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Partners in the Willamette River Basin mark recent accomplishments in conserving land for wildlife and fish

Salem, Ore. – An eclectic mix of utilities, non-profit organizations, municipalities and Northwest Native American tribes gathered last week to mark several recent land acquisitions in the Willamette River Basin and celebrate the landmark agreement that continues to enable effective partnership between Bonneville Power Administration, the state of Oregon and other partners.

Against the backdrop of the recently purchased 307-acre Minto Island, adjacent to downtown Salem, Ore., the group received a progress report on the Willamette Wildlife Agreement.

“This is truly a huge partnership effort,” said Lorri Bodi, vice president of Environment, Fish and Wildlife for BPA. “Both the state of Oregon and BPA have a rich history in preserving and restoring habitat for the betterment of fish and wildlife – often these lands, like Minto Island, benefit both.”

Signed in 2010 between BPA and Oregon, the Willamette Wildlife Agreement clearly established how the federal marketer of energy would mitigate for hydropower projects along the Willamette River and its tributaries.

Recognizing nearly 10,000 acres of land acquisitions that had already been or were in the process of being completed in the Willamette River Basin, the agreement lays out funding for 15-years with a goal of an additional 16,880 acres of mitigation. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife develops and certifies a list of potential acquisitions for the agreement.

In the past two years, ODFW and BPA have protected more than 3,000 acres. With an additional 2,000 acres planned in the coming year, that brings the total to 5,000 acres in the span of three years – nearly one-third of the program’s initial goal.

Lands acquired under the agreement are permanently preserved for the benefit of wildlife and fish species. But the story doesn’t necessarily end there. Often the acquisitions become sites for future restoration work and public spaces for wildlife viewing and passive education. For more information on how and why BPA participates in land purchases, see [BPA works with willing sellers to secure habitat for fish and wildlife.](#)

At Minto Island, for instance, the city of Salem is developing plans to continue enhancing the land’s conservation values for wetland and riparian habitat, bottomland hardwood forests and upland meadows. The City also plans to begin construction of a permanent trail that connects to the broader Minto-Brown Island Park trail network and a foot bridge that will connect Minto Island to the Riverfront Park in the downtown area. These planned pedestrian and bike connections and the recent acquisition on Minto Island will connect over 1400 acres of parks and natural area.

“This project is a perfect example of how collaboration weaves throughout the community,” said Anna Peterson, mayor of Salem. “It takes more than one city, one state agency or one department. This project would not have been possible without support throughout the community.”

One of the integral components to the Willamette Wildlife Agreement is the security of guaranteed funding for the duration of the agreement.

“All the good intent in the world won’t plant a single tree, reconnect floodplain to a river channel or complete a conservation real estate transaction. A program of this sort takes money,” Bodi said. “This program doesn’t get any taxpayer money or congressional appropriations. BPA’s electricity ratepayers provide this funding for the betterment of our region’s ecological and economic health and quality of life.”

One such ratepayer, the Salem Electric has provided energy to a portion of Salem for 72 years. Terry Kelly, the assistant general manager for the cooperative, said his organization has long recognized the value of being an engaged participant in efforts to improve the greater Salem area.

“The Minto Island project enhances the value of the community – we’re proud to be a part of this,” Kelly said. “It’s good to see that our funds are being used to conserve land for the benefit of fish and wildlife and also to benefit the quality of life for the city of Salem.”

In many instances, land acquisitions in the Willamette River Basin also present recreational opportunities for a public wishing to reconnect with nature.

“There’s nothing more important than connecting people and communities with fish and wildlife habitat,” said Roy Elicker, director of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

His thoughts were echoed by Bob Keefer of the Willamalane Parks and Recreation District. He spoke about a recent acquisition of Thurston Hills in partnership with The Trust for Public Land and the role the land played in the Rivers to Ridges Partnership in the communities of Eugene and Springfield, Ore.

“We’re losing a generation of kids who are not involved, not connected with nature,” Keefer said. “We continue to look for ways to reconnect our adults and our children and our families to the land.”

The \$3.6 million funding for the purchase of Thurston Hills by Willamalane Parks and Recreation District came largely from a community-driven bond measure from Springfield with BPA funding \$500,000 to cover a conservation easement on the property. The 106 acres are located outside of Springfield, in Lane County, and include oak woodlands, oak savannas and upland prairie habitat. The land is also adjacent to several other protected properties that help to increase wildlife connectivity throughout the area.

A third recent land acquisition took place north of Portland, Ore., on Sauvie Island in Columbia County. Flight’s End previously had been owned by a private duck hunting club that had operated for more than 80 years. Now it will be owned and managed by ODFW.

The 100 acres is home to numerous wildlife species, including northern red-legged frog, willow flycatcher, migrating waterfowl, neotropical migratory songbirds, raptors, amphibians, wading birds, and mammals like black-tailed deer and river otters. It also has conservation value for steelhead and chinook and coho salmon. The value is further enhanced by its direct connection to the Sauvie Island Wildlife Area, which will allow for efficient, long-term management and protection.

“It’s a tremendous piece of property,” Elicker said. “It brings a lot into the public in terms of public access and restoration values.”

WILLAMETTE WILDLIFE AGREEMENT

Signed in 2010 between the Bonneville Power Administration and the state of Oregon, the agreement recognizes the need for 26,537 acres of mitigation to offset the impacts of federal hydropower projects in the Willamette River Basin. Some 9,657 acres of existing mitigation were credited under the agreement, leaving at least 16,880 additional acres needed. The funding for the 15-year agreement comes from BPA electric ratepayers.

Partners working under the agreement include ODFW, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, city of Eugene, city of Salem, the Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land, McKenzie River Trust, Greenbelt Land Trust, Western Rivers Conservancy, Yamhill Soil and Water Conservation District, Willamalane Parks and Recreation District and Ducks Unlimited.

IMAGES

High quality images are available on Flickr for the three projects in question – Minto Island, Thurston Hills and Flight’s End –at the following link:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bonnevillepower/sets/>

BPA is a nonprofit federal agency that markets renewable hydropower from federal Columbia Basin dams, operates three-quarters of high-voltage transmission lines in the Northwest and funds one of the largest wildlife protection and restoration programs in the world. BPA and its partners have also saved enough electricity through energy efficiency projects to power four large American cities. For more information, contact us at 503-230-5131 or visit www.bpa.gov.

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