

# State of the River Report 2003



## WILLAMETTE RIVER

(OREGON)

The Willamette River has 13 major tributaries and drains approximately 12,000 square miles, almost one eighth of Oregon's total area. The Willamette River is the tenth largest river in the continental U.S. in total discharge, with over 24 million acre-feet annually. The 187-mile main stem of the Willamette River extends from its source south of Eugene, northward to the Columbia River at Portland. There are approximately 16,000 total stream miles in the basin. The Willamette River basin is the fastest growing and most economically developed region of the state.

The Willamette basin has long been a place of beauty, where the meandering Willamette River and its tributaries were surrounded by diverse landscapes of wetlands, prairies, and forests. Its multiple resources and myriad uses still reflect the high quality of life for which Oregon is celebrated. The basin encompasses a variety of landscapes; rivers and streams, wetlands and riparian areas, cultivated valleys, developed urban areas, and forested uplands.



Credit: USGS

### KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The success of the Willamette American Heritage River Initiative (AHRI) is based on local support and collaboration that has forged effective community partnerships. The Willamette AHRI was nominated by the State of Oregon's Willamette Restoration Initiative (WRI), which has continued as the primary community partner. The Willamette AHRI has consistently displayed leadership in the Willamette Basin, helping to reconnect communities with the river and developing a vision for river revitalization and restoration.

As a direct result of the Willamette River's designation, Oregon has leveraged the federal investment of a the cost of a River Navigator for financial returns to local communities at a 4:1 ratio. Currently, there are several potential funding applications pending that would increase this ratio. The Willamette AHRI provided funding for local needs by:

- Obtaining \$225,000 to support watershed groups over a three-year period.
- Obtaining more than \$60,000 for Perwinkle Creek restoration in Albany.
- Obtaining \$250,000 to provide technical support and assistance to local watershed groups.
- Writing more than \$2.5 million in grant applications.
- Identifying additional funding opportunities and making connections to fund future projects.

**Coordination of the Willamette Technical Assistance Program (TAP):** The Willamette AHRI worked with Willamette Restoration Initiative to secure a \$250,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for technical assistance within the Willamette Basin. The Technical Assistance Program was created to increase the capacity of watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, public agencies, and citizens groups to develop, fund and implement Willamette Basin watershed restoration activities through the efficient and effective provision of technical information and assistance. The Willamette River Navigator serves as the Coordinator for the TAP. It is one of three work plan action items for the Willamette Provincial Interagency Executive Committee (PIEC). In addition, the TAP assisted For Sake of Salmon with its technical assistance directory and Healthy Stream Partnership Technical Assistance Report.

**Creation of the Mid-Willamette River Connections Workgroup:** This workgroup enhances connections with River communities; celebrates the river's history, culture, and its unique natural environment; identifies opportunities to support economic vitality and increased tourism; and promotes recreational experiences and educational opportunities. The Willamette AHRI assisted in the creation of this workgroup, helped secure present and future National Park Service (RTCA) assistance with this effort, and has played a significant role in recent accomplishments, including completion of Willamette River Open Houses held in Salem, Corvallis, and Dundee in October and November, 2002. About 180 people attended the Open Houses, where they shared their connections interests and concerns, recorded their input on questionnaires and large-format maps, and had a chance to talk with local experts. In addition, this group organized Willamette River Day in coordination with Oregon State Parks, to increase awareness and galvanize support for river-related community efforts. The Willamette AHRI co-sponsored this event.

**Community Assistance:** The Willamette AHRI has recently provided assistance to the cities of Independence, Milwaukee, Dundee, Albany, Keizer, and Salem, in addition to the Counties of Benton, Clackamas, and Yamhill. Support included funding research, grant writing assistance, letters of support for community efforts and grants, and integration of community goals with other efforts. Several other Willamette Basin communities are in consultation to receive assistance in the near future.

**Watershed Council Assistance:** The Willamette AHRI has provided direct assistance to several Willamette Watershed Councils. Recent consultations include the Scappoose Watershed Council for funding assistance with fish barriers projects, (including creation of a funding design template for other Watershed Councils) the McKenzie Watershed Council for funding assistance with several projects, and Mary's River Watershed Council for technical assistance through the Willamette TAP efforts with the Benton County Soil & Water Conservation District. In addition, a Business Plan was created for all Watershed Councils to use in coordination with their Action Plans.



