

Winthrop Valley Life

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Winthrop residents observe the passage of time in myriad ways, one of the most mundane of which involves a trip to the local post office.



Now, one could easily fall down a rabbit hole—or perhaps a storm drain—by looking into the cause of and possible solutions to the small pond that forms intermittently in the post office parking lot. I will leave that investigation to the bulletin board community.

Instead, my angle on the post office puddle is to note its role as a both a seasonal indicator—stretching (so far) from early duck hunting season, to the beginning of (so-called) winter, and through the holidays—and as a temporary art (debatable) installation.

Initially, a traffic cone marked the most perilous spot in the pool: the Grand Canyon of a pothole with which my passenger side rear tire is all too well acquainted. Soon, however, the cone was overpowered by the December deluge that, as we all know, swelled the river and wiped out a large chunk of Highway 20 in Mazama.

The next iteration of the visual warning cue was a metal 30-gallon garbage can, which conveyed an industrial vibe on our quaint frontier mail depot. Through clever employment of a broom handle, the cone perched at a jaunty angle atop it.

Early one morning when the little lake was placid, a duck (decoy) glided through the murky waterway before the morning rush of customers. The wildlife tableau contrasted with the trash can and its Brutalist aesthetic, while the elementary geometry of the orange pylon reinforced the utilitarian simplicity of the installation.



The puddle receded somewhat when temperatures turned colder. The waterfowl decoy disappeared and in its place a new decoy was unveiled: a discarded Christmas tree planted in the trash bin alongside the construction cone. Unlike the duck decoy, however, this one's purpose was not to lure, but to fend off—it urged drivers to steer clear of the slush pool in which the entire large-scale mixed media sculpture rested.

If the post office piece were to be titled, it might be called Cone Can Conifer. The tree's triangular outline was echoed in the adjacent cone, a repetition of shape and form that juxtaposed two conflicting messages: the tree's evocation of seasonal or spiritual rebirth and the cone's suggestion of imminent danger—the duality of life played out in a parking lot.

Cone Can Conifer reminds us of the choice we face daily: stay on high ground, or wade right in and get mired in the muck.

