BLACK FOREST (29,930,000 tons)

www.theblackforest.org

Frequently Asked Questions

The Project

Q: What is it? Why it is here?

Black Forest (29,930,000 tons) is a land art installation by the Swiss-American artist Hans Baumann, a resident of Seattle. It is located inside King County's Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park in Bellevue/Issaquah, WA. From 1863 to 1963, this park was the site of intensive coal mining and logging, and it is estimated that some 29,930,000 tons of carbon dioxide (CO_2) were emitted into the atmosphere as a result of these activities. *Black Forest (29,930,000 tons)* will reimagine the park as a site for carbon sequestration through the construction of a large-scale land art installation. The project entails covering a carefully selected site in the forest with 45,000 pounds of bio-carbon – an environmentally benign charcoal that is uncannily similar in appearance to the coal that was once mined here and still litters the forest floor in some places. More information can be found on the project's website at www.theblackforest.org or by visiting the project's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/blackforest2014.

Q: What is land art?

Wikipedia provides a succinct definition: "Land art is an art movement in which landscape and the work of art are inextricably linked … Sculptures are not placed in the landscape, rather, the landscape is the means of their creation." Some of the more prominent land art practitioners include Robert Smithson (Spiral Jetty), Michael Heizer (Levitated Mass), Maya Lin (Vietnam War Memorial), and James Turrell (Roden Crater).

Q: How is the project funded?

Black Forest (29,930,000 tons) was awarded two grants totaling $20,000 by 4Culture's Historic Site Specific Arts grant program. Find more information about 4Culture's Site Specific program at www.sitespecificarts.org/. King County Parks is supporting this project by providing staff and other resources in-kind.

Visiting the Project

Q: When does the installation open?

The installation is scheduled to be fully completed by March 1, 2014.

Q: Is the project publicly accessible? How can I see it/get there?

The project is free and open to the public. The installation is located in King County's Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park, near the Red Town trailhead. To find driving directions and a map to the site, visit www.theblackforest.org and click the header entitled "How to Get There".

Q: How long does it take to walk to the project? Is it a difficult walk? Is it ADA accessible?

The installation is located along a trail, which is approximately 15 minutes from the trailhead. The trail leading to the installation is made of compacted gravel and is not ADA accessible. There is small but steep hill coming out of the parking lot, but aside from that, the trail is relatively flat.

Q: Can I walk inside the Black Forest or take a piece of it home with me?
No. For your safety, do not leave the trail at any time while visiting Cougar Mountain, as certain areas are unstable from the coal mining activities that took place here in the past. It is illegal to remove any material from this park, including pieces of the biocarbon from this installation.

Q: Is the installation safe to visit? Is there any chance that it could harm my health?
The installation is safe for all visitors. Although it resembles coal, the product used in this installation is chemically identical to products used to purify water sources, like activated carbon, and is safe for humans and all manner of plants and animals. The biochar used in this installation is used to grow agricultural crops for human consumption, as well as ornamental plants such as orchids.

Volunteering

Q: How can I volunteer?
We are looking for volunteers to help with installation from February 21-23, 2014. There will be two shifts per day, and we encourage people to volunteer for more than one shift. Volunteers will be limited to 8 people per shift and pre-registration is required. To sign up, please contact Laurie Clinton, King County Parks Volunteer Program Manager, at laurie.clinton@kingcounty.gov or at (206) 296-4452.

Project Afterlife

Q: Will the project be maintained?
It is the artist's vision that the project be left as part of the forest. Plants and dead leaves will cover the "Black Forest" eventually hiding it from view. It is unknown how long the installation will remain clearly visible. Visit before spring, when emerging vegetation will begin to obscure the installation from view, and return throughout the year to see how the site changes with the natural progression of decomposition.

Media Queries

Q: Where can I learn more about the project?
Visit www.theblackforest.org. or http://www.facebook.com/blackforest2014 for more information about this project, concept, materials, and the artist.

Q: Do you have any photographs or images of the project?
Please contact the artist, Hans Baumann at hbaumann@post.harvard.edu or at 301-792-1647 for media requests. Professional photographers will be documenting the installation process and the final installation, and these photographs can be made available to the media upon request.

Biochar and Ecosystem-related Questions

Q: What is biochar (or bio-carbon)?
The National Resource Defense Council defines biochar as "charcoal that is formed by heating biomass at high temperatures in the absence of oxygen and then added to soil to improve its health" (http://www.nrdc.org/energy/files/biocharFS.pdf). There are subtle differences between biochar, biocarbon (any form of carbon stored by an organism and/or ecosystem), charcoal, activated charcoal and carbon, but they all possess the same chemical composition: they are 100% carbon. The biochar used in this process is derived from farmed hardwood trees and was processed in earthen kilns.

Q: Will the installation harm the forest ecosystem?

No. Biochar was used for thousands of years by the indigenous peoples of the Amazon to improve soil fertility in the rainforest. The "char" used in this project was processed in a similar manner to this. The feedstock for the char is single-sourced and contains no waste materials or potentially contaminated debris material that could introduce toxins into the ecosystem. Biochar is increasingly used in agricultural applications, and a broad range of scientific studies have shown that biochar improves soil quality and overall ecosystem health. The exact material used in this installation is frequently used to grow orchids.

Q: How does the project improve the forest's health?

Being pure carbon, the char can absorb chemicals and minerals already present in the ecosystem. As soil-based microorganisms break down organic matter and forest duff decays, the char will naturally absorb these beneficial elements and retain them in the soil, making them available for use by organisms and enriching the ecosystem.

Q: How long will it take for the char to break down/decompose?

Biochar continues to generate interest in environmental circles as a tool to sequester carbon and mitigate against climate change because it takes upwards of 10,000 years to fully decompose. Theoretically, CO_2 could be removed from the atmosphere and stored in the soil as biochar, thereby reducing or negating the effects of climate change. For more information about biocarbon, visit Climate Solution's Northwest BioCarbon Initiative at climatesolutions.org/programs/NBI.