

LUCKIAMUTE STATE NATURAL AREA

DRAFT MASTER PLAN SUMMARY

An Important Place To Protect

Luckiamute State Natural Area occupies roughly 900 acres of river floodplain where the Luckiamute and Santiam Rivers join the Willamette, about 23 miles upriver from Salem. With recent land acquisitions that have added to the original Luckiamute Landing Greenway parcel, the park's two separate tracts now include about three miles of frontage on the Willamette River's west bank. The Luckiamute flows through about one mile of the park's north tract, entering the Willamette at the northern tip of the park, less than a quarter mile downriver from the mouth of the Santiam which enters the Willamette from the east. Although flood control projects have greatly reduced the extent and frequency of major floods, frequent flooding still occurs over large areas of the park, and most of the park is inundated in major flood events. A flat to undulating floodplain landscape, marked by levees, ridges, abandoned meander channels and depressions, reflects the long history of fluvial activity.



Agricultural fields, some of which are still farmed under lease agreements, have replaced half of the park's forests, and other past land use activities such as gravel extraction and filling and draining of wetlands are also evident. Despite historic land uses, a variety of native fish, reptile, amphibian, bird and mammal species, some of which have become increasingly rare in the Willamette Valley, inhabit the park's natural and human-altered landscapes.



The riparian forest in the north part of the park represents some of the best remaining bottomland forest habitat in the valley. Various songbirds frequent the oak woodlands that remain on some of the higher ridges and terraces, and some find suitable nesting habitat in the park. Old river channels and other depressions fill with water during normal high rainfall periods, and surface water persists in a number of ponds, sloughs and emergent wetlands that support a variety of wetland and floating aquatic plants. Red-legged frogs are known to inhabit the park, and ponds in the south tract support one of the valley's largest remaining populations of western pond turtles.

Native riparian forests, wetlands, oak woodlands, and prairie habitats have been reduced to a fraction of their historic abundance in the Willamette Valley. Conservation groups and natural resource scientists regard this river confluence as one of the high priority locations for restoring native habitats and multiple ecological functions of the river floodplain. Restoration projects are already underway over much of the park with the help of restoration grants and partnership agreements.



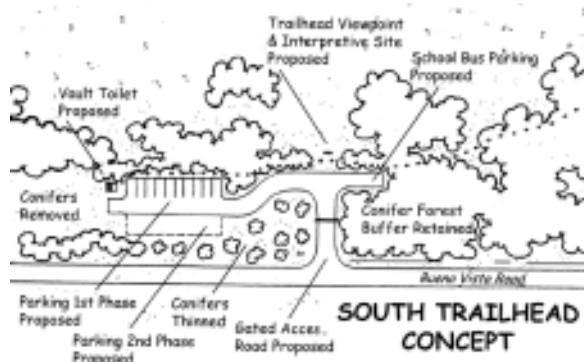
A Popular Place To Recreate

Information on recreation trends illustrates the rapidly growing popularity of activities associated with natural area settings, such as hiking, wildlife viewing and other nature study. River paddlers also value natural settings that are accessible by canoe or kayak. The park's existing boat landing and primitive camp on the Willamette River are expected to increase in popularity with use of the Willamette Water Trail, and paddlers have recommended providing a place with vehicular access where canoes and kayaks can be launched on the Luckiamute River. The park has also been identified as a priority site for interpreting floodplain functions, ecological resources and restoration efforts for visitor education and enjoyment. Facilities are needed to support the low impact recreation uses and related management and maintenance activities that are appropriate for the park.



A Concept for the Future

The master plan for Luckiamute State Natural Area presents concepts for providing recreation access and related management and maintenance facilities, protecting important natural, cultural and scenic resources, and restoring native habitats in the park. The master plan proposals respond to the assessments of resource conditions and recreation needs, and related issues and professional recommendations that were compiled during the planning process.



The key master plan proposals include:

- Retain the Luckiamute Landing boat-in camp on the Willamette River.
- Develop a paddlers' access on the Luckiamute River. Provide overnight parking for multi-day river trips. (6 dayuse spaces, 4 overnight spaces.)
- Enlarge the north trailhead. (10 spaces total.)
- Relocate and enlarge the south trailhead. Include an interpretive viewpoint. (20 spaces total, in two phases, plus 1 school bus space.)
- Expand and formalize the north and south trail systems with trail loops that provide views of the river and other natural features while protecting sensitive habitats.
- Provide interpretive signage in the trail system to interpret the floodplain landscape and its ecological and cultural values and restoration efforts.
- Develop an accessible wildlife viewing site and fishing platform at the west pond.
- Establish park administration facilities using the existing buildings on the former Willamette Botanicals property.
- Use one of the two existing dwellings in the park to house park staff. In the future, consider using the Baker house to support environmental learning field school activities in cooperation with local universities.
- Provide facilities to support volunteer park hosts to support visitor services and oversight.
- Continue supporting existing viable projects for floodplain habitat protection and restoration. Pursue opportunities for additional projects for restoring native habitats, promoting recovery of sensitive species, and controlling invasive weeds.

Although it will take many years for floodplain restoration projects to become well established, Luckiamute State Natural Area is already becoming recognized as a place where valley residents can enjoy the recreational experiences of a natural area setting by traveling a short distance from home. OPRD is proud to add this new park to the state park system.