

Land trust to purchase Green Island, key habitat in Willamette floodplain

The McKenzie River Trust is poised to close the Willamette Valley's largest single conservation land deal in decades.

The Eugene-based land trust expects to complete by June 30 its purchase of 856 acres on Green Island at the confluence of the McKenzie and Willamette rivers. Much of the remainder of the 1,300-acre island complex is already in public ownership, most of it in the network of old river channels that laces the floodplain.

The Green Island property is valued at \$2.2 million, but the owners – members of the

Green family, which has farmed on the island since the 1930s – have agreed to sell it to the McKenzie River Trust for about \$1.7 million.

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board approved a \$750,000 grant for the project in mid-May. The land trust will use a short-term loan to complete its purchase and seek to raise the balance of the money over the next few years.

The Green Island property includes four miles of the Willamette River and another 4.5 miles of an abandoned channel of the McKenzie River. The island historically supported a variety of habitats, including oak woodlands, wetland prairies, floodplain forests, oxbow lakes, open wetlands, and a variety of islands, sloughs, and side channels.

More than one-third of the island has been farmed over the years, but a changing agricultural



Ryland Moore/MRT

Backwater in Green Island complex

economy, continuing depressed crop prices, and access problems convinced the owners that the best long-term use of their property lay in conservation.

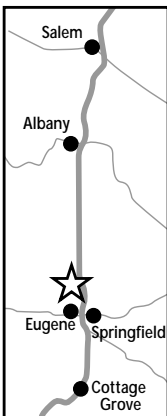
The McKenzie River Trust's long-term plans call for restoration of native habitats and re-establishment of natural floodplain processes on the island, but some farming will continue on an interim basis.

Habitat restoration is expected to benefit a wide variety of migratory birds and other resident wildlife as well as a number of at-risk fish species, including spring chinook salmon, bull trout, and the Oregon chub. The area is heavily used by migrating and wintering waterfowl, and could provide important habitat for songbirds dependent on the Willamette Valley's dwindling oak woodlands, grasslands, and riparian forests.

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Inside the joint venture

Different name, same basic approach to conservation

The Oregon Wetlands Joint Venture is changing its name to the Oregon Habitat Joint Venture. The new name marks another step in the evolution of the organization, which started in 1991 as the Oregon state steering committee for the Pacific Coast Joint Venture, a regional partnership created to implement the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

In 1992, the group became the Oregon Coastal Wetlands Joint Venture, consistent with its focus on the wetlands along the coast and lower Columbia River. With expansion to the Willamette Valley in 1994, and the beginning of similar efforts in eastern Oregon under the auspices of the Intermountain West Joint Venture in 1995, it became the Oregon Wetlands Joint Venture. In recent years the partnership expanded its agenda beyond wetlands to include other habitats, such as grasslands, oak woodlands, and floodplain forests, identified as priorities by Partners in Flight and other bird conservation initiatives.

The new name reflects that broader agenda, but wetlands continue to be a primary focus. And the joint venture's approach – partnerships for voluntary, cooperative efforts to protect and restore important habitats – remains unchanged.

This is the first joint venture newsletter in more than a year, but it hasn't been for lack of news. Initially, the problem was financial. More recently, it's just been too many competing priorities for limited staff time. We hope to get back on our normal irregular schedule again starting with this issue... The different look (no color) of this edition is the result of a state policy instituted earlier this year to reduce printing costs.

The joint venture's website got a major re-design and update last fall. You can see the results at: <http://wetlands.dfw.state.or.us>.

Participants in a joint venture planning session in early May at Baskett Slough National Wildlife Refuge saw an emerging general consensus on Willamette Valley conservation priorities. Maps of conservation priority areas identified by the joint venture, The Nature Conservancy, The Wetlands Conservancy's "Oregon's Greatest Wetlands" project, and the Pacific Northwest Ecosystem Research Consortium showed a remarkable overlap. The four different plans are in various stages of development. The joint venture's draft plan for the Willamette Valley (available in text form on our website) will be undergoing some revisions and should be finalized later this year.

