of Current Interpretive Elements by Exhibit Area**. Note that in Table III. Update Inventory, sections marked with an asterisk are not included in the recommendations. Suggestions for updating these sections are provided in the table but not elaborated upon in the plan.

Figure I. Map of Current Interpretive Elements by Exhibit Area



Note: Base of map designed by Superscenics ©1994

Table III. Update Inventory		
Section	Updates/Additions	Reasoning/Opportunities
0: Discovery Rocks (throughout)	- General makeover - Interpretive panels	- Add additional context and vocabulary to wildlife - Make connections to the local ecosystem more explicit - Add contrast and vibrance to visuals
1: Entrance: stone bench, waterfall	- Pacific Northwest Nature Walk - Salmon lifecycle	- Make vocabulary more accessible - Add additional context to the questioning - Incorporate the throughline and the objective into self-guided programming - Include more local wildlife
2: Photosynthesis tree	Shelving for the Pacific Northwest Nature Walk	- Increase interactivity (offers a low-budget and organizable opportunity to add loose objects to the program) - Update visuals to reflect updated outcomes
3: Hemlock log tunnel, soft ground	None, for now	Children appear to enjoy the crawl space; however, the activity may benefit from a clearer, Pacific Northwest-specific nature theme
4: Old snag, tree of trees	None, for now	Increase accessibility of vocabulary in interpretive panels
5: "Talking" trees	None, for now	Part of the initial design concept but never manifested: here, visitors could press a button to hear the bird call of its respective fabricated bird in the tree.
6: Inner Mural ("Hide and Seek")	Repaint or develop projector opportunity	- Serves as the current "hide and seek" activity - Refresh visuals to increase interactivity and engagement
7: Lava cave, sediment layers, cave walk	Flashlight bucket	- Discussion of cave being "too scary," indicated both in survey responses and in-person conversations with visitors - Opportunity to increase interactivity and incorporate outdoor activities
8: Marmot burrow	None, for now	Visitors appear to enjoy the climbing opportunity, but it may benefit from added padding or soft lighting to make the descent into the burrow less scary
9: Glacier slide	None, for now	This is a very popular feature with visitors of all ages
10: Summit, mountain range light handle	Mailbox Peak	- Opportunity to highlight local geography - Opportunity to add interactivity, cause and effect to the area
11: Peak: flora, fauna, flags	None, for now	Opportunities for seasonal variability; this is not elaborated on in this plan
12: Climbing wall	Climbing apparatus	- Strong staff and visitor interest in revisiting this feature - Safety concerns are addressed herein

The survey results complement these findings. Visitors like the current exhibit’s physical and imaginative play features and local environmental themes but are interested in the changes shown in **Table IV. Relevant Survey Results: Visitors’ Primary Desires for the Future Exhibit** below.

Table IV. Relevant Survey Results: Visitors’ Primary Desires for the Future Exhibit		
Subjects	Activities	Types of Play
1) Caring for the natural world 2) Outdoor activities in the PNW, like hiking and camping 3) Local plants and animals 4) Wilderness safety and survival	1) Safe rock climbing 2) Practical wilderness skills 3) Animal and plant identification scavenger hunt 4) Camping activities	1) Physical play 2) Object play 3) Imaginative play 4) Collaborative play (with others)

Source: Visitor Feedback Survey. See Appendix H for a complete list of survey questions.

Recommendations

Big Idea

In order to add a cohesive narrative to the *Mountain*, the graduate team drafted a big idea to serve as the main message of the exhibit. This big idea encapsulates the educational framework that SCM staff have recently developed, simplifying it to a single theme that can guide these and future updates. The big idea for the exhibit is:

“We are a part of nature; we have a responsibility to learn about and care for the natural world around us.”

Target Audience of the Exhibit

The SCM’s general audience includes children aged 0–11 and their adult caretakers. Specific audiences that can be better served with the updates herein include the following groups:

- Pre-readers and emergent readers
- Local visitors (residing in Washington State)
- Adult visitors interested in collaborative play
- Adult and child visitors interested in nature-based play and learning

Organization of This Section

In this section, individual recommendations have been organized by location within the exhibit. They are color-coded with their associated section, indicated in **Table V. Recommendations Criteria**. All recommendations include an overview, recommendation type, location, audience, justification, required resources, didactics, estimated costs, and an estimated implementation timeline. Several specific sections are expounded upon below.

Table V. Recommendations Criteria	
Recommendation Type	Notes whether the proposed change is an update (i.e., it alters an existing feature), a new addition (i.e., it adds to the exhibit; not based on existing elements), and/or a replacement (i.e., replaces an existing feature with something wholly new).
Justification	This section identifies the specific aspects of the educational framework, survey results, and literature that served as the basis for the recommendation. • Educational framework: Establishes the link between the recommendation and specific key ideas, outcomes, and characteristics • Survey results: Connects the recommendation to question-specific survey findings Literature: Identifies resources that support the content and/or design of the recommendation. Note that complete citations are found under resources.
Didactic Materials	This section includes recommended learning materials to accompany the recommendation, as well as any mockups provided in the appendices.
\$ System	In this segment, dollar signs indicate estimated costs to implement each feature. Costs are estimated using online listings for supplies and estimated labor hours. • \$: >\$500 • \$\$: \$500–2,000 • \$\$\$: greater than \$2,000
Short-term, medium-term, and long-term timeline	Recommendations include short-term recommendations that can be implemented in 3 to 6 months or less; medium-term recommendations may take between 6 months and 2 years; long-term recommendations that may take longer than 2 years. Some recommendations can be added to the current exhibit they are, or they are provided with lower-and higher-resource variations.

Section 0. Discovery Rocks

The Discovery Rocks are a valuable part of the *Mountain* exhibit, with two people writing the rocks into the survey as something their child enjoys about the exhibit, and children were often seen interacting with them through casual observation. However, these rocks are old, have little variation in their backgrounds, and have no identifying information for interested children or caregivers. These rocks deserve updated scenes featuring a variety of local wildlife, accompanied by identification cards to support caregivers of curious children. Detailed information about these updates is included in **Appendix A**.

Recommendation Type

Update

Location

Scattered throughout the exhibit in sections 1, 4, 6, 8, and 10

Audience

Child visitors and their caregivers

Justification

Key Ideas, Outcomes, Characteristics

Ideas

- We share outdoor spaces with other people and other living things.
- We can find nature all over, including in the city.

Outcomes

- Visitors will be curious about the natural things they encounter in the world around them.

