

# Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report Summary

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## FY 2024 Fiscal Highlights

Total Program Operations Funding Allocated (7/1/23 – 6/30/24)	\$2,322,028
Total Program Operations Funding Spent (by 6/30/2024)	\$1,720,785

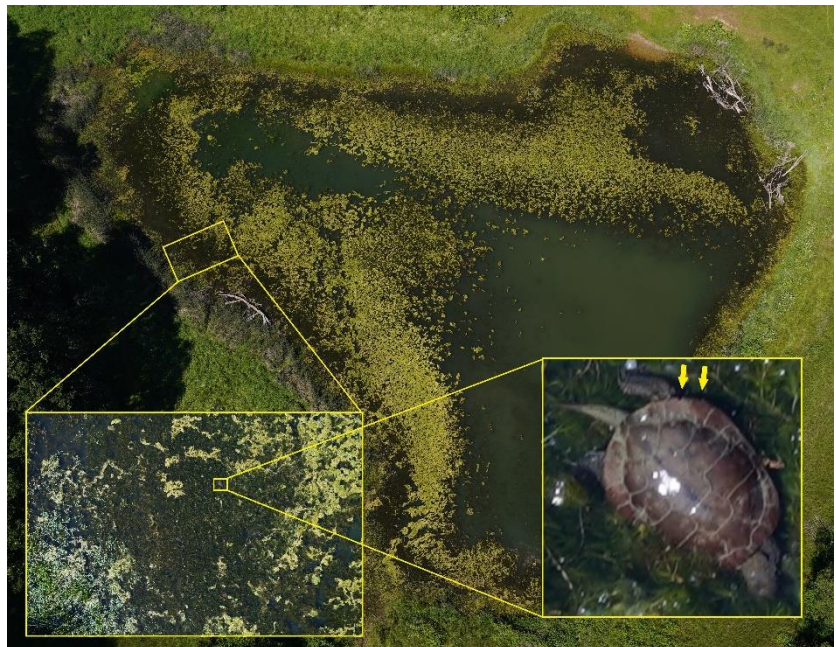
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## Conservation Spotlight

In Fall 2023, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed to list both the northwestern pond turtle, and the southwestern pond turtle as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. A final ruling is anticipated to be released late in 2024.

The Service is also proposing a 4(d) rule that allows activities that support conservation of both species, including wildfire suppression and management, maintenance of existing livestock ponds, habitat restoration, and non-native species removal. The 4(d) rule would allow land managers and others to carry out these activities without the risk of violating the Endangered Species Act on their properties because they are expected to have beneficial or negligible impacts to pond turtles and their habitat.

Northwestern pond turtles have been observed on 27 properties in the Willamette Valley where BPA holds a real property interest. On June 7, 2024, ODFW tested the new WWMP drone at Muddy Valley (WILWF-WL-38) in a field trial. The trial compared the current Visual Encounter Survey (VES) technique with drone-acquired aerial imagery. With the drone we detected twice as many turtles as the VES method and captured photographs that allowed researchers to estimate turtle size and age distribution. This aerial survey technique will be shared with partners to improve monitoring capabilities across the WWMP.



*Image illustrating the capability of the WWMP drone. One photograph is 40 m<sup>2</sup> with a resolution of 1 millimeter per pixel. 170 photographs were taken of this 0.7-hectare pond.*

