City of Portland

RIVERS OFFICE

Office of Healthy Working Rivers

Information Report to City Council

April 2012

photo by Mike Houck, on theintertwine.org

1. INTRODUCTION

The Office of Healthy Working Rivers last updated Council on its activities in April 2011. This document addresses activities undertaken by the Office over the subsequent twelve months.

Portland's location at the confluence of two great rivers has made it a home for people for over 10,000 years. The City embraces rivers of history, of commerce, of natural diversity, and of scenic beauty. Portlanders have an instinctive understanding that rivers are as critical to our future as they have been to our past.

The Office of Healthy Working Rivers (the Office) was created by Portland City Council ordinance in January 2009. The Council established the "Rivers Office" to bring a new focus to advancing the City's vision of:

- *assuring a clean and healthy river for fish, wildlife and people,*
- *maintaining and enhancing a prosperous working harbor,*
- *embracing the river as Portland's front yard,*
- *creating vibrant waterfront neighborhoods, and*
- *promoting partnerships, leadership, and education.*

The Office consists of four positions, including Director Ann Beier who reports directly to Commissioner Amanda Fritz. Funding has been provided through the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES). The original intent was to provide more diverse funding sources, including General Fund revenue, for the Office to meet the Council's broad mandate to address both environmental and economic development issues related to rivers. Because all funding is currently provided by BES, the Office has targeted its efforts to support the BES mission to promote watershed health.

The Rivers Office collaborates with local partners and links the work of many City Bureaus to bring together the people and resources necessary to improve the health and economy of our waterways. Improvement of watershed health is not simply a City aspiration; it is a City legal obligation. Conditions of its stormwater discharge permits require the City to continue or commence significant actions intended to protect and improve natural watershed conditions and, at the same time, to involve its citizens in those efforts. This is and must be a City-wide effort, even though the immediate beneficiary is the Bureau of Environmental Services, the agency that is responsible for stormwater management. The Office works to make sure that all the City's Bureaus understand and assist in meeting the City's commitments and that the City's citizens understand and have opportunities to participate in meeting the City's obligations.

The Office serves two major functions:

<u>Coordination and connection:</u> Operating within a complex and lively environment of diverse river wants, needs, and regulations, the Office makes sure the numerous actors are aware of each others' missions, needs, and schedules in order that the City's river goals can be met more efficiently and smoothly. Typical activities include keeping an eye out for potential conflicts in objectives or timing; facilitating understanding between river interests; serving on work groups; providing one-stop-shopping for information on rivers, projects, and organizations; and hosting presentations, briefings, or seminars on river topics. In this respect, the Office acts largely in a service capacity to other bureaus and organizations.

<u>Project management:</u> Over the past year, the Office has been given increasing responsibility over discrete projects, where it acts as the lead management entity. These projects arise either from the Office's unique river-focused mission, or in response to a critical need identified by partnering bureaus or Council.

The Rivers Office performs these functions in five major areas:

- *Deepening Portland's river partnerships and dialogues*
- *Connecting Portlanders with their rivers*
- *Teaming with city bureaus to advance Portland's and BES river goals*
- *Building Willamette community watershed ties*
- *Leading major projects*

2. Deepening Portland's River Partnerships

What is the theme behind these river partnerships? Bringing people together, leveraging resources, and finding new ways to respond to river issues. While important, City government is just one among many organizations that shape today's river environment. The Rivers Office puts a premium on keeping channels of communication open and active with the wide range of other governments and organizations that work for and along our rivers. Deeper partnerships make healthier rivers.

Key Activity Profiles

River Safety: The Rivers Office participates in meetings of the River Safety Committee. The group includes the Multnomah County River Patrol, Portland Fire and Rescue, the Coast Guard, the Marine Board and others with a role in public safety on the River. The Office is leading a subgroup of the committee to address public health, safety and environmental issues.