Characteristics

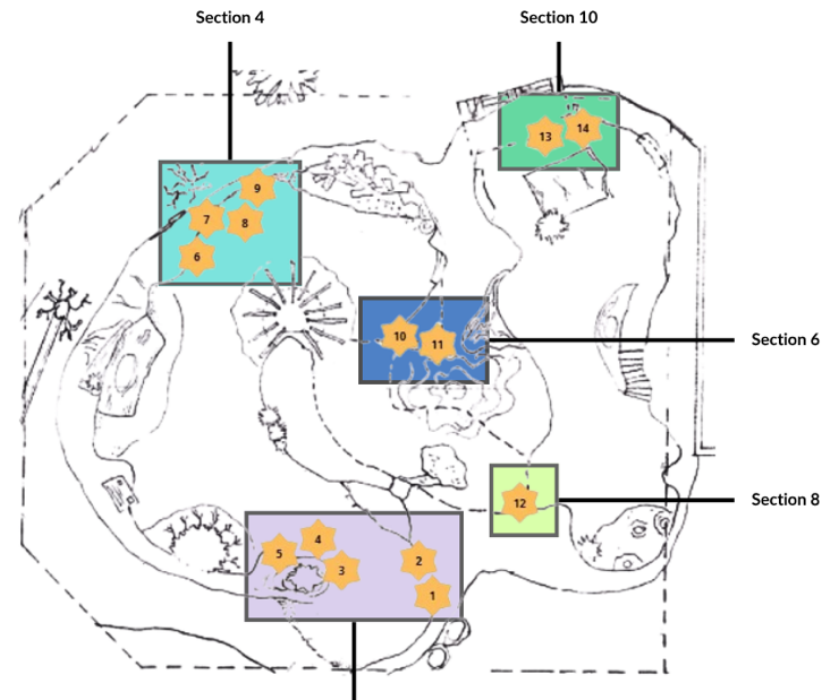
- Based in the local environment.

Survey results

- Visitors expressed strong interest in incorporating local plants and animals into the exhibit (Q2)
- Visitors mentioned interest in the animals within the exhibit (Q3, Q5).

Literature

N/A



Note: Base of map designed by Superscenics ©1994

Resources Needed

Below is a list of the resources needed to update the Discovery Rocks. Detailed information on which items will be used for which scenes is included in Appendix A. The Museum already has some of the items; this is noted below.

Animals	Set Dressing
• 1 Northern alligator lizard • 1 Wolf spider • 2-3 Bumblebees • 2-3 Earthworms • 3-5 Bird eggs (white with brown speckles) • 2 Snails (<i>already have 1</i>) • 2 Western deer mice (<i>already have</i>) • 1 Moth (<i>already have</i>) • 1 Banana slug (<i>already have</i>) • 1 Snake (<i>already have</i>) • 1 Western toad (<i>already have</i>)	• Flowers • Grass • Moss • Leaves in a variety of colors (including green and yellow) • Yellow pine needles • Dirt • Sticks • Tree bark • Bird nest • Resin for water (or other material to create that effect) • Seeds, nuts, or berries

Didactic Materials

A label should be made for each rock identifying which animal is on view in the scene and can be placed on the underside of the rock. Mock-ups are included in the appendix.

Estimated Cost: \$

Estimated Implementation Timeline: Short- to mid-term

Section I. Pacific Northwest Nature Walk

For this activity, visitors will be invited to participate in a pretend hike. Various sites on the *Mountain* will be used to offer information on local wildlife and safety practices. This offers a selection of possible stops and instructions. These stops can be adapted to accommodate other structural updates to the exhibit but can be used as-is with the existing *Mountain*.

The nature walk includes steps for visitors to 1) prepare for the hike, 2) explore the Discovery Rocks, 3) identify animals at the Seek and Find/Hide and Seek, 4) explore the cave, and 5) tell stories around the campfire. Stop 3 is accompanied by tips for being safe around animals, emphasizing keeping distance and staying calm. Visuals include icons of supplies and images of local mountains with Indigenous and European names. The icons will support participation by pre-readers, while the instructions encourage collaborative play with adults and reading children.

The Pacific Northwest Nature Walk replaces the current visitor-facilitated program, which uses the same title. Incorporation of more local plants and animals along with Pacific Northwest outdoor activities were among the most favored activities in the visitor survey; both are represented here. Additionally, the updated Nature Walk encourages thoughtful interactions with *The Mountain's* features, namely the Discovery Rocks and Seek and Find. Paired with the inclusion of local mountains and the updated Discovery Rocks, this activity includes applicable references to the local ecosystem.

Recommendation Type

Update

Location

Instructions offered at entry; stops located throughout

Audience

- Child visitors 2 and up
- Adult visitors and/or guardians (facilitators)

Justification

This activity fleshes out the existing programming, offering a more in-depth, visitor-led experience

Key Ideas, Outcomes, Characteristics

Ideas

- We share outdoor spaces with other people and other living things.
- Everyone can find ways to enjoy and be inspired by the outdoors.

Outcomes

- Visitors will be curious about the natural things they encounter in the world around them.

- Visitors will feel more comfortable/confident being in and with nature.

Characteristics:

- Based in the local environment.

Survey results

Aligned with visitor interest in added themes:

- Outdoor activities in the PNW, like hiking and camping (Q2)
- Local plants and animals (Q2)

Aligned with visitor interest in added activities:

- Practical wilderness skills (Q4)

Literature

- “Wildlife Safety 101” (Conservation Northwest)
- “Natural Learning Initiative” (NC State Design)
- “Safety Essentials: A Toolkit for Hikers” (Washington Trails Association)
- “Hiking Safety” (National Park Service)

Resources Needed

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| • Backpack (x2) | • Sunscreen (empty/fake) (x2) |
| • Hiking pole (x2) | • Binoculars |
| • Water bottle (empty) (x2) | • Map (laminated) |
| • Sunglasses (x2) | • First aid kit (Resources Needed secured inside or pasted image of example) |

Didactic Materials

See **Appendix B** for large-scale printables of the instruction page and map.

Estimated Cost: \$

Estimated Implementation Timeline: Short-term



Pacific Northwest Nature Walk

Welcome to the Mountain! Today we are going on a hike. Go to each stop to learn more about how to have fun and be safe in nature.

Stop 1: Get Ready
Pack your backpack for the hike! What will you bring with you?

Stop 2: Discovery Rocks
Lots of different animals call the Mountain their home. Flip the rocks and see who you can find!

Stop 3: Seek and Find
What types of animals live in the mountains? Stop here to see what animals you can find!

Being Safe Around Animals

1. Stay calm
2. Keep your distance
3. Be loud
4. Be big
5. Don't run
6. Face animal and back away slowly.

Practice these steps before going to the next stop!

Turn the page →

See Appendix B for large scale image.

Section I. Salmon Lifecycle

For the salmon lifecycle interactive, a camouflaged projector is mounted on one of the existing trees opposite the *Mountain's* waterfall and projects a moving image of fish jumping upstream on their way to spawn. Representing the region's natural ecosystem, the coho life cycle is projected by a looping visual of salmon at various stages: eggs → alevin → fry → smolts → spawning salmon → eggs. Adult salmon will not be shown due to their presence in saltwater environments only. An interpretive sign that visualizes the different life stage of the coho with its respective habitat (salt water vs. fresh water) will accompany the waterfall in the existing frame located directly to its right. This realistic depiction of the salmon's lifecycle can be strengthened by adding a fabricated black bear at the top of the waterfall. This will serve as a reminder of the synergistic relationship between species in the Cascades.