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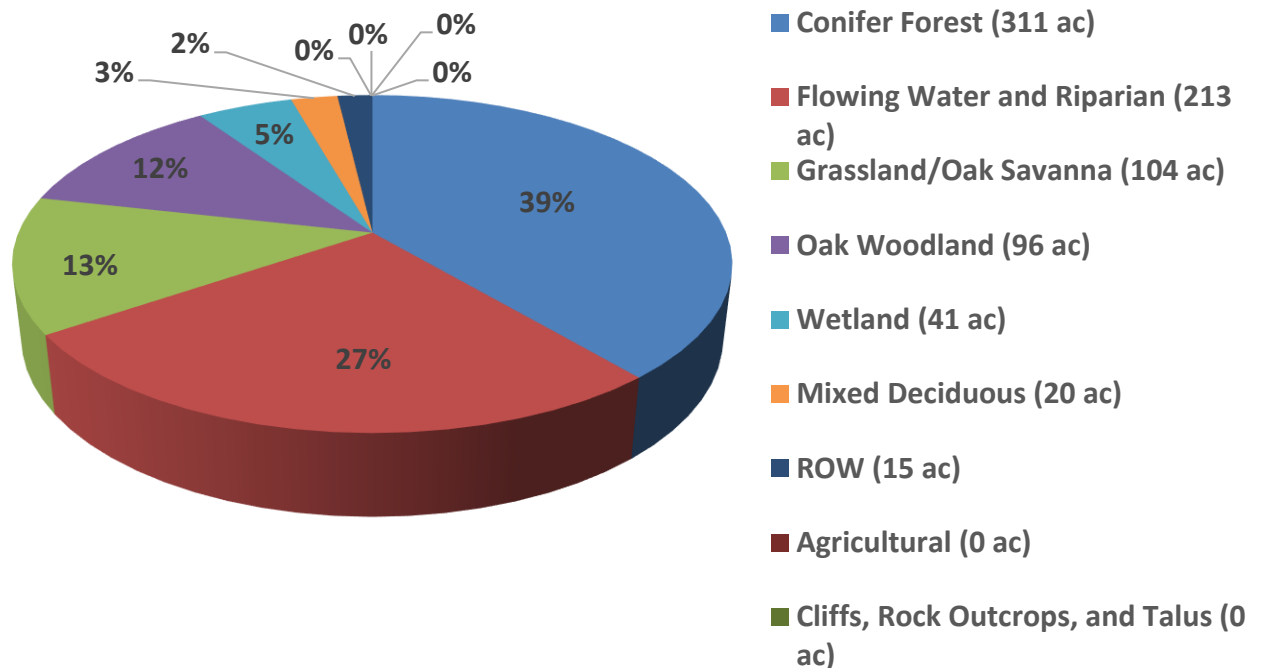
## FY 2024 Acquisition Project Summary and Costs

(October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024)

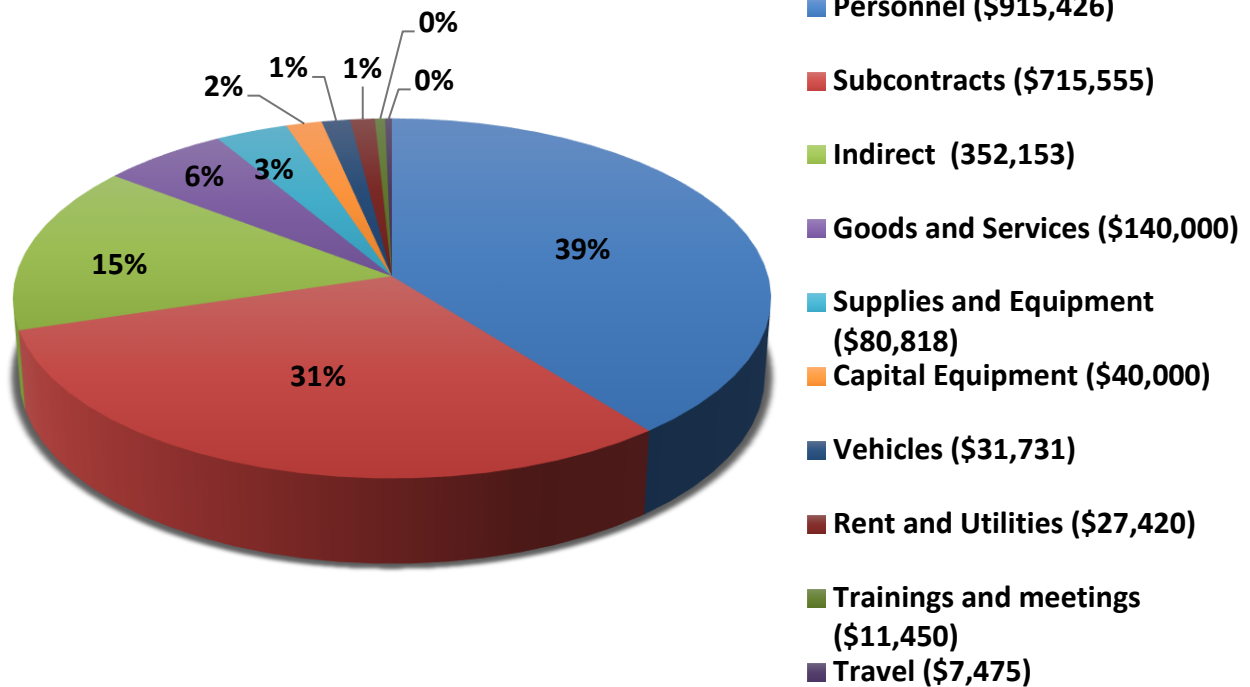
Project	FY	Sponsor	Fee Title Acres	Cost to the WWMP
Coyote Creek South II	22	Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife	40	\$397,811
Finn Rock Reach Phase II	22	McKenzie River Trust	464.29	\$2,002,046
South Fork Spencer Creek	23	McKenzie River Trust	245.12	\$1,437,373
Deer Path (East)	24	Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde	57.68	\$140,735
<b>Total</b>			<b>807.09</b>	<b>\$3,977,965</b>

There were three projects recommended for FY 2024 funding – Deer Path, Molalla River Forest Conservation Easement, and Oak Basin Conservation Easement. The eastern parcel of Deer Path closed in FY24, as well as three projects from prior years – Coyote Creek South II, Finn Rock Reach Phase II, and South Fork Spencer Creek.