*Community Open House, Corvallis, Oregon*

**Willamette River Interpretative Sign Project:** The Willamette AHRI led a group of local communities to develop and implement a system of watershed restoration interpretive signs while providing assistance to a collaborative effort to use interpretive signs to tell the story of watershed restoration efforts in Corvallis, Albany, Salem and Eugene. Funds provided by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Portland General Electric will help to design and construct signs to describe restoration projects at highly visited locations. The long term goal is for a network of educational sites which could be incorporated into a brochure and website for a “restoration tour.” Several signs are in place today, and the existing template can be used for future efforts along the river.



*Willamette River Navigator Mark Brown (right) and Alan Pennington, City of Salem, at site of new Willamette watershed sign at Minto-Brown Park.*

**River Cites Conference:** In 2002, the Willamette AHRI helped create this effort that convened representatives from Willamette Basin communities to explore what it means to be a Willamette River City in the 21st Century. Communities shared their visions, described project-by-project how they are advancing on that vision, and explained the lessons they have learned in terms of planning, funding, and the practicalities of riverfront revitalization. Experts on river ecology, river history, river tourism, and riverfront revitalization provided insights into the Willamette of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

**Presentation and Exhibit at the River Network 2003 National River Rally:** The Willamette AHRI organized an AHRI session at the annual River Rally conference which is run by the national technical assistance organization, River Network, with presentations on the Connecticut AHRI, Willamette AHRI, as well as related activities of the NW Regional Team of Coastal America. The Willamette AHRI and Coastal America also put together a joint exhibit.

**Hyas-Tyee Tumwater Community Dinner & River Tour in Oregon City:** The Willamette River Navigator helped WRI in organizing this event. It was sponsored by the Clackamas County Commissioners and attended by 60 people, including five mayors from lower River cities. This event stimulated interest in a collaborative vision for this region of the Willamette River.



*Willamette River Day 2003*

**Paddle Oregon and Willamette River Day:** The Willamette AHRI contributed to the first “Paddle Oregon” float down the Willamette River and helped support and sponsor the event. The Willamette AHRI led local groups in hosting a very successful Willamette River Day with over 70 people participating.

**EPA/Watershed Council Habitat Priority Mapping Project:** The Willamette AHRI worked with this EPA ongoing project designed to provide both a map of habitat priorities for the Mary’s River Watershed Council and a template for other Watershed Councils.

**Oregon State Parks, Willamette Greenway Planning:** The Willamette AHRI was invited by Oregon State Parks to assist with the community outreach associated with the Willamette Greenway planning update.

**Willamette Falls FERC Re-licensing:** The Willamette AHRI was invited by Portland Gas & Electric to participate in the FERC re-licensing process to help address the cultural and historic aspects of the project. The re-licensing process is a unique opportunity to leverage resources and implement community goals.

**Appointment to the Keizer Task Force:** The Willamette AHRI has been asked to participate in this effort to increase public access to existing riverfront property in the City of Keizer and secure funding to manage the property to fit identified community goals.

**Coastal America Co-Chair:** The Willamette River Navigator was appointed as Co-Chair of the Coastal American Northwest Regional Implementation Team. Recent efforts include development of a Corporate Wetlands Corporate Partnership and possible collaboration with the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board on watershed projects in the Willamette Basin.

## FUTURE CHALLENGES

Reflecting on the original goals and challenges outlined in the 2001 State of the River Report, the Willamette American Heritage River has successfully worked with local communities to address several important issues, but there are still many significant challenges ahead. The Willamette AHRI will continue to:

- Link local communities to the river,
- Focus on implementation of the Willamette Technical Assistance Program, and
- Develop a Willamette River Water Trail.

The Willamette River Navigator will expand ongoing collaborations with the local community partner, Willamette Restoration Initiative, to complement existing federal, state, and local agency river-related efforts in the Willamette Basin, and identify strategic opportunities for collaboration.

## WEBSITES

[www.oregonwri.org/ahr.html](http://www.oregonwri.org/ahr.html)  
[www.epa.gov/rivers/98rivers/willamette.html](http://www.epa.gov/rivers/98rivers/willamette.html)

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