

Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission

April 27, 2016

Agenda Item: 8a

Action

Topic: Natural Areas Registration – Mill Creek Ridge

Presented by: Trevor Taylor, Stewardship Section Manager

Background: 2011 Senate Bill 58 transferred the State Natural Areas Program from the Department of State Lands (DSL) to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD). OPRD is now responsible for processing nominations/petitions received to voluntarily add lands of a variety of ownerships to the register of State Natural Areas.

“Registration” and “dedication” are two vehicles for inclusion of properties on the register, with dedication being the more permanent arrangement. Privately owned lands that are registered or dedicated receive a waiver of land use conversion property taxes. Publicly-owned lands are registered because of ecological value without receiving a tax benefit. In all cases of registration or dedication, the subject properties are required to be of high or unique ecological value. The types of habitat that are eligible for inclusion on the register are described and cataloged in the State Natural Areas Plan as “ecosystem elements”. When enough examples of a particular ecosystem element are registered, that type is considered adequately represented and further registrations are no longer allowed for that element.

Per legislation, the steps in processing registration nominations are as follows: OPRD Stewardship staff and the Oregon Biodiversity Information Center (or a convened review board, at OPRD discretion) collaboratively review petitions for meeting the requirements of the State Natural Area Plan. If the subject property meets the requirements and intent of the Plan, OPRD Stewardship staff bring the proposal for registration to the Parks Commission for final decision regarding registration.

In December of 2014, OPRD staff received a petition to register a private parcel in Wasco County. A brief description of the property, its ecological value, context, and reasons for registration are included as attachments. Staff has reviewed the petition and has concluded that the subject property is of high ecological value and meets the intent of the State Natural Areas Plan.

Prior Action by the Commission: Contiguous property also owned by Columbia Land Trust was registered by the Commission in February 2015. This addition adds to and links previously non-contiguous Columbia Land Trust properties.

Action Requested: Staff recommend that the Commission approve the addition of the Natural Area into the registry of State Natural Areas.

Attachments: yes

Prepared by: Noel Bacheller

OREGON PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
OREGON REGISTER OF NATURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES
SUMMARY FORM

1. NATURAL AREA NAME: Mill Creek Ridge Conservation Area – Paintbrush Meadows
2. LOCATION: Wasco County, Township 1N, Range 12E, Section 11
3. SIZE: 115 acres
4. OWNERSHIP: Columbia Land Trust
5. CONSENT OF OWNER (PRIVATE), DATE: March 1, 2016
6. REGISTER CATEGORY: State Natural Area
7. PRINCIPAL NATURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES: East Cascades Ecoregion: Grasslands and Shrubland Steppe- #45. Bluebunch wheatgrass-Sandberg bluegrass, Special Types - #53 Ponderosa pine-Oregon white oak woodland.

8. SPECIAL SPECIES: The site has a population of the priority species, Lewis' woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*). The site has also been identified as a location for potential restoration of two other, high priority species, White meconella (*Meconella oregana*) and Dalles Mt. buttercup (*Ranunculus reconditus*).

9. EVALUATION OF CRITERIA FOR REGISTRATION
 - A. PRIORITY IN PLAN: # 53 is an unfilled, high priority need (page 112). There are no other sites in north central Oregon (except the adjacent Mill Creek Ridge – Oak Savanna site registered in 2015) listed for Lewis woodpecker.

 - B. ADEQUATE REPRESENTATION: The overall Mill Creek Ridge area provides adequate representation for the Ponderosa pine – Oregon white oak woodland. However, the area being registered is too small to adequately represent this site. However, it provides additional acreage to the adjacent Mill Creek Ridge – Oak Savanna site that was registered in 2015.

 - C. DEGREE OF DISTURBANCE: This site has not been grazed for approximately 20 years and is less disturbed than the adjacent Mill Creek Ridge – Oak Savanna site that was registered in 2015. Non-native plant species are the most significant ecological concern yet the site still supports a high diversity of native grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees.