### FY 2024 Acquisitions by Habitat Type



## FY 2024 Budget Allocations by Category



### 2024 Program Highlights

- ✓ There were a few staff changes among WWMP staff during FY 2024. Laura Tesler, former WWMP Coordinator, accepted a new opportunity with the Oregon Water Resources Department. Justine Brumm, South Willamette Project Biologist, moved into a job rotation backfilling in the Program Coordinator role. Brad Langford also joined the team as the South Willamette Valley technician stationed at Fern Ridge Wildlife Area.
- ✓ WWMP and Bonneville Power Administration staff continued coordination on land management plan (LMP) reviews. Five plans were formally acknowledged, 7H Reserve, Smithfield Oaks, Red Hills Forest Management Plan, John R. Palensky Wildlife Area, and Molalla River Forest Conservation Easement. Thirteen plans are under review.
- ✓ WWMP staff worked with partner staff to conducted 10 site visits to monitor conservation values and easement compliance on WWMP properties during the 2024 field season. Staff continued to collect monitoring data electronically this year, streamlining the data management process and enabling staff to share results quickly with interested landowners. The new WWMP drone was used to collect high resolution aerial imagery over approximately 2,500 acres of property.
- ✓ WWMP and Information Services Staff completed the development phase of the monitoring and reporting database and web application. The database will allow WWMP and BPA staff to track property details and allow project sponsors to submit their Annual Reporting documents through a web portal.
- ✓ WWMP staff facilitated a ~ \$5.4 million federal grant application led by Pacific

Birds Habitat Joint Venture to restore over 2,100 acres of oak and prairie habitat on 22 WWMP properties, improve ecological and cultural burning capacity, and increase native plant production in the Willamette Valley. Grant award announcements are anticipated in late November 2024.

- ✓ ODFW and WWMP staff secured more than \$580,000 in Natural and Working Lands 2024 grant funding through the Oregon Climate Action Commission to assist with restoration on two tribally-held WWMP properties over three years.

## **Lessons Learned**

- ✓ Staff continued to recognize the value of partnerships to leverage funding, equipment and skillsets – the completion of the Palensky Wildlife Area underpass (an effort more than 10 years in the making) as well as restoration and seeding at Coyote Creek NE, which both leaned heavily on help of partners, each exemplify this.
- ✓ The database development process required significantly more WWMP staff time than anticipated. Database testing and refining post-development will continue to require dedicated time for this very worthwhile effort.
- ✓ Job rotations are an excellent opportunity to enhance skills and experiences for program staff. Additional staff are needed to backfill during staff rotations.

## **Program Goals for 2025**

- ✓ Continue to facilitate landscape-scale and other grant opportunities for WWMP partners and ensure existing grants are administered effectively.
  - ✓ Further improve the Land Management Plan writing and review process by providing guidance for updating expired plans.
  - ✓ Continue to refine the Habitat Monitoring Program using drone imagery and ground-level data collection that can be used to generate site-specific and program-level reports and inform funding needs.
  - ✓ Provide partner training for the new web application and database to facilitate annual easement reporting and internal tracking.
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## ODFW Project Highlights

### Palensky Wildlife Area (PWA)

Archaeological surveys were completed at PWA in preparation for the rollout of the multi-year planting plan throughout the property.

Staff made significant gains in the acreage of Himalayan blackberry and reed canary grass treatments.

After years of data collection, feasibility analyses, and design phases, the Palensky – Highway 30 Wildlife Underpass was completed this year. The project broke ground in April and the last construction details were wrapped up in November. The Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce (CREST) coordinated the project, with significant input from WWMP staff and ODFW's Wildlife Division staff.



