

# Fieldbook

COLUMBIA LAND TRUST



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Conserving and caring for the vital lands, waters, and wildlife of the Columbia River region through sound science and strong relationships.

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Columbia Land Trust conserves and cares for the vital lands, waters, and wildlife of the Columbia River region through sound science and strong relationships.

Cover photo: Mount Hood seen from Nestwood Forest. Photo by Emma Browne Media.  
Inside cover: Arrowleaf balsamroot flowers outside The Dalles, Oregon.

Columbia Land Trust has earned accreditation from the Land Trust Alliance, which recognizes land trusts that adhere to national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust with rigorous ethical standards, and take steps to ensure that conservation efforts are permanent.



**Rooted in Relationships**

Like many of you, we have been patiently (or in my case not so patiently) awaiting the arrival of summer! As the days have gotten longer and the sun starts to shine, our stewardship team has been spending days controlling invasive weeds, coordinating construction projects, and managing all sorts of on-the-ground efforts as we work toward ambitious restoration projects and ecological goals. At the same time, our advancement team has been busy engaging with our incredible community!

We welcomed Peter Condra as our new Events Manager at the beginning of 2023, and you may have noticed that our calendar has been filling up. It has been wonderful to spend time together, and after years with fewer in-person gatherings, the enthusiasm is energizing! We are grateful to everyone who participated in our

**“It has been wonderful to spend time together, and after years with fewer in-person gatherings, the enthusiasm is energizing!”**

spring volunteering events, pitching in to help with invasive weed management at Optimist Club along the East Fork Lewis River, collecting western grey squirrel survey data in the East Cascades, and removing old tires from a new section of trail in Hood River (see page 4). We are hard at work planning additional events and engagement opportunities for the rest of this year and we hope you will join us!

Our Executive Director, Meg Rutledge has now been leading Columbia Land Trust for about six months and has been busy visiting sites and meeting with supporters and partners from throughout the Land Trust community.

Meg brings a wealth of leadership experience and familiarity with working across diverse landscapes and complex conservation projects from her previous role as Director of Biodiversity Threats at the New Zealand Department of Conservation. Her knowledge of wildlife is also astounding—she is trained as a veterinarian! This scientific expertise, combined with her warm laugh and knack for asking great questions, have helped make our organization’s transition a smooth one, and Meg reports that her family’s return to the Northwest has been joyful!

As you will read on page 7, Meg understands that our work is founded in strong, collaborative relationships and on page 8, we are excited to share an 820-acre conservation success that grew out of one of those relationships! Every supporter, from donors to volunteers, is vital to our work and gets us closer to achieving our conservation goals. *Thank you for believing in the work of Columbia Land Trust.*

– Jennifer Wilkerson, Advancement Director



A young volunteer looks for western gray squirrel nests.



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# PARTNERSHIP POWERS NEW VANTAGE POINTS

An aerial view of the Hood River near its confluence with the Columbia River.



Columbia Land Trust has stewarded the 400-acre Powerdale Natural Area in Hood River since 2013. The Powerdale Corridor, as it is often called, traces about four miles of the Hood River and the canyon it runs through, starting just south of its confluence with the Columbia River.

The name of the site comes from its history as a hydroelectric project. The Powerdale powerhouse produced the most electricity in Oregon when it was built in 1923 and fostered the early success of the fruit industry that still thrives in this region. Eventually the hydroelectric plant was rendered obsolete, and the dam, powerhouse, and other infrastructure were decommissioned in 2010.

Dam removal restored open access to the Hood River for salmon, steelhead, and Pacific lamprey. In 2013, utility company PacifiCorp donated the 400-acre Powerdale property to Columbia Land Trust and Hood River County, conserving the land to

permanently protect water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, allow public recreation, and ensure tribal fishing access. Ever since, the Land Trust has owned and managed 300 acres, and the county owns the remaining 100 acres.

In 2019, as a new housing development of more than 100 homes was being constructed on the bluffs above the river's west bank, Columbia Land Trust acquired 40 additional acres of land, thanks to a donation from Sieverkropp Development. This property adjoins the existing Powerdale Natural Area and functions as an important natural buffer between the new homes and the riparian zone, protecting wildlife habitat and water quality. The donated land also created an exciting opportunity for the Land Trust to collaborate with the Hood River Valley Parks & Recreation District to construct a new .56-mile trail segment that extends the existing Indian Creek Trail network.