Recommendation Type

Replacement

Location

Waterfall near the exhibit's entryway

Audience

Child visitors 2 and up, and adult visitors and/or guardians (facilitators).

Justification

Key Ideas, Outcomes, Characteristics

Ideas

- We share outdoor spaces with other people and other living things.

Outcomes

- Visitors will be curious about the natural things they encounter in the world around them.

Characteristics

- Being a part of - not dominating - nature.
- Accessible experience that promotes increased outdoor accessibility.
- Based in the local environment.

Survey Results



This image was created using Canva for educational purposes only. Do not reuse.

Aligned with visitors' interest in incorporating local plants and animals into the exhibit (Q2).

Literature

- "Salmon Cascades" (National Park Service)
- "Anadromous Fish" (National Park Service)
- "Coho Salmon" (National Park Service)
- "How do Salmon Get Over the Mountains?" (Mountain to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area)

Resources Needed

- High-quality projector
- Fabricated bear
- White paint to prepare the waterfall for projection
- Animator selected by the SCM

Didactic Materials

See **Appendix C** for a large-scale printable of the sign.

Estimated Cost: \$\$\$

Estimated Implementation Timeline: Mid- to long-term



This image was created using Canva for educational purposes only. Do not reuse.

Section 2. Photosynthesis Tree

The photosynthesis tree is a spot in the exhibit that is underutilized, with a diagram that is too complicated for the Museum's young, pre-reading audience. To make the photosynthesis tree more engaging, the fence and diagram should be removed, and a toy shelf should be placed in front of the tree.

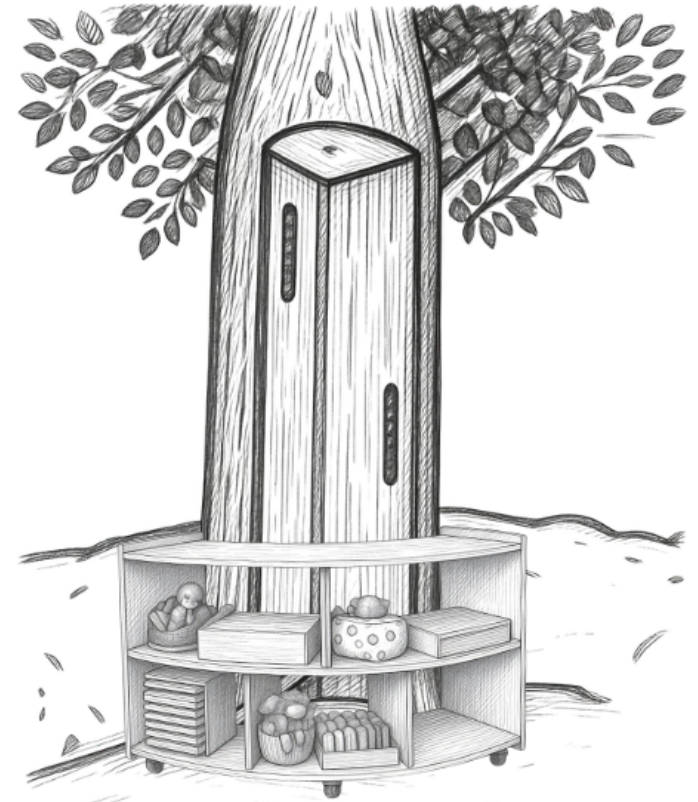
In the survey, many people expressed interest in more toys and loose objects being added to the exhibit. In casual observation, children have also been seen bringing loose objects from other areas of the Museum into the *Mountain*. While it's not unusual for children to move toys around, it does indicate that there are not enough loose objects within the exhibit with which the children can play. Adding this toy shelf would increase the number of loose objects within the exhibit, and due to the location of the photosynthesis tree, there would be enough space around the shelf that children grabbing toys would not block the walking path.

To conserve space, the toy shelf should be a half-circle to fit around the photosynthesis tree. The toy shelf could also be decorated to better blend in with the mountain environment: green would blend in with the foliage, or a natural wood finish would blend in with the tree. Foliage such as mushrooms or flowers could also be added on or around the shelf to make it feel more cohesive within the exhibit.

The toys within the shelves can tie into the nature walk program described on page 16. At this toy shelf, children can pack backpacks for the hike. Toys can include common hiking equipment such as water bottles, snacks, first aid kits, compasses, and maps. These toys will allow the exhibit to be more immersive and feel more like visitors are preparing for a hike while also helping children learn what materials they should bring on an actual hike. A mock-up of what this would look like is included in **Appendix D**.

Recommendation Type

Update; New addition



This image was created using Canva for educational purposes only. Do not reuse.

Location

Photosynthesis Tree

Audience

Child visitors

Justification

Key Ideas, Outcomes, Characteristics

Ideas

- Everyone can find ways to enjoy and be inspired by the outdoors.
- Being in nature can be fun, inspiring, and beneficial.

Outcomes

- Visitors will feel more comfortable/confident being in and with nature.

Characteristics

- Ensuring accessibility to experiences to promote increased outdoor accessibility.

Survey Results

- Respondents expressed interest in outdoor activities in the Pacific Northwest, such as hiking and camping, being used as a theme for the exhibit (Q2).
- Respondents expressed strong interest in more toys and loose objects being added to the exhibit (Q6).

Literature

- “Safety Tips” (Seattle Mountain Rescue)
- “Items to include in a first aid kit” (American Hiking Society)

Resources Needed

- Toy shelf
- Any paint or decorations (such as mushrooms or flowers) to make the shelf fit into the mountain environment
- Bins for toys
- Toys to fill the shelves
 - Compass
 - Flashlights
 - Toy Matches (to light the campfire at the top)
 - Toy snacks for hiking: fruit, trail mix, granola bars, nuts, candy
- Objects from Pacific Northwest Nature Walk (see pg. 16)
 - Backpacks, Hiking poles, Water bottles, Sunglasses, Sunscreen, Binoculars, Map (laminated)
 - Toy First aid kit: Bandages, Gauze/Ace bandage, Antiseptic Ointment, Pill bottle of medicine (Antihistamine, Ibuprofen)

Didactic Materials

None

Estimated Cost: \$\$

Estimated Implementation Timeline: Short- to mid-term

Section 6. Mural

This update will make the “hide and seek” mural more locally based, seasonally adaptive, and interactive. This recommendation offers several possible strategies to refresh this section which can be implemented altogether or incrementally.

Physical mural: The existing painting will, at minimum, be refreshed to increase cohesivity with the larger exhibit. It is recommended to simplify the visuals and use more saturated colors in the art. The mountain peak featured in the mural will be adjusted to reflect a real local peak (Kulshan/Mt. Baker or Tahoma/Mt. Rainier recommended). Interpretive paneling will be updated to indicate as such.

