

## **Cutthroat Climb by Rebecca Lexa**

One of the benefits of living in the Northwest is our relatively mild winters. While we may occasionally get a dusting of snow or early morning frost, for the most part we stay above freezing. This means that, with the right rain gear for those wet days, it's possible to enjoy the outdoors year-round.

One of the best trails for fall and winter hiking is the Cutthroat Climb. Located at the Refuge headquarters on Highway 101, this trail is named for the cutthroat trout which spawn in nearby streams. It is three quarters of a mile long and is a circle which begins and ends at the end of the Art Trail boardwalk.

While insects, flowers and some other life forms have disappeared for the year, this trail is still rich with conifers, including old-growth hemlocks, and lush ferns. Juncos and other small birds flit through the underbrush, and you may find the tracks of Columbian black-tailed deer. The rain brings out the vibrant greens in the evergreen plant life, and the red tones in the soil, giving this trail deeper hues not often seen in summer. At the north end of the loop is a labyrinth made of paving stones, open for anyone to stop and contemplate.

The Cutthroat Climb does have a few steep parts and there are no hand rails, and can be a bit muddy during heavy rains, so it is considered a moderately challenging hike. Be sure to wear hiking boots with good treads, and consider bringing a hiking pole or walking stick.