Milestones

Events highlight completion of multi-million dollar projects

LOCAL OFFICIALS IN MID-MAY MARKED THE COMPLETION OF THE WEST EUGENE WETLANDS' LARGEST RESTORATION EFFORT TO DATE, A 400-ACRE RESTORATION PROJECT ALONG AMAZON CREEK IN AN AREA NOW KNOWN AS MEADOWLARK PRAIRIE. THE \$6.5 MILLION PROJECT REMOVED OLD FLOOD CONTROL LEVEES AND PUT AMAZON CREEK BACK INTO A NATURAL STREAM CHANNEL THROUGH A RESTORED WETLAND PRAIRIE SOUTHEAST OF GREENHILL ROAD AND ROYAL AVENUE. THE PROJECT ALSO INCLUDED A 2.5-MILE EXTENSION OF THE FERN RIDGE BIKE PATH AND A WILDLIFE VIEWING OVERLOOK OFF GREENHILL ROAD. MAJOR PARTNERS IN THE PROJECT INCLUDED THE CITY OF EUGENE, THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, AND THE OREGON DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION.

DUCKS UNLIMITED HAS SCHEDULED A JUNE 28 DEDICATION CEREMONY TO HIGHLIGHT COMPLETION OF THE MOST RECENT IN A SERIES OF WETLAND RESTORATION PROJECTS ON THE OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE'S Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area near La Grande. THE SATURDAY CEREMONY BEGINS AT 11 A.M. PARTNERSHIPS AMONG PUBLIC AGENCIES AND PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS HAVE HELPED EXPAND THE STATE WILDLIFE AREA AND RESTORE OR ENHANCE HABITATS ON 1,500 ACRES WITHIN THE HISTORIC TULE LAKE AREA AT THE SOUTH END OF THE GRANDE RONDE VALLEY. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT MARTI COLEMAN AT (360) 885-2011.

THE JACKSON BOTTOM WETLAND PRESERVE IN HILLSBORO IS ONLY A FEW WEEKS AWAY FROM OPENING ITS NEW WETLAND EDUCATION CENTER, A FOCAL POINT FOR EDUCATIONAL AND INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS IN THE TUALATIN RIVER VALLEY. MORE THAN 25,000 PEOPLE VISIT JACKSON BOTTOM ANNUALLY TO PARTICIPATE IN PROGRAMS, TOURS AND TO HIKE THE TRAILS IN THE 710-ACRE PRESERVE, WHICH ALSO OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES FOR APPLIED FIELD RESEARCH AND ADVANCED TRAINING. COMPLETION OF THE 6,000 SQUARE-FOOT BARN-STYLE BUILDING CAPS MORE THAN FIVE YEARS OF FUND-RAISING THAT ATTRACTED ALMOST \$2.5 MILLION FROM CORPORATIONS, FOUNDATIONS, LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES, INDIVIDUALS, AND AREA BUSINESSES.



Federal funds for coastal projects stall in Legislature

More than \$1.7 million in federal grants to protect coastal wetlands in Clatsop and Lincoln counties are on hold until key legislators decide whether the state will accept the money.

The two grants would help local land trusts purchase more than 600 acres of tidal marshes around Yaquina Bay and a 365-acre flood-plain property along the Necanicum River in Seaside.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the grants to the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board in November 2002, awarding \$952,000 for the Yaquina project and \$750,000 for purchase of the Seaside property. The watershed board approved an additional \$200,000 state contribution to the Seaside project in mid-May.

However, under Oregon law, state agencies must get approval from the Legislature to apply for federal grants and then submit a second request for permission to accept the funds. A key state legislator, Sen. Ken Messerle, has blocked legislative action on the two federal Coastal Wetland Conservation Grants since last fall.

Messerle, R-Coos Bay, chairs the Joint Ways and Means Committee's subcommittee that controls funding for state natural resource agencies. Messerle has been concerned about the economic and agricultural impacts of land acquisitions by government agencies and conservation organizations. The Yaquina Bay project is in his district.

None of the properties targeted for purchase around Yaquina Bay have any recent history of agricultural use. The proposed acquisition in Clatsop



Circle Creek property in Seaside

North Coast Land Conservancy

County includes about 70 acres of pasture that lies within the Seaside city limits.

