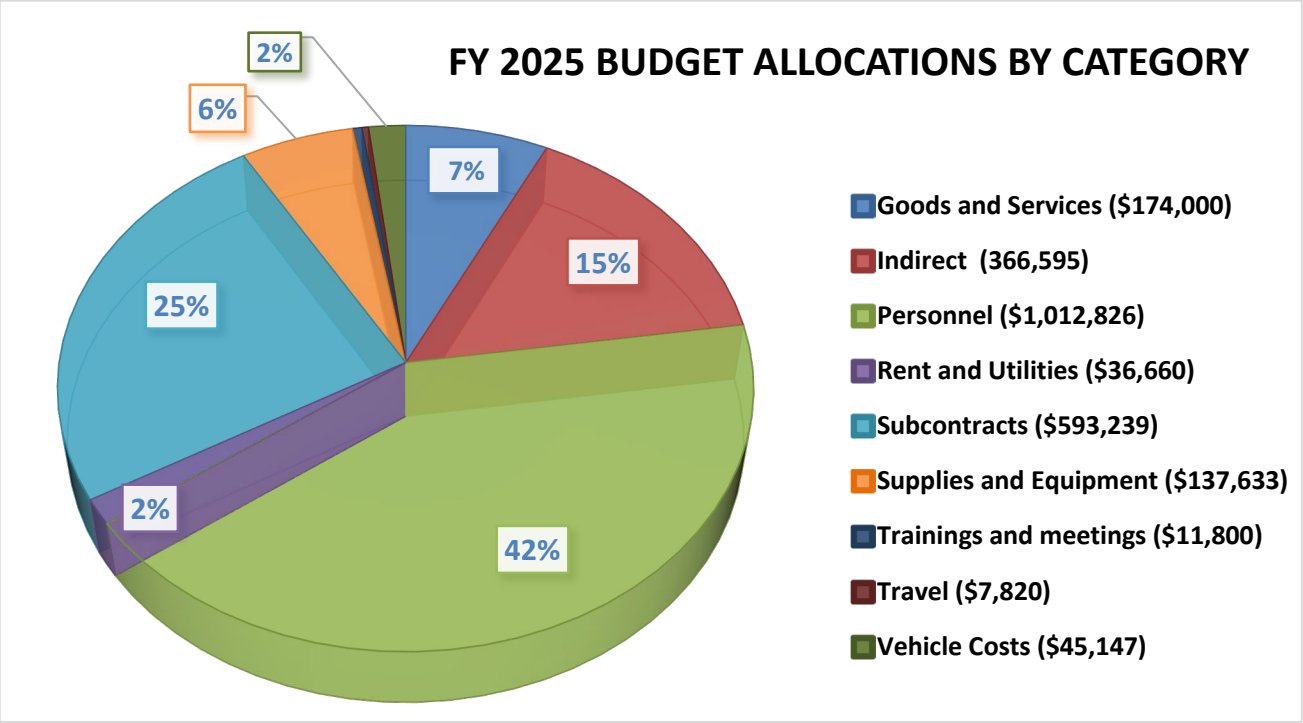
Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program
Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report Summary

FY 2025 Fiscal Highlights

Total Program Operations Funding Allocated (7/1/24–6/30/25)	$2,385,720
Total Program Operations Funding Spent (by 6/30/2025)	$1,363,046



Conservation Spotlight: The Importance of Returning Wapato to the Landscape

Wapato and Swans beaded bag by Native Anthro (2023)

Wapato (*Sagittaria latifolia*), or "duck potato," played a central role in the diet, economy, and cultural practices of indigenous peoples such as the Chinookan, Kalapuyan, and other groups in the Willamette Valley. Wapato was a major trade commodity between inland and coastal tribes, and its abundance along the mainstem Willamette River made it a staple in intertribal commerce all over Oregon and especially along the Columbia River.

Large wapato wetlands were once common along the Willamette River. Before the dams were constructed and agricultural conversion occurred, much of the Willamette River sloughs and wetlands were filled with extensive wapato wetlands. Early accounts describe the 'luxuriant growth' of these wapato "patches". In a normal patch, there can be approximately 28 plants to the square meter in a solid monoculture.

