CONSERVATION REPORT

2024 / 2025

Columbia Land Trust

Collaborating to Care for Nature

Embracing the strength of collective effort allows us to focus on what we do best: fostering inclusive, voluntary land conservation, crafting site-specific stewardship plans, and committing to the care of our lands forever.

Last fall, I stood on the banks of Wildboy Creek and watched as three upstream tributaries merged together and continued flowing toward the Washougal and, eventually, the Columbia River. Until last October, a 425-foot, unused dam stood here, blocking fish passage and creating a stagnant reservoir that was detrimental to the entire watershed. We planned and organized for decades with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe and many funders and supporters (see the full list on pg 9) before removing the dam last summer, allowing the water to carve its natural path once again. As we await the return of salmon to these waters, I reflect on how a project of this scale is only possible through the strong relationships we've built.

Collaboration is at the core of our conservation efforts, because we know we can achieve far more together than we ever could on our own. Embracing the strength of collective effort allows us to focus on what we do best: fostering inclusive, voluntary land conservation, crafting site-specific stewardship plans, and committing to the care of our lands forever. Our partnerships take many forms, from informal conversations with neighbors to ongoing relationships with state agencies and powerful agreements like the memorandum of understanding we signed with the Chinook Indian Nation, committing to work together to increase access to culturally important lands and resources (pg 10).

In this Conservation Report you will see examples of how collaborative conservation fosters success, both in our new endeavors and in those projects and lands we have stewarded for decades. Whether we're removing a dam, implementing a controlled burn, growing a backyard habitat, or restoring waterways for salmon, we can't do it alone. Thank you for being a partner in creating conservation that endures. Together we are building a legacy of connectedness and care for the nature we all love.

— **Meg Rutledge**, *Executive Director*

Cover: A foggy Northwest forest. Photo by Ian Shive. This page: Horseshoe Falls on the East Fork Lewis River

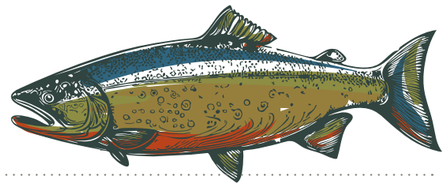
Columbia Land Trust

CONSERVATION SUCCESSES

ways we worked together in 2024 to conserve the nature we love

6.5 MILES OF FISH HABITAT

reconnected by the removal of Kwoneesum Dam in collaboration with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe

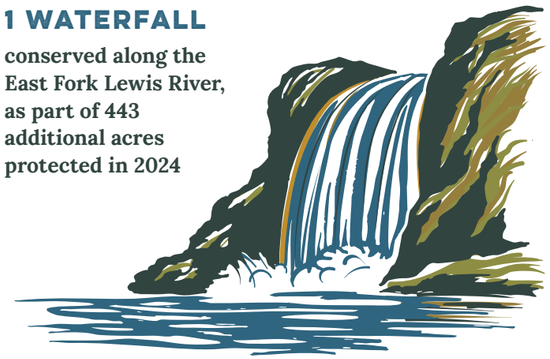


60 LOG JAMS

erected along Rattlesnake Creek to restore hydrologic function and improve habitat for juvenile salmonids

1 WATERFALL

conserved along the East Fork Lewis River, as part of 443 additional acres protected in 2024

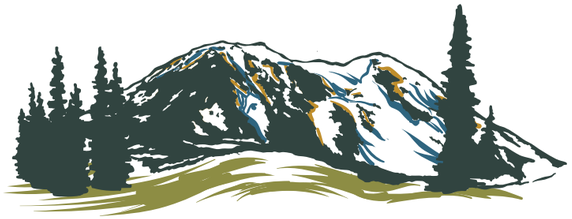


1 MOU AGREEMENT

signed with Chinook Indian Nation

29,778 ACRES OF WORKING FOREST

around Mt. Adams will be conserved thanks to funding we secured with partners



WHERE WE WORK

Columbia Land Trust's priority conservation areas span five ecoregions

Conservation Area

Tribal Reservation

Mount Rainier

Chehalis Tribe

Shoalwater Bay Tribe

Long Beach

Astoria

Mount St. Helens

Mount Adams

Yakama Indian Reservation

West Cascades

East Cascades

Coast Range & Estuaries

Cowlitz Indian Tribe

The Dalles

Columbia Plateau

Willamette Valley & Puget Trough

Mount Hood

Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs

COLUMBIA LAND TRUST LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that the lands and waters of the Columbia River region are the ancestral homelands of Indigenous peoples who have been living and working here from time immemorial and are the original stewards of these lands.

Our Approach

Columbia Land Trust has established priority conservation areas that are critical to ecosystems and wildlife throughout the region we serve, from rainy coastal mountains to the arid Columbia Plateau. To establish these conservation areas, we analyze the current presence of wildlife and habitat, landscape connectivity, and climate resilience. We are committed to fundamentally changing the pace and scale of conservation in the Northwest through collaboration and community engagement. Ultimately, our success is not measured in dollars raised or acres conserved, but in ecological integrity and healthy relationships between people and nature.

CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

Ecological Integrity

A state in which the nature of the Northwest is intact, functional, and supports a diversity of habitats, species, and processes. Landscapes with ecological integrity are self-sustaining; they are able to evolve and self-regulate within a natural range of variability.

Climate Resilience

Resilience means that a system is able to deal with change (like fires and flooding) and continue to develop. Our definition includes human communities, and we work to build climate resilience by restoring natural systems that are capable of adapting to changing weather and climate. For example, a mature restored forest can reduce flood risk for downstream infrastructure.

Climate Mitigation

Mitigation is taking action to limit the magnitude or rate of global warming and its related effects. The Land Trust aims to leverage natural climate solutions, like the protection and restoration of forests and wetlands, to increase the rate of carbon sequestration by natural systems.

Connecting People to Nature

Connecting with people and building relationships is at the core of our work. Our conservation strategies will not be effective over time if we do not build broad, enduring support for conservation. Furthermore, our conservation work needs to respond and adapt based on mutual learning and understanding.

YEAR HIGHLIGHTS

RESTORATION

Working Together to Restore a Watershed

Access to 6.5 miles of fish habitat in the upper Washougal River watershed has been restored, following the removal of Kwoneesum Dam in summer 2024.

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe led the removal of the defunct dam on 1,300 acres of forestland that Columbia Land Trust acquired in 2020, specifically with the vision of removing the dam and restoring the creek.

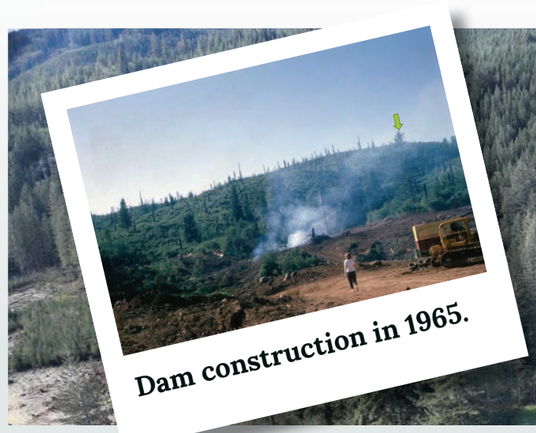
The former dam stood 55 feet tall by 425 feet wide and blocked all fish habitat in a headwater tributary of the Washougal River in addition to holding back valuable sediment and wood to starved channels downstream. Its removal restored fish passage, and the project included extensive restoration work to enhance instream conditions, benefiting coho salmon and summer steelhead — species sacred to the Cowlitz Indian Tribe's ancestral heritage and way of life.

The dam was originally constructed in 1965 by the Camp Fire organization to create a recreational lake for a new girls' camp. Girls from across the region spent summers swimming, sailing, and canoeing there until the mid-1980s, when the camp closed and the land was sold to an industrial timber company. Despite its scenic appearance, the stagnant lake created by the dam absorbed sunlight and increased water temperature, which can be fatal to adult and juvenile salmon and steelhead.

After the dam was deconstructed over months of work, additional restoration and native planting activities within the nine-acre reservoir footprint followed the dam removal. Hundreds of logs were anchored to bedrock in the channel of Wildboy Creek and covered with rock and gravel to restore the degraded streambed for fish habitat.

"The removal of Kwoneesum Dam marks a significant milestone in our journey to restore the natural beauty and ecological balance of our ancestral lands, which in this case has been in the process for many years," said William Iyall, Cowlitz Indian Tribe Chairman.

"Columbia Land Trust is here to deliver conservation that lasts, and that has meaning for the peoples and places where we work," said Land Trust Executive Director Meg Rutledge. "Being able to collaborate with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, who always have been and always will be leaders in stewarding and caring for lands and people, is a privilege. The dam removal is the first phase in our shared vision for the restoration of the ecological integrity of this landscape."



Dam construction in 1965.

The land purchase was funded with grants from the Open Rivers Fund, a program of Resources Legacy Fund supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, as well as funding from Washington Department of Ecology's water quality program, Washington Salmon Recovery Funding Board, M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust, Hugh and Jane Ferguson Foundation, Wiancko Family Foundation, The Conservation Alliance, private donors, a program-related investment loan from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the Pacific Northwest Resilient Landscapes Initiative with support from the Land Trust Alliance, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and Oregon Community Foundation.

The dam removal was funded by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service — Environmental Quality Incentives Program, NOAA Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation, Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office — Salmon Recovery Funding Board & Brian Abbott Fish Barrier Removal Board, Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund, and Open Rivers Fund, a program of Resources Legacy Fund supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Left: Before removal, Kwoneesum Dam blocked fish passage upstream. Above: An aerial view of the restored tributary channels, and a gathering at Wildboy Creek with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Columbia Land Trust, and partners.

