

Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report Summary

FY 2022 Fiscal Highlights

Total Program Operations Funding Allocated (7/1/21 – 6/30/22)	\$1,702,922
Total Program Operations Funding Spent (by 6/30/2022)	\$1,205,260

Conservation Spotlight

An interesting visitor in the spring and summer is the Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerine*). This small sparrow migrates from the southern US and breeds throughout the Pacific Northwest. The birds arrive in the Willamette Valley as early as March, but the peak of migration is mid to late April. In autumn, many birds form large flocks in open grassy clearings in the mountains. Few birds remain beyond early October. Chipping sparrows are an Oregon Conservation Strategy Species.



Photo 1. A male chipping sparrow in summer breeding plumage. K. Kohl photo

Chipping sparrows are typically found in open forests and drier woodland edges. They prefer areas with sparse, herbaceous understories for foraging. They are often found on WWMP properties that have high amounts of oak forest canopies and grassland areas.

Limiting factors of chipping sparrow populations include loss of oak woodlands, due to development, fire suppression, and invasive plant encroachment; nest predators including snakes, American crows, (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), and domestic cats (*Felis catus*). The increase of brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) nest parasitism is also a concern.

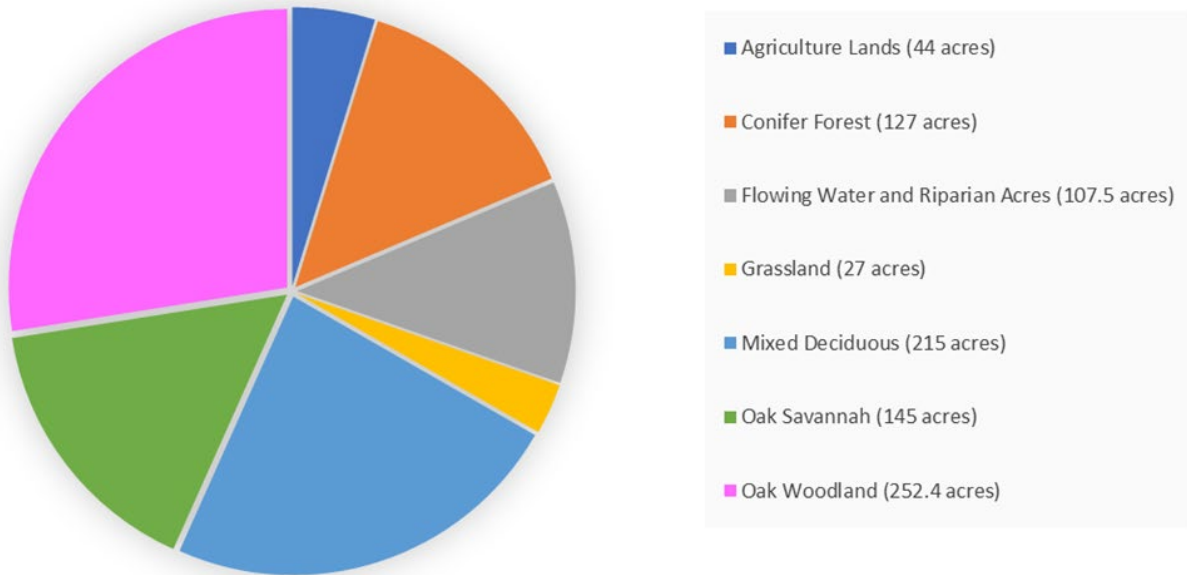
FY 2021 Acquisition Project Summary and Costs

Project	Sponsor	Fee Title Acres	Cost to the WWMP
Dupee Valley Reserve	Yamhill Soil and Water Conservation District	137.0	\$800,118
Enchanted Oaks	Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde	462.8	\$2,453,627
Jefferson Farms Conservation Easement	US Fish and Wildlife Service	226.55	\$1,217,196
South Coyote III	Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Service	98.23	\$690,299
Widgeon Prairie	Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians	77.36	\$894,940
Total		1001.94	\$6,056,180

In 2022, there were five projects in total recommended for funding for a total of \$6,056,180 with an average cost of \$7,022 per acre.

The Dupee Valley Reserve project provides connectivity and protects access to an already purchased acquisition.

