

Agenda Item Summary

BACKGROUND

In 2010, the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and the State of Oregon signed an agreement to settle BPA wildlife habitat mitigation obligations in the Willamette Valley. The agreement guarantees more than \$117 million for fish and wildlife habitat protection through the acquisition of real property, purchasing a minimum of 16,880 acres of important native habitats in fee title or via conservation easements. The agreement runs from 2010 to 2025, and also provides for the implementation of a long-term account to fund habitat maintenance for the program when the agreement expires. At least 10 percent of the projects will also benefit ESA listed fish species through habitat protection. Most of these properties have not and will not be acquisitions by ODFW, but instead are funded by BPA and held by outside parties such as land trusts, tribes, and other governmental agencies. ODFW is currently targeting only in-holdings and lands adjacent to already established Wildlife Areas in the Willamette Valley for acquisition under this program. Staff is proposing two such acquisitions for Commission approval.

Relevance to Plans and Strategies

Both of the proposed acquisitions are located within Conservation Opportunity Areas (COA) identified in the Oregon Conservation Strategy. The Flight's End property is located in the Willamette River Floodplain COA (WV-03). This area spans almost the entire length of the Willamette ecoregion encompassing the floodplain of the Willamette River from south of Springfield to the confluence with the Columbia River. Restoration of the Willamette floodplain has important implications not only for wildlife habitats, but also for the social and economic factors resulting from restoring ecological function such as flood control and improvement of water quality. The Coyote Creek Property is located in the West Eugene COA (WV-23). This site extends from Camas Swale north along the foothills to Cox Butte, including the West Eugene Wetlands. This area contains many important sites including Camas Swale, Fern Ridge Reservoir, and the West Eugene Wetlands. This COA also contains some of the largest remaining fragments of the Willamette Valley's native wet prairies (West Eugene Wetlands) and provides important habitat for migratory birds. Acquisition of these two sites will facilitate management of adjoining ODFW wildlife areas due to consolidation of boundaries, efficiencies of scale, and increased public recreational opportunities.

Coyote Creek Property

This 310 acre property is located just west of the City of Eugene in the West Eugene Wetlands/Spencer Creek Conservation Opportunity Area, in very close proximity to the Fern Ridge Wildlife Area. The proposed purchase price of this property is \$805,000. This area includes the largest remaining wet prairie in the Willamette Valley. This area supports valley

bottom wetland, grassland, and riparian habitats with the highest remaining concentration of rare Willamette Valley at-risk endemic species, including the federally Endangered Bradshaw's lomatium (*Lomatium bradshawii*), Willamette daisy (*Erigeron decumbens* var. *decumbens*), Fender's blue butterfly (*Icaricia icariodes fenderi*), and the federally threatened Kincaid's lupine (*Lupinus sulphureus* ssp. *kincaidii*). In addition, there are 13 Federal Species of Concern (four plant and nine animal species) in the conservation area. The surrounding uplands support some of the largest expanses of Oregon white oak woodlands and savannas remaining in the Willamette Valley, along with their associated upland species such as the western grey squirrel, acorn woodpecker, and wayside aster.

This acquisition will help conserve 99 acres of riparian forest and 211 acres of restorable wet prairie, which will provide habitat for foraging waterfowl, grassland birds and native cutthroat trout. Upon restoration the property also will provide opportunities for re-introduction of endangered Willamette Valley plant species associated with wet prairie, such as Bradshaw's lomatium and Willamette daisy. The property is currently owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). If approved, TNC would transfer the property to ODFW by October, 2013 as an addition to Fern Ridge Wildlife Area. ODFW would then begin planning for the area, including habitat restoration and public use. ODFW has agreed to manage the property until the transfer occurs, and after transfer will initiate a formal management planning process.

The zoning of this property is Exclusive Farm Use. The historic use of the property was agricultural in nature, and it has been farmed for grass hay for many years. There are no structures on the property. A dirt berm is located along a portion of the western boundary and appears to be man-made. Access to the property is from Cantrell Road, a gravel rural road on the north, and Halderson Road, a paved rural road from the south. There is a current farm lease with a local farmer. The property has no water rights. The 2012 annual property taxes were \$1,405.06.

With more than 250 acres of hydric soils, restoration of the Coyote Creek tract will provide an opportunity to restore a mosaic of vernal pool, wet prairie and riparian forest habitats. Permanent protection of this property will also provide an opportunity to restore wetland hydrology within an existing complex of conservation lands. The 211 acres of open field will require major habitat restoration, while the riparian area is in fairly good ecological condition.

The vision for this property is to restore the open farm fields to wet prairie for western meadowlark, vesper sparrow, Nelson's checkermallow, red-legged frogs, streaked horn larks, and other grassland bird use with seasonal use by waterfowl. Staff will also discuss removal of the berm with the City of Eugene, which owns the neighboring property to the east. City staff have already expressed an interest in removal, to allow better sheet flow across both properties and recharge of the vernal pool habitat.

Planned restoration of the site would result in approximately 211 acres of wet and upland native prairie, 25 acres of riparian forest and shrub and 14 acres of oak woodland.