EVENTS

Connecting People and Nature

In 2024, Vive Northwest hosted a series of Spanish language birdwatching events at three Columbia Land Trust sites: Cranes' Landing, Howard Canyon Natural Area, and Mill Creek Ridge. These visits were guided by staff from the Land Trust and Bird Alliance of Oregon, who shared information about the ecology, history, and wildlife of the area.

Vive NW provides Latino/a and BIPOC communities throughout the West with hands-on experiences and accessible information to build a greater connection with the natural world and help protect and restore our ecosystems. "Participating in a walk was an enriching experience, not only because of the breathtaking landscape we explored but also because of the sense of community that formed among all the partici-pants," said tour participant Roxana.

These tours were organized as part of Vive NW's commitment to removing barriers to nature and creating a future where BIPOC and Latinx communities feel empowered to recreate in outdoor spaces.

Roxana continued, "It is inspiring to see how these organizations promote environmental stewardship while also fostering the well-being of everyone involved. I am deeply grateful to have been part of this event, which reminds us how vital it is to protect our natural spaces for future generations."

"It was great to visit conserved lands with Vive NW and Bird Alliance of Oregon, whose enthusiasm and expertise brought these walks to life," said Land Trust Community and Corporate Engagement Manager Peter Condra. "Visiting familiar places with new friends is a chance to see the world with new eyes."

The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts provided support for this series.

PARTNERSHIP

A Shared Commitment to the Land

In November 2024, Chinook Indian Nation and Columbia Land Trust signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU), launching an unprecedented partnership that establishes a co-stewardship model within ancestral Chinook lands.

"This relationship provides us with land access. It's an important stride towards reclaiming Indigenous lands for Indigenous people," said Rachel Cushman, Secretary and Treasurer of the Chinook Indian Nation. The partnership combines the Chinook's rich traditional knowledge with a shared commitment to sustainable land management.

"This presents a remarkable opportu-nity to collaborate with the Chinook Indian Nation, who have cared for this land since time immemorial, and to learn from their deep connec-tion to this region," said Columbia Land Trust Executive Director, Meg Rutledge.

"This agreement was more than ten years in the making," added Land Trust Conservation Director Cathy Kellon. "Conservation is better when we work together, and this MOU describes how we will do so in service of the health and prosperity of the lands, waters, and people of the Chinook Indian Nation homeland."

It is inspiring to see how these organizations promote environmental stewardship while also fostering the well-being of everyone involved.

Vive Northwest at Mill Creek Ridge.

Chinook Indian Nation Chairman Tony Johnson and Columbia Land Trust Executive Director Meg Rutledge sign a memorandum of understanding.

RESILIENCE

A Prescribed Burn, Before and After

Over a year ago, in fall 2023, we completed a broadcast burn at Bear Creek Natural Area in the East Cascades as part of Columbia Gorge TREX, a prescribed fire training program that boosts local capacity for beneficial burning events. Photos taken before and after reveal how the burn helped reduce fire fuel loads and is helping improve overall forest health.

"The grass is literally greener," said Land Steward Helen Gavrilov. "The native pinegrass is more abundant, it flowered profusely and stayed fresh and green through-out the entire summer and into fall." While there is still work to be done, the results from this burn (and others) will promote resilience to climate, drought, forest pathogens, and future wildfires. Seeing these results on Land Trust sites inspires our continued push to integrate controlled fire into our stewardship plans and to further its use as a valuable tool for land managers throughout the region.

Measuring Restoration Success

WHAT IS AN ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY ASSESSMENT?

The Ecological Integrity Assessment (EIA) is a method used to assess the conditions of the lands that we manage. It incorporates a variety of metrics such as vegetation composition and structure, forest stand health, coarse woody debris, soil condition, hydrology, landscape context, etc. These metrics are scored individually and then combined to give each unit we manage a grade on a scale from A through D. This assessment helps us establish measurable stewardship goals, know where to focus our restoration efforts, and track our progress. Ideally the EIA is conducted once every ten years. This long-range tracking will tell us how the conditions of our lands change with time and show how our management and restoration actions are impacting the land.

In 2024 the monitoring program gained momentum, with activities occurring throughout the region. We reinvigorated the use of a standardized method, developed by the Washington Department of Natural Resources Natural Heritage Program (NHP), to assess ecological conditions on our properties. The Ecological Integrity Assessment (EIA) method was conducted previously in coordination with the NHP on 21 properties. This year we completed an EIA on three of our properties: Middle and South Nemah, West Fork Washougal Forest, and Rattlesnake Creek, developing efficiencies in field data collection and office processing. We are planning to implement EIAs on nine properties in 2025, more than doubling the current acreage assessed. This data feeds into site-scale management planning.

Action effectiveness monitoring is a mainstay of our monitoring program, allowing us to evaluate how successful our restoration is at achieving our goals. We often monitor numerous metrics prior to restoration and continue long-term monitoring to track changes over time. This information can inform whether changes are needed at a site and if improvements should be made to future restoration design.

YEAR HIGHLIGHTS

In 2024 we conducted effectiveness monitoring in numerous areas. In the Columbia River Estuary, we monitored four tidal wetland restoration sites, measuring plant cover and species composition, channel shape, hydrology, water temperature, and sedimentation rates. In the Willamette Valley, we conducted vegetation monitoring at Rainbow Natural Area where wet prairie restoration is underway. In the East Cascades, we installed permanent forestry plots at Bear Creek, Summit Creek, and Bowman Creek, prior to implementing prescribed fire or thinning. These plots will be evaluated over time to measure forest health and development. At Rattlesnake Creek, we worked with Yakima Nation Fisheries to conduct stream surveys, install hydrology and temperature sensors, and establish sediment plots to document changes from the process-based stream restoration occurring along one mile of the creek and floodplain.

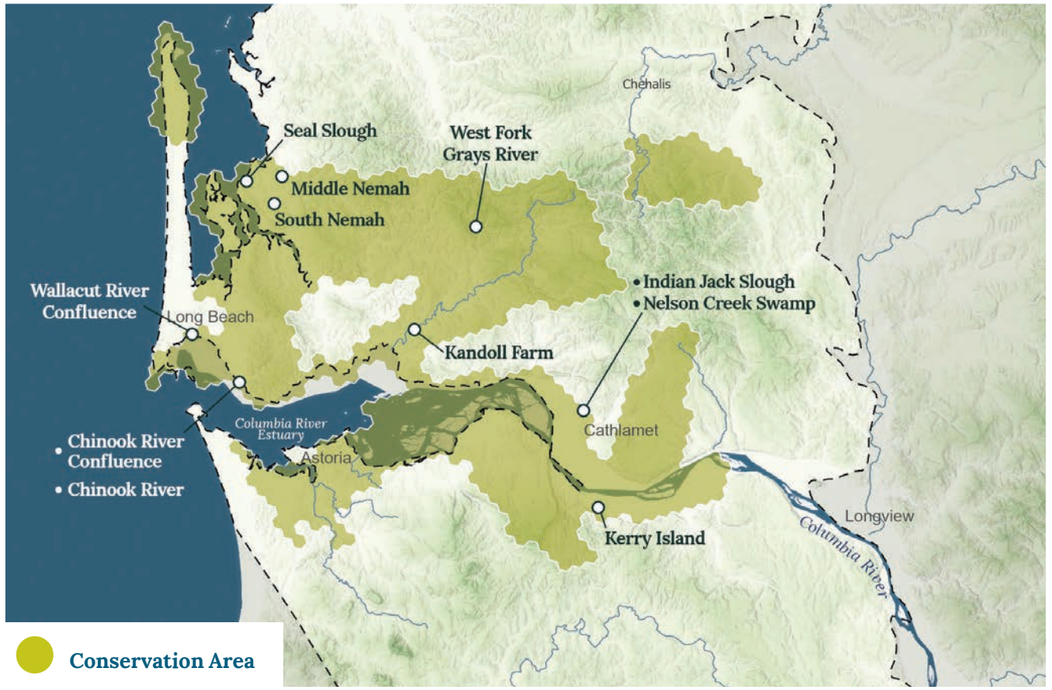
Left: Monitoring Program Manager Amy Borde collects field data.

MONITORING STATS

Sites where Ecological Integrity Assessments have been completed	25
Vegetation cover plots surveyed	194
Sediment accretion stakes measured	22
Water depth and temperature sensors deployed	17
Forestry plots surveyed	17

Funding Secured to Conserve 30,000 Acres

After working closely with Twin Creeks Timber/Green Diamond Resources, The Conservation Fund, and the Department of Natural Resources, we secured funding to conserve nearly 30,000 acres of productive forestland in Klickitat County, Washington at the end of 2024. This $36,000,000 award from the U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy program will have a remarkable landscape-scale impact, and the conservation easement it will fund will have far-reaching benefits for water quality, habitat connectivity, cultural and recreational access, and the regional resource-based economy. Learn more about this project on pg 36.



ECOREGION

Coast Range & Estuaries

OBJECTIVES

GIVE rivers room to move and flood naturally, enabling them to support healthy salmon runs and riverside habitat without threatening communities and infrastructure.

PROTECT older forests, ensuring that large expanses are managed in ways that connect critical habitat areas, set the stage for more old forests, and support the survival of endangered species.

INCREASE the prevalence of tidal wetlands in the Columbia River Estuary and continue managing invasive species.

CONSERVE and restore the last remaining large, undeveloped properties containing coastal interdunal wetlands and lakes, associated forests, and beaches.

STRENGTHEN local economies and expand public awareness of conservation benefits by providing healthy and functional natural areas.

Winter clouds reflect on newly filled waterways lined with new native plantings.

LAND PROTECTION

197 Acres

Chinook River Confluence

Conservation Area: Columbia River Estuary

Pacific County, WA

Conserved in October 2024, Chinook River Confluence protects highly threatened tidal wetland habitat near the Pacific Ocean. It supports our conservation goals in the Estuary, which focus on protecting remaining high-quality habitat for salmon and steelhead and restoring key habitat needed to support their full life cycle.

