

## Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission

April 9, 2014

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Agenda Item: 12 a

Action

Topic: Natural Areas Registration – Willamina Oaks

Presented by: Jim Morgan

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**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 February of 2014, OPRD staff received a petition to register a private parcel in Polk County. A brief description of the property, its ecological value, context, and reasons for registration are included as an attachment (Exhibit A). 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:** None.

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

**Attachments:** Exhibit A – Summary Form; Willamina Oaks map; letter from Mr. Noble

**Prepared by:** Noel Bacheller

EXHIBIT A

NATURAL HERITAGE ADVISORY COUNCIL  
OREGON REGISTER OF NATURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES  
SUMMARY FORM

1. NATURAL AREA NAME: Willamina Oaks
2. LOCATION: Yamhill County, Township 4 S, Range 6 W, Section 36
3. SIZE: 472.61 acre preserve.
4. OWNERSHIP: Richard Noble (real estate transaction scheduled to transfer property to The Nature Conservancy in April, 2014)
5. CONSENT OF OWNER (PRIVATE), DATE: February 24, 2014
6. REGISTER CATEGORY: State Natural Area
7. PRINCIPAL NATURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES: Willamette Valley, Ecosystem; Hardwood forests, #11, Oregon white oak/grass savanna; #13. Oregon white oak-(madrone)/poison oak/bunchgrass woodland.
8. SPECIAL SPECIES: The site has a population of the recently federally listed, threatened species, the streaked horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris strigata*). The site has also been identified as a location for potential restoration of two other, high priority species, Kincaid's lupine (*Lupinus sulphureus ssp. kincaidii*) and Fender blue butterfly (*Icaricia icarioides fenderi*).
9. EVALUATION OF CRITERIA FOR REGISTRATION
  - A. PRIORITY IN PLAN: Both ecosystem types, Oak savanna and oak woodlands are high priority, unfilled cells.
  - B. ADEQUATE REPRESENTATION: The site represents a critical connection between the Yamhill Oaks Preserve, which is the best example of oak remaining in the valley, and the important habitat at Baskett Slough National Wildlife Refuge. There is sufficient area to represent the oak savanna and oak woodland types. The occurrences of the oak savanna and woodlands will adequately represent the site. The site has excellent opportunities to restore the Roemer fescue prairie habitat, and this restoration is planned by TNC.
  - C. DEGREE OF DISTURBANCE: This represents one of the largest protected areas for oak savanna and woodlands in the Willamette Valley, and much of it is in good quality, although as is the case for most sites in the valley, there is still a significant amount of cover of non-native species.
  - D. VIABILITY: It is one of the largest remaining sites.
  - E. UNIQUE GEOLOGICAL VALUES: None.
  - F. PRIORITY FOR SPECIAL SPECIES: The streaked horned lark is a List 1 species and is federally and state listed as threatened.
  - G. SPECIAL SPECIES PROTECTION CAPABILITY: Excellent. The population of and area for the streaked horned lark is sufficiently large that with adequate management, it should persist. The capacity for the lupine and butterfly will depend on the area restored and the restoration success.
  - H. MANAGEABILITY: These are fire-maintained habitats, which will require management. The Nature Conservancy does have experience managing other similar properties in the Willamette Valley. This site is very large for any property within the Willamette Valley, and is especially significant in this regard. The area also is adjacent to