Neither project has provoked any local controversy and both enjoy strong local support.

The Yaquina Bay project, sponsored by the MidCoast Watersheds Council, calls for acquisition of approximately 624 acres of estuarine marsh along the bay between Newport and Toledo. Restoration is proposed on 91 acres. The properties would be owned by The Wetlands Conservancy or the Central Coast Land Conservancy. Supporters include Lincoln County and Simpson Timber Company.

The Seaside project involves purchase by the North Coast Land Conservancy of more than two

miles of frontage along the Necanicum River and most of Circle Creek, a small but highly productive salmon and steelhead stream. The property also encompasses a 160-acre spruce swamp, a wetland type that has been reduced by almost 90 percent in Oregon, and about 60 acres of seasonal freshwater marsh. Backers of the project include the city of Seaside, Clatsop County, and Sen. Joan Dukes and Rep.

Betsy Johnson, who both serve with Messerle on the Ways and Means subcommittee on natural resources.

Contacts: Yaquina Bay: Esther Lev, The Wetlands Conservancy, Box 1195, Tualatin OR 97062; 503-691-1394; esthelev@wetlandsconservancy.org.

Circle Creek: Neal Maine, North Coast Land Conservancy, Box 566, Astoria, OR 97103; 503-738-4021; nmaine@pacifier.com



Elk herd grazing along Circle Creek

Neal Maine/NCLC



Yaquina Bay's Poole Slough

Congress OK's money for Oregon projects



Tillamook Bay wetlands

Oregon's congressional delegation managed to win funding for a handful of major conservation projects in the final federal budget for 2003.

The long-delayed budget, which wasn't wrapped up until February – more than four months into the federal government's fiscal year – includes funding to complete key wetland acquisitions on the coast at Tillamook Bay (\$600,000) and Bandon Marsh National Wildlife Refuge (\$140,000).

The 3,000-page spending package also includes \$500,000 that will indirectly support Marion

County's purchase of wetlands near Salem and \$745,000 for interchange improvements for future visitor facilities at the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge.

Tillamook Bay: A \$600,000 earmark in the Commerce Department's budget will help Tillamook County complete the

final piece in a 400-acre package of land purchases negotiated by the Trust for Public Land at the south end of the bay. The money had been requested by Rep. Darlene Hooley and Sens. Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith.

Bandon Marsh: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will use \$140,000 requested by Wyden, Smith and Rep. Peter DeFazio to add a 48-acre parcel to the refuge's Ni-les'tun Unit near Bandon. The Nature Conservancy purchased the property last year to protect it until the agency could come up with the necessary funding. Transfer to refuge ownership will

remove the last major obstacle to restoring about 400 acres of tidal wetlands along the Coquille River east of Highway 101.

Tualatin River: Rep. David Wu secured \$740,000 for improvements to Highway 99W near Sherwood to allow public access and eventually a visitor center at the site of the former Steinborn Dairy, probably the best wildlife viewing area on the refuge. Highway safety issues have kept the Fish and Wildlife Service from opening the area, which includes about 400 acres of intensively managed wetlands, to public use.

Marion County: The U.S. Forest Service will purchase lands owned by Marion County near Detroit for \$500,000, and the county will use the proceeds to buy and restore wetlands near Salem. The funds were originally intended for purchases within the historic Lake Labish, northeast of Salem, but county commissioners dropped that proposal because of strong local opposition.

Wetlands Reserve Program gets new infusion of funding

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has allocated \$7.7 million this year to protect and restore wetlands in Oregon under its Wetlands Reserve Program.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service will use the money to purchase conservation easements from private landowners and pay habitat restoration costs on eligible lands.

Last year, with a slightly smaller allocation, the agency funded 18 Oregon projects totaling almost



Wetlands Reserve Program helped fund restoration of Multnomah Channel wetlands purchased by Metro Greenspaces program.

4,700 acres, bringing total enrollment in the Wetlands Reserve Program in the state to more than 24,000 acres in 12 counties. Landowner interest in the program remains strong, with almost 10,000 acres in unfunded applications in 2002.