Named for its location at the confluence of the Chinook and Columbia rivers in Pacific County, Washington, the site contains highly threatened, functionally intact tidal wetlands and stretches along the Columbia River for over a mile, supporting migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife. Half a mile of side channels provide important resting and rearing habitat for salmon, especially juveniles on their long journey from the interior Columbia Basin to the Pacific Ocean.

The property generates outsized benefits for fish and wildlife, as it is interconnected with other protected lands and restoration projects in the area. The Land Trust has supported the protection of over 1,340 acres in the

Chinook River watershed alone. Moreover, the property is adjacent to 1,000 acres of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's John's River Wildlife Area and just downriver from the 600-acre Fort Columbia Historical State Park.

Our stewardship will focus on protecting existing high-quality habitat and enhancing ecosystem function where suitable through culvert removal, channel reconnection, noxious weed control, and native planting.

As this site is in the heart of unceded Chinook Indian Nation territory, we will continue to engage with their leadership about the future of this important place. This project was funded by Bonneville Power Administration.

Chinook River

Conservation Area: Baker Bay

Pacific County, OR

We restored this site a few years ago with funding from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. Restoration included the removal of eight sections of a gravel logging road to reconnect wetlands on either side. We planted conifers in some sections of the road that were already worn down and permeable. This year, we planted 375 spruce trees in some of the same planting areas to fill in gaps and add diversity.

Indian Jack Slough

Conservation Area: Lower Elochoman River

Wahkiakum County, WA

At our 180-acre Indian Jack Slough site in the Elochoman River watershed, we completed a 50-acre restoration project in 2024 to improve ecosystem function by filling ditches and creating new ponds and channels to create more surface water for waterfowl. These new variances in terrain elevation will also better support a variety of native vegetation types that benefit migratory waterfowl and federally threatened Columbian white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus leucurus*). "This was the final phase in a multi-year restoration effort," said Coast Region Stewardship Manager Austin Tomlinson. "We originally conserved this land to benefit Columbian white-tailed deer, and this project accomplished that and simultaneously improved habitat for other species." Excavation and earthmoving took about three weeks and were immediately followed by native seeding. This 50-acre restoration project builds on the 150-acre floodplain reconnection project we completed in 2022 at Nelson Creek, just to the east. The work was made possible by the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, which provided staff and an excavator and bulldozer from the nearby Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for Columbian White-tailed Deer (JBH).

Additional funding for site preparation and planting was provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. PR Worth was the excavation contractor hired for this project. "JBH and these Columbia Land Trust sites are neighbors, and the lands collectively provide important habitat for deer, waterfowl, and other wildlife," said US Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist Kirsten Brennan. "This project was a great opportunity to work together to accomplish shared goals." In the northern area of the property, which was formerly overrun with invasive reed canarygrass, the JBH team excavated two deeper ponds that are about 30-50 feet wide and will hold more water and inhibit the growth of reed canarygrass. In turn, this will encourage plant diversity and improve habitat quality. These new ponds and channels were also connected to Indian Jack Slough, a tidal slough of the Elochoman River that runs through the adjacent JBH refuge.

In early 2025 about 68,000 native plants were installed.

Kandoll Farm

Conservation Area: Grays Bay

Wahkiakum County, WA

Building on the successful findings on reed canarygrass at Kandoll Road and Kerry Island, conducted in partnership with the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, staff began using the proven methods of treatment across additional areas beyond the original study site. We hope to build on the trial's success, which significantly reduced reed canarygrass in all treatment plots and promoted the growth of native plant species.

Left: A Columbian white-tailed deer. Photo by Jake Bonello. Below: Bare root native plants going in the ground.

We originally conserved this land to benefit Columbian white-tailed deer, and this project accomplished that and simultaneously improved habitat for other species.

Nelson Creek Swamp

Conservation Area:
Lower Elochoman

Wahkiakum County, WA

Last year was the first full year when we could watch this landscape take shape and thrive after reconnecting about two miles of stream channel and tidal tributaries in 2022 and planting more than 180,000 native plants in 2023. So far, the survival of those new plants has been strong, which we attribute to the initial site preparation work and continued plant maintenance. Funding for this work is provided by our contract with the Bonneville Power Administration and continues through 2025. In 2024 we also planted Sitka spruce and Douglas-fir trees on a neighbor's property, after they previously allowed us to harvest some of their trees for use in the in-stream restoration work.

South Nemah

Conservation Area:
Willapa Hills

Pacific County, WA

We completed 30 acres of pre-commercial thinning on our South Nemah unit with funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. We manage this site as habitat for endangered marbled murrelet, meaning that we maintain existing habitat and work to put the rest of the forest on a trajectory towards old growth habitat qualities. This can include the strategic harvest of trees to increase the age and species diversity of the forest.

Wallacut River Confluence

Conservation Area:
Columbia River Estuary

Pacific County, WA

Gorse remains the primary invasive species of concern at this site on the north side of Baker Bay where we reconnected 100 acres of tidal floodplain in 2016. We continue to learn and experiment with treatment of gorse, and in 2024 we planted 75 spruce trees in areas where gorse was treated in the past. This large site provides habitat to an incredible diversity of wildlife including the bear and coyote photographed by one of our trail cameras last summer.

West Fork Grays River

Conservation Area: Grays River

Pacific County, WA

We conserved this 1,100-acre site in 2023 as a step toward our vision of a connected coastal landscape that fosters salmon recovery and forest health and supports community goals related to flood reduction, recreation, and public access. In 2024 we rebuilt a 300-foot section of road and installed three new culverts in an area where the road had washed out. This site was previously harvested for timber. In January 2025 we planted Douglas-fir, cedar, alder, big leaf maple, and hemlock in clear cuts that existed before our acquisition of the site.

