

OCRF 2024-34 Increasing and Leading Access to Nature in the Willamette Valley

Spring 2024 OCRF Project Proposal

Environment for the Americas

Susan Bonfield
5171 Eldorado Springs Dr, Suite N
Boulder, CO 80303

O: 303-499-1950

Stephanie A Loredo

1292 Washington St
Eugene, OR 97405

sloredo@environmentamericas.org
O: 541-603-8444

FollowUp Form

Introduction

Project Title*

Insert the full project name assigned by ODFW, including the unique code before the Project Title that was given in the agreement.

(Example) **OCRF XXXX-XX_ ProjectTitle**

OCRF 2024-34 Increasing and Leading Access to Nature in the Willamette Valley

Upon completion of the project, please complete this Final Report document and submit it before the Project Expiration Date on the Project Agreements. The information you provide will be used for accountability and reporting and displayed to the general public. Please be as clear and concise as possible and avoid jargon or acronyms.

Project Location

Provide the nearest city and the county where project work will be completed, if multiple locations will be used provide them as a bulleted list.

- Salem-Keizer, OR
- Albany, OR
- Corvallis, OR
- Dallas, OR
- Jefferson, OR
- Independence, OR
- Mammoth, OR

Anticipated Impact Measurement Unit*

Other (please explain below)

Anticipated Impact Measurement Unit - Other

If you selected other above, please explain here.

165 volunteers engaged; 1969 youth participants reached; 40-50% Latino & Hispanic engagement through community events.

Anticipated Impact Value

(from the original application)

190

Anticipated Impact Value 2*

Enter the actual miles, acres, volunteers engaged, etc.

165

Oregon Conservation Strategy Species*

List the Oregon Conservation Strategy Species and Oregon Conservation Strategy Opportunity Areas that the Project benefited.

Nature programs targeted understanding of the ecology and conservation of the Northern Red-legged Frog, Oregon Vesper Sparrow, Fringed Myotis, Acorn Woodpecker, and Western Pond Turtle. The nature programs delivered by two interns had a focus on how climate change and population growth affect multiple habitats, the impact of key conservation issues (land use changes, disruption of disturbance regimes), and the ways invasive species affect water use (drought) and species health in those habitats.

Final Report Questions

Project Statement*

Briefly describe what the project accomplished and the problem(s) it addressed. Make a clear and concise statement; avoid jargon and acronyms.

The project addressed community outreach to the growing Latino Community in four mid-Valley counties. Funding provided supported two interns organizing and facilitating educational and bilingual programs. In addition, it supported the purchase of a boot-brush station to stop the spread of invasive weeds at the site.

Summary of Goals*

Describe how project goals, objectives, and/or milestones were completed. Discuss any measurable and achieved benefits (# of volunteers engaged, acreage restored, retrofits, planning documents created, research results, etc.).

Successful intern recruitment took place in Fall 2024, leading to the hiring of Emily Mendez to lead bilingual nature-based programming at Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex (NWRC). Emily began work in December and after training, helped coordinate Winter Wildlife Days, a multi-site, multi-day, bilingual event. The event was centered around the theme of Habitat is home. In March, nineteen Winter Wildlife Days events were delivered across the refuge complex and local parks. The event reached 1266 members from the community. Emily created a Decomposer Detective Station that was incorporated in many of the events, where kids got hands-on with soil critters like worms, grubs, beetles, millipedes, pillbugs, and centipedes.

In the Spring, Emily also focused on targeting programs to Latino youth. She partnered with four Boys and Girls Clubs, reaching 100 participants of primarily Latino descent in the Greater Salem Area for a wildlife-inspired art challenge and field trips to various sites in the complex. For the Nature Art Contest, she created inspiration stations featuring owls, elk, and bird adaptations. Winners of the contest had their artwork turned into stickers that were used as outreach material at the Ankeny Hill Nature Center. Aside from working with

local youth programs, Emily led other bilingual field trips to the refuge complex, including 30 students from North Salem, 120 from Pringle Elementary, 66 from Garfield Elementary, 51 from Lincoln Elementary, 75 from Grant Community School, 50 from STEAM Night at Kathryn Jones Harrison Elementary School, and 70 participants from Boys and Girls Club. Some field trips had a more scientific focus, like an owl pellet investigation of twenty students at Oregon State University. Emily also led nature events, engaging 171 people in photography, birding, a volunteer fair, and a stream celebration.

Behind the scenes, Emily helped with Ankeny Hill Nature Center operations, visitor services, social media outreach, bilingual translations, and brochure updates. She worked on getting the foundations for accessible bird outings for participants with disabilities. She received training in facilitating inclusive bird outings from Access Birding.