Under the new Farm Bill approved by Congress last year, the Wetlands Reserve Program will expand its enrollment by up to 250,000 acres per year nationwide over the next four years, more than doubling the total to 2,275,000 acres.

Harney County projects to restore wetlands, control carp

A long-stalled project to restore more than 2,000 acres of floodplain and wetland habitats along the lower Silvies River near Malheur Lake cleared a major hurdle in January when the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) approved almost \$300,000 for the project.

Ducks Unlimited has been working with private landowners, the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, and other federal agencies since 1998 to assemble the \$3 million project southeast of Burns in Harney County. But the big breakthrough came when the Harney Soil and Water Conservation District agreed to join the partnership and take the lead after three previous requests for OWEB funding were turned down.

The local district's support helped counter persistent controversy over the project, which would be one of the largest habitat restoration projects in eastern Oregon.

OWEB also awarded the Harney Soil and Water Conservation District \$184,000 for a second project to help control populations of carp, a non-native fish that has had devastating effects on the Malheur Lake ecosystem. That project, a partnership with Ducks Unlimited, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, is expected to dramatically improve water quality and wildlife habitat in Mud Lake, a 9,400-acre marsh on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

Ducks Unlimited hopes to use the two OWEB grants to help leverage an additional \$1 million in federal funding for Harney County projects through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act.

The Silvies River project involves two adjacent private properties on the river's west fork a mile or two above Malheur Lake. Both landowners have already enrolled in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wetlands Reserve Program, which purchased conservation easements on the properties. The river, now a straight 3.5-mile ditch between large dikes, will be returned to a more

have produced major habitat improvements.

The Mud Lake project will construct a carp barrier and trap adjacent to the Highway 205 bridge at The Narrows, which separates Mud and Harney lakes from Malheur Lake. The barrier will block movement of carp larger than one inch in diameter into Mud Lake. Smaller carp are not expected to

"...the big breakthrough came when the Harney Soil and Water Conservation District agreed to join the partnership..."



West Fork of Silvies River

natural channel meandering five miles through 1,400 acres of floodplain wetlands and 800 acres of sagebrush grasslands to be restored as part of the project. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Landowner Incentives Program will contribute \$75,000 to the project through the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The Silvies River project also includes installation of a fish trap to allow removal of adult carp as they move upriver to spawn. Similar structures have been installed on the Blitzen River, the major southern tributary to Malheur Lake, where a combination of traps and screens to prevent carp from entering wetlands

survive to adulthood in Mud Lake, which routinely dries up during the summer and frequently freezes to the bottom in winter.

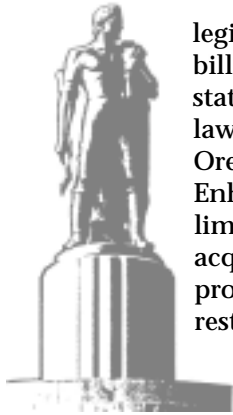
Carp were first introduced to Malheur Lake in the late 1920s but the population exploded in the 1950s. Carp destroy aquatic vegetation and increase turbidity in affected waters, dramatically reducing habitat values for waterfowl and native redband trout. Refuge

managers used the chemical rotenone to try to eliminate the carp in 1955 and again in 1992, but populations rebounded within a few years. Current strategies focus on control, rather than elimination, by blocking carp access to wetlands and rivers upstream from Malheur Lake, and trapping adult spawners at strategic locations to reduce overall populations.

Contacts: Marty Suter, Harney Soil and Water Conservation District, (541) 573-5010; marty-suter@or.nacdnet.org. Mike Shannon, Ducks Unlimited, (541) 884-3449 mshannon@ducks.org. Tim Griffiths, Natural Resources Conservation Service, (541) 883-6932 tim.griffiths@or.usda.gov

Conservation gains unlikely in this Legislature

Wetlands conservation and other habitat-related issues are getting a less than friendly reception in the 2003 Oregon Legislature.