Willapa Bay Area

Conservation Area: Willapa Hills

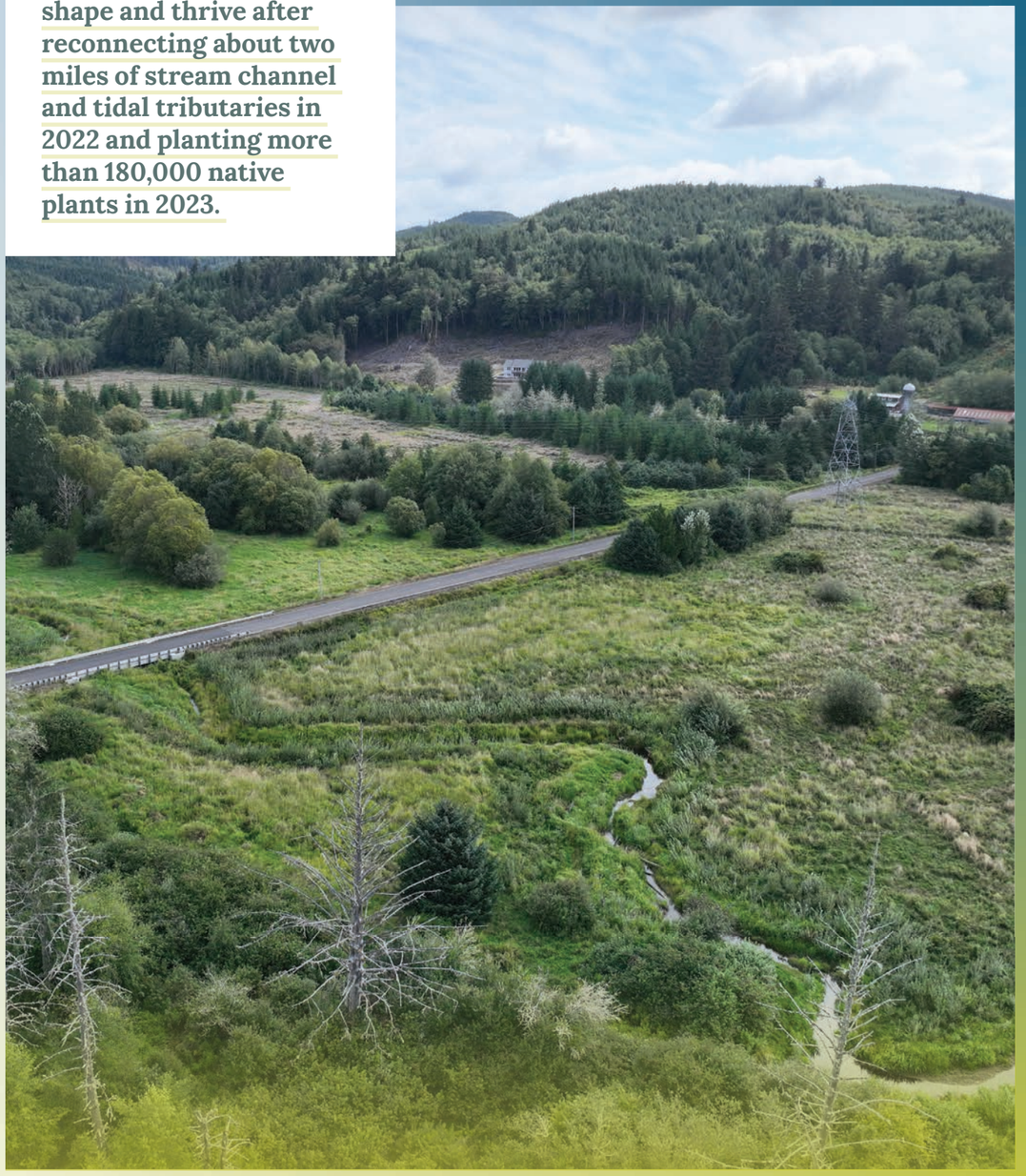
Pacific County, WA

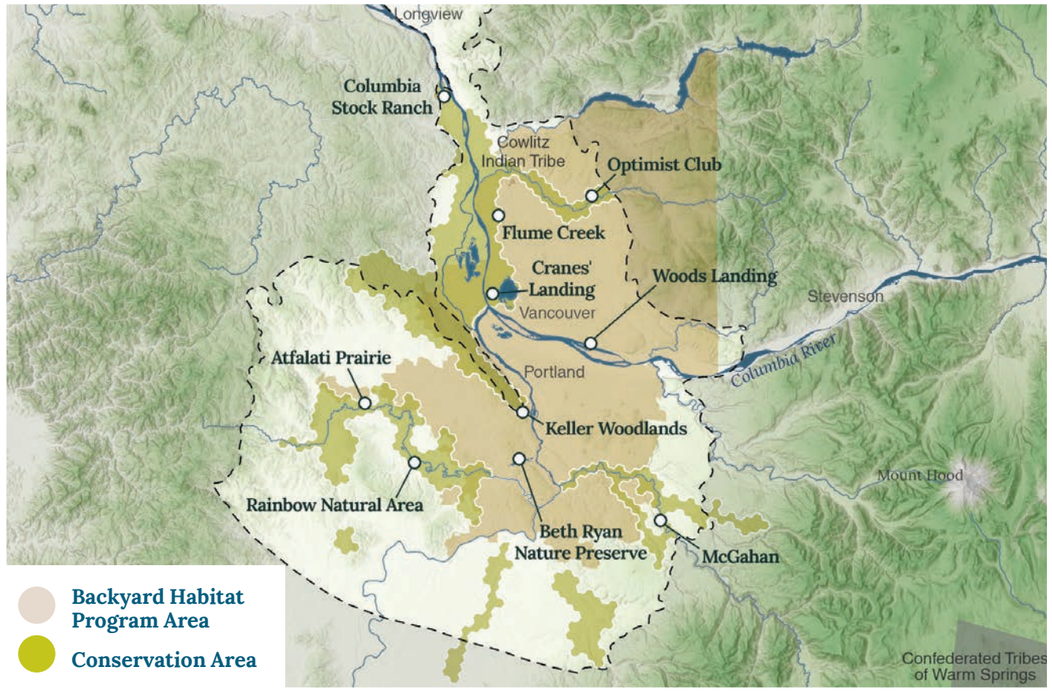
Staff established long term forestry monitoring plots throughout three conserved forest sites along East Willapa Bay: Seal Slough, Middle Nemah, and South Nemah. These plots will provide long-term monitoring opportunities and data to help us understand the effects of forest restoration on tree size, species, and structure, as well as understory vegetation and the presence of downed wood.

Right: Post-restoration Nelson Creek.

Last year was the first full year when we could watch this landscape take shape and thrive after reconnecting about two miles of stream channel and tidal tributaries in 2022 and planting more than 180,000 native plants in 2023.

Nelson Creek Swamp





ECOREGION

Willamette Valley & Puget Trough

OBJECTIVES

RESTORE the health and function of the floodplains, forests, and wetlands associated with our rivers.

PROTECT, maintain, and restore oak and prairie habitats.

MAKE urban areas more conducive to wildlife through thousands of naturescaped properties that allow pollinators, resident and migrating birds, and other wildlife to move across the landscape.

BUILD strong partnerships between agriculture and conservation communities to benefit wildlife habitat, movement, and migration.

PROVIDE meaningful opportunities for people to connect to nature throughout both cities and natural areas.

Volunteers install native plants at Cranes' Landing.

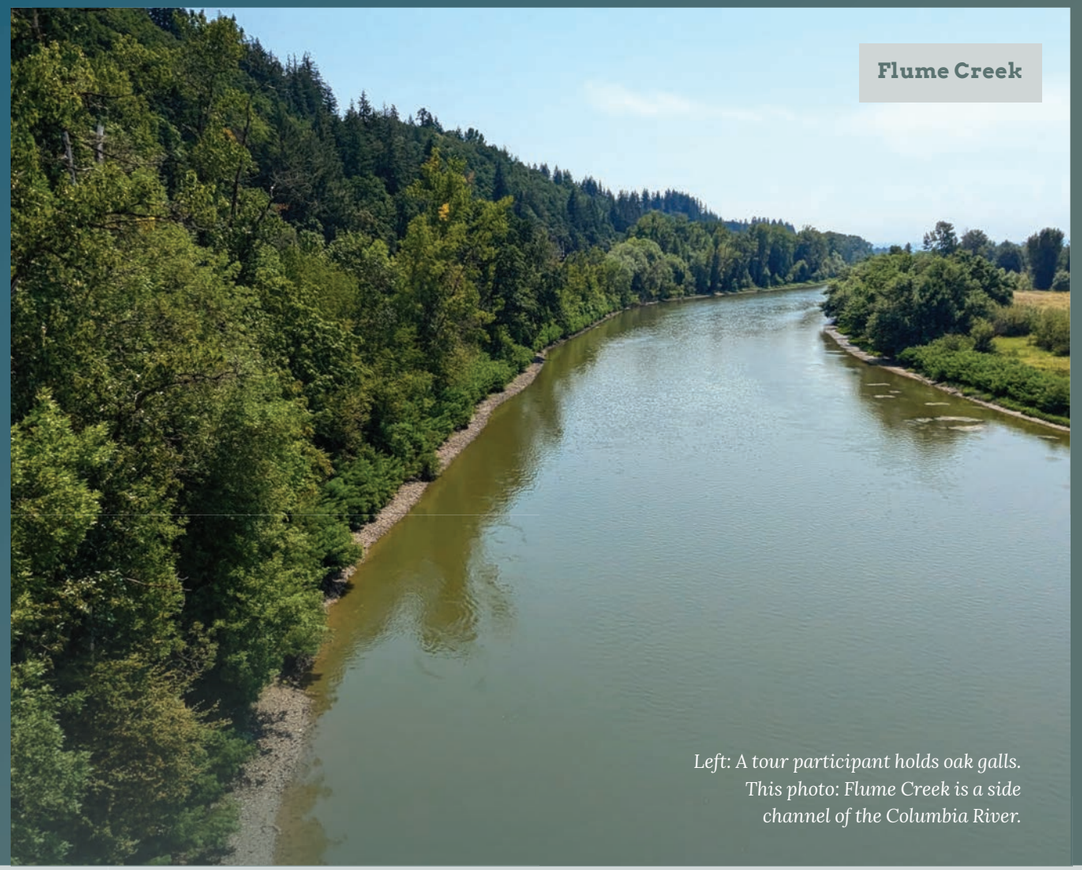
LAND PROTECTION

3,000 Acres Enrolled

Backyard Habitat Certification Program

Conservation Area: Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties, OR and Clark County, WA

The Backyard Habitat Certification Program is co-managed by Columbia Land Trust and Bird Alliance of Oregon (formerly Portland Audubon). Backyard Habitat operates throughout the urban and suburban parts of four counties in Oregon and Southwest Washington. In 2024, more than 1,500 new properties enrolled and 500 properties were certified, bringing the participant total to over 13,000 households and about 3,000 acres enrolled in the program. Participants act as partners in conservation by planting native plants, removing priority weeds, eliminating pesticide use, managing stormwater on site, and stewarding wildlife. Each participant receives technical assistance, incentives like coupons and certification signs, and encouragement. Then they dig in to enhance habitat on their property. The program gets neighbors working together to build wildlife corridors, with the added benefit of building community. Individuals, apartments, businesses, schools, places of worship, and community organizations are all encouraged to participate.



Flume Creek

Left: A tour participant holds oak galls. This photo: Flume Creek is a side channel of the Columbia River.

In 2024, Backyard Habitat continued collaborating with Centro Cultural, a Latino-based community organization in Washington County. Alongside Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District, Centro engages youth in their Climate Justice Leadership Program in a series of workshops, field trips, and outreach based around community response to the emerald ash borer (EAB) within Cornelius and the surrounding community. The campus is close to the site where EAB was first identified in Oregon, putting them on the frontlines.

We launched a new partnership with People of Color Outdoors (POCO) to create habitat in the yards of 16 BIPOC residents within the City of Portland. We also continue to support our ongoing collaboration with Verde to enroll new participants and install free rain-gardens and naturescapes for low-income households in North/NE/East Portland. Learn more: **backyardhabitats.org**.

41 Acres

Flume Creek

Conservation Area: Columbia River Lowlands

Clark County, WA

In November 2024, Columbia Land Trust conserved a 41-acre site along Lake River, a side channel of the Columbia River near Ridgefield, Washington. This site is relatively small, but mighty in terms of habitat connectivity for animals and birds, as Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge is immediately to the west and Clark County's Flume Creek Natural Area is located to the east.

The riparian forest here is within the floodplain and dominated by black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*), Oregon ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*), and red alder (*Alnus rubra*), with Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*) scattered throughout. Many species of birds use this habitat. Notably, bald eagle, purple martin, and great blue heron have breeding and nesting areas in the vicinity.

"This sliver of land could easily have been forgotten and left to grow less healthy over time," said Land Trust Conservation Lead Jocelyn Tutak. "Instead, it has been conserved and will serve as a corridor for wildlife between Ridgefield's forested creeks and the Refuge, providing quality habitat and enhancing the community's natural areas."

In addition to protecting open space and riparian areas within a rapidly urbanizing part of Washington State, this project provides habitat and landscape connectivity between existing protected areas, which help wildlife thrive. The conservation of this site could also create opportunities for the Land Trust to restore fish habitat in the long term, as Flume Creek and Lake River both have documented coho and steelhead presence, and fall chinook are also known to utilize Lake River.

Our work here will allow us to grow existing partnerships with neighboring natural area managers from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Clark County. This aligns with our long-term goal of advancing collaborative conservation.

Our stewardship goals are to maintain, restore, and enhance riparian forest and wetland habitat. There are some invasive weeds present that we will manage, including blackberry and reed canarygrass, but previous restoration efforts have kept these non-native species in check and helped to strengthen the site's ecological health.

