

## **Oze History of Conservation**

Oze has been a pioneer in nature conservation since early visitors fell in love with the landscape and determined to protect it.

During the Edo period (1603–1868), the area was often visited by hunters and fishermen, drawn to the game attracted by the lush marshes. The Aizu-Numata road, a mountain route used to carry food and other goods between the district to the north (Aizu) and the southern district (Joshu), passed across the Oze area. By the end of the Meiji era (1868–1912), the first mountain lodge was built, and Oze's topography became the subject of research and nature studies.

The Oze area was first targeted for development in 1903 as part of a plan to construct a system of dams and tunnels that would supply hydroelectric power to a swiftly modernizing Japan. Luckily, nature enthusiasts were able to organize and stop the plan. Their activism became more focused with the establishment of the Oze Conservation Association in 1949.

The most recognizable symbols of Oze's conservation approach are the boardwalks that protect the fragile surface of the national park's marshlands. In the beginning they were just logs laid across spots that were difficult to cross; later the logs were split and laid flat, making walking around the marshes even easier. By the 1950s, the damage from increasing numbers of visitors had become apparent, and serious work on the boardwalk system began in 1952. These boardwalks, most of them raised above the surface of the marsh, now extend over 54 kilometers.

Oze was once slated for road development, but this, too, was blocked by environmental activists. When trash left by climbers and hikers began to overwhelm the area, Oze began a campaign to get visitors to take their waste home with them. The campaign was successful, and the movement spread to other areas around Japan dealing with the same issue.

Most recently, Oze has established programs aimed at maintaining the area's water quality and promoting the use of clean energy, such as solar power. Through the efforts of park staff and volunteers, and with the cooperation of visitors, Oze will continue to protect the park's natural resources.

