



Willamette Valley Conservation Study

A Project of the America's Great Outdoors Initiative

Conserving Rare Species and Habitats

Once a vibrant and interconnected web of riparian corridors, wet prairie grasslands, upland prairie-oak savanna and oak woodlands, we now speak of native habitats in the Willamette Valley in terms of disconnected remnants. As these lands have been converted to other uses over time, many fish, wildlife and plants dependent upon them have suffered steep declines. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) has identified the importance of these native habitats and species as a key component in its collaborative study of conservation in the Willamette Valley.



Together, a Course for Wildlife and Habitats

In the face of significant native habitat loss in the Valley, how do we best work together to address these losses and the resulting declines of native fish, wildlife and plants that are vital to a healthy Valley ecosystem and economy?

Issues, Concerns and Opportunities

If you can imagine it, nearly half of the Willamette Valley, about 1.8 million acres, was once covered in oak savanna and prairie. Remaining today is about 47,000 acres, or 3%. Floodplain habitats, like riparian forests and shrub-lands, have declined by 80%. Tied to the fate of these habitats are the fish, wildlife and plant species within them.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife identifies 15 wildlife species imperiled with extirpation from the Valley along with a longer list of vulnerable species. There are 12 Valley species listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act with two more proposed. Factors are many, including small population size, habitat loss and degradation, and immediate threats.

Tremendous opportunities remain to address these problems. Citizens throughout the Valley are mobilizing together to take action and address the Valley's conservation issues. Private landowners have teamed up with the Service through its Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to restore native habitats on their land. We are convinced that by pooling our efforts, we can reverse the decline in the Valley's at-risk species and habitats.



Building Upon Successful Models

Through the Conservation Study, the Service endeavors to define our role in species and habitat conservation in the Valley and work collaboratively to build upon the efforts of other organizations and individuals who are addressing these issues.

What We've Heard

To gauge public interest and receive input from interested parties, we've held public meetings and met with state and local government and non-government organizations. We heard concern about the status of wildlife and habitats in the Valley, and support for the Service examining our role in helping to address these conservation issues. The need was also made clear to work cooperatively with other agencies,

non-governmental organizations, and private landowners to build upon the goals and strategies from plans such as Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Oregon Conservation Strategy, rather than starting from scratch.





The Goal of Conserving Rare Species and Habitats

The Service’s conservation goal for the Valley is to maintain a functional landscape capable of supporting self-sustaining native fish, wildlife and plant populations while supporting the economic sustainability of working farms, ranches and forests with high wildlife habitat values.



Fender's blue butterfly ©PortlandCorps

Our Approach to Achieving This Goal

In conducting the Conservation Study, we have, and will continue to, collaborate with Federal, State and local agencies, non-government organizations and private landowners who are actively engaged in conserving the Valley’s species and habitats. Part of this collaboration will include application of Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC), which the Service has adopted as its approach to efficient conservation of wildlife populations through habitat management.

SHC is a species-based approach to conservation involving biological planning, conservation design, program delivery, and outcome-based monitoring. Because it is impractical to develop conservation prescriptions for all species present in a planning area as large as the Willamette Valley, SHC requires that a subset of species be selected as the conservation targets under the assumption that by implementing management strategies that support the ecological conditions favored by the targets, the needs of the larger set of species characteristic of the area will be met. We are utilizing this approach in developing the WVCS.

To implement SHC, we will begin by selecting a subset of species that represent the Valley’s strategic habitats as identified by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW 2006) in the Oregon Conservation Strategy: grasslands, oak woodlands, riparian habitats, wetlands, and freshwater aquatic sites. We will then formulate conservation objectives for the selected species. The key question for the Study will be: “What is it that we ultimately want to achieve for these species?” Developing answers to this question will tell us where on the landscape to focus conservation efforts, what types of actions to take and how much effort is needed. The intent is to complete the plan by the end of this year.

Here’s an example of what we’ll consider:

The listed prairie species of the Valley (Fender’s blue butterfly, Willamette daisy, Kincaid’s lupine, Nelson’s checker-mallow, and Bradshaw’s lomatium) are now found only in small, highly fragmented upland and wet prairie habitat remnants. The first step in the recovery of these species is to identify and protect the remaining populations with the greatest potential for restoration. The next step is to augment, and if necessary, reintroduce populations to restore connectivity between those that are currently isolated from one another to restore gene flow and to create a population structure that provides for resiliency in a dynamic natural environment. How we can establish this population structure across the historic range of these species in the valley will be a major focus of the study.

Contact Us for More Information

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