Seasonal Variability Options:

- *Projection:* A short-throw projector will be installed opposite the mural. Seasonally adaptive animations including falling rain and petals for spring, leaves for fall, and moving clouds for summer will be cast over the image. Animations will complement the refreshed mural. A longer-term, more wholesale change would involve completely “whiting out” the mural and replacing it with an animated projection.
- *Practical effects:* Material versions of the above effects (petals, raindrops, leaves, clouds) can be created using fabric. These fabric effects will be suspended from string or fishing wire with the intention that visitors can touch and manipulate them.
- *Signage:* For each season, temporary signage can be added to the “hide and seek” describing visual differences in the environment as seasons change.

Interactivity: Stools in the form of stylized tree stump seats will provide a rest spot, pose opportunity, and add interactivity. The small fence in front of the mural should be removed to accommodate the stumps. These can be fabricated in-house from wood. The mural is already a popular photo opportunity, so this will strengthen that. The deer can remain in its current location, possibly with added signage to discourage touching. In its current location, the deer can be used as a “prop” in the proposed Nature Walk, as children practice keeping their distance and slowly backing away.

Recommendation Type

Update

Location

“Hide and Seek” Mural

Audience

All visitors, including adults

Justification

Key Ideas, Outcomes, Characteristics

Ideas

- We share outdoor spaces with other people and other living things
- Everyone can find ways to enjoy and be inspired by nature

Outcomes

- Visitors will be curious about the natural things they encounter in the world around them

Characteristics

- Based in the local environment, which also includes urban nature

Survey Results

Aligned with visitor interest in discovery and finding hidden animals in the landscape (Q2, Q5)

Literature

N/A

Resources Needed

- Tree stump seating
- Short throw projector
- String/wire
- Fabric and/or paper for practical effects
- Didactic Materials
- N/A, possible “please don’t touch” sign for deer

Didactic Materials

N/A, possible “please don’t touch” sign for deer

Estimated Cost: \$\$-\$\$\$

Estimated Implementation Timeline: Medium- to Long-term



Image of current SCM Mural courtesy of UW Museology Team

Section 7. Lava Cave

Several survey participants expressed that the cave portion of the Mountain is too scary for younger children. It is important for children to have safe experiences to build their confidence with the unfamiliar. Therefore, instead of brightening the cave or making it otherwise less scary, we suggest providing a tool to help children manage their fear: flashlights, a common household item that many children will already be familiar with.

The flashlights will be offered for children who are scared to enter the cave. The flashlights will encourage them to look around the cave and overcome their fear of dark spaces. Children who are not frightened by the cave will still benefit from learning about a resource they can use to safely navigate nature. The flashlights can be located at one of several areas: 1) in a bucket or basket near the cave, 2) at the staging area for the nature walk, or 3) the photosynthesis tree shelves.

Recommendation Type

New addition

Location

Variable. Without additional recommendations, can be placed directly outside of the cave; can be kept in a wooden box or basket

Audience

Child visitors, particularly those expressing fear when approaching the cave

Justification

Key Ideas, Outcomes, Characteristics

Ideas

- Everyone can find ways to enjoy and be inspired by the outdoors

Outcomes

- Visitors will feel more comfortable/ confident being in and with nature

Characteristics

- Ensuring accessibility to experiences to promote increased outdoor accessibility

Survey Results

Multiple instances of participants indicating that the cave was too scary and/or intense for children. (Q5, Q10)

Literature

“Raising Nature-Confident Kids” (Outdoor Nebraska)

Resources Needed

- Flashlights (3)
- Bucket or woven basket

Didactic Materials

Explanatory Panel found in Appendix E.

Estimated Cost: \$

Estimated Implementation Timeline: Short-term

Section 10. At the Summit (Mailbox Peak)

An interactive mailbox, along with notecards and golf pencils, will be placed along the outer wall of the *Mountain* summit. The mailbox invokes the real-life Mailbox Peak, a notably challenging hike in the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Recently, additional trails were added to this popular hike to make it accessible to more hikers. Some older visitors may recall their own hiking experiences upon seeing the mailbox. Younger visitors or those who have not climbed it will be introduced to an iconic climb that they can aspire to complete someday. This increases the peak's connection to the local environment and shows a novel aspect of hiking culture.

Visitors will be given the opportunity to draw a picture or leave a note for future “hikers” to read. The option to draw a picture offers the opportunity for emerging and pre-readers to participate.

The mailbox can be fabricated out of wood with a metal hinge opening. Alternatively, pre-made metal and wooden mailboxes start at \$20 on various e-commerce sites (Home Depot, Lowe's, Walmart). The mailbox can be attached directly to the concrete wall of the peak, behind the campsite, or can be placed on a wooden mount. It is recommended to place it a safe distance away from the slide, as that area can garner a good deal of traffic. Writing utensils (golf pencils recommended) and notecards will be placed in a bucket or pouch nearby.

Recommendation Type

New addition

Location

Mountain peak, behind the campsite

Audience

- Child visitors
- Adult visitors, especially those with interest/experience hiking

Justification

Key Ideas, Outcomes, Characteristics

Ideas

- Everyone can find ways to enjoy and be inspired by the outdoors
- We share outdoor spaces with other people and other living things

Outcomes

- Feel more comfortable/ confident being in and with nature

Characteristics

- Ensuring accessibility to experiences to promote increased outdoor accessibility
- Based in the local environment, which also includes urban nature

Survey Results

Experiential learning, outdoor activities (Q2)

Literature

N/A

Resources Needed

- Post mount mailbox (wood or metal)
- Wood mount
- Golf pencils
- Notecards
- Pouch or small bucket for writing materials

Didactic Materials

See **Appendix F** for printables of an interpretive panel.

Estimated Cost: \$

Estimated Implementation Timeline: Short-term

At the Summit

Congrats! You made it to the top of the mountain!



Photo: Caitlin Moore

In the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, thousands of hikers every year trek up Mailbox Peak where they leave messages and gifts for future climbers in a mailbox.

What message would you leave future hikers?
Write a note or draw a picture and leave it in the mailbox!

See Appendix F for large scale image.

Section 12. Climbing Wall

There are currently no/limited opportunities for climbing in the Mountain, and the climbing wall on the outside of the exhibit is, in its current state, not sufficiently safe for children to climb. Two things need to change to make the climbing wall usable: 1) adding a pad on the floor, and 2) adding a barrier at the top of the wall to prevent kids from climbing over.

The pad on the floor needs to be 4" thick to prevent injuries if children fall. A plastic barrier would be effective at preventing children from climbing over the top of the climbing wall. The smooth plastic would make it so children would not be able to physically grip the barrier, meaning they couldn't use the barrier to continue climbing. A vinyl can then be put over the barrier on either side to make it more immersive, showing scenes of wildflowers, the sky, or a rocky mountainside. Mockups and references for the climbing wall can be found in **Appendix G**.