Wapato flowers and plants in a "patch"

Indigenous families owned large areas of wapato, camping beside their harvesting sites for a month or more. Sometimes entire villages would spend the winter near wapato ponds or sloughs. Traditionally, wapato was harvested by the people wading into wetlands and using their feet to dislodge the tubers, which would float to the surface and then were collected for roasting in large camas ovens for later consumption and storage. The tubers were sometimes processed into bread-like cakes referred to as *chaplil* in the Chinook wawa language.

Wapato and waterfowl also have a mutually beneficial relationship. Waterfowl "grubbing" has been shown to increase the spread of *Sagittaria* species. Grubbing is a feeding behavior where certain birds, primarily geese and swans, excavate the soil to eat the underground parts of plants, such as roots, tubers, and rhizomes.

Trumpeter swans can be seen on the Flight's End and Palensky Wildlife Area WWMP properties in the winter using wapato areas. ODFW photo.

Waterfowl contribute to the spreading of wapato by breaking up the tubers, allowing un-grazed tubers to drift to new locations and reestablish themselves. These birds also assist in dispersing seeds, which stick to their feet and legs, and are shed after digesting, enabling the plant to spread over great distances very rapidly. Trumpeter swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) are very fond of wapato- and are an Oregon Conservation Strategy Species, facing threats from habitat loss and other factors. The WWMP is very fortunate to have several large patches of wapato on Palensky Wildlife Area and Flight's End and on Gail Achterman Wildlife Area (GAWA) that staff are carefully cultivating and encouraging more growth in several new areas.

A three-acre wapato patch on GAWA increases in size every year. This patch is currently the biggest intact patch of wapato on the mainstem Willamette River.

WWMP staff participated in the third year of a collaborative wapato harvest with staff from The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, ODFW, the cities of Eugene and Salem, and the Willamette Riverkeeper in August 2025. This well-attended event engages Tribal youth and provides a plant source annually to participating partners.

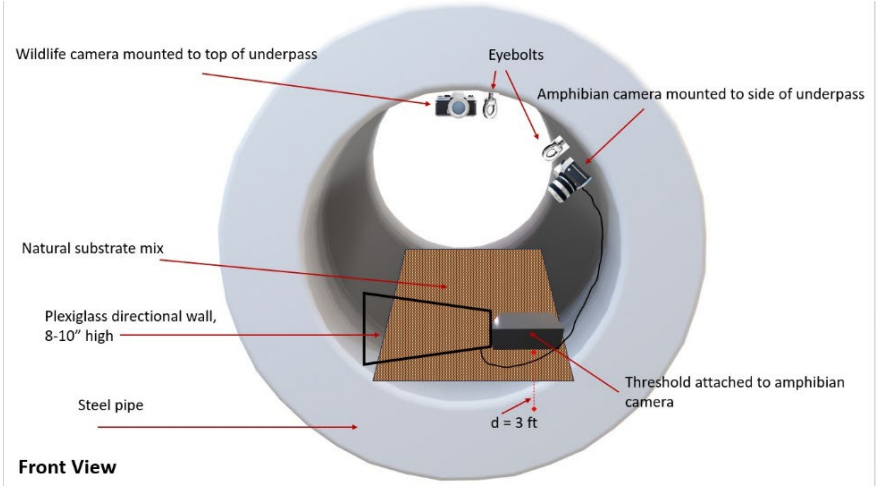
The harvest and propagation of wapato, and cultural plants, are goals of the GAWA land management plan and these efforts are also supported through various grants and BPA operations and maintenance funding.

The WWMP is pleased to be a part in helping to restore wapato to the landscape and is honored to be a part in helping Tribal and other partners acquire wapato to spread "patches" to their lands so that wapato can again someday be a common sight throughout the Willamette Valley.

