

# Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah

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## Willamette Confluence Acquisition

### Background

The 1973 Oregon Legislature authorized acquisition of 3,500 acres at the confluence of Coast & Middle Forks of the Willamette River as state Greenway park purchase. Funding available at that time purchased the existing 2,300-acre Buford Park, now managed by Lane Co. Parks Division. The community has long supported purchase of the remaining 1,200-acre parcel, owned by Wildish Land Co. Numerous public plans have supported this acquisition, including The Metro Plan (1980), the Buford Park Master Plan (1994), and most recently the Rivers to Ridge Open Space Vision (2003). All these plans were adopted or endorsed by elected officials of Springfield, Eugene, and Lane County.

In November 2006, the Wildish Land Co. offered to sell the parcel for \$26 million to Lane County to complete the park. The county is conducting its due diligence, doing its own appraisal, and working to obtain an option on the land. Lane County seeks federal land acquisition and restoration funding to assist with the purchase.

### Parcel Description and Public Benefits

The 1,200-acre Wildish lands lay between the 2,300-acre Buford Park's extraordinary wildlife and botanical resources and approximately 1,000 acres of public land along the Middle Fork Willamette River. This acquisition would create a 4,700-acre complex of open space at the confluence of two major rivers and consolidate an anchor of open space and critical habitat for the rapidly developing Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area. Some of the potential public benefits include:

- 1) conserving and improving habitat in the dynamic confluence area for fish (including threatened Chinook salmon and winter steelhead) and wildlife;
- 2) expanding opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, wildlife viewing, fishing and boating;
- 3) extending river front bike paths from Eugene/Springfield to Buford Park;
- 4) creating a natural, easier-to-manage park boundary formed by the rivers;
- 5) improving water quality and reducing downstream flood impacts by restoring the area's extensive floodplain so it can detain, store and filter floodwaters; and
- 6) providing environmental education and restoration research opportunities for students and scientists.

Thirteen ponds formed by gravel extraction on the Wildish ownership and twelve ponds on public land provide good wetland habitat. These ponds and adjacent floodplains can be further enhanced to improve habitat and recreation use (hiking, birding, horseback riding, boating, fishing, etc.).

### Fish & Wildlife Benefits

The Oregon Conservation Strategy (2006), prepared by the Oregon Fish & Wildlife Dept. as mandated by Congress, specifically identifies the Mt. Pisgah area as site WV-03A in its ecosystem conservation opportunity profile. The plan notes several special features of Mt. Pisgah area, including that:

- The area supports a number of at-risk and listed species;
- The Mt. Pisgah area contains some of Willamette basin’s largest tracts of native habitats,
- Mt. Pisgah is designated an “Oregon Important Bird Area,”
- Its floodplains host one of the largest western pond turtle populations in the Willamette Basin,
- The area has a history of great blue heron rookeries.

The consolidation in public ownership and rehabilitation of both banks of 8 miles of Willamette River creates an unprecedented opportunity for riparian floodplain restoration that would benefit threatened salmon, Oregon Chub, and Pacific Lamprey species, as well as a great variety of birds, reptiles, amphibians, and small mammal that use depend upon the riverside for their homes.

**Federal, State & Local Partners**

A variety of state, federal and non-profit agencies have expressed strong interest in participating in assuring public acquisition and subsequent restoration of this important site. The table below describes the contributions each partner could make.

**POTENTIAL STATE & LOCAL PARTNERS**

| <b>AGENCY</b>                       | <b>FUNDING SOURCE</b>                               | <b>NOTES</b>                                    |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board  | Acquisition and Restoration Grants                  | Competitive grants                              |
| Oregon Parks & Recreation Dept.     | Park acquisition funds                              | Might assist with management                    |
| Oregon Dept. of Fish & Wildlife     | Technical Assistance                                | Management Planning                             |
| Lane County                         | Park bond measure                                   | Manages adjacent Buford Park                    |
| The Nature Conservancy              | Self-funded. Potential conduit for dedicated funds. | Acquisition & management expertise.             |
| Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah | Private Capital Campaign                            | Willing to assist with restoration, stewardship |

**POTENTIAL FEDERAL FUNDING**

| <b>AGENCY</b>                                   | <b>FUNDING REQUEST</b>  | <b>NOTES</b>  |
|---|---|---|
| U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Portland District | Willamette Floodplain Restoration General Investigation Study | Study would analyze restoration options on this reach of Middle Fork. |
| US. Dept of Interior                            | Land & Water Conservation Fund.                               | Suitable agency needs identification                                  |
| Bonneville Power Administration                 | Fish & Wildlife Mitigation Program                            | Congressional appropriation not required.                             |