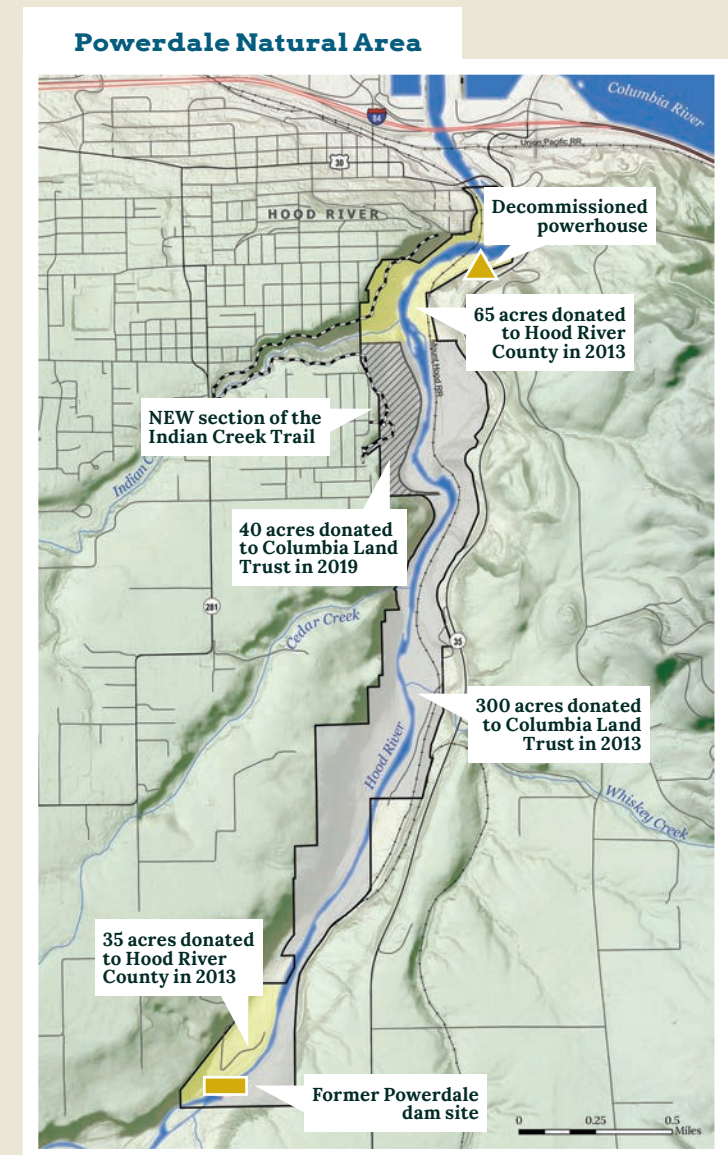
## Columbia Land Trust works with Hood River Valley Parks & Recreation District to construct a new trail segment in the Powerdale Natural Area

"This trail as a whole is so special," said Parks District Director Mark Hickok. "The fact that it exists at all is a minor miracle, since it didn't come about until the early 2000's when Parks District board member Art Carroll started working to connect a trail system through the city of Hood River. It crosses so many pieces of private property and easements and public land, while only crossing three major roads. This latest extension has been a vision of ours for over a decade."

Currently, the Indian Creek Trail runs from East Hazel Avenue (a few blocks uphill from downtown) to Barrett Park three miles away, passing Hood River High School and Columbia Gorge Community College. There is only one missing section in the middle, and the Parks District is working on purchasing the intervening property to fully connect the trail.

Construction of the new section was completed by Parks District staff and a dedicated group of volunteers, who worked on the trail every Tuesday for several months over the winter. One especially steep section at the trail's southern terminus required the services of Twin Oaks Trails, to build the switchbacks and navigate an unstable hillside.