Flight's End Property

This 100 acre property is located at the north end of Sauvie Island and is an in-holding to the Sauvie Island Wildlife Area, an 11,543 acre wildlife area owned and managed by ODFW. The proposed purchase price of this property is \$731,000. Bordered by the Multnomah Channel to the west and Crane Slough to the east, the property is located in the Columbia River Bottomlands Conservation Opportunity Area, and is also part of the Willamette River Anchor Habitats for ESA listed salmonid species. Should this property becomes part of the SIWA, the site will contribute to a unique and complex array of wetlands owned and managed for wildlife in the area, including; Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS), Shillapoo Wildlife Area (WDFW), Deer Island (Columbia Land Trust), Multnomah Channel wetlands (Metro), Palensky Wildlife Mitigation Area (BPA and ODFW), and Wapato Greenway Access (Oregon State Parks). Flight's End is the last privately held inholding on the west side of the Sauvie Island Wildlife Area.

Under ODFW ownership, the property would be incorporated into the management of SIWA and would be available for public recreational activities consistent with the conservation purpose of the acquisition. The property has been primarily managed for waterfowl hunting for many years. In 2009 Ducks Unlimited (DU) conducted a wetland restoration project at the site, which resulted in the construction of two water control structures, a culvert and contouring of an area for inundation. There are two aging "floating lodges" located on the property and they will probably be disposed of due to safety concerns.

Habitats at the Flight's End site include wetlands, grasslands, riparian forests, lacustrine lake and cultivated fields. Though formal surveys have not yet been conducted, a number of wildlife species that have been documented at the site include several Oregon Conservation Strategy (OCS) priority status species, including Northern red-legged frog and willow flycatcher. Additional wildlife species that utilize the habitats on site include migrating waterfowl (dusky Canada goose, pintail, green-winged teal), neotropical migratory songbirds (common yellowthroat, Western wood-pewee) and raptors (bald eagle, osprey), and wading birds (great blue heron, great egret).

Current habitat conditions vary and include wetlands with patches of wapato and other native species. Reed canary grass, an introduced invasive grass, is also present and dominates some portions of the wetlands. A total of 26 acres of grasslands occur on the site, of which all but 2 acres are currently in cultivated fields of corn and millet. Bordering the entire property are extensive riparian forests dominated by Oregon ash with scattered black cottonwood, Pacific willow and black hawthorne. The understory of the riparian forest varies in condition with native shrub

species such as Douglas spiraea and snowberry and non-native reed canary grass.

The Multnomah Channel borders the site to the west and has been identified as a priority habitat for restoration of ESA listed salmonid species and Pacific lamprey. The Multnomah Channel is also an important site for public recreation including fishing, boating, and bird watching. Crane Slough borders the east side of the site and is also important habitat for salmon and steelhead as well as numerous species of birds.

ODFW's habitat restoration goals for the site include maintaining existing high quality habitats such as riparian forests and restoring degraded habitats to historic grassland and wetland plant communities. Restoration activities will be based on the topography, river levels, elevations and historic habitat conditions of the site. A key component of habitat restoration at Flight's End will be the use of moist soil management which is used to mimic historic hydrologic regimes on the lower Columbia River. ODFW will initiate a formal management plan process upon acquisition of the property.

Attachment two contains both aerial views and maps of the surrounding areas of both acquisitions.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The proposed land purchases have been presented by ODFW staff and TNC partners at meetings of conservation organizations, local civic clubs, angler/hunter groups, local governments, and resource industry groups; staff and TNC partners have also met individually with private landowners. Two directed public meetings were scheduled for December 18 on Sauvie Island and December 19 in Veneta to provide information on the proposed land exchange and gather public input.

ODFW staff have also met and discussed the land exchange agreement with several Oregon State legislators, including Senators Betsy Johnson and Floyd Prozanski, and Representatives Brad Witt and Paul Holvey. ODFW staff have also provided information on these purchases to the offices of elected Federal officials and both Columbia and Lane County Commissioners. Attachment three contains three public information fact sheets used to inform the public about the proposed acquisitions and the Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program (WWMP) in general.

ISSUE 1

ACQUISITION OF TWO PROPERTIES LOCATED IN THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY

ANALYSIS

The restoration efforts will have direct, positive economic impact on local communities. New wildlife-related recreation access opportunities for the public will be provided, and restoration work may also provide opportunities for local jobs. Both of these properties show future promise to showcase Oregon Conservation Strategy habitats and restoration that would benefit strategy species.

ODFW will follow Oregon law and pay "in lieu of taxes" to counties for the properties involved (ORS 496.340). ODFW will also pay fire protection and drainage district assessments (ORS 547.045, ORS 477.230).

ODFW seeks approval from the Commission as agency policy requires approval for all land transactions valued over \$100,000 (fair market value). *Policy Number ASD-19, November 17, 2000.*

OPTIONS

1. Approve the acquisition of the Coyote Creek property and the Flight's End property in the Willamette Valley.
2. Do not approve the acquisition of the Coyote Creek property and the Flight's End property in the Willamette Valley.

**STAFF
RECOMMENDATION**

Approve the acquisition of both described properties and direct staff to proceed to escrow closing upon completion of the due diligence processes required under Oregon Administrative Rules for land acquisition.

DRAFT MOTION	I move to approve the acquisition of both the Coyote Creek and Flight's End properties, and direct staff to proceed to escrow closing upon completion of the due diligence processes required under Oregon Administrative Rules.
EFFECTIVE DATE	January 11, 2013