Kerianne Jarnagin, ODFW, harvesting wapato tubers at GAWA in August 2025. Photo by O. Cass

Build It and Frogs Will Use It- Monitoring the New Highway 30 Wildlife Underpass

After the successful completion of this innovative wildlife underpass beneath Highway 30 at Palensky Wildlife Area, the next step was to collect data to confirm that Northern red-legged frogs (*Rana aurora*) were using the new crossing to access upland habitats across the highway after breeding.



Cross section view of the monitoring apparatus developed for installation in the Highway 30 wildlife undercrossing.

WWMP staff coordinated with ODFW's Wildlife Connectivity Coordinator and Wildlife Diversity Biologist to design, install, and test monitoring equipment, as well as refine monitoring techniques for use inside the undercrossing.

Preliminary monitoring data from the first season following construction successfully confirmed that Northern red-legged frogs of both sexes and multiple age classes used the undercrossing to move in both directions between wetland breeding areas and upland habitats.

Trail camera photos of animals using the wildlife undercrossing near Palensky Wildlife Area to safely cross Highway 30 (ODFW photo)

Additional wildlife documented using or near the crossing included Dunn's, northwestern, long-toed, and western red-backed salamanders; common garter snakes and Northwestern garter snakes; and several small mammal species such as mice, rats, voles, chipmunks, and shrews. A striped skunk and a Virginia opossum were also observed.

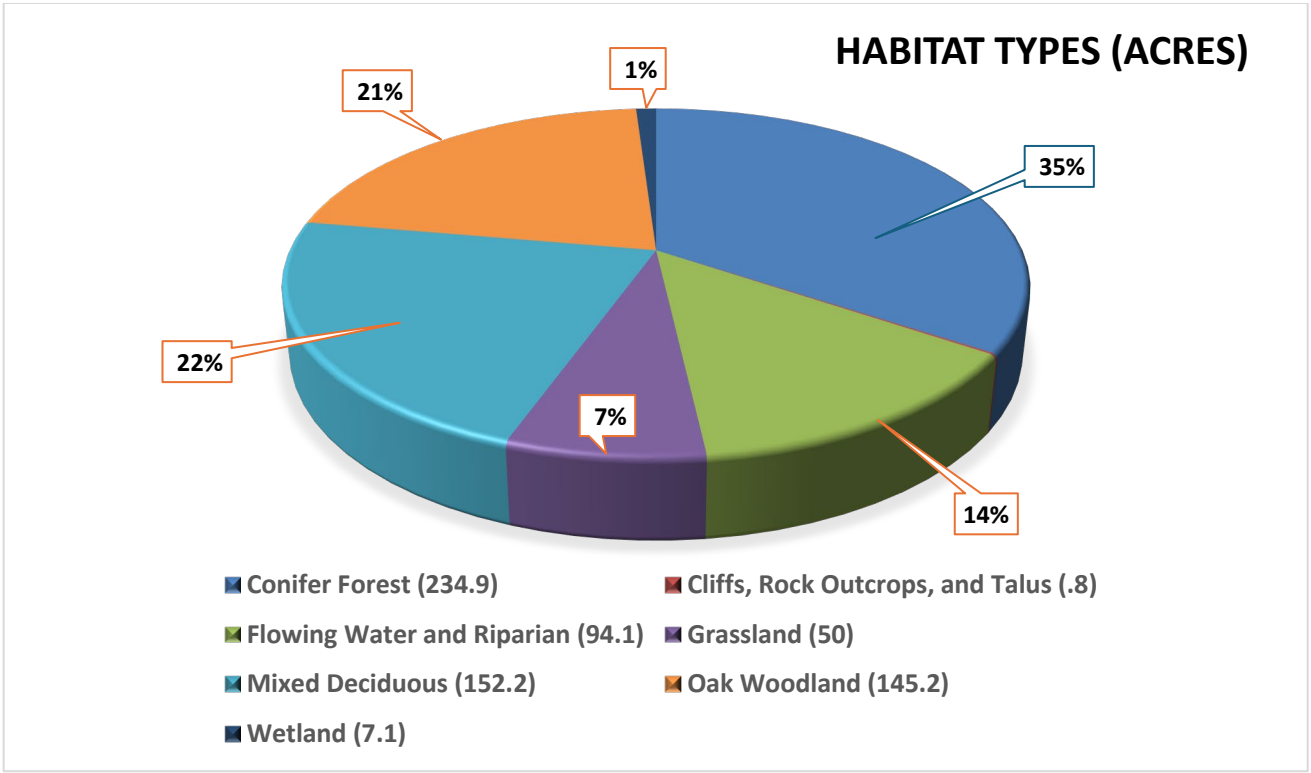
Late fall to early spring Northern red-legged frog migration season monitoring activities are on-going at the crossing and will continue to be adapted and improved as needed. This crossing is the first of its kind in Oregon and hopefully will serve as an example for more to be constructed in the future.