"The new trail brings people to an incredible viewpoint overlooking the Powerdale corridor," said Natural Area Manager Kate Conley, who was hired by Columbia Land Trust in 2013 when the organization began managing the



**"The new trail brings people to an incredible viewpoint overlooking the Powerdale corridor."**

—Kate Conley, Natural Area Manager

### HOW TO GET THERE

The new trail section is just over half a mile long and has three access points:

- The corner of Betty Lou Avenue and 2nd Street
- Pacific Avenue and 2nd Street
- The cul-de-sac at the end of Sieverkropp Drive

If you visit, please respect neighboring private property and follow posted rules.





Land Trust Development Manager  
Teddy Wingo helping remove tires.

newly conserved Powerdale lands and has spent the last decade of her career caring for this landscape. “The urban residential neighborhood adjacent to the new trail was still agricultural land when I started working on the Powerdale project,” she said. “I’m thankful that we were able to conserve the forested river canyon and establish public access along the canyon rim.”

In addition to great scenery, the vantage point from the trail allows people to see where they are in relation to the Hood River and feel connected to their home watershed.

“Hood River is surrounded by an abundance of natural beauty and recreation opportunities, but this is one of the most accessible,” said Hickok. “There are several areas on the Indian Creek Trail where you feel like you are deep in the Gorge, miles from civilization, then you round a corner and smell someone’s barbecue, hear children jumping on a trampoline, and remember that you are right in town. It is also an important form of pedestrian transportation, with people using the trail to commute to work and school.”

Engaging people with nature is one of Columbia Land Trust’s primary objectives outlined by our 25-year Conservation Agenda, and this project was an incredible opportunity to work toward that goal, while simultaneously protecting the ecological integrity of the Hood River watershed, and collaborating with the Parks District.

“Working with the Columbia Land Trust has been a rewarding experience,” said Hickok. “It is great when your partner’s values and enthusiasm align with your own. Our agency and the Land Trust each bring unique skills to the table and we found a way to divide the work and resources in a fair way to leverage so much benefit for the community. The Hood River Valley Parks & Recreation District looks forward to partnering with the Land Trust for years to come.”

As a celebration of the new trail segment, the Land Trust and the Parks District co-hosted a ribbon-cutting and volunteer event on Earth Day this April. After a short presentation on the history of the trail and how it came to be, about 100 volunteers removed more than 500 tires from the trail canyon and helped remove invasive blackberry bushes from a hill next to the trail. We suspect the area was used as a dump site in the 1960’s and the eager volunteers quickly removed two full dumpsters worth of tires!

“It was so gratifying to see how many community members turned out on Earth Day to celebrate the culmination of the trail project and the land conservation work that underlies it,” said Conley. “We entered into this complex project with community at the forefront of our mind, and this was a powerful demonstration of how much the community cares. Also, the number of tires the group hauled up a hill in less than two hours was astounding!”

**100 volunteers removed more than 500 tires from the trail canyon and helped remove invasive blackberry bushes from a hill next to the trail.**



The Land Trust will continue to work on habitat enhancement projects along the trail corridor and we hope there will be future opportunities for volunteers and local residents to get involved.

“The vision is that Powerdale Natural Area and its trails will continue to provide our community with a feeling of connection to the Hood River, our forest ecosystems, and this spectacular place that we call home,” said Conley. “I hope that visiting and enjoying our local natural areas will inspire people to help protect them in perpetuity.” 🌿

*Thank you to PacifiCorp and the Sieverkropp family for the land donations that made this project possible, and thank you to Hood River Waste Management for donating the tire removal services.*

# A Joyful Return to the Northwest

## Executive Director Meg Rutledge reflects on her first six months leading Columbia Land Trust

**A**t the end of 2022, Meg Rutledge and her family moved from New Zealand back to southern Washington so Meg could begin a new role as Executive Director of Columbia Land Trust. Meg was eager to be close to her family and return to her Northwest roots, and since joining the Land Trust this January she has been traveling throughout the region familiarizing herself with sites we steward and meeting Land Trust supporters and partners.

“Conservation is complex, expansive, and important,” Meg said. “It has only been six months, and it will take much longer than that for me to fully understand the depth of our work and the history of some of these places.”

“It’s impossible to pick a favorite site,” she continued, “I’m consistently impressed at how interesting these landscapes are and how valuable our work is.”