As stewardship staff continue to get to know the land, we will monitor for signs of emerald ash borer and evaluate opportunities for reforestation and creek restoration.

Cedar waxwing (Bombycilla cedrorum).
Photo by Linda Steider.

Atfalati Prairie

Conservation Area: Tualatin River

Washington County, OR

Our focus at this site is building partnerships and raising funds to support a major restoration project in the floodplain of the Tualatin River. In collaboration with Oregon Metro, who owns the adjacent floodplain, we will restore nearly 300 acres of Oregon white oak savanna, oak woodland, and wet prairie habitat. Restoration work is slated to kick off as early as fall of 2026. In the meantime, a local farmer is growing annual crops across most of the site to help keep weeds from spreading, and our staff are working with partners and contractors to address particular weeds of concern like puncturevine and Himalayan blackberry. Our partners at Tualatin Soil & Water Conservation District are working to enhance the forest along the river, controlling weeds and preparing to plant trees and shrubs in 2025. We will also continue to monitor the site for signs of emerald ash borer and prepare for the likely eventual loss of Oregon ash trees from this insect.

Beth Ryan Nature Preserve

Conservation Area: N/A

Clackamas County, OR

Normally a quiet urban natural area with a walking trail enjoyed by neighborhood residents and their dogs, this three-acre wetland and forest changed dramatically last January when eight large trees along a neighbor's fence line fell across the trail during an ice storm. Volunteers, including an Eagle Scout troop, neighbors, and two groups of hard-working Columbia Land Trust supporters, repaired the trail and replanted the adjacent slope during three different volunteer events this spring and fall. Their work culminated with a planting party in November co-hosted by the Oswego Lake Watershed Council, where hundreds of wildflowers and a small number of oaks and shrubs were planted to fill the bare space left by the fallen trees. We look forward to continuing to give this site more love next year by removing more weeds and caring for the newly established patch of oak and meadow habitat.

Columbia Stock Ranch

Conservation Area: Columbia River Lowlands

Columbia County, OR

Work at the ranch in 2024 focused on maintenance of large previous plantings, which included weed control and the addition of white alder, black hawthorn, cottonwood, Oregon grape, snowberry, red elderberry, and blue elderberry in zones that needed additional native plant support. We continued monitoring of the Columbian white-tailed deer populations that we moved here over several years from Julia Butler Hansen Refuge, after restoring 150 acres of Columbia Stock Ranch as habitat for the endangered species. This monitoring includes annual fawn and doe surveys in partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists. We completed the permitting process to remove two remaining buildings in 2025. After 12 years of leasing this land to a farmer as a temporary maintenance strategy, we have ended the lease as we prepare for the next phase of restoration.

Cranes' Landing

Conservation Area: Vancouver Lowlands

Clark County, WA

Land Trust Monitoring Scientist Cindy McCormack is in her fourth season conducting project effectiveness monitoring at Cranes' Landing, which includes counting and mapping state-listed endangered sandhill crane use of the different fields and observing crane activity and behavior throughout the overwintering season. Cindy's observations continue to be incredibly valuable, and we use her insights to inform our management actions each year and increase our understanding of this population of cranes in the Pacific Flyway. We farm about 380 acres of this 527-acre site, and for the second year in a row we did not make any major changes to our farming plan, as we see increasing use of the site by the cranes and continue to test our management hypotheses and create continuity for the birds.

We had exceptionally high crane use of the site in October 2024— an average of 946 cranes per day. That is the highest number observed in October since we began monitoring and actively managing this site. We have never seen that many cranes in the lowlands quite that early in the fall season. The peak of the season came in December when we saw an average of 1,571 cranes per day. The birds continue to love the nutsedge and spring

Woods Landing

Optimist Club

Rainbow Natural Area

wheat fields where they probe for nutlets and invertebrates to eat.

Sandhill cranes are easily startled by dogs and passing vehicles, so in early 2024 with the help of volunteers, key berms surrounding the site were planted with more native trees and shrubs to enhance the screening of the property and create privacy for the cranes. The native plants in these berms also welcomed a team from Washington Bee Atlas, who used the site to conduct a small training event in the summer.

We are also working toward restoring about six acres that we currently farm at Cranes' Landing into native prairie/grassland habitat, which is a rare habitat type in the area and would eventually be self-sustaining for future crane use. In August, we spread about 5,000 bulbs including species such as crown brodiaea, camas, and larkspur over two of these acres. Each year, we plan on monitoring the area and adapting our management and restoration techniques to encourage this fallow farm field to shift towards native plant habitat.

Rainbow Natural Area

Conservation Area: Tualatin River

Washington County, OR

We launched a major oak and prairie restoration project at this Tualatin River site in 2023, beginning with site preparation in fall, spring, and summer and ending with an exciting first phase of planting and seeding. Over two days in September and October of 2024, we sowed thousands of prairie bulbs, along with camas seed and a wetland seed mix, to begin establishing native wet prairie habitat. In fall of 2025, we will sow additional seed from a diverse mix of prairie plants including wildflowers, grasses, sedges, and rushes. Planting the bulbs and camas one year in advance of other seed will allow them to establish with less competition from other native plants. Our approach is to seed a wide variety of prairie and wetland species, allowing subtle differences in topography and seasonal hydrology to determine where each species will establish. In future phases of the project, once prairie vegetation is established, we will plant Oregon white oak and other trees and shrubs to restore oak woodland and savanna. All told, this project will convert 50 acres of former farm field, which floods seasonally with the rise and fall of the Tualatin River, to wet prairie, oak savanna, and oak woodland habitat - all rare habitat types in the Willamette Valley. Meanwhile, we are continuing to enhance forest habitat along the river by controlling weeds and planting more oaks and other native trees and shrubs. We also worked with a neighbor this year to install 1,500 feet of fencing along the site boundary.

Woods Landing

Conservation Area: N/A

Clark County, WA

We continued ongoing work to control blackberry and care for previous plantings at this site that protects one of the last remaining chum salmon spawning locations in the Columbia River. Volunteers from Hewlett Packard (HP) continued their annual tradition of volunteering to care for this site, and in December a group of nine volunteers spent a sunny winter day removing invasive plants. While the blackberry here is persistent, routine weeding helps control its growth and provides other native plants room and resources to grow. Last year, a volunteer group from HP mulched shrubs and trees in order to provide shelter and forage for wildlife, while preventing erosion of sediment into the salmon spawning grounds below.

Keller Woodlands

Conservation Area: Forest Park

Multnomah County, OR

Throughout the year we monitored this 40-acre urban forest for high priority weeds like garlic mustard and knotweed, assess habitat conditions, and work with local partners like the West Willamette Restoration Partnership to plan for future work. Recently, three generous supporters stepped up to fund the construction of a trail on the property that will connect to public trails in the City of Portland's Marquam Nature Park. Trail planning and design are underway with our partner Portland Parks & Recreation.

McGahan

Conservation Area: Clackamas River

Clackamas County, OR

In 2024, we continued controlling weeds like false brome (a non-native grass), spurge laurel, Himalayan blackberry, and English ivy at this 23-acre forest near the Clackamas River. Columbia Land Trust is a member of the Clackamas River Invasive Species Partnership, a group of public and private land managers working together to prioritize and respond to weeds in the Clackamas River watershed. The partnership provides funding to support weed control at the McGahan site and ensures that we are investing time and resources to tackle the most important weed problems across the region.

Partnership activities include a new initiative with People of Color Outdoors and an ongoing collaboration with Verde to enroll new participants and install free raingardens and naturescapes for low-income earning households in Portland.

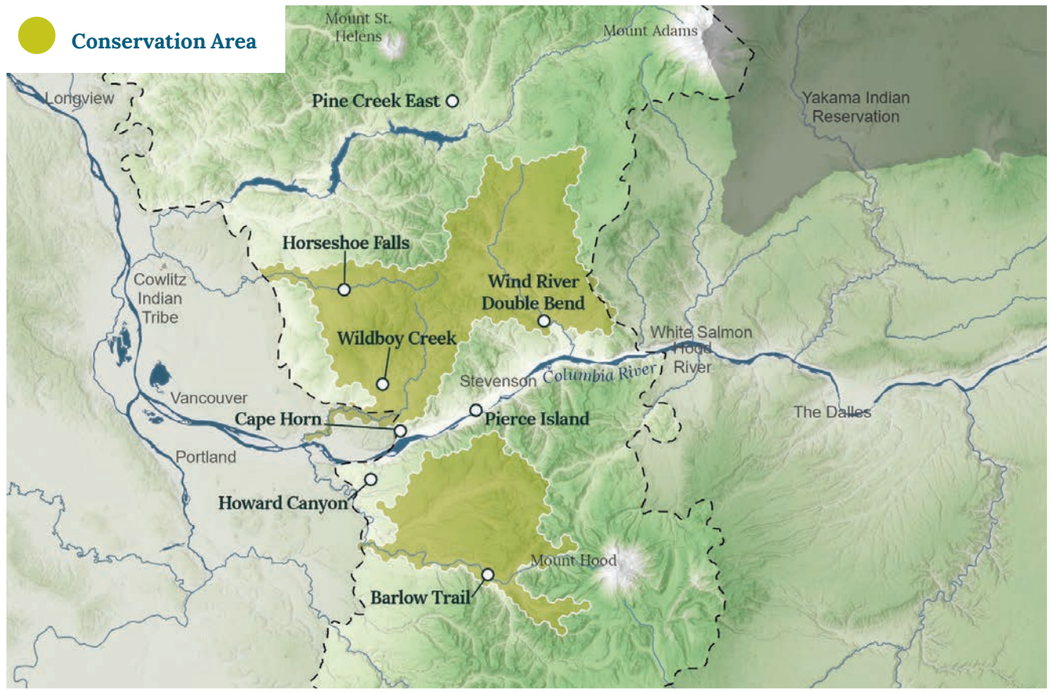
Optimist Club

Conservation Area: East Fork Lewis River

Clark County, WA

We received funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to implement restoration at this easement site in Clark County that we conserved in 2022 in partnership with the Optimist Club of Vancouver. We worked to control holly, Scots broom, blackberry, and other weeds, and a group of hard-working volunteers from Holland Partner Group helped with English holly removal. Holly shrubs can grow up to 50 feet tall and displace other native species in forest understories, which reduces biodiversity. At this conserved site, native plants like orange honeysuckle, Oregon iris, and rare small-flowered trillium can be found in abundance in nearby areas. Removing non-native plants reduces competition for species like these to take hold once again.

