

NEWS

[Home](#) / [News](#)

https://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/news/waterworks-art-project-looks-to-get-folks-thinking-about-hydrology/article_d0017ff4-32f6-5aa0-bcdb-ddd5e1818f3e.html

WaterWorks art project looks to get folks thinking about hydrology

By Eric Dietrich Chronicle Staff Writer Jun 17, 2017



Artist Jenny Hale paired up with scientists to create a map showing the groundwater beneath Bozen the window of the Great Rocky Mountain Toy Company was created for a series of public art installat tours concerning water conservation.

Rachel Leathe/Chronicle

Standing on a downtown sidewalk in front of the Nova Cafe on Saturday morning, a small group of people hunched over a smartphone, watching Bozeman Creek flow beneath their feet.

The creek, of course, has been buried for decades as it crosses Main Street between the cafe and Bar IX. But an augmented reality app on the phone's screen layered a video of running water over a sticker on the concrete, giving its clustered viewers a sense for what the stream would look like laid bare.

The app, it turns out, is a small-but-eye-catching part of a major community art project underway in Bozeman this summer.

WaterWorks 2017, as organizers with Mountain Time Arts are calling the effort, aims to use installations, tours and performances to get folks thinking about how our water supplies flow through Bozeman above ground and below it.

The idea, said organizer Jim Madden, is to boost awareness of the science and history around water resources as well as the work necessary to conserve them — “using art as a vehicle for communication that touches people in a different way than graphs and charts and meetings.”

“All of these artists are working with scientists as a foundation,” he said.

Saturday's stop on the sidewalk, for example, was part of a walking tour series that guides participants down a section of Bozeman Creek. It started with a soon-to-be-completed project

that's restoring the creek to a more natural state in Bogert Park and followed the waterway as it ducks in and out of culverts through downtown.

Historically, said tour guide Angela Davis, Bozemanites building homes and businesses in what are now the south side's historic neighborhoods have channelized much of the creek, lining its banks with rocks and concrete to force its natural meanders into a straight shot.

That made space for development, but also forces water to abandon natural curves, speeding up storm surges and reducing the habitat available for fish.

Similar stream tours, planned by the Extreme History Project, will be held daily at 10 a.m. through June 30, with additional 6 p.m. tours on Wednesdays and 1 p.m. tours on Saturdays and Sundays.

Through the end of this month, a dozen downtown businesses are also hosting storefront art installations inspired by water issues. One of the Rocky Mountain Toy Company's display cases, for example, is hosting a window-sized map of the Bozeman-area watershed.

A number of other events are planned as part of the WaterWorks effort, as well:

- **June 23 and June 24 at 8 p.m.**
- , aerial dance troupe Zaccho Dance Theatre will perform "Spring Thirst" while suspended from the Bogert Park pavilion, using dance to explore the influence of climate change on water resources.
- **July 21 to July 30, from noon to 6 p.m.**
- , a multi-screen video installation at the Dry Creek School House will explore the role of wetlands.
- **Aug. 23 to Aug. 25, at sundown**
- , the Gabriel Canal off River Road near Four Corners will be illuminated with a sound and light installation, accompanied by music involving repurposed ranching equipment.

Last summer, Mountain Times Arts presented the FLOW video installation, which involved projecting large-scale videos on the walls of the Story Mill grain terminal.

"We're dependent on the snow pack and the snow melt," Madden said. "And after we use it, it all goes back into the same system."

"We're hoping that with the rapid population growth in the valley," he said, "we can raise people's awareness about water conservation and land use planning to protect the water."

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