Recommendation

Update

Location

Climbing Wall, outside exhibit

Audience

Child visitors

Justification

Key Ideas, Outcomes, Characteristics

Ideas

- Being in nature can be fun, inspiring, and beneficial
- Everyone can find ways to enjoy and be inspired by the outdoors

Survey Results

- Respondents expressed strong interest in climbing opportunities being added to the exhibit (Q3, Q4, Q5)
- Respondents expressed strong interest in more opportunities for physical play being added to the exhibit (Q6)

Literature

N/A

Resources Needed

- 4" Thick padding for the floor
- A plastic barrier for the top
- A vinyl to cover the plastic (one for each side)
- The sign saying "Adult Supervision Recommended"

Didactic Materials

A sign saying "Adult Supervision Recommended"

Estimated Cost: \$

Estimated Implementation Timeline: Short-term

Conclusions

Implementation Timeline

The included recommendations will better align *The Mountain* with SCM's updated framework, along with increased interactivity and connections to the local environment. They can be implemented gradually according to the estimated completion timelines. Each recommendation is designed as a standalone addition that can be implemented individually or simultaneously with others. For example, the Nature Walk can be implemented with or without the addition of flashlights.

As SCM plans future updates and/or larger renovation projects for the exhibit, we offer the following considerations.

- **Further audience evaluation:** Evaluation was a key component of the planning process. We suggest formative assessment of updates as they are made and summative evaluation at the conclusion of any larger renovation projects.
- **Exhibit Inventory:** We offer our exhibit inventory of objects and panels to support future recordkeeping of the exhibit's features.
- **Decolonizing/Indigenizing the exhibit:** Further efforts should be made to Indigenize the exhibit. Though this was out of the scope of our capability as a team, incorporation of Indigenous perspectives will strengthen

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Appendices

Appendix A. Discovery Rocks Materials

Map of the Discovery Rocks:

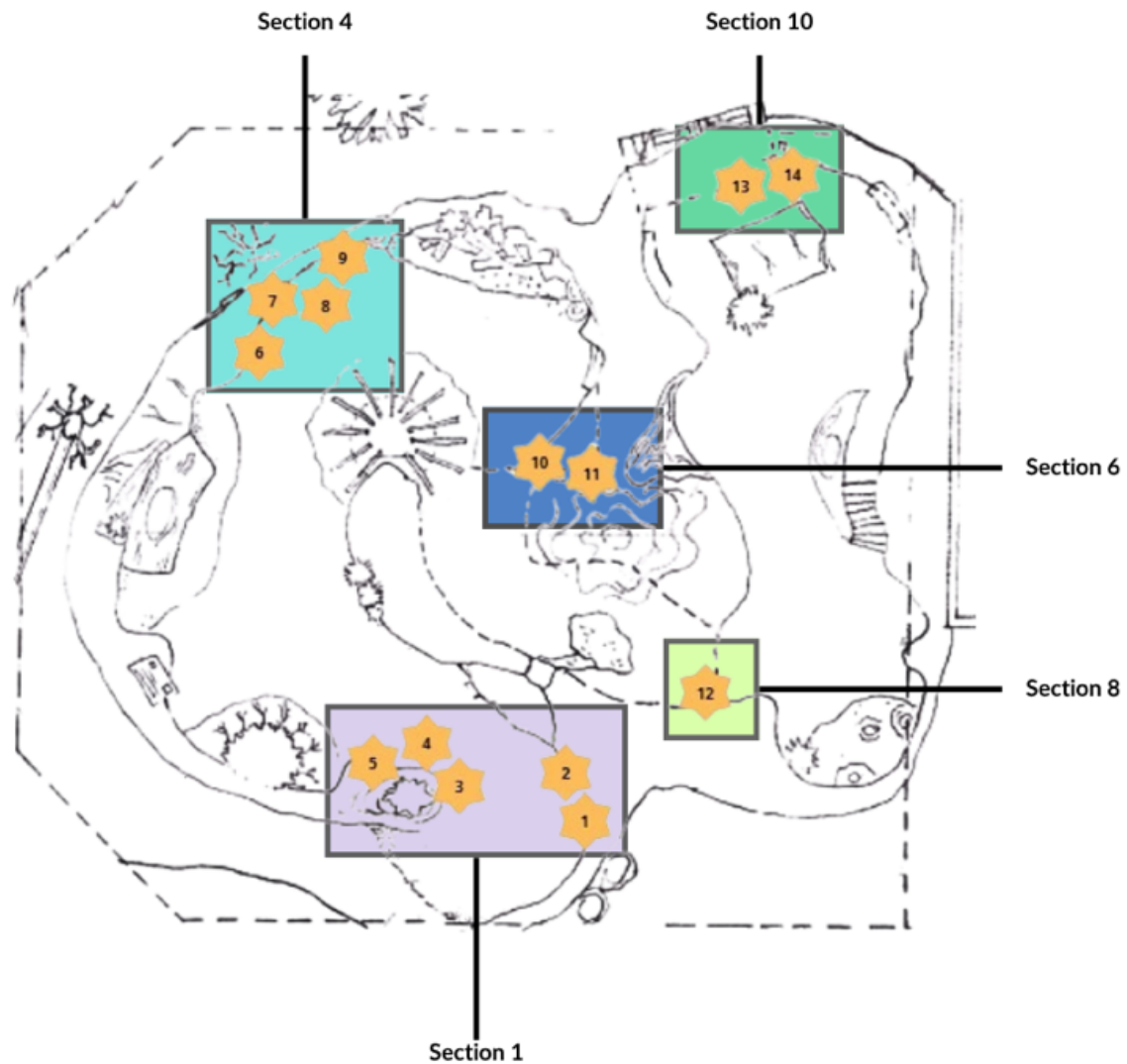


Table VI. Current Discovery Rock Inventory + Recommendation Rationale

#	Current Scene	Visual Inventory*	Recommendation	New Scene	Rationale
1	Spiders		Replace	Western Bumble Bee	The spiders are difficult to see due to their size and color. The background is monochromatic. Because of their role as pollinators, bumble bees are an important part of the mountain's ecosystem. They are also common in cities, where visitors are more likely to see them. Including bumble bees in the discovery rocks supports one of the zone's key ideas: we can find nature all over, including in the city.
2	Vineyard Snail		Update	Vineyard Snail	The scene is monochromatic and only the snail's shell is visible. Adding another snail and more foliage may make the scene more interesting by providing more visually striking items for children to engage with.
3	Pacific Giant Salamander		Keep	--	This scene is in good condition. The background highlights the salamander's camouflage.
4	Brown Angle Shades Moth		Update	Brown Angle Shades Moth	The background is very similar to the other scenes. Adding fake bark with moss will make the scene more unique, while also highlighting the moth's natural camouflage.
5	Pacific Banana Slug		Update	Pacific Banana Slug	Adding more foliage may make the scene more dynamic and can better highlight the banana slug's camouflage capabilities.