Top left: Native plantings and weed removal at sites throughout the Willamette Valley. Left: Orange honeysuckle (Lonicera ciliosa) at Optimist Club.



ECOREGION

West Cascades

OBJECTIVES

ENSURE large swaths of both public and privately owned forestlands are intact and functional, connecting habitat for migratory species.

HALT the net loss of older forests and increase the number of forested acres managed toward old-growth forest habitat.

PROTECT important rivers for salmon and steelhead by removing barriers to migration, improving river conditions, and restoring floodplains.

CULTIVATE local and regional public support for conserving working forestlands by demonstrating their economic and recreational value.

Horseshoe Falls on the East Fork Lewis River.

LAND PROTECTION

12 Acres

Cape Horn

Conservation Area: Columbia Gorge

Clark County, WA

In 2024, Columbia Land Trust proudly concluded our active role in stewarding the area around a beloved trailhead in the Columbia River Gorge, after conserving the land and caring for it for 22 years. Connecting people with nature is at the heart of Columbia Land Trust's conservation vision, and our actions here ensured that this trailhead space was permanently protected and available for what was, at the time, the yet-to-be-developed Cape Horn Trail. Today, this trail is one of the most diverse, beautiful, and popular trails in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

After this long legacy of involvement, Columbia Land Trust transferred 12 acres of old forest at the beginning of the Cape Horn Trail in Washougal, Washington to the permanent care of the U.S. Forest Service last March. If you begin your hike at the Salmon Falls Park & Ride and head counterclockwise on the loop, you are walking on land conserved by Columbia Land Trust as you start the trail.

In 2011, the Land Trust raised funds to purchase a conservation easement here to ensure connectivity for the future Cape Horn Trail, which at that point was still just

Cape Horn

Connecting people with nature is at the heart of Columbia Land Trust's conservation vision, and our actions here ensured that this trailhead space was permanently protected and available for what was, at the time, the yet-to-be-developed Cape Horn Trail.

a dream of local trail advocates. Over time, and thanks to years of work by Cape Horn Conservancy and Friends of the Columbia Gorge, the trail became an eight-mile hiking route offering unparalleled views of the Columbia River and taking visitors through an incredible diversity of topography and flora, from oak woodlands and old conifer forests to spring wildflowers on rocky outcrops.

"Columbia Land Trust played a key role in creating this trail from the very beginning and conserved multiple critical trail links," said former Land Trust Forest Conservation Director Cherie Kearney. "It took many years of passion, dedication, and collaboration to bring all the pieces of this trail together."

21 acres

Horseshoe Falls

Conservation Area: East Fork Lewis River

Clark County, WA

With funding from the Clark County Legacy Lands program and the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, Columbia Land Trust purchased 21 acres along the East Fork Lewis River to safeguard critical forest and riparian habitat and half a mile of scenic shoreline. This marks a significant milestone in protecting Clark County's wild places and permanently protects Horseshoe Falls, the last remaining major unconserved waterfall along the East Fork Lewis River. The East Fork watershed provides critical spawning and rearing habitat for federally threatened summer steelhead, and this site is important in facilitating their passage up the river.

The East Fork is significant as one of just four rivers on the lower Columbia River designated as a wild steelhead gene bank by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, where hatchery fish are excluded to protect federally threatened Lower Columbia steelhead. Waters in the reach above the project site are closed to fishing to protect this important population, so this property plays an outsized role in habitat conservation.

This project was comprised of two transactions, in which Columbia Land Trust purchased parcels from both the English family and the Mathews family. The English family has a long history on the land, which was passed down to the current generation from their aunt who managed it as a privately-operated recreational site and residence for the better part of the last century. Both sellers had a strong desire to preserve the properties' conservation values and worked with Columbia Land Trust for years to make this project a reality. We are grateful for the endurance and conservation commitment they demonstrated.

Currently, the site is not open to the public, because as part of the purchase agreement, one of the family members (who has resided beside the river his entire life) will live out his days on the property and serve as an informal caretaker. This life estate restricts public access for the foreseeable future, but some day the Land Trust will develop and implement an access plan.

In the near term, the Land Trust's stewardship work will include weed management and planting native trees and shrubs to improve the riparian habitat. We also plan to work with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to study steelhead and monitor habitat enhancement strategies.

85 acres

Wind River Double Bend

Conservation Area: Wind River

Skamania County, WA

This newly conserved 85-acre riparian forest includes 1.1 miles of the mainstem Wind River and brings the Land Trust's conservation total in the river corridor to 2.7 miles. This stretch of the Wind River is within its most productive juvenile salmonid rearing reach, where they feed and grow strong before migrating to the ocean. It is ranked within the highest priority category for conservation by the Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board. The acquisition extended the existing 336-acre Wind River Double Bend Natural Area.

Ecologically, the most recently conserved parcel has intact aquatic habitat, riparian habitat, areas of old and young conifer forest, and a nearly seven-acre patch of remnant oak habitat. Oak patches like these, that are otherwise surrounded by conifer forest, are important biodiversity refuges that can foster climate resilience.

Land Trust stewardship efforts will work to enhance forested watershed processes that are essential for fish habitat. Our team will encourage younger conifer stands towards older growth conditions, and we will utilize forest harvests and replanting to enhance habitat and create space for trees of diverse ages and species to grow.

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe provided funding for this project through the Cowlitz Tribal Foundation Statewide Fund. "We are immensely proud to partner in support of Columbia Land Trust's 86-acre conservation project on the Wind River," said Sarah Cooke, Cowlitz Tribal Foundation Officer.

Additional funding to conserve Wind River was provided by the Washington Salmon Recovery Funding Board, the Hollis Foundation, and the Felburn Foundation. The Conservation Fund and Lupine Forest LLC were also integral partners in this conservation project.

Looking east along the Columbia River from the Cape Horn Trail.

Barlow Trail

Conservation Area: Sandy River

Clackamas County, OR

Ongoing weed control and monitoring public use and forest health were the priorities this year at this 30-acre forested site near Rhododendron, Oregon, which includes an important reach of shoreline and side channel along the salmon-bearing Sandy River. Over the last few years, our stewardship staff and consulting arborists have observed significant drought stress on our native tree species. The Barlow Trail property is due for an update to its management plan in 2025 and we will be re-evaluating how to manage the forest with ongoing changes in climate and with an eye towards fire resiliency, especially given the proximity of neighbors.

We regularly see signs of beaver activity at Barlow Trail, and last year a neighbor who walks there every day showed us a den built into the bank of the Sandy River — across a very swift moving section of water from Barlow. The beaver regularly swims over to the Barlow Trail site to harvest building materials and food.

Pierce Island

Conservation Area: Beacon Rock

Skamania County, WA

Womskiold's northern wormwood (*Artemisia campestris var. wormskioldii*) is a rare plant species endemic to the Columbia River region and listed as endangered in both Oregon and Washington, and Columbia Land Trust staff continue to collaborate with a dedicated working group to increase the plant's population along the river.

Last summer, Land Trust staff and Drew Merritt from Humble Roots Native Plant Nursery visited Pierce Island to check on plantings we did in 2022 and 2023. We were pleased to find that about 65% of the total seedlings planted were alive and well. Although that percentage might not sound impressive, these were tiny seedlings planted into sand and rock on a dynamic island shoreline where wind and water are constantly changing the landscape, so we consider that a great success. What's more, the majority of the two-year-old plants had produced flower stalks this year, indicating that these plants have the potential to seed out and establish a larger population on Pierce Island.

Pierce Island

Pine Creek East

Conservation Area: Mount St. Helens

Skamania County, WA

Over the summer we partnered with a group of volunteers from EVO, a local outdoor apparel shop, to assess the many round culverts under the forest roads at Pine Creek East. An athletic team of five rode e-bikes along these roads, stopping at each culvert, evaluating its condition, and updating our GIS database. This work ensures that these key pieces of infrastructure are not plugged or blocked, which could lead to road washouts and decreased access to the site. Afterwards, the group walked the Cedar Flats trail, a nearby pocket of old growth forest, and was able to see the characteristics and desired future habitat conditions that we envision for Pine Creek East.

In 2024, our partnership with Cramer Fish Sciences also progressed as they completed a comprehensive watershed assessment of Pine Creek, a tributary of the Lewis River and an important spawning habitat for the federally threatened bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*). The assessment reviewed existing data and also compiled the hydrologic, geomorphic, hydraulic, habitat, and general watershed process characteristics of the area to help inform a conceptual design for in-stream restoration to benefit bull trout. Currently, Cramer Fish Sciences is completing the design portion of the project, narrowing the design scope to key reaches that would benefit from habitat enhancement while leveraging the least harm to this key species.

Howard Canyon

Conservation Area: Sandy River

Multnomah County, OR

The unique and special nature of this forest continues to unfold as we spend more time scrambling its steep slopes, wading the creeks, and listening through the seasons. Conserved in late 2022, this 437-acre forested site has immense value for wildlife habitat given its connectivity with other conserved lands and location less than a mile from the Columbia River. In February we counted northwestern salamander egg masses in the ponds along Big Creek. Contractors, partners, and volunteers continued work to remove Himalayan blackberry along the creek valleys and help restore the riparian forest corridors. A tree was harvested for use in a longhouse as part of a planned exhibit for the Crown Point Historical Society.

