



News

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State Land Board Awards Honor Exceptional Projects, Partners

SALEM, Ore. – The State Land Board today honored five projects and partners for their exceptional contributions to thriving Oregon waterways, wetlands, and lands.

“While their contributions are unique from one another, these five projects have a common thread: leading the way for others,” said Governor Tina Kotek, who presented the awards with State Treasurer Tobias Read.

Since the State Land Board Awards were established in 2004, the Land Board has presented more than 40 awards, recognizing extraordinary efforts in every region of Oregon.

The 2023 honored projects and partners are:

Wetland Award – Palensky-McCarthy Creek Restoration Project, Multnomah County

Palensky Wildlife Area provides incredibly important floodplain habitat for native species, including western painted turtles, northern red legged frogs, and thirteen salmon species.

Changes to the landscape over time created pockets of floodplain habitat that weren’t connected to the bigger river system. Salmon couldn’t reach the habitat. Native animals and plants struggled, but invasive species thrived.

The Palensky-McCarthy Creek Restoration Project changed that, reconnecting more than 280 acres of floodplain habitat to Multnomah Channel for the first time in more than 150 years. Work included removing culverts, adding bridges, and carving swales into the landscape.

“This is the ultimate feel-good project because you put all this work into it and then you get to see the direct result: the native plants, salmon, the amphibians and reptiles returning to the site and directly benefiting from the work that we’ve done to restore these wetland habitats,” said Jason R. Smith, senior habitat restoration project manager with the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce, which led the project.

The project is a treasure trove of best practices, including an innovative approach to targeting invasive reed canary grass. By lowering the elevation of marshes infested with reed canary grass, those areas are more frequently flooded, creating optimal growing conditions for wapato and native rushes.

CREST's project partners included the Bonneville Power Administration, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources Conservation Service, West Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District, Wolf Water Resources, PC Trask and Associates, BCI Contracting, and the Enyart family.

"Because this project was targeting so many species, we really leaned on the specialization provided by our partners to understand best practices for bringing this landscape of artificially isolated floodplains back into a wetlands system," Smith said.

Stream Award – Wade Creek Restoration, Clackamas County

In the 1960s, Wade Creek, a tributary of the Clackamas River that runs through the City of Estacada, was converted to a pond. With that change came warmer water, bacteria, and invasive plants and species like blackberries and bullfrogs.

The pond also impacted the effectiveness of the adjacent floodplain. In 2009, during a flash flood, the pond overflowed into Estacada's library.

Bringing back Wade Creek was at the heart of the city's multi-year effort to address problems with the pond while also creating community. Work included restoring the historic course of the creek to provide improved passage for salmon species throughout their life cycle, adding native plants along the bank to shade and cool the creek, and eliminating steep slopes to create a working floodplain.

"Restoring Wade Creek is a great example of a project resulting in ecological and community uplift," said John van Staveren, President of Pacific Habitat Services. "From the initial design to final construction and planting, the City of Estacada's project team delivered a project that improved fish and wildlife habitat, stream function, and multiple community benefits."

The restoration project also added accessible walking trails and a boardwalk to the adjacent park and public library, an amphitheater and community gathering space, stormwater rain gardens, and a pollinator garden.

Fifteen years after that flash flood, the restored Wade Creek anchors a place for the community to gather, learn, and celebrate.

"The restoration of Wade Creek completes the 20-year community vision for the Wade Creek Park Complex," said Estacada City Manager Melanie Wagner. "It has been great to increase public access to the area so our community can learn about the history of the site and observe the environmental stewardship of the creek while spending time with family and friends."

The project was led by Greenworks, with Otak and Pacific Habitat Services, and partners SeaReach and Keystone Contracting Inc.

Stream Award – Wilson Haun Wallowa River Project: Restoring Natural Processes for Salmon and Steelhead, Wallowa County

Restoring the milelong stretch of Wallowa River that runs through their family ranch near Lostine realized a longtime dream for Ian and Heidi Wilson. The ranch has been home to five generations of Wilson and Haun families. And the river is home to many fish species, including Chinook salmon, summer steelhead, and bull trout.

In partnership with Trout Unlimited and Grande Ronde Model Watershed, the family worked to reconnect the Wallowa's floodplain and restore important spawning and rearing habitat. With an overall focus on bringing back natural processes, this project aimed to create more habitat and increase habitat complexity and ecosystem function. Work included adding side channels, placing logs, building beaver dam analogs, and planting thousands of native trees.