 - D. VIABILITY: This site is one property within a complex of other protected properties on Mill Creek Ridge, totaling over 400 acres. This site will be managed along with the others to reduce weed cover and encourage native species to flourish.

 - E. UNIQUE GEOLOGICAL VALUES: None.

 - F. PRIORITY FOR SPECIAL SPECIES: Lewis woodpecker is a List 2 species.

 - G. SPECIAL SPECIES PROTECTION CAPABILITY: The overall site provides excellent capacity to protect the Lewis woodpecker. The ability to restore the other at-risk species is unknown.

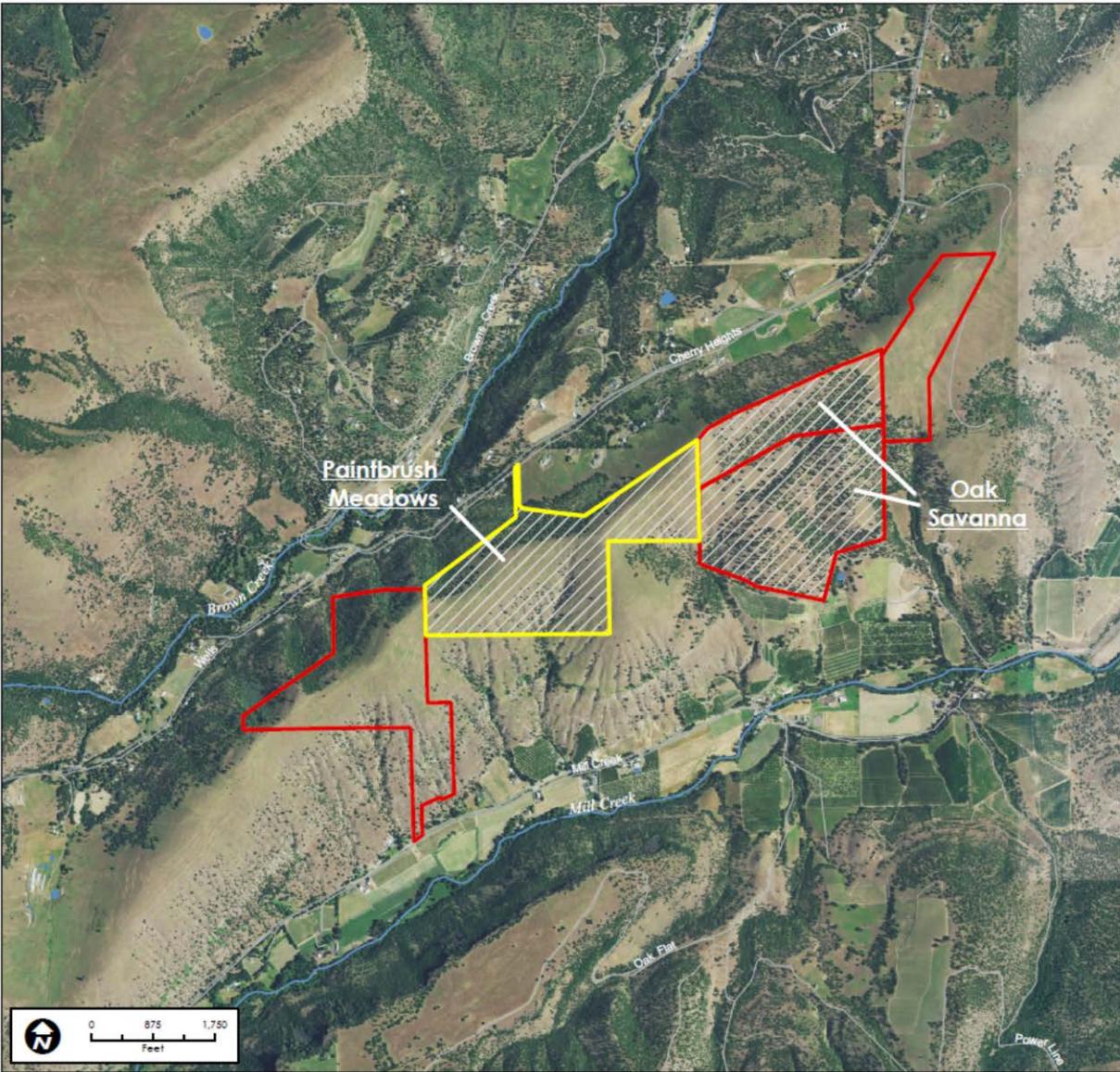
H. MANAGEABILITY: Columbia Land Trust will manage this property in conjunction with the additional 303 acres owned by the Trust. A management plan formulated by the Trust identifies appropriate actions to steward the Ridge to meet the conservation purposes of the project.