FY 2022 Habitat Types Acquired

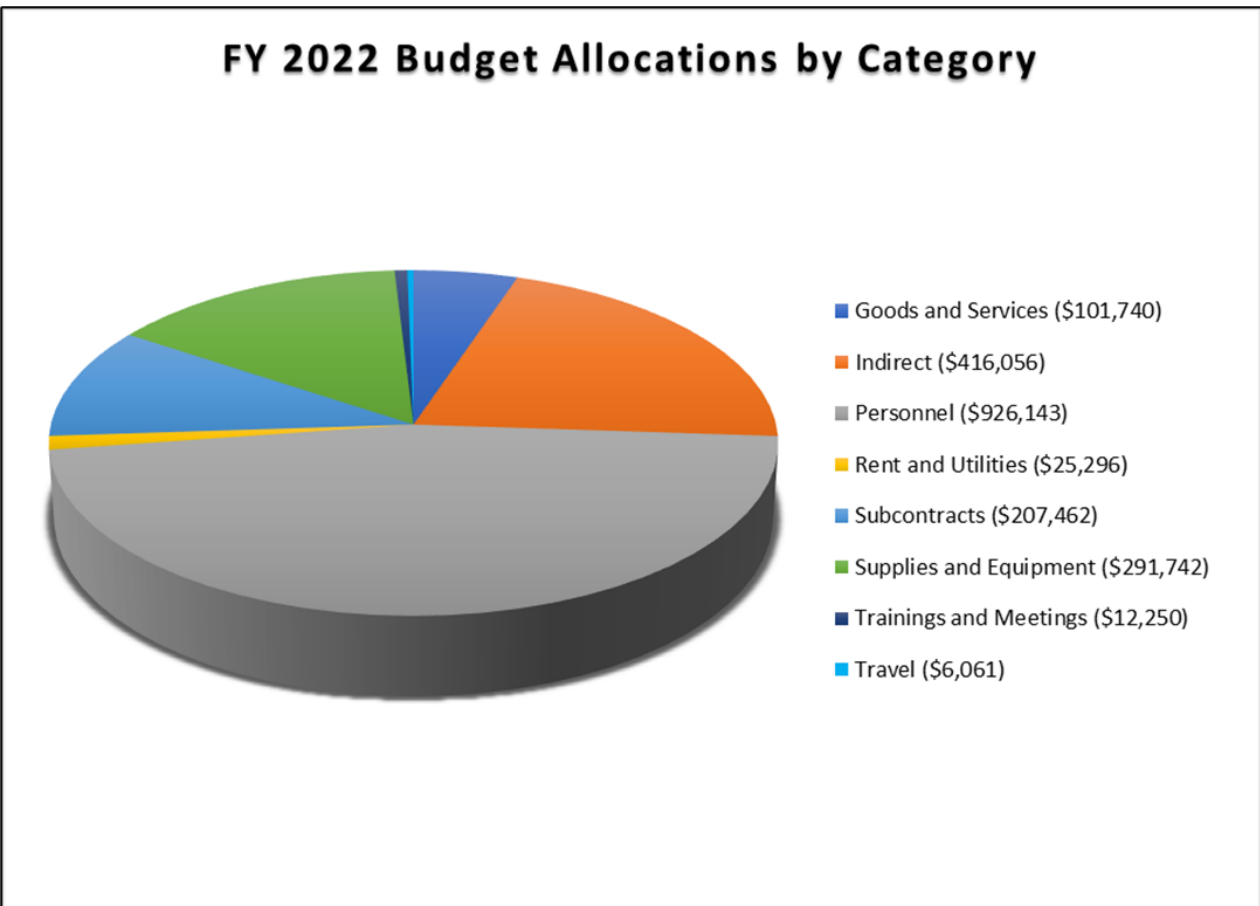


2022 Program Highlights

- ✓ WWMP and Bonneville Power Administration staff worked together to review land management plans (LMPs) which led to increased numbers of LMPs being acknowledged by BPA. By working together and creating a streamlined LMP template and reviewer efficiencies, the backlog of LMPs has been reduced dramatically, and the quality of plans has also gone up.
 - Staff found that coordinating field trips that include BPA, WWMP and project sponsor staff to properties where sponsors are starting a land management plan greatly help in understanding the direction and intent of the sponsor and improve the quality of the review process.
- ✓ WWMP staff worked with BPA staff to conduct five compliance easement site visits on WWMP properties.
- ✓ WWMP and ODFW outreach staff continue to develop WWMP public outreach using virtual and social media platforms. Five short videos have been produced, and many social posts were developed and posted to ODFW social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Weekly activity reports go out to the public and internal ODFW staff describing activities throughout the region.
 - WWMP videos can be viewed here:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLeHsPDijGbM_mfdyoT4rMWjKuEVcTVS

