



# Cully Park

## Health Consultation Summary

### **Once a landfill, now a park**

All over the country, communities are looking to create more green spaces, parks and places to gather. This is especially true in urban areas where land is less available. Where there was once a landfill, a gas station or an empty lot, people come together to open a coffee shop, design a park or build a community garden. This type of re-development can improve the health and well-being of a community by creating opportunities for healthy activities like growing fresh foods, getting more physical activity and connecting with others. This is the case in Northeast Portland where a neighborhood came together to turn a former landfill into a park.

The Environmental Health Assessment Program (EHAP), part of the Oregon Health Authority, partners with Oregon communities to assess and prevent exposure to chemical contamination. EHAP was asked to provide a health consultation for the Cully Park site because of concerns about possible contamination from when the site was a working landfill. People voiced concerns about the topsoil covering the site, because it was not clear where it had come from. Others had concerns about air contaminants that might still be coming from the former landfill.

EHAP worked with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Cully neighborhood residents to design an environmental sampling plan for the park property. Samples were then analyzed for air and soil contaminants.

The results of the analysis showed that all contaminants tested for were at levels typical of soil and air in urban environments, and considered to be too low to cause concern for human health.

To read the Health Consultation report and learn more about brownfields and the testing that was conducted for Cully Park, please visit: [www.healthoregon.org/ehap](http://www.healthoregon.org/ehap).



1805

Indian village



1936

Pioneer settlement



Small farms

1948



Rock quarry

1981



Landfill

1990



Vacant

2012



Park

## Site history

Cully Park is located on land that has long supported traditional ways of life for Oregon Indians. The Neerchokikoo Indian Village thrived in the nearby Columbia Slough area and a strong trade economy prospered along the Columbia River. Before the early 1800's, thousands of Native American tribal members from across America were drawn to the area. By the mid-1800s, Europeans were moving in and developing small farms, as part of the Land Act of 1850.

In 1936 part of the Cully Park property became a rock quarry where sand and gravel were mined. When the quarry closed in 1978, the large pit that was left behind was used for a landfill, which was a common practice at the time. The bottom of the pit was lined with a thick plastic-like material, making it the first fully lined landfill in Oregon.

From 1980-1990, the property was used as a landfill for construction waste. When the landfill closed, it was covered with a liner. Soil was then brought in and the site was planted over with grass.





## Air and soil testing

Cully residents, community organizations, environmental experts and government agencies met for several months to design and carry out environmental sampling for the site. The community wanted to know if there were contaminants in the soil and air that could be harmful to people's health. The sample results showed that the levels of contaminants that were found are typical of what is found in urban environments. All contaminants measured were below levels of health concern.

## Current conditions

Today, the site is 25 acres of grassy meadow that sits on a plateau above the neighborhood. There are active groundwater monitoring wells, a system to collect leachate (liquid from decomposing material), and a system to manage methane gas. The methane is collected on-site and burned at a flare in a small facility at the 75th Avenue and NE Killingsworth park entrance. The landfill and its systems must be maintained in order to safely use the land as a park.

## Future use

The park's master plan, which included ideas and feedback from local residents, was completed in 2008. The opening ceremony for the community garden area took place in the fall 2012. The non-profit organization Verde is leading the design for a habitat restoration area, a temporary plant nursery, a play area, a tribal plant-gathering area and a network of trails. Development of these park features began in the fall 2012 and will be completed by 2014. Other plans include using only local businesses and labor for supplies, materials and construction of the park and its features.



## How can I get involved?

Everyone is welcome to contribute ideas, concerns and efforts to help build Cully Park. Please contact Tony DeFalco, the Living Cully coordinator at Verde: 503-309-7385 or [www.LetUsBuildCullyPark.org](http://www.LetUsBuildCullyPark.org).

Here are just a few things individuals and groups can do to help:

- Conduct community outreach (presentations, door-to-door, community events);
- Raise funds and donations;
- Volunteer to be a member of the Cully Park Foot Patrol;
- Assist with the community garden and other park features;
- Provide professional services (construction, marketing, landscape architecture, engineering, teaching/training, design, legal);
- Locate donated or discounted plants and other materials.

## Understanding the health benefits of building Cully Park

Research shows that positive changes in a community, like a park or a community garden, can improve the health and well-being of those who live there. Finding the right mix of housing, employment, and open space is essential for maintaining community health. The Cully Park project will offer many health-related and employment opportunities for local residents, and the community is looking forward to enjoying many of the benefits, which will include:

- A safe place for physical activity and play;
- An area for growing and harvesting healthy foods at very low cost;
- An open gathering place to connect with others in the community;
- An opportunity to restore Native American culture through the tribal planting area; and
- Improvements in pedestrian safety.



PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION  
Environmental Health Assessment Program

[www.healthoregon.org/ehap](http://www.healthoregon.org/ehap)

For more information about this Health Consultation, please contact EHAP at [ehap.info@state.or.us](mailto:ehap.info@state.or.us) or call 1-877-290-6767.

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