University of Oregon Urban Architecture: Healthy working waterfronts have been the theme for graduate design projects at the University of Oregon's Portland program in Urban Architecture for the past two years. The Rivers Office has provided historical context and information on current watershed health concerns for students to consider as they create their visions of waterfront redevelopment.

Baltimore Woods – DePave Project: The Rivers Office is working with Depave, the Friends of Baltimore Woods, and BES' Willamette Watershed Team to restore a 6.3-acre partially-wooded parcel in St Johns located close to the Willamette. It will ultimately become part of the North Portland Greenway. The project includes removing a 2-acre parking lot, controlling invasive species, and re-establishing the site as a native Oregon white oak savannah

The Office worked closely with:

- TriMet
- Port of Portland
- Working Waterfront Coalition
- River taxi and river transportation interests
- Maritime Heritage Coalition
- West Multnomah SWCD
- Intertwine Alliance
- SOLVE
- Willamette Riverkeeper
- Portland Audubon
- Willamette Partnership
- Columbia Corridor Association
- Interagency River Safety Panel
- Metro
- U.S. EPA
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- Department of State Lands
- Oregon State Marine Board
- Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership
- Mercy Corps
- Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde
- South Waterfront dock committee
- Johnson Creek Watershed Council
- Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watershed: Science Team
- OMSI
- Portland State University
- University of Oregon

3. Connecting Portlanders with Their Rivers

Each generation has the opportunity to rediscover its rivers. Given that the hard work of recent decades has resulted in cleaner, healthier rivers, there are now more reasons than ever to appreciate the Willamette and Columbia as incomparable city assets. The Office looks for every opportunity to share river stories with Portlanders, through speakers, the web and other electronic media, and events—on average the Office reaches over 12,000 people per month.

Key Activity Profiles

The Big Float: How do you convince Portlanders the Willamette's clean enough for swimming? Invite them to float across the River. The Rivers Office supported the 2011 "Big Float" and introduced over 1000 people to our river – allowing them to learn about and take direct advantage of water quality improvements resulting from City investments like "The Big Pipe."

River News: The Office dialed-up its efforts to inform Portlanders about their rivers by increasing the outreach for, and attendance at, its monthly River in Focus brownbags and nearly doubling its subscriptions to the bi-monthly River News Digest, a round up of news items on the Willamette and Columbia.

The Willamette—Who Lives Here? The Office partnered with OMSI and TriMet to produce a new interactive exhibit profiling the ecology of the River. Called "Who Lives Here?," the exhibit invites kids to identify which river creatures live in which river environment—and how important it is to protect them.

Tracking Connections: The Rivers Office prides itself on connecting people to information on our Rivers – whether providing information to our decision makers or linking technical experts to members of the public. The Office has implemented a series of metrics to understand how many people we are reaching.

The Office was proud to:

Sponsor speakers on:

- Elk Rock Island: Restoring Oak Woodland
- Willamette Trails: Present and Future
- Salmon, Science and the Urban Challenge
- Beyond the Gulf Oil Spill
- Willamette: A Special OWEB Investment
- Wild in the City--Exploring the Intertwine
- The Maritime Heritage Coalition
- The Zidell Remediation Project
- What's the Nature of Your City?

Support river events and education:

- The Big Float
- RiverFest 2011
- River Rally 2012
- Honoring Our River 2012
- "Who Lives Here" OMSI River Exhibit
- Nature in Our (City) Parks / Willamette Stewardship art show

4. Teaming with City Bureaus to Advance Portland's River Goals—Better Information for Decision-Makers

A multitude of City interests intersect at Portland's river edge—watershed health, economic development, habitat restoration, recreation, and transportation, to name a few. The Office works to make sure this intersection is well-lighted, signal-timed, and designed to foster forward movement of projects and progress—all the while advancing the City's balanced set of river goals.