Upon finalizing the internship, Emily said in a post-internship interview, "This internship really leveled up my skills in bilingual interpretation, project coordination, and public engagement. I got more confident in leading field trips and developing programs for diverse age groups. I also learned a lot about translating outreach materials, planning inclusive events, and collaborating with partners across different agencies and nonprofits." When asked how the experience changed her perceptions of public lands or conservation work, she said, "This experience made me realize how multi-layered conservation work is. It's not just about protecting land and species, but about building bridges between people and nature. Outreach, interpretation, language access, equity work, education is all a part of creating a large community. It gave me a new level of respect for the behind-the-scenes work that makes our refuges and parks feel welcoming, inclusive, and inspiring."

Virginia was an intern for two months. During her time, she accomplished the following tasks:

- Organized a World Migratory Bird day event with activities for families.
- Created a recruitment and informational video for Ankeny Hill Nature Center volunteers.
- Contributed to the site's social media content to increase and diversify audiences, reaching over 5,000 new accounts.
- Provided support to AHNC Programs
- Updated signage at Turtle Flats site with interpretative ways to engage visitors.
- Updated Snag Boat Bend restoration and AHNC brochures with current information.
- Updated QR code on the Homer Campbell Boardwalk Trailhead sign.

The park acquired a boot brush and produced signage and structure for an invasive species boot brush station.

Lessons Learned*

Describe lessons learned and challenges faced during the grant performance period. Examples being delays, contractual issues, permitting, funding, changes to the project Scope of Work or amendments, etc.

We had a gap in activities due to Emily Mendez leaving the position in May, two months early. She got hired as a seasonal Park Guide at Channel Islands National Park with the National Park Service, a job she was very excited about. This caused some issues with the site's staff management. Recruitment for a new intern took some time due to a supervisor taking leave for family reasons. Recruitment was challenging because there were fewer resources for a new intern; they could only work for 8 weeks and would receive minimal training. The timeline of activities had to be redefined, such as bilingual outreach opportunities. The new intern, Virginia Corona, hit the ground running as she was a prior volunteer at the site and even participated in Winter Wildlife Days. However, about a month into her position, the government was shut down.

The government shutdown affected the work on this project. Our main partner and intern on-site supervisor at the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Samantha Bartling, has not been able to work. This affected the completion and delivery of the following activities:

- The Boot brush station was not finalized. While all pieces were ordered and delivered, the station has not been set up.

- World Migratory Bird Day event was canceled
- The STEAM Boat sticker production was unfinished
- Transportation funds for a bilingual family program were left unused. There was a plan for an activity with Polk Soil & Water Conservation District, as well as Luckiamute Watershed Council but it did not materialize without Samantha as she was the main point of contact.

Next Steps*

Describe any next steps for the project, if any.

The boot brush station will be finalized once the government re-opens. The Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex will continue its outreach to Latinos in nearby communities. They have had an intern focusing on Latino outreach for the last 10 years and will continue to find ways to fund the work. Ankeny Hill Nature Center has a lot of plans for environmental education programs. Currently, there is a small number of staff working and a large number of volunteers bringing forward many of the activities. The site hopes to increase audience participation by leading more accessible birding and other nature experiences to the disabled community.

Attachments

Include all project data collected, such as surveys, reports, PDF maps, photo monitoring and planning documents. Upload any color photographs of the Project area(s) before and after the Project completion taken at the pre-set photo points as one document.

Optional Document URL

If documents are stored in an accessible location such as Dropbox, you may enter the url here.

Attachment 1

DecomposerDetective_Richard Siyuan Yu (2).JPG

Attachment 2

VisitorServicesTeam_Ricardo Rodriguez USFWS.jpeg

Attachment 3

BGC Epping Homestead_Ricardo Rodriguez USFWS (1).jpg

Attachment 4

Felice&EmilyAtWWFD_Ricardo Rodriguez USFWS (1).JPG

Attachment 5

Pat&BobbieWithVSTeam_Sam Bartling USFWS.jpg

Attachment 6

WILLAMETTE VALLEY TRIFOLD.png

Attachment 7

emily_decomposers booth.jpg

Attachment 8

Decomposer-Log-1024x683.jpeg

Attachment 9

Prairie-Path-1024x683.jpg

Attachment 10

OSU-Grad-Students-1024x683.jpeg

Certification

Drafts of final reports for review may be submitted to OCRF.ODFW@odfw.oregon.gov.

Certifying Statement*

I certify that the above and attached information is true and accurate.

Yes

Applicant Authorized Representative Name*

Stephanie Loredo

Authorized Representative Title*
Internship Programs Manager

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- DecomposerDetective_Richard Siyuan Yu (2).JPG
- VisitorServicesTeam_Ricardo Rodriguez USFWS.jpeg
- BGC Epping Homestead_Ricardo Rodriguez USFWS (1).jpg
- Felice&EmilyAtWWFD_Ricardo Rodriguez USFWS (1).JPG
- Pat&BobbieWithVSTeam_Sam Bartling USFWS.jpg
- WILLAMETTE VALLEY TRIFOLD.png
- emily_decomposers booth.jpg
- Decomposer-Log-1024x683.jpeg
- Prairie-Path-1024x683.jpg
- OSU-Grad-Students-1024x683.jpeg











THE VILLAMETTE VALLEY National Wildlife Refuge Complex



The Willamette Valley was once a diverse landscape of wetlands, meandering streams, and seasonal marshes filled with other Canada geese, ducks have wildlife. Over time, people transformed much of this natural mosaic into farmland and the expanding cities, leaving fewer places for native species to thrive.

