



PR 16 13

**BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION
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Monday, April 15, 2013

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**Rare wet prairie, wildlife corridor protected
by land acquisition in Willamette Valley**

Portland, Ore. – Building upon a well-established ethic in the Eugene area, the Bonneville Power Administration teamed with The Nature Conservancy and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to secure 310 acres in the Willamette Valley adjacent to two existing conservation projects.

Nestled between Fern Ridge Wildlife Area and the city of Eugene’s Coyote Prairie wetland mitigation site, Coyote Creek provides a mix of rare wet prairie and riparian forest.

Purchased through a closed-bid auction by The Nature Conservancy in 2012, BPA rate payers provided \$805,000 for a permanent conservation easement on the property as well as a transfer of its title to ODFW this week.

“BPA provides the structure and resources to approach a project like this,” said Dan Bell, the Willamette Basin conservation director for The Nature Conservancy. “ODFW is a great fit for long-term ownership because they’re managing the Fern Ridge property next door, so they have people and resources already in the area.”

ODFW manages some 5,000 acres in the Fern Ridge Wildlife Area under a long-term lease with the Portland District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who own the property as well as the adjacent reservoir and Fern Ridge Dam.

Bell noted that the purchase of the Coyote Creek property is consistent with the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area’s Rivers to Ridges initiative to create regional parks and preserve open space.

BPA has been actively partnering for more than two decades with local and state agencies and nonprofit organizations to identify opportunities for the preservation and restoration

of wetlands in the Willamette Valley. Recent mapping and studies show less than 1 percent of the historic range of wet prairie remain in the valley.

Wet prairie is a seasonal wetland that is partially inundated from late winter to May, which leads to some unique characteristics.

“You’re going to have these scattered, very shallow pools – usually not deeper than 2 feet,” said Laura Tesler, staff biologist for ODFW’s Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program. “These pools offer habitat to a number of amphibious species that base their lifecycle around when these pools are wet. The vernal pools provide different types of special habitats that are very ephemeral – they might last for three to four months – and many plants, grasses and species depend on that.”

The area is prime habitat for waterfowl, grassland birds, red-legged frogs, native cutthroat trout and other species, including the Western meadowlark. Restoration work on the property may allow for the reintroduction of several endangered Willamette Valley plant species.

In addition to 211 acres of wet prairie, Coyote Creek is comprised of riparian forest, shrub and oak woodland. The fact that the Coyote Creek forms a corridor connecting similar habitat in both the Fern Ridge Wildlife Area and the city of Eugene’s Coyote Prairie was not lost on the partners involved in the acquisition.

“In the Willamette, generally 95 percent of the land is in private ownership,” Bell said, adding that individual parcels often are small. “When you have that characteristic of private ownership and small parcels, it tends to be challenging to step back and think about the ecological viability of these systems or the species in them.”

That connectivity drives up the conservation value of all the adjacent lands.

“If you are protecting land through the creation of a corridor, you’re helping to avoid habitat fragmentation while creating larger blocks of protected habitat that improve resources for a host of species. You’re also minimizing conflict with humans and encroachment,” said Dorie Welch, BPA’s coordinator for the Willamette Wildlife Habitat Agreement.

The 15-year agreement, fashioned with the state of Oregon, provides stable funding for wildlife habitat acquisitions for more than 26,000 acres in the Willamette Valley to offset the impacts of federal dams on the Willamette River and its tributaries.

The agreement also provides seed funding for continuing basic work on acquisition sites – a new practice for BPA, which historically budgeted for ongoing maintenance, but one that has been a standard in the land trust community for years.

“We work with our project sponsors to develop a one-time stewardship fund at the time of acquisition that will provide for the long-term maintenance of the site,” Welch said.

Over the next 12 to 18 months, ODFW will work the city of Eugene to produce a land management plan that will detail restoration activities and recreational possibilities for Coyote Creek.

Tesler said the public will be asked to participate in the process through a series of meetings and public comment process.

“We will suggest some strategies and scenarios for the land management, including different ways that the public can access and view the Coyote Creek habitat,” Tesler said, adding that the agency is looking for input as well. “We’re a public agency and we follow a public process. It’s important to us to get out and hear what the public has to say.”

COYOTE CREEK

Number of acres: **310** (99 acres of riparian forest; 211 wet prairie)

Cost of acquisition: **\$805,000**

Potential plant species for reintroduction: **Kincaid’s lupine, Willamette daisy, Bradshaw’s lomatium, Nelson’s checkermallow**

Wildlife species potentially benefitting from restoration: **Red-legged frog, Western meadowlark, vesper sparrow, streaked horned lark**

For more information on Coyote Creek:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/willamette_wmp/docs/Final%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Coyote%20Cr.pdf

For more information on the Willamette Wildlife Habitat Agreement:

<http://www.bpa.gov/news/newsroom/Pages/New-Oregon-BPA-agreement-protects-Willamette-habitat.aspx>

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/willamette_wmp/docs/Final%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20WWMP.pdf

BPA is a nonprofit federal agency that markets renewable hydropower from federal Columbia River dams, operates three-quarters of high-voltage transmission lines in the Northwest and funds one of the largest wildlife protection and restoration programs in the world. BPA and its partners have also saved enough electricity through energy efficiency projects to power four large American cities. For more information, contact us at 503-230-5131 or visit www.bpa.gov.

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