Key Activity Profiles

Piling Inventory and Assessment: The Rivers Office has joined with Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) staff to inventory derelict pilings within City limits on both the Columbia and Willamette. This database is being used to understand how removing pilings may: reduce sediment contamination; improve sediment transport; lessen impacts from non-native fish that prey on salmon; and improve juvenile salmonid habitat. A derelict piling removal program has the potential not only to deliver ecological benefits, but also to satisfy state and federal regulatory requirements.

West Hayden Island: The Rivers Office is charged with the coordination of river related activities in both the Willamette and Columbia rivers. The Office has been a key player in the West Hayden Island planning process on the Columbia River, by providing technical support to the natural resources inventory and the mitigation subcommittee, and by developing land management options for the island's natural areas. These efforts aim to provide a piece of the puzzle in coordination with other river planning, watershed and service efforts across the City and to prepare the City to face the challenge of integrating the opportunities for preservation and development on West Hayden Island into the City's existing watershed and stormwater management obligations. Rivers Office staff also served on the technical review group for the project's benefit cost analysis and worked with the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability to make sure that the process is responsive to the Council's 2010 resolution.

Swan Island Beach Restoration: The Rivers Office has been working closely with BES teams to plan habitat restoration at Swan Island Beach. The project will demonstrate a commitment to improving natural resources within the industrial harbor, while assuring its economic vitality. A restoration project in this location fits within the City's commitments to improve natural area stormwater and habitat functions and has the potential to satisfy potential Superfund cleanup obligations, as well as state and federal regulations for new development.

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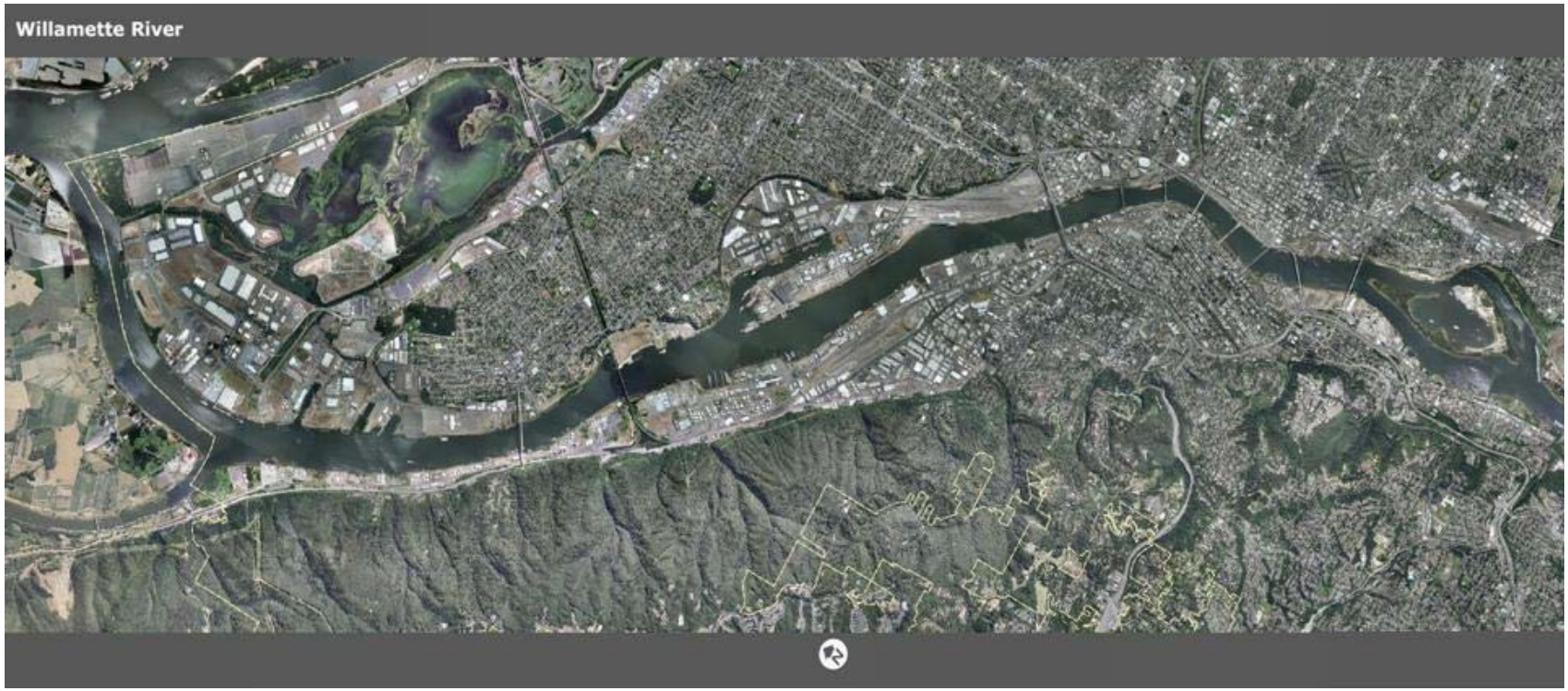
TEAMING WITH CITY BUREAUS continued