In the 1960s—more than fifty years after President Theodore Roosevelt established the first National Wildlife Refuge—three refuges were created in the valley: William L. Finley, Ankeny, and Basket Slough. Their mission was to protect and restore what remained of the region's native habitats. Today, these refuges are actively managed to maintain a rich variety of plants and animals, and are rare or have limited ranges.

The Willamette Valley refuges focus on providing vital wintering habitat for dusky Canada geese. Unlike seasonal marshes, ducks have very limited ranges—they rest and winter almost entirely in the Willamette Valley. Over time, habitat loss, predation, and hunting have reduced their numbers.

The refuges also work to preserve native species and enhance biodiversity, protecting endangered wildlife like peregrine falcons, bald eagles, Oregon chub, Fender's blue butterfly, and Bendavid's desert parsley.

Today, seasonal wetlands, native prairie, and riparian forests are carefully managed to support wildlife through education and recreation.



The three refuges in the Willamette Valley are part of more than 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The service also manages national fish hatcheries and provides Federal leadership in habitat protection, fish and wildlife research, technical assistance, conservation and protection of migratory birds, certain marine mammals and threatened and endangered species.

Spring



Willamette Valley CONSERVATION AREA

The Willamette Valley Conservation Area, established in 2024, is the 572nd unit of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and part of the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Managed under the National Wildlife Refuge System, it introduces a different model of conservation.

Unlike traditional refuges, which are largely publicly owned, conservation easements on private lands. Through these easements, landowners retain the ability to use their property—often for farming or other activities—while also ensuring the long-term protection of critical habitats. This approach safeguards key migration corridors, supports diverse fish and wildlife populations, and helps maintain the valley's agricultural heritage.

This 600-acre parcel is part of a decade-long effort to permanently conserve the valley's rare oak and prairie habitats. Within its boundaries, it provides refuge for five federally listed species, two candidate species, and numerous other sensitive plants and animals.

In addition to these protections, the area serves as essential habitat for migratory birds and iconic Oregon wildlife. Western monarch butterflies, western meadowlarks, and the state's Oregon white oak all find a stronghold here, ensuring that these species remain part of the Willamette Valley's natural legacy.



William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge

The 5,325 acres of the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) protects examples of Willamette Valley historic habitats including Oregon White Oak Savanna, bottomland oak forest, and native upland and wet prairie. Over 230 species of birds have been recorded at the refuge.

William L. Finley (NWR) has over twelve miles of hiking trails. The logging auto four routes on Finley Refuge Road and Bruce Road is a great way to view geese and ducks during the wet winter months.

Located on the east side of the Willamette River in Linn County, Snag Boat Bend is a small unit of William L. Finley NWR that provides vital habitat for many wildlife species. The 367 acres that encompasses the refuge are a blend of riparian forest, backwater sloughs and seasonal wetlands.

The Nature Conservancy bought the land in 1998 and sold it to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2000.

With the help of volunteers, trail building and habitat restoration projects, the refuge was opened to the public in May 2003.

Snag Boat Bend provides wonderful wildlife viewing opportunities. Trails throughout the refuge take you to seasonally flooded habitat, along ponds and to the edge of Lake Creek.

Did you know...

...that the refuge was named for William L. Finley, an early conservationist and photographer who persuaded President Theodore Roosevelt to set aside the first National Wildlife Refuge West of the Mississippi River?



Land Use: Copyrighted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge

Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) contains 2,796 acres of flat to gently rolling land located near the confluence of the Willamette and Santiam Rivers. The Refuge's farmed fields, wetlands, and riparian forests provide a variety of wildlife habitats.

Ankeny Refuge also has extensive boardwalk trails and a network of marshes popular with thousands of resident and migratory birds. Interpretive panels along trails, at kiosks and parking areas describe different wildlife and habitats found in the refuge.

The partnership received an award as a Public Lands Partner in 2025 as a Public Lands Alliance.



Joe Lempho Photography. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.

Basket Slough National Wildlife Refuge



Basket Slough is the most northerly of the three Valley refuges. It includes 2,492 acres of farmed fields, rolling oak covered hills and shallow wetlands. Dusky Canada geese usually appear here first in the fall, and use the refuge as their last rest stop before heading back to their Alaska nesting grounds in the spring.

If you enjoy getting outdoors and looking for wildlife, consider a visit to Basket Slough National Wildlife Refuge! With over 250 recorded species of birds as well as coyote, Fender's blue butterfly, Western pond turtle and much more, you are sure to see something interesting no matter what time of year. Trails, observation decks, and refuge roads are available year-round for excellent visitor opportunities.

Did you know...

...that Fender's blue butterfly was once thought to be extinct? One of the world's largest populations on this tiny butterfly is found at Basket Slough NWR.