6	Pacific Tree Frog		Replace	Northern Alligator Lizard	There is another frog on view in the discovery rocks (toads are considered a type of frog). It may be beneficial to highlight another species of animal to get a more well-rounded view of a mountain's ecosystem. Northern alligator lizards are native to the area, and their addition increases the presence of reptiles in the exhibit, adding more biological diversity to the discovery rocks.
7	Millipedes		Replace	Dark-Eyed Junco Nest	The insects in this scene are not in great condition. There are also many other invertebrates on view in the discovery rocks, but no birds. Replacing the current scene with a bird's nest adds variety, better representing the forest floor.
8	Beetles		Replace	Earthworms	The beetles are small. Earthworms are important to the ecosystem. While they live in the mountains, they are also common in cities. Including earthworms in the discovery rocks supports one of the zone's key ideas: we can find nature all over, including in the city.
9	Northwestern Garter Snake		Update	Northwestern Garter Snake	The fake leaves look old and worn. Adding fake grass and new fake leaves will make the scene feel livelier and better represent the forest floor, where these snakes live.
10	Western Redback Salamander		Replace	Wolf Spider	There is another salamander on view in the discovery rocks. It may be beneficial to highlight another species of animal to get a more rounded view of a mountain's ecosystem. Spiders are important to the ecosystem and very common in the Pacific Northwest. They are also traditionally considered unpleasant and scary; including spiders in the discovery rocks provides an opportunity for children to become more familiar and more comfortable with these important creatures.

11	Western Toad		Update	Western Toad	The current background is not very dynamic. Adding fake water will make the scene more interesting, make it stand out from the other discovery rock scenes, and will highlight the amphibious nature of the western toad.
12	Brown Bat Skeleton		Keep	--	The bat skeleton in this scene fits the aesthetic of the cave, where it is located. Good condition.
13	Western Deer Mice		Update	Western Deer Mice	This scene is monochromatic and similar to the mountain beavers in discovery rock #14. Adding green foliage and some fake food will make the scene more colorful, more unique, and more educational by illustrating the western deer mice's diet.
14	Mountain Beavers		Keep	--	This is a dynamic scene with the two mountain beavers going in and out of the burrow. The dark background is a good contrast to the foliage, making the scene aesthetically pleasing.

*Note: Images courtesy of UW Museology Team

Table VII. Discovery Rock Recommendations & Resources Needed*

#	New Scene	Visual Inspiration	Recommendation	Resources Needed
1	Western Bumble Bee	 Fig. 1 & 2	Bees on flowers, highlighting their important role as pollinators. The flowers will also provide a colorful background, adding variety to the discovery rocks. Add fake grass or moss for a green background to the flowers or cover the entire bottom with flowers. Include 2 or 3 bees for a more dynamic scene (bees will also pollinate near each other or on the same flower in real life).	• 2-3 Bumblebees • Flowers • Grass or moss
2	Vineyard Snail	 Fig. 3 & 4	Two snails on tree bark with moss. Add leaves to make the scene more interesting and to highlight the snails' diet. Note: vineyard snails are one of the few snails in Washington that have white shells, but they are an invasive species. ³ If you would prefer to display a native snail, replace the white snail currently on view or paint it to mimic the Puget Oregonian snail. ⁴	• 2 Snails • Tree bark • Moss • Leaves
4	Brown Angle Shades Moth	 Fig. 5 & 6	A brown angle shades moth on tree bark, which will highlight the moth's natural camouflage. Place moss on the tree bark to add color and to make the scene more interesting.	• Moth • Tree bark • Moss

³ "Vineyard Snail," Washington Invasive Species Council, accessed May 12, 2026, <https://invasivespecies.wa.gov/priorityspecies/mediterranean-white-snail/>.

⁴ "Puget Oregonian (snail)," Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, accessed May 12, 2026, <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/species/cryptomastix-devia#desc-range>.

5	Pacific Banana Slug	 Fig. 7 & 8	A banana slug with sticks and yellow pine needles and/or yellow leaves covering the floor. The yellow pine needles and leaves will highlight the slug's camouflage, and adding more foliage will make the scene more interesting. - Banana slug - Sticks - Yellow pine needles and/or yellow leaves
6	Northern Alligator Lizard	 Fig. 9 & 10	A northern alligator lizard with some fake yellow pine needles or moss. Northern alligator lizards are often found underneath rocks or bark along the forest floor, so we can utilize the rocky appearance of the background that's already there. The pine needles or moss will add a little more interest to the scene, so it isn't so flat. - Northern alligator lizard - Pine needles and/or moss
7	Dark-Eyed Junco Nest	 Fig. 11 & 12	Dark-Eyed Junco's are a species of bird that builds their nests on the ground, often under grass, rocks, or logs.⁵ In this scene, place a bird's nest surrounded by long, fake grass. Place 3-5 eggs in the bird's nest. The eggs should be white with brown speckles, as seen in the photos below. 3-5 bird eggs (white with brown speckles) - Bird nest - Grass

⁵ "Dark-eyed Junco," Bird Web, accessed May 12, 2026. https://birdweb.org/birdweb/bird/dark-eyed_junco#.

8	Earthworms	 Fig. 13 & 14	Earthworms with dirt. Fake grass, moss, or leaves can be included to add color to the scene.	• 2-3 Earthworms • Dirt • Grass, moss, or leaves
9	Northwestern Garter Snake	 Fig. 15 & 16	Add grass to the already rocky background of the discovery rock. Include some fake leaves to make the scene better resemble the forest floor.	• Snake • Grass • Leaves
10	Wolf Spider	 Fig. 17 & 18	Add some fake dirt, while keeping some of the naturally rocky background visible. Add some small patches of fake moss for color. Important note- wolf spiders do not usually spin webs. Instead, they hunt!⁶	• Wolf spider • Dirt • Moss

⁶ “Wolf Spider,” Wikipedia, accessed May 12, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolf_spider.

11	Western Toad		A western toad on rocky ground, partially submerged in water. The rocky background that already exists works well to illustrate a rocky riverbed. Resin or another substitute can be used to create fake water around the toad, covering part of its body, but leaving the top part of its head above the water. Since toads live in wetlands and lay eggs in water, this will show off this creature's amphibious nature.	• Western toad • Resin for water (or other material to create that effect)
13	Western Deer Mice		Two western deer mice poking out of their burrows. Adding some fake green grass will add some needed color to the scene and better illustrate their natural habitat. Including some fake seeds, nuts, or berries will make the scene more interesting while also showcasing their diet.⁷	• 2 Western Deer Mice • Grass • Seeds, nuts, or berries

*Note: Discovery rocks #3, 12, & 14 are excluded from this table because they do not need updates.

Label Mockups:



Mockups were created in Canva for visual aid and educational purposes. Do not reuse.

⁷ "Deer Mouse," Western Exterminator Company, accessed May 12, 2026, <https://www.westernexterminator.com/mice/mice-species/deer-mouse>.

Appendix B. Nature Walk Signs

Pacific Northwest Nature Walk



Welcome to the Mountain! Today we are going on a hike. Go to each stop to learn more about how to have fun and be safe in nature.

Stop 1: Get Ready

Pack your backpack for the hike! What will you bring with you?



Stop 2: Discovery Rocks

Lots of different animals call the Mountain their home. Flip the rocks and see who you can find!



Stop 3: Seek and Find

What types of animals live in the mountains? Stop here to see what animals you can find!