FY 2025 Acquisition Project Summary and Costs

(October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025)

Project	FY	Sponsor	Project Type	Acres	Total WWMP Cost
Deer Path (west parcel)	25	Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde	Fee title	55.46	$592,503
Molalla River Forest Conservation Easement	24	Center for Natural Lands Management	Conservation Easement	143.9	$2,305,135
Oak Basin Conservation Easement	25	Greenbelt Land Trust	Conservation Easement	428.20	$2,156,693
South Coyote V	25	Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife	Fee Title	56.74	$435,920
Total				**684.30**	**$5,490,251**

In addition, six projects were formally recommended for FY26 funding. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde had three fee title projects recommended: Butte Creek, Jordan Valley and the Upper Molalla River project. Long-time program partner Institute for Applied Ecology had its first project in the FY26 recommendation, Judith Ann Siebold-Freed Preserve, a conservation easement.



Two other FY26 fee projects, Western Rivers Conservancy's Rock Creek Forest Conservation Project, and the City of Eugene's Songbird Prairie, were both withdrawn after the funding recommendation. In addition, ODFW withdrew its South Coyote IV (FY25) project during the reporting period.

2025 Program Highlights

- ✓ Staff changes: Laura Tesler returned as WWMP Coordinator. Justine Brumm moved into the role of the North Willamette Project Biologist stationed at Sauvie Island Wildlife Area. The WWMP team is in the process of filling the South Willamette Biologist position at Fern Ridge Wildlife Area. This position is expected to be filled by late 2025

- ✓ WWMP and Bonneville Power Administration staff continue to coordinate on land management plan (LMP) reviews. One plan was formally acknowledged, Oak Basin. Sixteen plans are currently under review

- ✓ WWMP staff coordinated with partners to conduct 19 site visits to monitor conservation values and easement compliance on WWMP properties during the 2025 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. Staff used the WWMP drone to collect high resolution aerial imagery over approximately 4,000 acres

- ✓ ODFW worked with partners to submit a grant application to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and was awarded $4,500,000 towards restoration of 1,877 acres of oak and prairie habitat across 22 WWMP properties on tribal, private, and public land. Compliance steps are ongoing, with restoration actions expected to begin in 2026

- ✓ The Conservation Easement Reporting Application, or “CERA”, continues to be refined with the goal of being available for 2025 Annual Reporting via the web portal in early 2026. WWMP staff are entering historical data into the internal site.

Lessons Learned

- ✓ Due to staff commitments to assist in reducing the backlog on land management plan review and to achieve more restoration gain on WWMP properties, contracted services will be used to help control noxious weeds at various Wildlife Areas.

Program Goals for 2026

- ✓ Provide partner training for the new web-based application and database to facilitate annual easement reporting and internal tracking

- ✓ Participate in the Independent Scientific Review Process review process that is slated to begin in late 2025 or early 2026

- ✓ Initiate negotiations with BPA to continue the excellent work of the WWMP through FY2043 as per the MOA

- ✓ Continue to facilitate and seek out 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, and work with BPA staff to expedite the LMP review process

- ✓ Develop a new WWMP website consistent with the State of Oregon’s updated website format that will house the WWMP public files and the portal to the Conservation Easement Reporting Application (CERA).