For Meg, exploring completed restoration projects in person, for example, is essential to connecting big picture plans with on the ground impacts. “I really enjoy spending time with colleagues and supporters,” she said. “Relationships are central to the work of Columbia Land Trust and are essential for grounding high level strategic plans in tangible results. This is ongoing work and it is my job to strengthen and expand existing relationships, and to foster new ones.”

Meg’s professional background includes rigorous professional and academic training in protected areas management. This work relies on both sound science and community engagement, so it is valuable to her that Columbia Land Trust’s stewardship efforts prioritize this approach.

“The monitoring that we and others do is essential to informing our decisions and guiding our management plans,” she said. “The Land Trust has been collecting and sharing data, and analysis is used to guide our site-specific outcomes. I’m glad we are continuing to increase capacity in that area. This information enables us to measure progress toward our ecological goals and allows us to course correct when necessary.”

Despite all the negative storylines around species extinction, climate change, and other pressing issues facing our natural world, Meg is most motivated by positive stories. “It has been joyful to come back to the Northwest and see the major conservation successes that took place while I was away,” she said. “It inspires me and I am excited to be joining that momentum.”

Outside of work, Meg is looking forward to summer plans to spend time with family and re-connect with friends throughout the region. “I’m excited to take my husband and son to some of my favorite Northwest summits, and to visit some new places that I have always wanted to go.” she said. 🌿

**“Relationships of place are central to our work, they ground strategic planning in tangible results.”**

—Meg Rutledge, Executive Director

*Meg among the wildflowers of the East Cascades.*



# A Legacy of Conservation

The Wiancko Family partners with Columbia Land Trust to conserve Nestwood Forest

**J**ust outside the City of Portland, at the western edge of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, stands the 820-acre Nestwood Forest. This is one of the largest privately owned forests in Multnomah County, which Columbia Land Trust has now permanently conserved through a decades-long philanthropic collaboration with Cynthia and Dennis Wiancko.

"I am very grateful for the upbringing I had," said Dennis, when asked how he came to care so deeply for the natural world. "My mother and father were nature lovers. Growing up, I spent a lot of time outdoors and developed an appreciation for conservation very early on."

The name Nestwood originated from the acronym NEST that Dennis and his neighbors created to stand for "New Earth Stewardship Trust", a reference to his broad conservation philosophy.

"One of our helpers Ryan, a forest aficionado and talented woodworker, started calling the woodlands Nestwood and the name stuck," said Dennis. "It makes sense—this forest is our nest; it's where we live and where we fledge."

Nestwood Forest is located less than a mile from the Columbia River, and adjoins the National Scenic Area, making it especially valuable as wildlife habitat because of its connectivity with other conserved landscapes.

"This site represents an increasingly rare example of a nearly intact West Cascades forest," said Columbia Land Trust Conservation Director Dan Roix, "It provides great wildlife habitat, fosters climate resilience by sequestering carbon, and benefits water quality."

Dennis' parents, Tom and Sibyl Wiancko, purchased the initial 250 acres in 1966. Over the years, Dennis and Cynthia worked to acquire adjacent parcels with the intention of creating a large, cohesive, connected landscape.

Situated in the Cascade foothills, the high point of Nestwood Forest is 1,300-foot Ross Mountain, an ancient

Page 8: Trillium in Nestwood Forest (above) and Dennis Wiancko beside a trail sign (below).

cinder cone. "The ad my parents saw in the Oregonian called it an 'all fine view property', and it certainly is," said Dennis. "You can see the Columbia River in two different directions, you can see Mt. Hood... the views used to be better, but the trees just keep growing," he joked.

Most of the rain that falls at Nestwood Forest makes its way to Big Creek, which flows into the Sandy River and, ultimately, into the Columbia. However, three small springs on the north side of Ross Mountain drain into Latourell Creek, which flows directly to the Columbia over the famous waterfall of the same name.

Dennis eventually bought the property from his parents, constructed a house, and moved to his Home Place on Ross Mountain full-time. Shortly thereafter, Cynthia joined a friend up on the mountain for a walk. Dennis and Cynthia married in 1993 and a new era began.