Being Safe Around Animals

1. Stay calm
2. Keep your distance
3. Be loud
4. Be big
5. Don't run
6. Face animal and back away slowly.

Practice these steps before going to the next stop!

Turn the page →

Pacific Northwest Nature Walk



Stop 4: The Cave

Who turned off the lights? Caves are home to lots of critters, like bats, salamanders, and spiders.

Caves are dark and damp. Take a flashlight to light the way!

Stop 5: The Summit Congrats!

You made it to the top of the mountain!

Time to celebrate at camp! Tell stories or sing a song around the campfire!



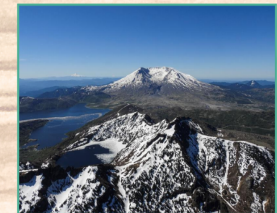
Tahoma
(Mt. Rainier)

Photo: US Geological Survey



Kulshan
(Mt. Baker)

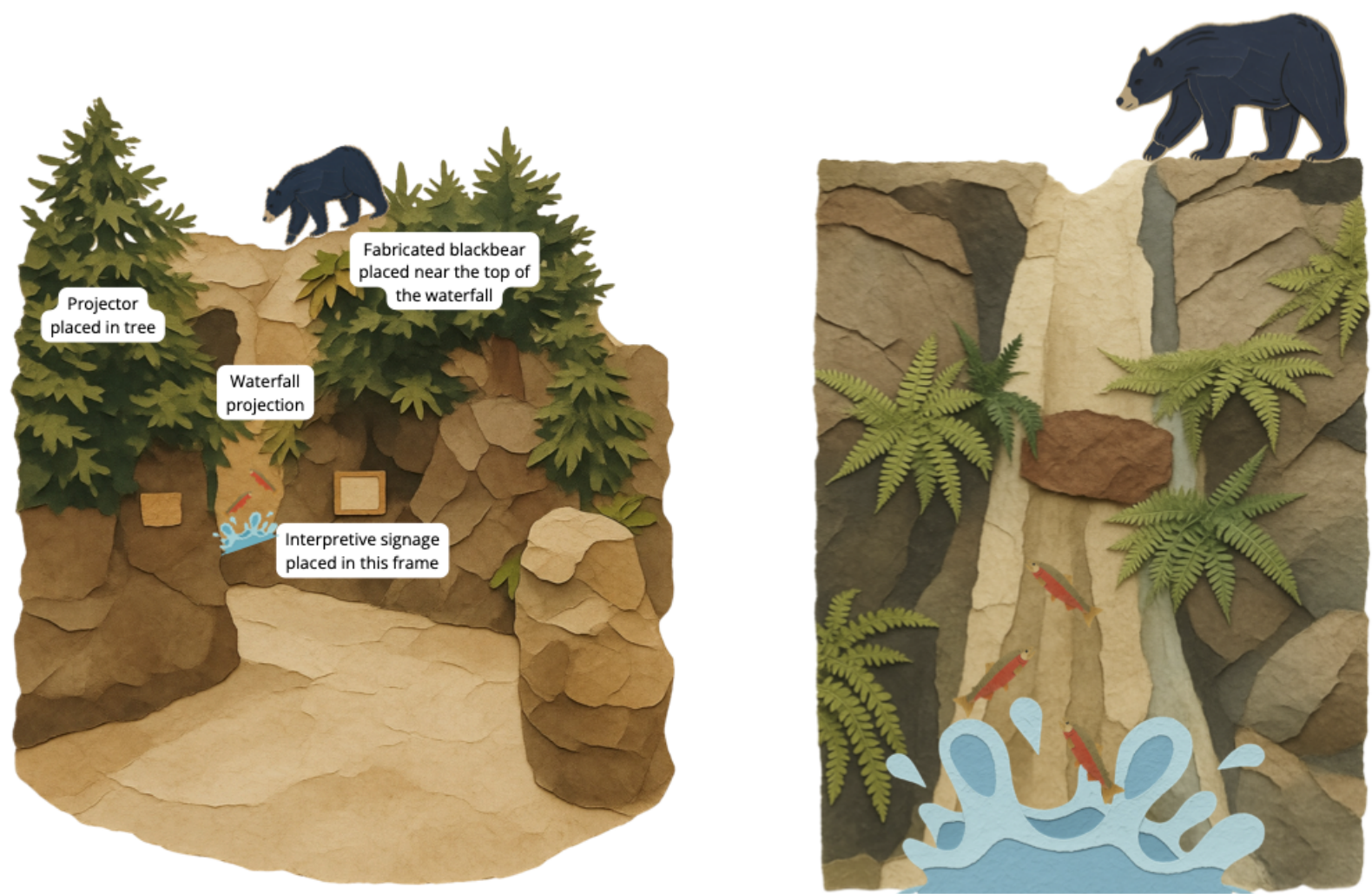
Photo: US Geological Survey



Lawetlat'la
(Mt. St. Helens)

Photo: Cascades Volcano Observatory

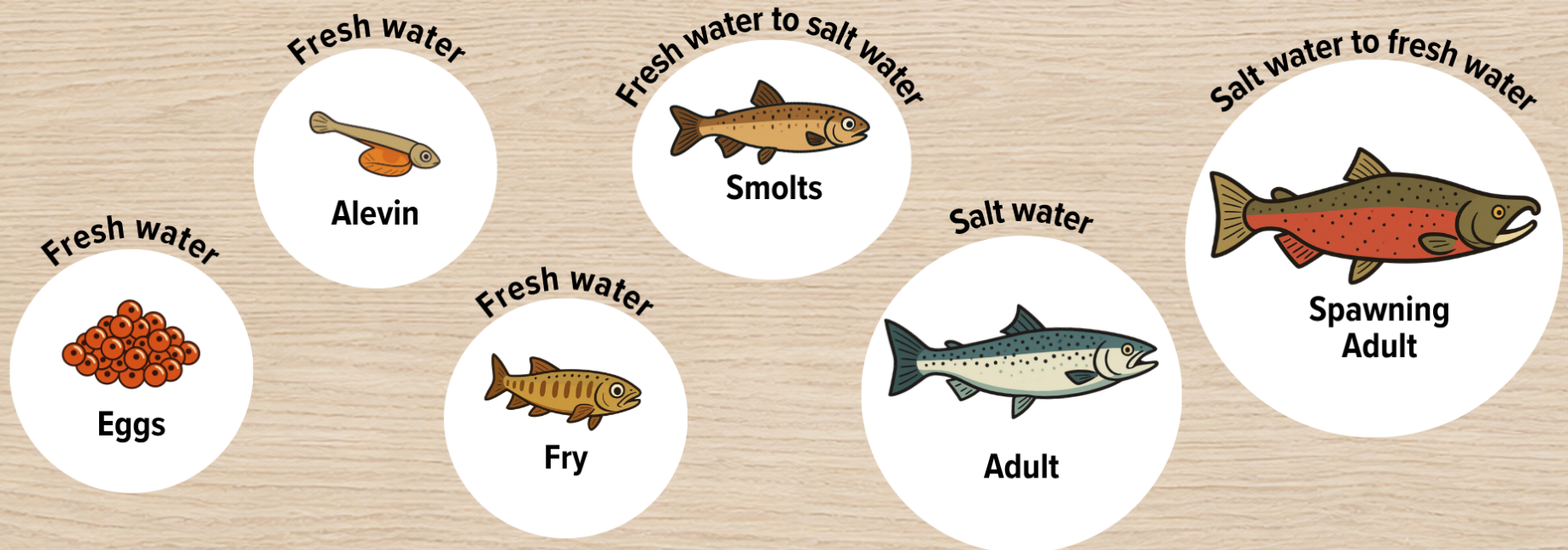
Appendix C. Salmon Lifecycle/Waterfall Mockups + Interpretive Sign



Mockups were created in Canva as a visual aid for the general design of future signage and physical elements. For educational purposes only. Do not reuse.