Their efforts lead to remarkable results. Water surface area in the floodplain went from 3 acres to 25 acres, adding important habitat. Salmon and steelhead appreciated that 700 percent increase, with spawning and rearing activity already observed.

Attracting beavers was a big goal for the family, said Ian Wilson, who's a trained fisheries biologist and restoration project manager for the Grande Ronde Model Watershed. "We wanted them to take over long-term stewardship, and not rely on future man-made intervention," he said. "We wanted the original stream restorers to come in and do their thing."

Within two months of project completion, for the first time in nearly 25 years, beavers got back to work as stewards of the stream.

The project demonstrates a wide range of floodplain restoration techniques that are highly replicable, Wilson said, for different projects in different places.

"When I'm working with landowners, I can not only say, I do this for a living, but I can share this project I did on our property," he said. "I also get to go down there every day, as I have for the last 25 years, and now get to experience this restored landscape."

The project team includes Wolf Water Resources, BCI Contracting, Anabran Solutions, Plantworks, and Wildlands. Partners included the Wallowa Implementation Team: the Nez Perce Tribe, U.S. Forest Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Wallowa Resources, NOAA Fisheries, and Bonneville Power Administration.

Partnership Award – Trailkeepers of Oregon

With work gloves on and tools ready, Trailkeepers of Oregon helps inspire both exploration and stewardship of South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve in Coos County.

"Having great relationships with land management partners like South Slough Reserve helps us focus on doing outreach to get more people, from totally different walks of life,

out enjoying a trail keeping experience with us,” said Trevor Bradford, TKO’s South Coast Stewardship Coordinator.

TKO hosts regular trail parties at South Slough Reserve, including a major effort to build the fifteen-hundred-foot Hidden Creek boardwalk.

“TKO is quick to approach us with new opportunities to work together,” said South Slough Reserve Manager Dr. Bree Yednock. “They are particularly good at joining their resources with our resources to make projects happen.”

TKO also provides terrific support for volunteers, helping build trail-building skills through hands-on experiences.

“One of our main priorities is to lower barriers for folks that may not have had the privilege of learning how to operate a chainsaw or build a drain dip”, Bradford said. “We invite everyone to be a Trailkeeper.”

Catalyst Award – Peggy Lynch, League of Women Voters of Oregon

As a champion for public participation in government, Peggy Lynch has been making a difference in Oregon – and helping other people make a difference in Oregon – for decades.

Washington County’s first community plan came together at the Lynch dining room table, with information she and other community members gathered by walking their neighborhoods. She volunteered on the committee that helped create Metro regional government, and engaged with others as Oregon’s land use program was expanded beyond the first 10 goals.

“The public can make a difference,” Lynch said. “I experienced my friends and neighbors making a difference in developing good policy. Which is why I continue to do what I do.”

As a 30-year League of Women Voters of Oregon volunteer, she has continually encouraged awareness of the State Land Board and Department of State Lands’ contributions to natural resources and school funding.

“The Catalyst Award recognizes people who bring change,” said DSL Director Vicki L. Walker. “Peggy has inspired her neighbors, and the public agencies who serve her neighbors and all Oregonians, to work together.”

Lynch is quick to credit those she’s worked with, like her LWVOR mentor Liz Frenkel, and the importance of sharing experience and information through mentorship and partnership.

Most important for getting involved, Lynch said: Focus on what you care about most. Do what you can and feel good about it. Share opportunities and information. Find the people who care about the same things as you do, and work together.

Everything helps, she said, “as long as you make a place a better place for others. I have family, friends and, neighbors all over the state, and it’s really important to make sure decisions are good for all Oregonians.”

About the State Land Board Awards

Now in their 19th year, the State Land Board Awards honor projects and partners that protect and enhance Oregon's treasured natural resources. Learn more on the [Land Board Awards website](#) or view this year's awards ceremony on the Department of State Lands [YouTube Channel](#). The award plaques feature glass tiles created by artist Ann Cavanaugh.

About the State Land Board

The State Land Board is Governor Tina Kotek, Secretary of State LaVonne Griffin-Valade, and State Treasurer Tobias Read. Established by the Oregon Constitution in 1859, the Land Board oversees the state's Common School Fund and the lands granted to Oregon at statehood "for the use of schools."

About the Department of State Lands

The Department of State Lands is the Land Board's administrative agency, managing the lands dedicated to helping 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.

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[Download photos of the State Land Board Awards ceremony and honored projects and partners here.](#)