Early on, legislators proposed bills to repeal the state's basic wetland laws, abolish the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, limit federal land acquisitions, and prohibit wetland restoration on agricultural lands, among other initiatives.

Ballot Measure 66, the 1998 initiative that allocated a portion of the state's lottery revenues to watershed restoration and habitat conservation, came under attack as cash-strapped budget writers sought to tap the constitutionally protected funds to pay for other state programs.

At the same time, key legislators blocked state agencies from accepting \$3.7 million in federal grants for local projects to protect coastal wetlands and oak woodlands in the Willamette Valley.

In May, the House of Representatives passed legislation, House Bill 3006, to deregulate "isolated" and "marginal" wetlands, which would include the vast majority Oregon's wetlands under the bill's definitions. The Wetlands Conservancy, a land trust that owns more than 800 acres of wetlands, concluded that none of its lands would be protected from development under the proposal.

Another bill approved by a House committee, House Bill 2364, would repeal all state wetland regulations.

Sponsors of one of the few conservation-oriented bills making its way through the process – House Bill 3616, a conservation incentives

package put together through months of discussion by a diverse group of stakeholders – were forced to drop provisions dealing with conservation easements.

But many of the more controversial proposals coming out of the House may face a stalemate in the Senate, which is evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats. Bills are likely to get stuck there unless they can attract bipartisan support.

Budget decisions made this year could have a profound impact on many agency programs. With revenue estimates dropping by another \$700 million in May, budget cuts could eliminate much of the meager general fund support allocated to most natural resource programs.

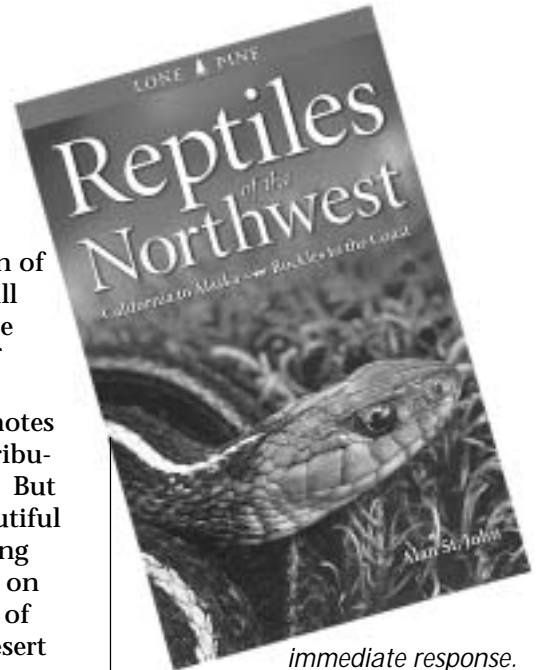
For information on specific bills, or to contact individual legislators, check the Legislature's website at <http://www.leg.state.or.us/>.

Reptiles of the Northwest

by Alan St. John
Lone Pine Press (2002)
\$18.95

This new field guide by veteran interpretive naturalist Alan St. John of Bend has everything you will ever want to know about the region's 42 native species of turtles, lizards, and snakes, including range maps and notes on their identification, distribution, habitats and behavior. But best of all are St. John's beautiful photographs and entertaining field notes, such as this one on an encounter in the middle of the road near the Alvord Desert in southeast Oregon:

"... I decided that I would demonstrate to my impromptu audience [of family, friends, and a couple of passing motorists] how an experienced herpetologist could adeptly catch the elusive Striped Whipsnake... I got down on my hands and knees and soon managed to get within arm's length of it... I lunged forward and grabbed the snake's tail, which precipitated an



immediate response. The next thing I saw was a wide-open snake mouth full of teeth coming toward my right eye, and before I knew what hit me was bitten on the cheek. While blood ran down the side of my face into my beard, everyone admired the lovely markings and coloration of the wriggling snake in my hands."

Landbirds finally get some numbers

American robins are so common, there must be millions of them out there, right?

Well, yes – about 320 million robins, more or less. Using sophisticated computer models and decades of data from the annual Breeding Bird Survey, scientists have now come up with population estimates for more than 400 species of landbirds.