Did you know?

Coho salmon swim from the ocean to the mountains and back to hatch their eggs!



Mockup was created in Canva as a visual aid for the general design of future signage and physical elements. For educational purposes only. Do not reuse.

Appendix D. Photosynthesis Tree



Mockup was created in Canva as a visual aid for the general design of future signage and physical elements. For educational purposes only. Do not reuse.



At the Summit

Congrats! You made it to the top of the mountain!



Photo: Caitlin Moore

In the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, thousands of hikers every year trek up Mailbox Peak where they leave messages and gifts for future climbers in a mailbox.

What message would you leave future hikers?

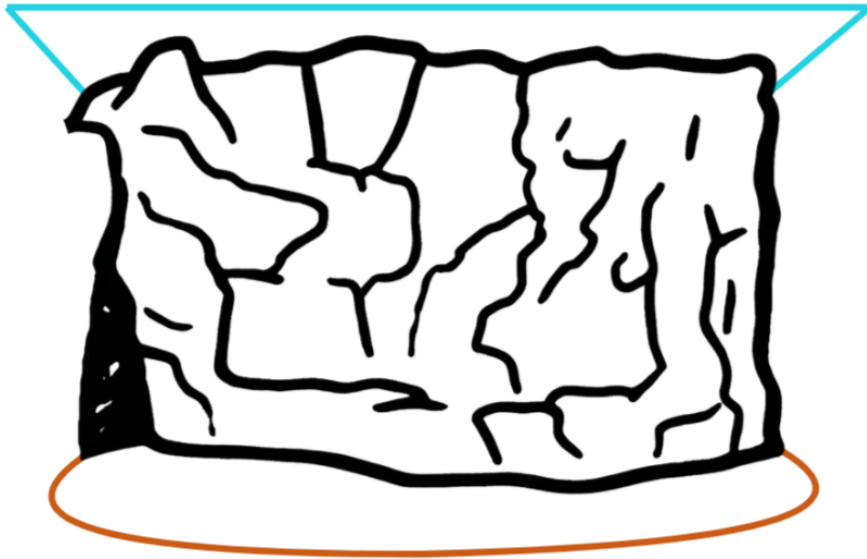
Write a note or draw a picture and leave it in the mailbox!

Appendix G. Climbing Wall

Fig. 23. Photo of the climbing wall when it was in service. Both signs say “Please climb across the mountain only ↔”



Mock-up of the additions. Blue represents the plastic barrier on top and orange represents the pad.



Mockup was created in Canva as a visual aid for the general design of future signage and physical elements. For educational purposes only. Do not reuse.

Appendix H. Visitor Survey

Visitor Feedback on the *Mountain* Exhibit

The Seattle Children's Museum has partnered with a team of University of Washington Museology graduate students to renovate *The Mountain* exhibit. To help guide the renovation, we want to hear from museum visitors about their interests and hopes for the future of the exhibit.

The survey will take about 5-10 minutes to complete. All survey responses are anonymous and will be grouped into themes. The results of the survey will be incorporated into an implementation plan for the future exhibit.

Thank you for participating in our survey! Your feedback is pivotal to the future of the exhibit. Please reach out to Zoe Velie (zvelie@uw.edu) or Kacie Perez (kacie.p@seattlechildrensmuseum.org) if you have questions or comments about the survey.

1. What does your child(ren) enjoy about the current *Mountain* exhibit? (Select all that apply).

- ☐ Local environmental themes
- ☐ Physical play features (climbing logs, slide, etc.)
- ☐ Imaginative play features (costumes, camping setup, etc.)
- ☐ Informational panels
- ☐ Other (Write-in): _____
- ☐ My child(ren) does not enjoy the exhibit (please explain your answer): _____

2. Please rank your interest in incorporating the following themes into the future *Mountain* exhibit, from 1st choice to 6th choice.

	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice	6th choice
<i>Caring for the natural world</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>Wilderness safety and survival</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>Local plants and animals</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>Outdoor activities in the Pacific Northwest, like hiking and camping</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>Washington's Tribes and their relationships to the region's natural landscape</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>History of mountaineering in the Pacific Northwest</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. Are there any other themes that you would like to see added to *The Mountain* exhibit?

4. To what extent are you and your child(ren) interested in seeing the following activities incorporated into the future *Mountain* exhibit?

	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Neutral	Somewhat disinterested	Not at all interested
<i>Animal and plant identification scavenger hunt</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>"Leave no trace" principles (e.g., disposing of waste properly, minimizing campfire impacts, & being considerate of others)</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>Practical wilderness survival skills, like using a compass or finding water</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>Camping activities, like telling stories around a fire pit</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>Safe rock climbing</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. Are there any other activities that you would like to see incorporated into the future *Mountain* exhibit?

6. To what extent are you and your child(ren) interested in seeing the following opportunities incorporated into the future *Mountain* exhibit?

	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Neutral	Somewhat disinterested	Not at all interested
<i>More toys and objects to play with, such as model camping equipment, plants/animals, etc.</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>More opportunities for your child(ren) to play with others</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>More opportunities to be creative and make something to take home</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>More opportunities for physical play, like climbing and running</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
<i>More opportunities for your child(ren) to use their imagination to act out scenarios</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. Would you like to see informational panels about how your child learns through play while interacting with *The Mountain*?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No opinion

8. Would you like to see other languages represented on *The Mountain*'s informational panels?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No opinion

9. If you answered "Yes", what language(s) would you like to see?

10. Is there anything else that you would like us to know or consider when implementing changes to the exhibit?

11. Are you a member of the Seattle Children's Museum?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

12. What is the age of the child(ren) that typically accompany you to the museum? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Under 2
- ☐ 4 to 6 years old
- ☐ 11 or older
- ☐ 2 to 3 years old
- ☐ 7 to 10 years old

13. What is your zip code? If you live outside the United States, please share where you are from:

14. What language(s) do you and your family speak at home?

Thank you for participating in our survey! If you have questions or comments about the survey, please email Zoe Velie (zvelie@uw.edu) or Kacie Perez (kacie.p@seattlechildrensmuseum.org).