This year we created opportunities to introduce more people to this special place by hosting bird walks, site tours, and volunteer events for a number of community groups and partners new and old. The Conservation Alliance partnered with us to host a volunteer event for their member companies in June. A group of volunteers from Killian Pacific lent their people power to blackberry removal. Vive NW joined us for a bird walk led by guides from Bird Alliance of Oregon. Understanding how different groups see and experience Howard Canyon, along with ongoing conversations with neighbors and the local community, help inform our long-term planning for public access. In the meantime, we are continuing to map and monitor the condition of the forest and plan for forest management activities that will improve habitat and fire resiliency.

Wildboy Creek

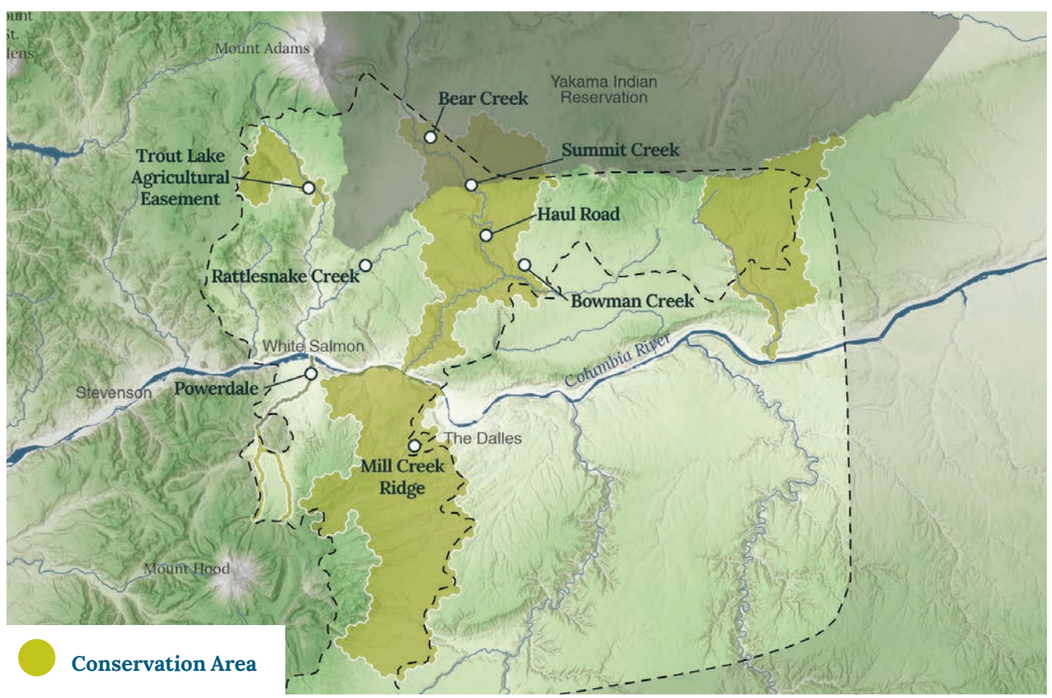
Conservation Area: Washougal River

Skamania County, WA

Our stewardship work at Wildboy Creek primarily revolved around the major effort with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe to remove the defunct Kwoneesum Dam over about five months in summer 2024 (see the dam removal spotlight on page 8). As part of the deconstruction process, we also worked with the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation to relocate about 3,500 native freshwater mussels from a portion of the creek that was going to be de-watered in order to remove the dam.

Beyond the dam removal construction area, we conducted some forest thinning and repurposed those tree materials as part of the in-stream work to increase habitat complexity to benefit fish. Our team also planned future planting and restoration work that will take place in the former reservoir footprint and construction areas.

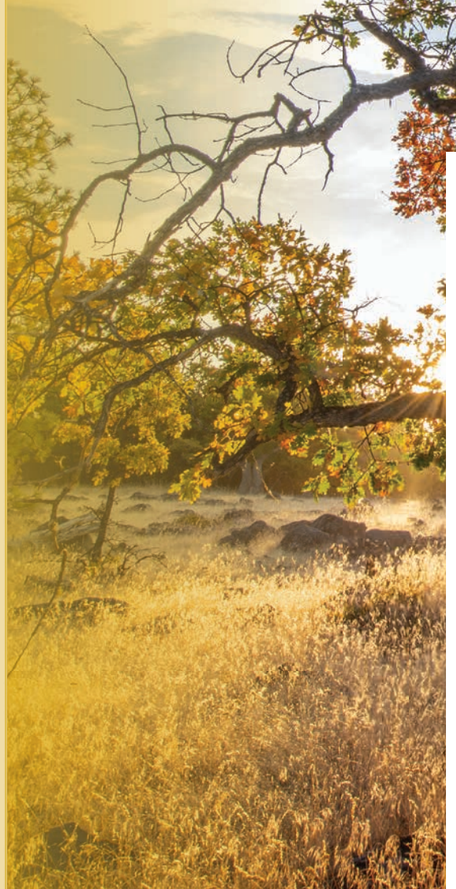
Left: Checking on plantings at Pierce Island. Below: Wearing a dry suit to relocate freshwater mussels in Wildboy Creek.



ECOREGION

East Cascades & Columbia Plateau

East Cascades Oak Partnership



EAST CASCADES OBJECTIVES

PROTECT and restore major east-side rivers and key tributaries.

PRESERVE oak woodland habitat systems and opportunities for wildlife migration and movement.

MAINTAIN the integrity of unique transition zones between riverside and upland habitats, high and low elevations, and wet and dry climates.

COLLABORATE with local stakeholders and increase public awareness about the benefits of oak woodlands, sustainable forestry, river conservation, and ecological processes.

SUPPORT community leaders in championing conservation strategies and leading implementation.

COLUMBIA PLATEAU OBJECTIVES

PROTECT intact and functional prairie and shrub-steppe habitat from land-use conversion and degradation.

RESTORE native plant species, habitat functions, and ecological processes on affected lands.

RAISE awareness of the benefits of conservation in prairie and shrub-steppe landscapes.

INVEST time in the area to learn more and build relationships to determine how we can be most helpful in local conservation efforts.

An Oregon white oak in the sunshine. Photo by Doug Gorsline.

75,000 acres

Columbia Gorge Forest

Conservation Areas: Columbia Gorge, Conboy Lake, Klickitat River, Little White Salmon River, Lower White Salmon River, Major Creek, Rattlesnake Creek, Wasco Oaks, and Wind River

Klickitat and Skamania Counties in WA, Hood River and Wasco Counties in OR

We continue to build momentum in this landscape-scale conservation effort that will eventually protect about 75,000 acres in the Columbia River Gorge in both Oregon and Washington. So far, we have conserved or secured funding for six of the 12 projects that comprise this campaign. We collaborated with partners including The Conservation Fund, Washington Department of Natural Resources, and Twin Creeks Timber/Green Diamond Resource Company to identify conservation outcomes for working forestlands as well as older forests and Oregon white oak landscapes that are critical to watershed health, wildlife habitat connection, climate resilience, and local recreation. Securing these lands will require major investments of both public and private funding. In 2024, we celebrated a major milestone and together with partners secured funding to conserve 29,778 acres of productive forestland around Mt. Adams. This $36 million award from the U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy program is the largest grant in Land Trust history and is emblematic of our collaborative approach to conservation, as well as a major step towards reaching the public fundraising goal for this project.

When the easement is complete, Twin Creeks Timber/Green Diamond Resource Company will own the forestland, which is located in Washington's White Salmon and Klickitat River watersheds, and the Washington Department of Natural Resources will hold and manage the easement.

With adjacency to other state, federal, and tribal forestlands, the easement will protect the region's working forests and the community benefits they offer, including wildlife habitat and migration pathways, traditional cultural and recreational access, clean water, climate resilience, and natural resource-based jobs. This $36 million allocation was the final phase of a 48,000-acre forest conservation strategy we are implementing on the Washington side of the Columbia River.

You will hear more about this multi-year project as we keep working to protect the awe-inspiring lands, waters, and wildlife of the Columbia River Gorge.

101 Acres

Trout Lake Agricultural Easement

Conservation Area: Trout Lake Valley

Klickitat County, WA

Columbia Land Trust conserved 100 acres of productive farmland in the heart of Trout Lake, Washington last May through the purchase of an agricultural conservation easement from the Pearson family — an accomplishment six years in the making. This is the second conservation project we have had the privilege of working on with the Pearsons and their organic dairy farm. In 2020, we protected 261 acres of productive haying and pasture ground, which provides nourishment for the family's herd of dairy cows. This new conservation easement protects additional summer pasture ground, as well as essential buildings and equipment that bring the farm's sustainable dairy products to grocery store shelves.

Located at the base of the southern flank of Mt. Adams, the soil in Trout Lake is rich and fertile. The valley is bisected by the glacier-fed waters of the White Salmon River and is a stronghold for family-owned dairy farms in our region.

Conserving farms like the Pearsons' helps keep our food sources close to home while providing jobs to the local community. It also benefits wildlife, like the state-endangered sandhill cranes that can be spotted grazing in pastureland in the spring.

The Pearsons' organic agricultural practices are certified by Oregon Tilth, indicating that the farm operates at the highest standards for sustainability. For example, the fields are fertilized with dairy manure, and the amount of fertilization is precise, minimizing the likelihood of excess leaching into groundwater. Irrigation water is routed from the nearby White Salmon River and applied using an efficient center-pivot irrigation system.

"Trout Lake is a special place and its farmland is facing significant conversion pressure," said Land Trust Conservation Lead Nate Ulrich. "The Pearsons are committed to good land stewardship and community, and this opportunity existed only because of their vision."

This project was made possible by funding from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Trout Lake Farmland

The Pearson family on their dairy farm in Trout Lake, WA.

Conserving farms like the Pearson's helps keep our food sources close to home while providing jobs to the local community. It also benefits wildlife, like the state-endangered sandhill cranes that can be spotted grazing in pastureland in the spring.