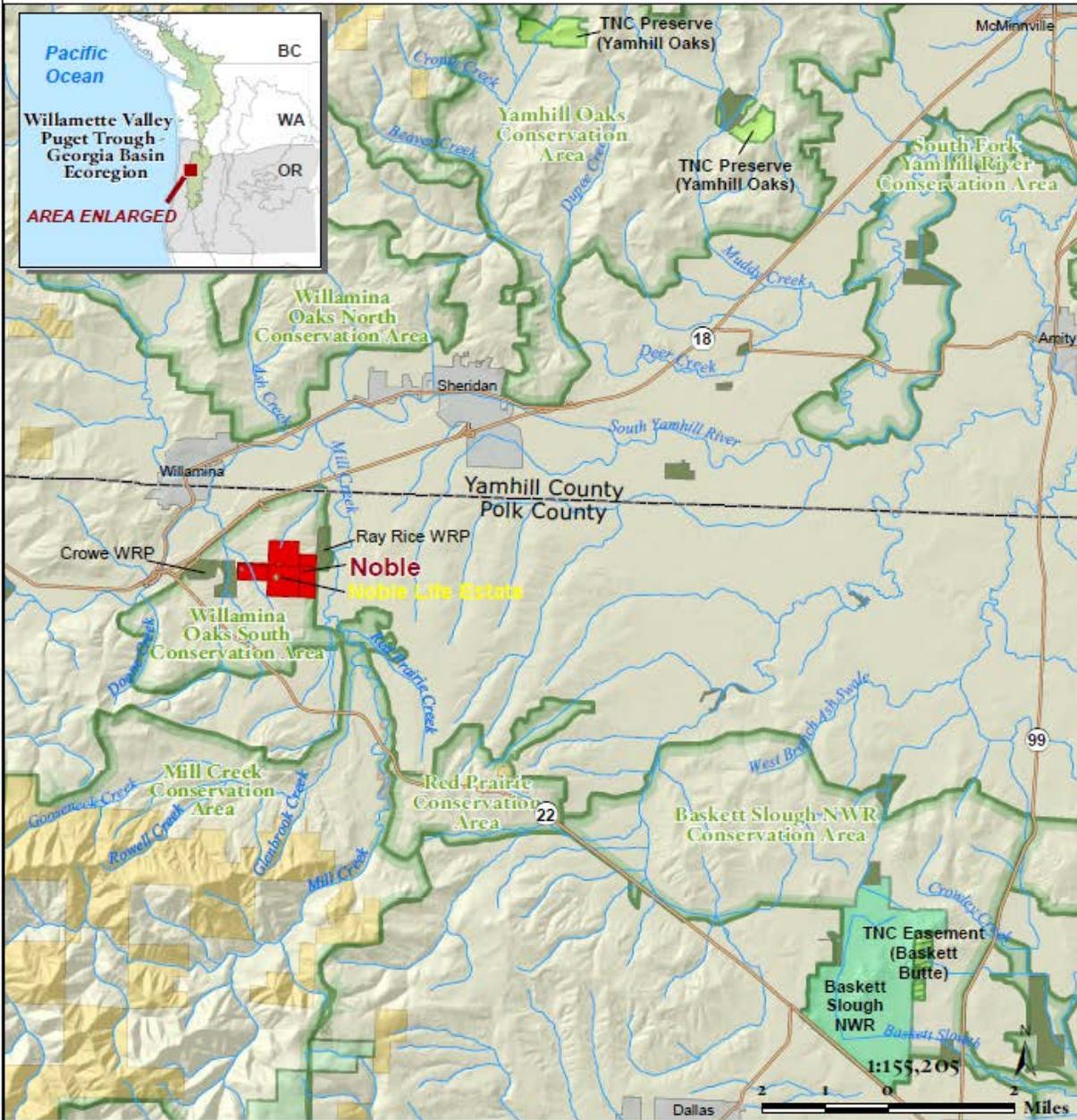
two permanent conservation easements held by the NRCS, creating a 700 acre block of conserved land.

10. SPECIAL REMARKS OR COMMENTS: The property will be acquired by The Nature Conservancy to assure that a large tract of oak woodlands is conserved. In addition, the site's large area provides the potential for restoration of a population of Kincaid's lupine to support reintroduction of the endangered Fender's blue butterfly, as identified in the Fender's recovery plan. The current landowner, Richard Noble, is retaining a life estate on the 2 acre portion of the site that contains his residence.

12. DATE OF ORBIC STAFF APPROVAL: 2/28/2014.

13. SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Oregon Biodiversity Information Center, Mailstop: INR, PO Box 751, Portland, OR 97207. The Nature Conservancy, 821 SE 14<sup>th</sup> Ave., Portland, OR 97214.

14. VALUE OF NATURAL AREA IN LAY TERMS: This area represents one of the largest blocks of oak woodlands and savannas remaining in the Willamette Valley, and it's location is centrally located between conservation areas in the valley foothills to the west, and the Baskett Slough National Wildlife Refuge near the center of the valley, to the east. The area provides habitat for the rare and threatened streaked horned lark, a species restricted to grasslands and savannas in the Willamette Valley. It also includes a number of small openings which The Nature Conservancy plans on restoring the very rare Roemer fescue prairie and its associated rare upland prairie species, including potentially, populations listed plant species, and habitat identified in the recovery plan for the endangered Fender's blue butterfly. The conservation of this site both protects the rare species, and provides the opportunity for the conservation of a very large patch of this woodland type that formerly dominated the Willamette Valley.



**Legend**

- Noble (472.61 acres)
- Noble Life Estate (2 acres)
- TNC Easement
- TNC Preserve
- NRCS Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)
- Conservation Area
- Managed Lands**
- Local Government
- US Forest Service
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Bureau of Land Management

**Other Features**

- City Limit
- County
- ~ Waterbody
- ~ Major River
- ~ Highway

September 18, 2013

Map Created by:  
Shonene Scott, Oregon Field Office, Oregon

Data Sources:  
Tract Boundary - Polk County (2009); TNC Land - TNC (2012);  
Conservation Area - TNC (2008); Ecoregions - TNC (2002);  
NRCS Wetland Reserve Program - NRCS (2007);  
Rivers - NHDPlus (2005); Waterbody - NHD Hydrography (2012);  
Highways - Oregon Department of Transportation (2006);  
City Limits - Oregon Department of Transportation (2009)

Map Projection:  
NAD\_1983\_Oregon\_Statewide\_Lambert

file: OR\_Willamina Oaks South AKA Baskett Butte (Noble)\_map1of2\_20130918.pdf  
map project: WillaminaOaksSouth\_Noble\_map1.mxd

Richard Noble  
8375 Steel Bridge Road  
Sheridan, OR 97378

February 24, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Wood,

I hereby request and give permission to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission to register the following property in the State Register of Natural Heritage Resources. I have owned the property since 1992.

Approximately 472.61 acres located in Polk County in Township 6S, Range 6W, Sections 7, 8, 17 and 18 and as depicted on the enclosed map.

Sincerely,

  
Richard Noble

Encl. Map