*The channelizing wall between the highway and Palensky Wildlife Area was designed to lead Northern red-legged frogs from their wetland breeding areas to the underpass and their upland habitat. Site hydrology was modified to direct all flow towards the culvert (on the right) to prevent water from flowing through the underpass.*



*Some of the design elements include a thick layer of local, natural substrate, light boxes throughout the length of the underpass, and white reflective walls. These components help mimic the ambient environment and are known to increase the likelihood of use by wildlife.*



The project is the first of its kind in Oregon. The underpass stretches under a four-lane highway and creates opportunities for safe passage for wildlife between BPA's Palensky Wildlife Area and Metro's Burlington Creek Forest. Staff expect small mammals, reptiles and amphibians to use the underpass but the target species for this project was the Northern red-legged frog. This species is a federal species of concern and a state sensitive species that relies on the habitat on both sides of the highway to complete its life cycle. Significant mortality of Northern red-legged frogs by vehicles has been observed on this stretch of U.S. Highway 30 during seasonal migration events for decades.

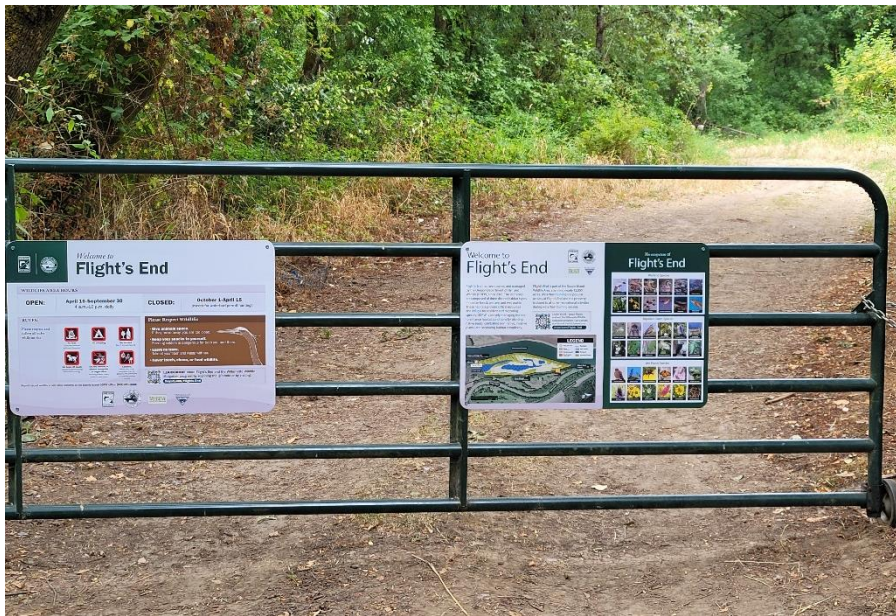
WWMP staff will install wildlife monitoring equipment prior to the migration of Northern red-legged frogs this winter. Several presentations and tours have already been requested and staff will continue with outreach in the coming years. Staff will also collaborate on two other amphibian underpass projects that are being developed within five miles of the Palensky underpass. This project has been a wonderful example of the power of partnerships, and we would like to thank all of you who have contributed to the project.



*The flare at the top of the channelizing wall was designed to prevent Northern red-legged frogs from climbing over the wall onto the highway, but also prevents frogs from becoming trapped on the highway or road shoulder.*

At **Flight's End**, Staff continued to make progress with habitat enhancement projects. Abundant wildlife has been observed using the brush piles, woody debris, and nesting boxes that were added to the property.

Educational signs were installed at both entrance points on the property. The signs include site rules, habitat maps, photos of species likely to be onsite, and a QR code to the WWMP website for more info.



# Welcome to Flight's End

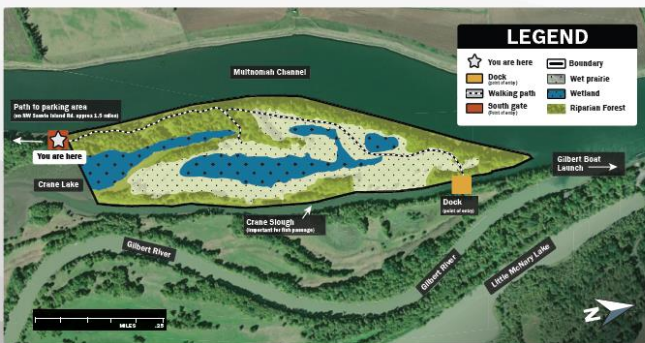


Flight's End has been owned and managed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) since 2013. The 99.7 acres are composed of three distinct habitat types – riparian forest, wetland and wet prairie. These habitats provide critical resources and refugia for resident and migrating species. ODFW is actively managing the site to enhance habitat conditions by planting native seeds, combating non-native, invasive plants, and increasing habitat complexity.