Bear Creek

Conservation Area: Klickitat River

Klickitat County, WA

The Land Trust secured a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program for fuels reduction treatments at Bear Creek. Thinning and pile burning was completed across 260 acres by hand crews who focused on reducing the overall density of medium and small trees in this ponderosa pine savanna system that would have historically been kept in check by frequent low-intensity fire. This unnatural buildup of trees increases the risk of high-intensity wildfire and threatens adjacent tribal forests and legacy trees.

In 2025, we plan to burn these slash piles, in preparation for a controlled broadcast burn at Bear Creek in following years. Thinning and pile burning like this is an important strategy for reducing overall surface and

ladder fuels. Many plant and wildlife species are adapted to these conditions and disturbance regimes and will benefit from these restoration treatments.

Bowman Creek

Conservation Area: Klickitat River

Klickitat County, WA

There has been lots of activity at Bowman Creek, as we completed a two-day prescribed burn that covered 59 acres of oak-pine woodland within the 350-acre stewardship unit. This major success was accomplished with local, regional, and national partners including Columbia Gorge TREX, Mt. Adams Resource Stewards, Washington Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, Skookum Resources, and the Klickitat Volunteer Fire Department. The primary goal was to reintroduce low-intensity fire to our oak-pine woodlands in order to maintain an open understory and recycle soil nutrients. The burns went well and appear to have met our ecological goals while also temporarily reducing the risk of high-intensity wildfire to the surrounding area.

This project was made possible through funding from The National Wild Turkey Federation, Columbia Gorge TREX, and Washington Department of Natural Resources. Stewardship at Bowman Creek continues to focus on promoting ecological integrity and climate resilience through the restoration of fire to the land and other forestry treatments.

The grant from The National Wild Turkey Federation also supported weed control treatments on ten acres in the center. This work will promote growth of native grasses and forbs that play an important role in the land's overall ecological integrity.

In another area, Land Trust staff thinned overstocked stands of trees and released Oregon white oaks from conifer encroachment.

Last year concluded with a prescribed pile burn in December, which we managed with the Mt Adams Prescribed Burn Association, to burn small diameter conifer trees that were cut, limbed, and piled in the spring, and left to dry out over the summer.

East Cascades Oak Partnership

Conservation Area: East Cascades Ecoregion

Klickitat and Skamania Counties, WA and Hood River and Wasco Counties, OR

Oaks need us more than ever. They are often misunderstood by the public and vulnerable to climate change and fire. That's where the East Cascades Oak Partnership (ECOP) comes in. We are working with urgency to help people understand the value of oaks and enable land managers to conserve and responsibly care for these habitats. ECOP is a collaborative conservation initiative that is improving outcomes for Oregon white oak habitats by empowering the people who work, play, and live among them. With leadership from Columbia Land Trust, this team of nonprofits, state and federal agencies, tribes, and community members, is making strides in restoring oak systems throughout the region.

Now in our second year of implementing a $7 million investment from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, our strategy is getting stronger and restoration is accelerating. With over 340 members and two new core partners taking on restoration projects, 2024 was a big year for ECOP. Projects were developed with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, the Mt. Hood National Forest, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Wasco Soil and Water Conservation District, The Conservation Fund, and Lomakatsi Restoration Project. This work will facilitate restoration of the oak understory, improve forest health, and reduce fire fuels.

In addition to jumpstarting oak habitat restoration efforts, ECOP addresses management uncertainties and knowledge gaps that challenge decision makers. Partners installed 121 new monitoring plots this year and assessed more than 8,000 acres to determine restoration needs—building a shared pool of knowledge that strengthens our collective efforts. Through collaboration, we overcome barriers that could impede conservation on a landscape scale.

With partners from Oregon State University, Cal Poly Humboldt, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, we kicked off an innovative monitoring project that will provide crucial insight into oaks' response to drought and thinning treatments. We hosted more than a dozen learning tours and events, empowering hundreds of members with the knowledge to navigate complex and changing conditions. Together, we learned how to identify native and invasive grasses, sustainably collect local native seed, and how to use wildlife signs to inform land management.

In 2025, we look forward to launching the ECOP website. It will expand accessibility to our community and deliver important tools like our monitoring protocols and management guidance—connecting us all to this inspiring story of collaborative conservation.

Left: Cavities in oak trees provide valuable wildlife habitat. Right: A prescribed pile burn at Bowman Creek.

Haul Road

Conservation Area: Klickitat River

Klickitat County, WA

The Land Trust conserved the Haul Road site in 2007 and has completed seven phases of restoration work here, including the removal of an eight-mile stretch of unused road in order to allow the river to once again shape the floodplain and form important habitat features for fish.

The Klickitat River is one of the longest free-flowing rivers in Washington and supports a large variety of fish and wildlife, including steelhead (summer and winter), chinook (spring and fall), coho, bull trout, lamprey, and others. The primary goal of this multi-phased project is to restore connectivity of riverine, floodplain, and hillslope processes. Prior phases of work have incrementally removed road infrastructure, re-contoured the floodplain, reconnected side channels and wetlands, and initiated revegetation and weed control.

In 2024, we continued our stewardship of this floodplain by partnering with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and a local contractor to map and treat invasive reed canarygrass. This final phase will help ensure the development of native riparian vegetation by controlling and preventing non-native plants.

Mill Creek Ridge

Conservation Area: Wasco Oaks

Wasco County, OR

In 2024, we made progress on our oak savanna understory restoration work spanning 20 acres within Mill Creek Ridge. This effort will restore native grass and wildflowers, in addition to building our knowledge and organizational capacity to achieve restoration on a larger scale. In 2024 we completed two rounds of rush skeletonweed (*Chondrilla juncea*) control, one in spring and one in fall. We observed that the previous year's fall herbicide treatment had been very successful at reducing the emergence of new rush skeletonweed plants this spring, so we only had to target small problem areas. Despite this success, this weed is persistent, and removal work continues within the project area. An off-road utility vehicle with a tank and sprayer setup, purchased with funds from a generous donor, expedited our weed control work significantly. Staff and volunteers from the ECOP also visited Mill Creek Ridge in the spring to complete the first round of native seed collection, focusing on balsamroot, for eventual planting at the restoration sites throughout the region. This group activity included expert teaching on methods for ethical seed collection and processing.

And in a sterling display of commitment and care for nature, two Mill Creek Ridge volunteer site stewards, Bruce Lumper and Susan Stelzer, finished a multi-year project to take down old barbed wire fences that used to crisscross the land, giving wildlife freer passage. "Working with my site volunteer partner to remove all the cross fencing has been fun and gratifying," said Susan. "Mill Creek Ridge is a beautiful piece of land with lovely wide-open vistas for our community to enjoy."

Powerdale

Conservation Area: Hood River

Hood River County, OR

We are partnering with the Hood River Watershed Group and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs to conduct an aquatic habitat restoration assessment within the Powerdale corridor of the lower Hood River. Inter-Fluve, Inc was hired to develop conceptual designs for projects that will benefit salmon, steelhead, and other aquatic species. After research, data collection, and survey work throughout the year, in December Inter-Fluve, presented a set of restoration alternatives for six different sites to a larger group of Hood River partners. The group participated in ranking the projects, setting the stage for implementing the highest priority restoration actions in the coming years. Meanwhile, the Hood River Watershed Group was awarded a multi-year, multi-million-dollar Focused Investment Partnership funding agreement by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. This enables the Watershed Group to begin work immediately on the highest ranked Powerdale project, which will entail creation and reconnection of side channel habitat. The project will be engineered and permitted in 2025, with construction possible by fall but more likely to occur in summer 2026.

On the north side of the Hood River in the upland portion of the Powerdale site (where we completed a collaborative trail extension project with Hood River County Parks in 2023), one member of our stewardship team constructed a brush thicket out of native plants for a population of California quail that were previously nesting in invasive blackberry bushes that we are working to control.

Rattlesnake Creek

In-stream restoration work at Rattlesnake Creek.

Rattlesnake Creek

Conservation Area: White Salmon River

Klickitat County, WA

Since conserving this 917-acre site in late 2023, we have completed the first of two phases of floodplain restoration in the upper section of the creek. Rattlesnake Creek is the largest anadromous tributary to the White Salmon River, and when combined with state-owned lands, this parcel protects the entire upper four miles of Rattlesnake Creek. U.S. Geological Survey biologists found that this reach of the creek remains the coolest throughout the year, which is important for climate resilience.

The floodplain enhancement used low-tech process-based restoration techniques, as crews installed 60 different log structures throughout a mile-long stretch of the floodplain to improve habitat for steelhead and improve overall watershed function. This project is funded by the Washington Salmon Recovery Funding Board and was developed in collaboration with Yakama Nation Fisheries whose staff have remained involved as technical advisors.

A truck filled with barbed wire that was removed from Mill Creek Ridge by volunteers.

Summit Creek

Conservation Area: Klickitat River

Klickitat County, WA

In 2023, the Land Trust secured a U.S. Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration grant (administered by the Washington Department of Natural Resources), with the goal of restoring ecological integrity to the Northern Rocky Mountain Dry-Mesic Montane Mixed Conifer and East Cascades Mixed Oak and Pine systems at Summit Creek and other areas within the Klickitat Canyon Stewardship Area. Beyond benefiting the land and wildlife, this work will support important human outcomes including local jobs, timber supply for local mills and other businesses, reduced risk of catastrophic wildfire and smoke impacts, and learning opportunities for partners and the public about managing dry forests in the East Cascades.

In 2024, we spent time planning forest health thinning treatments on at least 275 acres of Land Trust-owned land, and this year we will hire contractors to conduct both commercial and non-commercial thinning treatments in support of the above-mentioned ecological goals.

Columbia Land Trust

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Oregon iris (Iris tenax) growing at Optimist Club.

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