- ✓ The pandemic seems to be temporarily at bay, allowing staff to again resume in person site tours. However, staff decided to do all virtual technical review meetings and wildlife advisory group meetings. WWMP staff continue to assist proponents with preparing virtual site reviews.
- ✓ Work continues the database that staff hope will streamline program files. With the hire of new staff, the monitoring and reporting element of this project is starting to become re-organized.
- ✓ The challenge continues for proponents and WWMP staff to find yellow book certified appraisers to appraise WWMP projects.
- ✓ Staff plan to transition from paper to electronic data collection for compliance monitoring. Working out in the field using paper in bad weather does not work well.
- ✓ Uncertainties in projects closing, staff changes, and other complicating factors continue to provide uncertainties for timely closing of projects in a fiscal year. These factors cannot be accommodated for up front as they are very unpredictable. Staff continue to find that closing timelines are affected by these variables, most of which are out of control of the sponsor no matter how prepared the sponsor is.

Low project turnout could be an interesting side product of two years of COVID, and the program hopes to receive more applications in FY 2025.



Lessons Learned

- ✓ Planning restoration on properties that accommodate multiple species who like multiple different types of disturbance regimes is very challenging and takes a lot of up-front planning and accommodation to not leave some species out of the final vision. This was evidenced by restoration projects that have streaked horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris strigata*) present. The larks prefer the early phases of the project when the disturbance is high, however they do not prefer the later phases of the project when disturbance is low, and the restoration is nearing completion. At that stage of the project, larks are displaced from the property to take up residence on other properties that are not suitable or do not provide safe habitat.

Program Goals for 2023

- ✓ WWMP staff would like to investigate using specifically designed software that would be designed by a contractor and then adopted by ODFW to their data management standards.
- ✓ WWMP staff would like to continue to work on the concept of making specific technical assistance available to sponsors available to WWMP proponents that have acknowledged management plans. This concept need refinement, but it is felt this would greatly assist in clearing barriers that would enable bigger restoration projects over time.

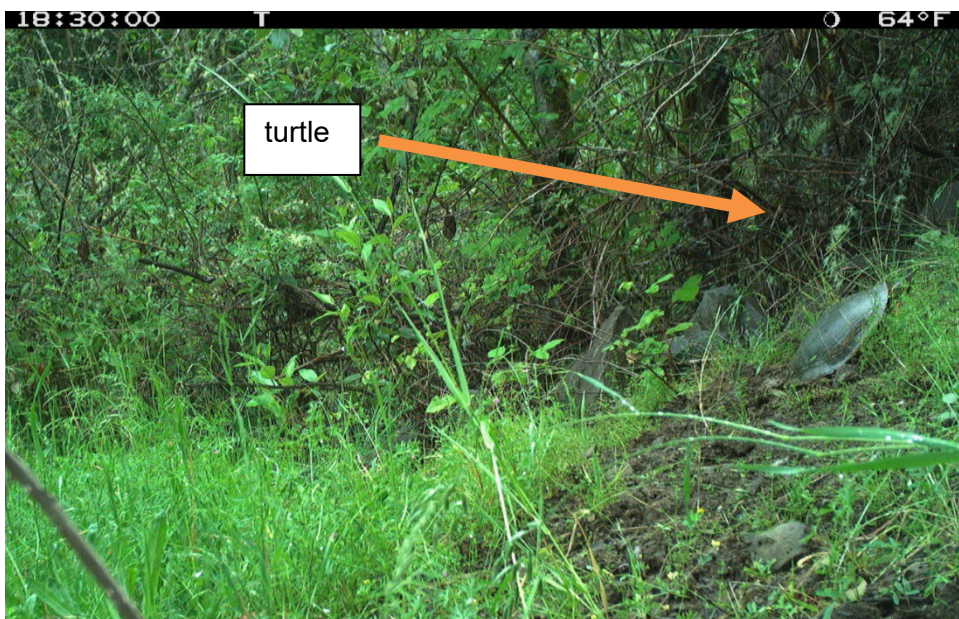
ODFW Project Highlights

A large-scale restoration project at **Palensky Wildlife Area** (owned by BPA) was completed by CREST (Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce) and their contractors (BCI). This 440-acre wildlife area is owned by BPA and is managed by ODFW. The project lasted months and included a variety of restoration components, including large wood placement for habitat and water control, water control structure removal, and wetland restoration through grading and planting.



Photo 2. Spraying *Ludwigia* spp. at Palensky Wildlife Area. M Owens photo.

ODFW continued work restoring and doing operations and maintenance activities on Palensky Wildlife Area (PWA). A big effort is the removal of *Ludwigia hexapetala*, water primrose, a highly invasive aquatic plant which outcompetes the native wapato (*Sagittaria latifolia*) and other native plants in wetland areas. ODFW staff contracted with Ash Creek



Forest Management for a multi-year treatment plan to combat newly established *Ludwigia* spp. in Horseshoe Lake at PWA.