10. SPECIAL REMARKS OR COMMENTS: The property has been acquired by Columbia Land Trust to assure that this large tract of oak/pine woodland/prairie is conserved. It is within the Wasco Oaks Conservation Opportunity Area as designated in the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

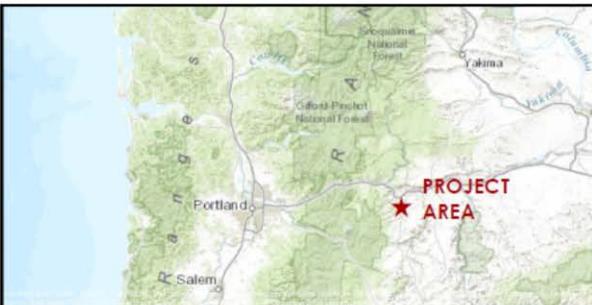
12. DATE OF ORBIC STAFF APPROVAL: March 8, 2016.

13. SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Oregon Biodiversity Information Center, Mailstop: INR, PO Box 751, Portland, OR 97207. Columbia Land Trust – 1351 Officers' Row, Vancouver, WA 98661 360 213-1207

14. VALUE OF NATURAL AREA IN LAY TERMS: South of The Dalles, rising between the populated riparian corridors of Brown's Creek and Mill Creek is a prominent ridge that extends from the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area eight miles south to the boundary of the Mt. Hood National Forest. Situated in the ecological transition zone between the East Cascades and the Columbia Plateau, the ridge is a mosaic of mature Oregon white oak/Ponderosa pine woodlands and expansive native grasslands replete with perennial bunchgrasses and diverse forbs. The floristic diversity of the property (there are over 90 species of native plants documented in the conservation area) is writ also in the skies with over 50 species of birds including Vaux's swift, western bluebird, a host of raptors, neotropical migratory songbirds, and the iconic western meadowlark. The area is identified by ODFW as a Conservation Opportunity Area for key oak and grassland habitats and key species including Lewis' woodpecker, ash-throated flycatcher and western gray squirrel, all found on the property. The area provides critical winter range for mule deer. Habitats here are sensitive to disturbance yet their beauty is attractive to people too. The subject property is zoned to be divided into 10-acre residential lots, so the establishment of the area as a preserve by the Columbia Land Trust will assure these natural values persist.



12/21/2015



- Paintbrush Meadows (115.2 Acres)
- OWEB Conservation Easement
- Columbia Land Trust - Conserved Lands

Data Sources:
 (1) Aerial Imagery - NAIP 2015
 (2) Parcels - Wasco County 2013

This map is not a survey and must not be construed as one. This product is for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for, or be suitable for legal, engineering or surveying purposes. Users should consult primary data and informational sources for further details.



March 7, 2016

Columbia
LAND TRUST

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
725 Summer Street NE, Ste. C
Salem, OR 97301

MAIN OFFICE
1351 Officers' Row
Vancouver, WA 98661
(360) 696-0131
(503) 224-3601
Fax (360) 696-1847
www.columbialandtrust.org

Re: Oregon Register of Natural Heritage Resources

PORTLAND OFFICE
1001 SE Water Avenue Ste. 455
Portland, OR 97214
(503) 841-5918

Dear Parks and Recreation Commission:

ASTORIA OFFICE
750 Commercial Street, Room 208
Astoria, OR 97103
(503) 338-5263
Fax (503) 338-1277

In February 2015, 160 acres of land, part of the Mill Creek Ridge Conservation Area in Wasco County, was placed on the Oregon Register of Natural Heritage Resources. In February 2016, The Land Trust acquired the adjacent 115 acres.

