



## MORE INFORMATION

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# Protecting Oregon's Natural and Fiscal Resources

*Ensuring a legacy for Oregonians  
and their public schools  
through sound stewardship of lands,  
wetlands, waterways, unclaimed property,  
estates and the Common School Fund*



## AN HISTORIC AGENCY

The Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL) is the administrative arm of the State Land Board, Oregon's oldest board. Established by the Oregon Constitution in 1859, the Land Board has been composed of the Governor, Secretary of State and State Treasurer throughout its history.

At statehood, the federal government granted Oregon 3.4 million acres – about six percent – of the new state's land to finance public education. The Constitution declares the mineral, timber and other resource rights of school lands to the Common School Fund. The State Land Board is trustee of the fund. The "land-rich, cash-poor" state sold many school lands, as state officials felt private ownership of these lands would yield more for schools through property taxes and other economic benefits.

Only about a fifth of Oregon's original acreage – 770,000 acres – now remains in state ownership. In 1991, a federal court determined that Oregon was entitled to additional land not received at statehood. DSL has been working with the federal government to obtain the remaining land, about 1,600 acres as of 2013.

## WHAT WE DO

DSL protects natural and fiscal resources by:

- **Managing lands and navigable and tidally influenced waterways** granted to Oregon at statehood.
- **Protecting the state's wetlands and waterways** – and their important ecological functions – through the removal-fill permit program.
- **Acting as trustee** for unclaimed property, and for estates with no will and no known heirs.
- **Serving as state administrative partner for the South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve** in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

DSL handles the State Land Board's day-to-day work managing resources dedicated to the Common School Fund:

- **Land:** About 630,000 acres of rangeland and agricultural land; approximately 130,000 acres of

forestland, most of which is within the Elliott State Forest (84,500 acres); and 7,000 acres of industrial, commercial and residential land.

- **Waterways:** 1.3 million acres of land under navigable and tidal waters and the Territorial Sea held in trust for public navigation, recreation, fisheries and commerce.
- **Unclaimed Property:** Abandoned assets such as bank accounts, unclaimed checks and safe deposit box contents.
- **Escheat Property:** Assets from estates with no will and no known heirs.

## DSL MANAGES LAND

DSL's Real Estate Asset Management Plan provides policy direction and management principles to guide short- and long-term management of Common School Fund lands. It describes DSL's system of seven land classes; provides an estimate of land values; and identifies performance measures to monitor returns from management activities.

The agency leases range and agricultural lands and waterways for a variety of business and recreational activities. The Oregon Department of Forestry manages Common School forestlands under an agreement with the Land Board. The addition of asset management staff in the late 2000s created real estate expertise within the agency, and expanded opportunities for managing and acquiring commercial properties.



## DSL ACTS AS TRUSTEE

### Unclaimed Property

In 1957, Oregon's legislature passed the Unclaimed Property Act, which directs DSL to hold in trust abandoned funds such as bank accounts, lost securities and uncashed checks. Holders of these funds must remit them to DSL a few years (three for most items) after efforts to contact owners have failed. Agency staff search for the owners, who may claim the funds at any time.

Unclaimed funds are held in trust in the Common School Fund until claimed by owners or their heirs. In recent years, DSL received about \$50 million in unclaimed property annually, and returned more than \$20 million per year to rightful owners.

Check the DSL website to see if we are holding money for you. We have money for one in four Oregonians!

[www.oregonstatelands.us](http://www.oregonstatelands.us)

### Estate Administration

DSL administers estates of people who die without a will and without known heirs. Agency staff search for heirs and, when none are identified, perform the duties of a personal representative to settle the estates in accordance with probate laws. If no heirs come forward within 10 years, the assets become a permanent part of the Common School Fund.



DSL holds public auctions of the contents of unclaimed safe deposit boxes.

## DSL PROTECTS WETLANDS AND WATERWAYS

### Removal-Fill Law

DSL protects the state's wetlands and waterways through administration of Oregon's removal-fill law, enacted in 1967. The law requires most activities that affect more than 50 cubic yards of material in wetlands, streams, lakes and estuaries to have a permit from DSL. Almost all activities, regardless of size, need a permit in Oregon Scenic Waterways and in streams designated "essential salmon habitat."

The permit review process involves coordination with the applicant, adjacent landowners, natural resource agencies and local governments. DSL is working with public agencies, permittees and other interested parties to improve and simplify the removal-fill permit application process.

### Wetlands

DSL implements the wetland program elements of the Wetlands Conservation Act of 1989, requiring the agency to develop a statewide wetland inventory, coordinate land use notices with local governments, and establish a wetland conservation planning program.

Wetlands Program staff provide information on wetland identification, functions, regulations and planning through publications, workshops, presentations and site visits. Staff also provide wetland expertise and delineation (mapping) review for the Removal-Fill Permit Program. The program's local planning as-



Oregon has a state benchmark of "no net loss" of freshwater wetlands and a "net gain" of tidal wetlands.



sistance and educational outreach help Oregon work towards the statewide benchmark of no net loss of wetlands.

### South Slough Reserve

DSL serves as the state administrative partner for the South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve, one of 28 reserves throughout the country. Located in Charleston near Coos Bay, it was the first national estuarine reserve, established in 1974 in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The South Slough Reserve is managed for research, public education and interpretation on estuaries (where fresh and salt water meet), and their importance to Pacific Northwest ecosystems. It comprises 1,000 acres of open water and tidelands, plus 4,000 acres of uplands needed to protect the watershed. An adjoining 1,000 acres are state-owned lands which are managed for conservation by the Reserve.



The South Slough's boating and hiking trails offer year-round outdoor recreation opportunities.

## FUNDS DISTRIBUTED TO SCHOOLS

Revenues from all agency activities are deposited in the Common School Fund, whose market value is over \$1 billion. DSL program revenues, combined with unclaimed property held in trust, comprise the principal of the fund. The State Treasurer and Oregon Investment Council manage the fund's investments.

Twice a year, earnings from investments are distributed to Oregon's 197 K-12 public school districts. The Land Board establishes the distribution formula. By law, fund distributions cannot benefit current students at the disadvantage of future students, or vice-versa.

The Oregon Department of Education sends the biannual distribution to the districts, based on each county's population of individuals aged 4-20. Recent annual distributions have ranged from \$35.2 million in 2000 to \$55.4 million in 2008. The average annual distribution from 2005 – 2013 is \$48 million.