Waterfowl biologists have long had a pretty good handle on continental populations of ducks and geese, but until recently, population estimates for most other

bird species were little more than guesses.

Partners in Flight, the international initiative to conserve landbirds, now has some ballpark estimates for bird populations in the United States and Canada. Although the numbers are derived from a computer model, rather than actual counts, the population estimates match up fairly closely with other estimates for species that have been subject of extensive surveys, such as the spotted owl (pop. 11,000, according to the model).

The big winner in the population derby, not surprisingly, is the American robin, followed by the dark-eyed junco (260 million), and the red-winged blackbird (190 million).

Continental populations of Oregon's state bird, the western meadowlark, are estimated at 30 million.

Contact: Bob Altman, American Bird Conservancy, 541-745-5339; baltman@abcbirds.org



Population estimates for selected species

Turkey vulture _____	1,300,000	Blue jay _____	22,000,000
Ferruginous hawk _____	23,000	American crow _____	31,000,000
Bald eagle _____	90,000	Horned lark _____	99,000,000
Golden eagle _____	81,000	Violet-green swallow _____	9,000,000
Peregrine falcon _____	340,000	Black-capped chickadee _____	34,000,000
Greater sage grouse _____	150,000	Chestnut-backed chickadee _____	7,500,000
Mountain quail _____	160,000	Brown creeper _____	5,900,000
Band-tailed pigeon _____	960,000	Marsh wren _____	8,200,000
Mourning dove _____	110,000,000	Golden-crowned kinglet _____	33,000,000
Great horned owl _____	2,200,000	Western bluebird _____	1,200,000
Northern pygmy owl _____	89,000	Varied thrush _____	26,000,000
Burrowing owl _____	700,000	Cedar waxwing _____	16,000,000
Anna's hummingbird _____	1,500,000	Townsend's warbler _____	12,000,000
Rufous hummingbird _____	6,300,000	Hermit warbler _____	2,500,000
Belted kingfisher _____	2,100,000	Western tanager _____	8,600,000
Lewis's woodpecker _____	140,000	Spotted towhee _____	13,000,000
White-headed woodpecker _____	83,000	Sage sparrow _____	3,100,000
Northern flicker _____	15,000,000	Song sparrow _____	56,000,000
Loggerhead shrike _____	3,600,000	Black-headed grosbeak _____	4,100,000
Warbling vireo _____	18,000,000	House finch _____	17,000,000
Steller's jay _____	3,900,000	Evening grosbeak _____	5,700,000

About the Oregon Habitat Joint Venture

The Oregon Habitat Joint Venture is a coalition of private organizations working with government agencies to protect and restore wetlands and other important habitats through voluntary, cooperative efforts.

The joint venture helps put together partnerships for a variety of habitat conservation projects, including habitat restoration and enhancement on private and public lands, acquisition of key areas for permanent protection, and educational and interpretive programs.

This newsletter is published by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife on behalf of the Oregon Habitat Joint Venture. Publication and mailing costs are covered in part with funding provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Pacific Coast Joint Venture) and Ducks Unlimited.

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This material will be furnished in alternate format for people with disabilities if needed. Please call 503-872-5260 (voice) or 503-872-5259 (Portland TTY) to request.

The Oregon Habitat Joint Venture coordinates state-level activities for two regional partnerships implementing the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and other continental bird conservation initiatives.

The Pacific Coast Joint Venture, created in 1991, includes all of western Oregon, as well as coastal British Columbia, Washington, northern California, Alaska, and Hawaii. The Intermountain West Joint Venture, begun in 1995, covers eastern Oregon and portions of nine other western states.

Steering Committee

Audubon Society of Portland
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
Greenbelt Land trust
McKenzie River Trust
North Coast Land Conservancy
Oregon Duck Hunters Association
Oregon Farm Bureau
Oregon Trout
South Coast Land Conservancy
The Nature Conservancy
The Trust for Public Land
The Wetlands Conservancy
Western Rivers Conservancy

Cooperating Agencies

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Oregon Division of State Lands
Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
Oregon Department of Transportation
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Forest Service
Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Natural Resources Conservation Service
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