Staff also successfully experimented with using wildlife cameras to document turtle nesting at PWA. Patterns in timing and duration of nesting, preferred substrate and locations are starting to emerge.

Photo 3. Trail camera picture of a turtle nesting at Palensky Wildlife Area.

This data will help inform how staff enhance and improve turtle nesting habitat in the future. In addition, the number of cover board stations were doubled this year at PWA.

These stations are areas where a piece of plywood or corrugated metal are laid down on the ground and then flipped over periodically to see what types of herptiles may be hiding underneath. Staff have found that this is a good way to monitor herptile populations.

WWMP staff also worked with CREST, ODFW biologists, and Oregon Department of Transportation staff to advance the U.S. Highway 30 amphibian underpass project that will soon go out to bid. Construction is aimed to begin this spring, and BPA is partially funding this project. Additional funding has been requested as part of a larger America the Beautiful Challenge grant to address wildlife connectivity and WWMP staff provided letters of support to support this effort.

Staff also had good success with seeding 10 acres of native wetland seed mix on **Flight's End**. This 100-acre site is owned by ODFW and is part of the Sauvie Island Wildlife Area. Access to Flight's End (FE) was greatly improved with the installation of a new dock and



Photo 4. A ruby crowned kinglet (*Corthylio calendula*) enjoys the floodplain forest at Gail Achterman Wildlife Area. L.Tesler photo.

gangway. Many public visitors come to FE via kayak and the old dock was rotting and unsafe for public use. New interpretive signs were also designed to explain about the various species that inhabit the site and that restoration work that is being done.

Staff also seeded wetland and grassland areas of FE and PWA to expand habitat with native vegetation and mixed in pollinator species. Efforts continued with collection of annual demographic data on OCS species with a focus on northern red-legged frogs

(*Rana aurora*), Northwestern pond turtles (*Actinemys marmorata*) and painted turtles (*Chrysemys picta*). Fish surveys were conducted at FE and PWA by the ODFW fish survey staff.

Restoration is almost finished at Coyote Creek South, a 309-acre ODFW-owned WWMP property that was purchased in 2013.

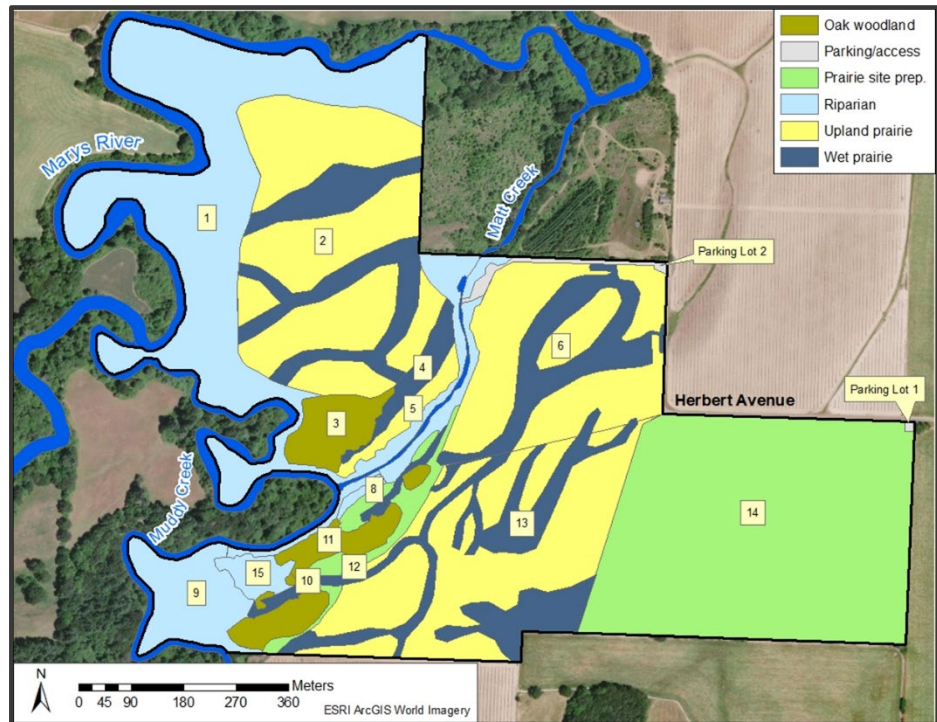
Through a combination of WWMP operations and maintenance funds, and outside grant funding from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), the Long Tom Watershed Council, and Ducks Unlimited, this property has been transformed from an active rye grass field into vernal pools and seasonal wetlands.