Flight's End is part of the Sauvie Island Wildlife Area, spanning nearly 12,000 acres. Waterfowl hunting is a popular activity at Flight's End and the property is closed to all other recreational activities during waterfowl hunting season.



LEARN MORE about Flight's end and the Willamette Wildlife Mitigation program. Take a photo now to visit the link below later.  
[tinyurl.com/Flights-End](http://tinyurl.com/Flights-End)



## The ecosystem of Flight's End

### Wetland Species



### Riparian Forest Species



### Wet Prairie Species



New informational signs posted at Flight's End.

## Coyote Creek Properties at Fern Ridge Wildlife Area (FRWA)

Spot spray and mowing maintenance treatments were continued at the **Coyote Creek South** unit of FRWA in FY 2024 as part of the long-term efforts to control weeds and protect and enhance conservation values at the site.



*Seeding at Coyote Creek NE*

Streaked horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris strigata*) surveys were conducted again in FY2024, with most effort focused on surveys at Coyote Creek Northeast where more suitable nesting habitat is found. With restoration seeding occurring across the site, discussions are ongoing for how best to manage vegetation and maintain suitable habitat for larks within the larger restoration plan.

WWMP staff continued to stabilize and maintain conditions at the **Coyote Creek South III** property, as well as **Coyote Creek South II**, acquired in February 2024. These activities include debris removal, cutting blackberry encroaching on fence lines and access roads, and replacing the property gate.

**Coyote Creek Northeast** was in active restoration in FY 2024, with berms designed to slow flow water across the property and improve wetland hydrology constructed in October 2023. Site preparation and final restoration seeding of 110 acres also occurred in August-October 2024. The initial phase of seeding yielded good results across much of the site, increasing native plant cover and biodiversity at the property.

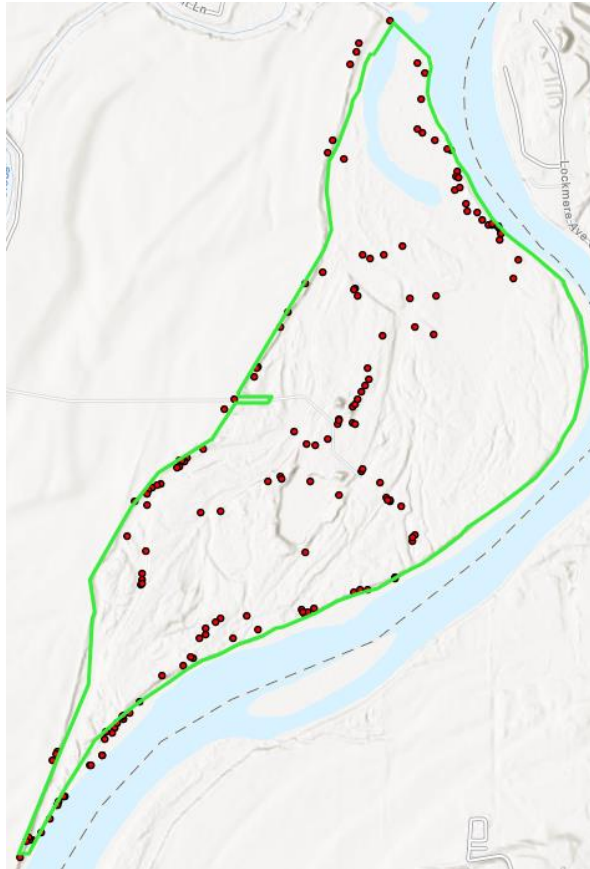
These efforts were funded through a combination of WWMP operation and maintenance funds and outside grant funds, including a NAWCA grant received by Ducks Unlimited and an OWEB grant received by Long Tom Watershed Council.



*New wildflowers at Coyote Creek NE, pictured June 2024, seeded in October 2023.*

## Gail Achterman Wildlife Area (GAWA).

This was the 6<sup>th</sup> year of riparian forest restoration planting funded through the Focused Investment Partnership grant. Over 70 acres of floodplain forest is planted and has entered the maintenance phase. This grant will continue to fund maintenance through 2025.



*Map of the priority invasive plant survey performed by ODFW interns from Western Oregon University. This was a valuable experience for the next generation of land stewards.*

This was the second year of a collaborative harvest of Wapato with staff from The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, ODFW, City of Eugene, The City of Salem, and the Willamette Riverkeeper. This harvest and propagation of Wapato, and traditional plants in general, is a key goal in the GAWA LMP and FIP Grants. Now the tubers thriving at GAWA can be used as propagation material for other WWMP properties such as Minto Island Conservation Area, Chahalpam, Chankawan, and more.