HOOD RIVER OFFICE
216 Cascade Avenue, Suite B
Hood River, OR 97031
(541) 436-4210

The Land Trust is requesting that this property be added to the Registry as part of the Mill Creek Ridge Conservation Area. The property is called Paintbrush Meadows and is a beautiful example of a Ponderosa pine and Oregon white oak woodland in the East Cascades Ecoregion. Columbia Land Trust purchased this property for conservation purposes and intends to manage it for wildlife habitat, passive recreation and scientific study.

PRESIDENT
Carolyn Vogt

VICE PRESIDENT
Betsy Henning

SECRETARY
Jim Thayer

TREASURER
Steve Shields

Sincerely,

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dave Beckett
Jerry Boehm
Debbie Craig
Greg Dardis
Jim Hook
Paul King
Paul Lumley
Marc Smiley

Scott McEwen
Conservation Director

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Glenn Lamb



Printed on recycled

Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission

April 27, 2016

Agenda Item:	8b	Information
Topic:	Western Snowy Plover Update	
Presented by:	Trevor Taylor, Stewardship Section Manager	

Background: In 2010 OPRD signed the Western Snowy Plover Habitat Conservation Plan, a strategy that marries recreation on the Ocean Shore with the conservation of a threatened species. In cooperation with many partners, 16 management areas (see map) were designated for snowy plover recovery actions totaling approximately 48 miles of the 230 miles of sandy beach. Habitat restoration, predator management, public outreach, and recreation management are the common tools used across the entire Oregon coast to assist recovery, and efforts are streamlined through the Western Snowy Plover Working Team. The Working Team is comprised of representatives from Endangered Species Act regulatory agencies (USFWS and ODFW), the land managers of each of the 16 designated plover management areas (BLM, OPRD, USACE, and USFS), and the contracted organizations for population monitoring (ORBIC) and predator management (Wildlife Services). There are also two areas privately held (Elk River and Euchre River) whose land managers are not actively participating in the Working Team. Of those, Elk River is actively managing their property in cooperation with USFWS. Since OPRD has jurisdiction of the Ocean Shore, we interface with all 16 areas regarding recreation restrictions, including the three privately owned areas.

Similar techniques for habitat restoration, population monitoring, and predator management are utilized by all of the Working Team agencies. Outreach messages delivered in news releases and programs differ in context and tone, but the overall message of “Share the Beach” is carried through by all agencies. Recreation restriction enforcement also varies in implementation. OPRD utilizes a “light touch” approach and relies almost exclusively on our four beach rangers. OPRD emphasizes education as our primary strategy for ensuring compliance, resorting to citations only when faced with compliance refusal or aggressive actions by visitors. USFS takes a harder line, and also engages with a significant number of volunteer docents that patrol trails and access points to plover areas. Through 20 years of management, the Working Team has shown that presence on the beach is the best tool to gain recreation restriction compliance.

Management Update: Overall, western snowy plovers are responding positively to management. Their population has increased from 35 adults in 1992 to an estimated 449 adults in 2015.