Portland Harbor Superfund outreach: The Rivers Office is leading the City's outreach on the Portland Harbor Superfund site. The City is committed to an integrated cleanup and restoration program that reduces risk to humans and wildlife, improves economic vitality and restores natural areas. The Office is making sure the public has accurate and understandable information about this important effort.

South Waterfront: South Waterfront is Portland's main riverfront neighborhood. The Rivers Office has been working with other City Bureaus on Greenway design and implementation as well as longer term planning for the area. The goal is to connect Portlanders to the River while improving riparian areas, stormwater management and overall watershed health.

Office staff serve on or work with:

- Portland Plan Healthy Connected Neighborhoods Team
- Central City 2035 Advisory Committee
- N-NE Quadrant Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)
- Sellwood Br. TAC
- Willamette Park Management Plan TAC
- North Macadam Urban Renewal Advisory Committee
- BES watershed and science staff
- BPS River Plan staff
- Portland Streamlining Team
- Planning and Development Directors Group
- West Hayden Island Land Management Assessment
- Swan Island Beach Restoration Collaboration
- Portland Harbor Superfund Outreach



5. Building Willamette Community Ties

Portland is the biggest, but not the only, community blessed with Willamette River frontage. Each community shares common opportunities and challenges relating to flood risk management, habitat restoration and species recovery, economic redevelopment, water quality improvement, stormwater management, and public access. Because the Rivers Office believes communities can learn a lot from each other and make common cause on watershed-wide needs, it makes a point of regularly visiting upstream communities, engaging in river-long dialogue. From a more parochial standpoint, how Portland manages its obligations to maintain River quality as it runs through the metropolitan area can be much influenced by the quality of water it receives from upstream. The City clearly has a stake in how communities upstream manage the River

Key Activity Profiles

Migrating Upstream: Over the last year, the Office has gone upstream to visit Milwaukie, Salem, Albany, and Eugene. These visits were aided by the advice and participation of the Meyer Memorial Trust which oversees the Willamette River Initiative, which seeks to "achieve meaningful, measurable improvements in the health of the river and selected tributaries by 2015, and to create a national model for effective philanthropic involvement in restoration of large, complex ecological systems."

These Willamette communities are taking bold steps to reconnect with the River we share: 1) Milwaukie's redeveloping its riverfront park and boating facilities; while restoring habitat at the mouth of Johnson Creek; 2) Salem recently re-purposed an old trestle as a bike-ped bridge across the Willamette, even as it plans a new mixed-use riverfront development on abandoned industrial land; 3) Albany's hosting the grand opening of its award-winning Talking Water Gardens water treatment/wetland complex; and 4) the Envision Eugene process which is identifying ways for that city to reconnect with a Willamette still-fresh from the mountains.