In 2022, a land use agreement was submitted to BPA for approval to install a small 75 x 100-foot parking area on the north side of the property. The cultural resources clearance was previously acquired. A gate and a small informational kiosk will also be installed.

Next steps in the Coyote Creek South property include a restoration burn scheduled to occur in Fall 2022 that will include Native American cultural approaches and techniques.

Streaked horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris strigata*) surveys continue at Coyote Creek South, with the subcontractor reporting that the larks have now moved from the 80% restored Coyote Creek South site to Coyote Northeast. This was somewhat expected, as the birds like disturbed sites and not restored vernal pool prairie habitat. Discussion is now centering around how to fit the larks into the next stage of restoration.

In late spring of 2022, ODFW staff were made aware that Ducks Unlimited staff had received funding from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act to move forwards with starting to restore the **Coyote Northeast** property. Discussions and meeting with partners started in summer of 2022 to begin to envision different designs for the property for Ducks Unlimited to begin to draw up designs. A total spray out of the ryegrass was scheduled in June of 2022 to begin site preparation.



Map 1. Herbert Farms Natural Area restoration locations.

WWMP staff is working diligently on stabilizing the newly acquired 93-acre **Coyote Creek South III** property, also owned by ODFW. These activities include debris removal, acquiring a cultural resources survey on the property, and starting a land management plan.

Restoration continues at the 290-acre **Gail Achterman Wildlife Area (GAWA)**. This area is one of the largest and most intact riparian forest habitats remaining along the Willamette mainstem below Harrisburg, and one of the only significant riparian forests in the 34-mile stretch between the Santiam River confluence and Willamette Mission State Park. A large backwater slough is present in the northern portion of the site, and side channels extend along the entire western side of the property. These side-channel areas provide habitat for amphibians and waterfowl and are important refugia for salmonids during high flow events. By purchasing the property in 2015, ODFW removed the imminent threat of gravel mining for which the property was zoned and permitted.

With a continuing partnership with Willamette Riverkeeper, WWMP staff continue to support vegetation removal and planting through OWEB’s Willamette Focused Investment Partnership funding program. This funding has allowed the aggressive removal of invasive species such as Himalayan blackberry and reed canary grass in the riparian forest areas, and *Ludwigia*, an invasive aquatic weed, in the off-channel sloughs.

WWMP Subcontractor Project Reports

At **Herbert Farms Natural Area**, a prescribed restoration burn on 37 acres of prairie (map code

2) was scheduled to maintain the natural processes to benefit native vegetation that was adapted to a fire regime, and to remove thatch which also promotes diversity of native plants. Unfortunately, the burn had to be cancelled due to unfavorable weather conditions and the planned seeding was not conducted. ODFW mowed the prairies in lieu of prescribed fire.



Photo 5. Rock jack style fence being installed on the Sorenson Meadow boundary to protect a culturally sensitive site from damage from trespass. J. Blazar photo.

The Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE) continues to serve as the subcontractor for ODFW and performs all restoration work. IAE staff continued more intensive restoration efforts in areas that are still in the phases of site preparation or establishment of native vegetation. Staff broadcast grass-specific herbicide in a 49-acre area (map code 14) where forbs were sown in 2021 and treated any areas that did not establish from seed or if there were weed outbreaks in the new prairies. ODFW mowed this 49-acre prairie in August to prepare for an October seeding of grasses, including Roemer's Fescue. The City of Corvallis will mow the low-density riparian restoration plantings (map code 1) every 2-3 years. The next scheduled mowing is in 2022.

The Friends of Buford Park continue to care for the Sorenson Meadows parcel, a BPA owned site outside of Springfield, Oregon. This site has been cared for by the FOBP since 2000 and has been extensively restored. In 2022, FOBP installed a fence with rock jacks to avoid having deleterious effects on a known cultural resource site. There were several issues with

this property that were unanticipated, however. One issue was that the neighbor in front of the property for many years had been crossing property with irrigation lines to water their crops. In discussion for a possible future property transfer, it was discovered that the water rights to the landowner were unclear, and that the landowner never had proper legal access across the property.

This caused much outrage on the part of the landowner, who publicly made claims that the BPA was putting their small farm out of business. This placed much negative local pressure on FOBP staff. Sorenson also experienced a lot of damage from trespass and homeless activity last year, with an illegal road being constructed on the property and dumping of building rubble and soil that was believed to come from a neighboring property. FOBP staff also had some unpleasant personal encounters with trespassers which caused them to fear for their personal safety entering the property. ODFW staff will be working with FOBP staff to procure some de-escalation training through a local agency to help them interact safely with possibly violent trespassers in the future