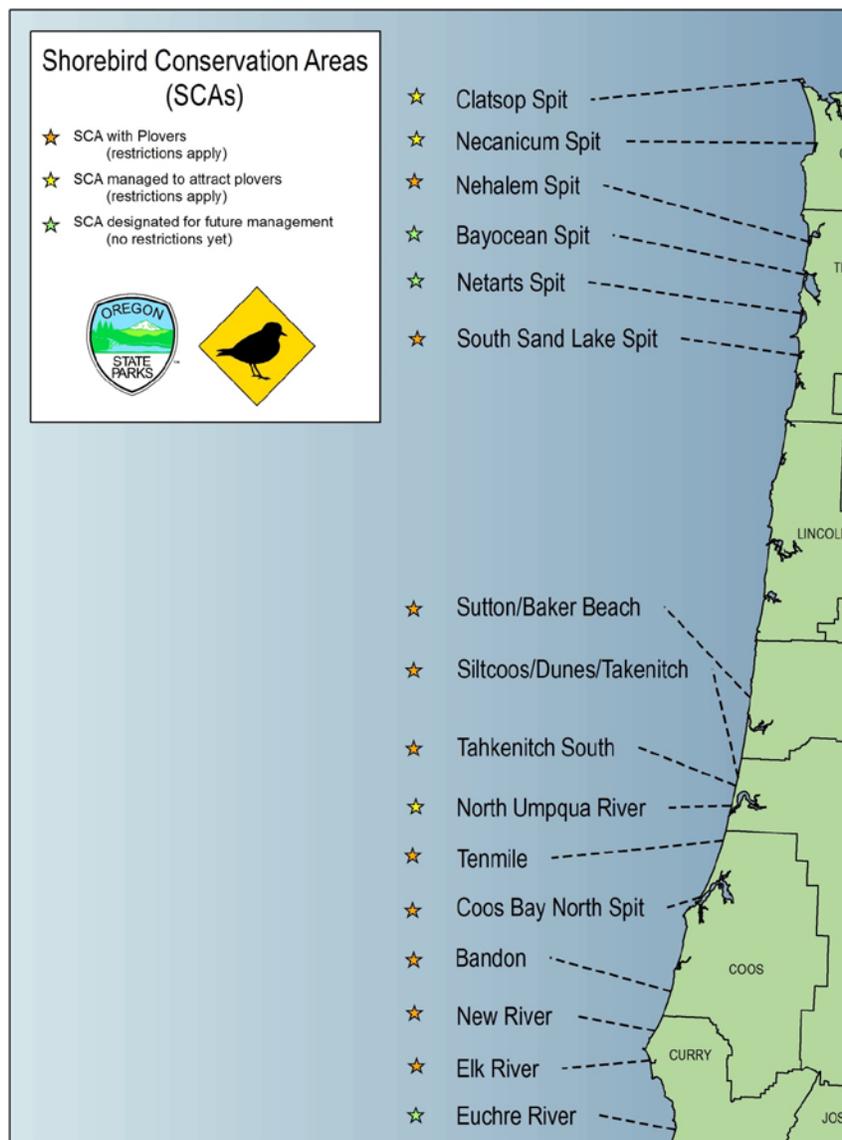
OPRD has been managing one site on the South Coast, Bandon, since 2002. Habitat restoration over the years has seen rapid plover response at this site. This winter 8 acres of new habitat was restored and already supports 6 nests.

In 2014, OPRD began managing three sites on the North Coast: Clatsop Spit at Fort Stevens, Necanicum Spit at Gearhart Recreation Area, and Nehalem Spit at Nehalem Bay. We focused heavily on outreach so the public was well informed and aware of changes on the beaches. That

effort was rewarded by snowy plovers colonizing Nehalem Spit in 2015, attempting to breed there for the first time since 1984.

In addition, snowy plovers recolonized South Sand Lake at Sitka Sedge State Natural Area this spring – also for the first time since 1984. OPRD responded by placing recreation restrictions on the northern half of the beach, and we discussing next steps with USFWS. These restrictions would have been required whether OPRD acquired Sitka Sedge or not, and it is advantageous for us to own the property as we are able to implement recreation restrictions in a way that may not occur if the property was still in private ownership. The restrictions are focused on the north end of the spit and still allow beach access from the dike.

Finally, we are also actively partnering and supporting management efforts by our federal partners on their properties.



Prior Action by Commission: None

Action Requested: None

Attachments: None

Prepared by: Vanessa Blackstone, Wildlife Biologist