The Rivers Office benefited greatly from this exchange of lessons-learned and best practices. Each community has faced permitting, financing, and coordination challenges—challenges that Portland faces, as well. The Rivers Office looks forward to returning the hospitality shown by our upstream colleagues by hosting them on a Portland river tour in the coming year and showing what our City Bureaus are doing to clean-up, protect and redevelop our rivers and the issues that we face that are unique to this portion of the Willamette river watershed.

The Office:

- visited the cities of:
  - Milwaukie
  - Salem
  - Eugene
  - Albany
- worked with
  - Meyer Memorial Trust's Willamette Initiative
  - Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation
  - Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition
- initiated a new Urban Watershed social media network
- helped facilitate an urban salmon recovery science workshop

6. Leading Major Projects

The Rivers Office has been tasked with taking the lead on a number of projects central to achieving Portland's river goals. While task objectives differ, projects managed by the Office are marked by a number of distinguishing features, including: the participation of multiply-aligned stakeholders; an unmet need on the part of one or more other bureaus; a requirement for in-depth communication and collaboration; and a focus on an issue or opportunity of significance for the future of our rivers.

Key Activity Profiles

Willamette River Recreation Strategy: Working jointly with Portland Parks and Recreation, the Rivers Office developed the City's first comprehensive plan for recreating on the Willamette. These efforts help to provide targeted access and ultimately watershed protections and help to involve Portland's citizens in River protection. Endorsed by Council in early 2012, the Strategy identifies key facilities for improvement, targets additional areas for expansion, delineates asset management and enforcement needs, and establishes a river recreation advisory group. The effort also included an inventory of docks and other over-water structures to inform future permitting and construction plans.

Mitigation Bank—Functional Assessment Tools: In partnership BES scientific staff, the Rivers Office is refining the Functional Habitat Valuation Methodology. This is a new approach for quantifying present—and future—environmental values on a site that can, among other things, help the City implement its legal obligations to improve the pollution reduction functions of natural areas. It will also allow businesses and agencies to more quickly and precisely identify impacts from development and benefits from restoration—critical for designing successful projects and speeding permitting. The Rivers Office will continue collaborating with state and federal agencies to ensure the new methods are consistent with other efforts.

Maintenance Dredging Survey: In response to concerns raised by its Advisory Committee, the Office engaged Portland State University's Oregon Consensus program to assess issues related to maintenance dredging of sediment, which can affect water quality as well as impact public and private uses of the river including marinas, boat ramps, and floating homes. The analysis identified potential concerns about the current federal, state, and local permitting processes that will be shared with regulatory agencies.

Major Rivers Office Projects:

- Willamette River Recreation Strategy
- Willamette Overwater Structure Inventory
- Willamette River Dredging Survey / Study
- Mitigation Bank Development—Functional Assessment

7. WHAT'S NEXT?

In the coming year, key outcomes planned by the Rivers Office include:

- *forming the River Recreation Advisory Group and tackling the "to do's" in the Recreation Strategy;*
- *completing the piling inventory and sharing results with interested agencies and groups;*
- *ramping-up outreach as the Portland Harbor Superfund clean-up process moves ahead;*
- *finaliizing the Functional Habitat Valuation Methodology;*
- *helping host the River Rally and Big Float II;*
- *positioning the Swan Island Beach restoration project for approval from regulatory agencies;*
- *visiting more Willamette River communities and assist in planning a basin-wide restoration conference; and,*
- *substantially increasing the numbers of Portlanders coming to river talks, using the Rivers website, and subscribing to River News Digest.*

The Office will also continue its "bread and butter" line of work first and foremost by serving as a resource for Portlanders, other City bureaus, and our partners as we work together to achieve Portland's river goals. This means we'll keep tracking riverside activities, serving on technical advisory committees, sharing river-related news and announcements, and just generally helping other bureaus incorporate the City's river goals into their work products.

For additional information, contact

City of Portland

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