



News

NEWS RELEASE – *for immediate release*

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Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge Wetland Restoration Recognized with State Land Board Award

SALEM, Ore. – An extensive wetland restoration project that allows juvenile salmon to access the Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge was today honored by the State Land Board during the 18th Annual State Land Board Awards.

Governor Kate Brown, Treasurer Tobias Read, and Secretary of State Shemia Fagan recognized the Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge Wetland Restoration, a large-scale effort by many agency and community partners that installed a fish-friendly culvert and improved wetland habitats to provide the cool, calm waters young fish seek during winter and spring conditions, when flow is high and turbulent in the Willamette River.

“With great partnership comes great benefit,” said Governor Kate Brown, who presented the award. “Young salmon species can now find refuge at Oaks Bottom. Otter, beaver, amphibians, and birds have enhanced habitat. And a wild place loved by so many can now thrive and be enjoyed by Oregonians for years to come.”

Once slated for development, the 170-acre Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge is an urban ecological treasure. But for decades, a small pipe culvert blocked fish passage and water exchange between the river and wetland.

The new, larger culvert creates a more natural connection between the refuge and the Willamette River for the first time in more than a century. The 75-acre project also improved stream flow within the refuge, removed invasive plants, and created a winding channel with native vegetation and trees.

Creating this haven meant overcoming unique construction and logistical challenges with creativity and collaboration.

“The Springwater on the Willamette Trail, a major bicycle arterial in the heart of Portland, had to be closed for roughly six months,” shared Sean Bistoff, project lead from the Bureau of Environmental Services. “City staff worked with bike advocacy groups to gain support for the

project and develop detour routes. The project also disrupted a privately owned railroad, and the railroad became instrumental in delivering construction materials and equipment. Barges were also used as platforms for large cranes and for the delivery of culvert sections to the site.”

The project took major coordination and cooperation between many partners. The Portland Bureau of Environmental Services, Portland Parks & Recreation, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers led the effort, with state regulatory partners that included the Department of State Lands and Department of Fish and Wildlife, and community partners such as the Sellwood-Moreland Improvement League, the Oaks Amusement Park, the Oregon Yacht Club, Portland Audubon and the Urban Greenspaces Institute. Tetra-Tech, Inc. performed design services for the project.

Creation of a viewing platform and overlook also expanded community access to the refuge, further connecting Oregonians to nature in their backyard.

“From the wildlife viewing platform and overlook, the community could observe fish and wildlife returning to the refuge, newly planted native shrubs and trees taking root, and other dynamic signs of a successful restoration in progress,” said Department of State Lands Director Vicki Walker.

The project, completed in 2018, finished required monitoring in 2021 and thereby became eligible for Land Board Award nomination.

The State Land Board Awards honor exceptional projects and partners for their contributions to protecting and enhancing Oregon’s treasured natural resources. View the awards ceremony on the Department of State Lands [YouTube Channel](#).

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About the State Land Board

The State Land Board consists of Governor Kate Brown, Secretary of State Shemia Fagan and State Treasurer Tobias Read. Established by the Oregon Constitution in 1859, the Land Board oversees the state’s Common School Fund.

About the Department of State Lands

The Department of State Lands is the Land Board’s administrative agency, managing the lands and resources that help fund Oregon’s public schools and protecting the state’s waterways and wetlands for the many benefits they provide. For more information on DSL, visit www.oregon.gov/DSL.