Dennis has never tired of exploring Nestwood. "I always feel like a young boy when I am out there," he said. "I go for a walk, stop by a tree that draws me in, follow a creek, seek out the fragrant fringe cup or rare phantom orchid. I always want to see what is down the next slope." Over the years, he and a team of helpers lovingly built a network of trails that crisscross the property, complete with bridges, benches, and signage.

Nestwood Forest is rich in flora and fauna. Over the years, Dennis has seen black bear, coyote, bobcat, deer, and many species of birds (favorites include Swainson's thrush and pileated woodpecker). He also finds great inspiration in the cultural history of the landscape, and his research into the land's history—from stewardship by Indigenous people, to dairy farming, to a major fire in 1902—has inspired poems, plays, short stories, and countless other creative endeavors and community gatherings.



The Wianckos had been purchasing adjacent properties for their conservation value, little by little, for about 20 years until 2010, when a neighboring partnership that included hundreds of acres of timberland dissolved. Over three years, they acquired all 554 acres that became available.

"Lots of people had questions about why I was doing this, but conservation was always in my mind," he said. Dennis and Cynthia considered various conservation methods before deciding to work with Columbia Land Trust. "I was aware of land trusts," Dennis said, sharing that he was initially concerned about the permanent nature of land trust conservation, but once he learned about management plans, and how they can be responsive and shift over time, he saw the potential. "I wanted all the land to be managed under a unified vision," he said. Years of relationship building between the Wianckos and Columbia Land Trust went into the project, as we worked together toward the shared goals of conserving the land to benefit wildlife, encourage native plant diversity, improve water quality, foster climate resilience, and provide recreational opportunities.

The Nestwood Forest conservation project has two main components. On the western side of the site,

Columbia Land Trust purchased 405 acres from the Wianckos that we will manage, called the Howard Canyon Natural Area. To the east, the Wianckos donated a conservation easement on 382 acres including their Home Place, Ross Mountain, and the surrounding fields and forestland. The conservation easement is a legal agreement between the Wianckos (and any future owners) and Columbia Land Trust that permanently protects the land from development or commercial logging.

The East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District was an important supporter of this project. District Vice Chair Mike Guebert noted that "EMSWCD's investment in Nestwood Forest represents our largest land transaction ever. Conserving Nestwood Forest addresses climate change impacts, protects and enhances soil and water resources, and is a significant milestone for our Land Legacy Program, which has now helped protect more than 1,000 acres." He added, "We are excited to work with Columbia Land Trust and the community on future opportunities for our urban constituents to visit and enjoy the site."

"It is remarkable what Dennis and Cynthia have done, how they acquired all this land over time with the vision of creating a large conservation area," said

**"I always feel like a young boy when I am out there, I ... stop by a tree that draws me in, follow a creek, seek out the fragrant fringe cup or rare phantom orchid. I always want to see what is down the next slope."**

—Dennis Wiancko





**“This site represents an increasingly rare example of a nearly intact West Cascades forest.”**

—Dan Roix, Conservation Director

Sunlight filters through the trees in Nestwood Forest. Photo by Emma Browne Media.

Dan. “When I started working at the Land Trust 15 years ago, there was a file on my desk about this project, and it grew larger as they acquired more land. This project took many years to complete, but when you think about how this land is now permanently conserved and will benefit many generations to come, 15 or 20 years is just a short moment with that perspective.”

Land Trust Natural Area Manager Emily Matson, who will be leading management of the Howard Canyon Natural Area, explained the current condition of the site. “The forest condition is really varied,” she said, “which reflects how it was shaped by wildfire and logging over the years.” Some areas burned heavily or repeatedly in the early 1900’s and some were logged as recently as the early 2000’s (before Dennis purchased the land), but others—especially along the creek canyons—have towering cedar, Douglas-fir, bigleaf maple, and hemlock trees that are more than 100 years old. There are invasive plants present, like Himalayan blackberry, but many of the forest stands that weren’t harvested recently have relatively intact, diverse understories. “The Land Trust will do some riparian enhancement and planting, but overall the creek corridors are in good ecological condition,” said Emily. “Some of our initial stewardship efforts will be focused on re-planting harvest areas to set them on a trajectory towards healthy conifer forest.”

All of this work is part of the long-term, adaptable management plan Columbia Land Trust creates for every landscape under our care. The two parts of Nestwood Forest are forever connected through their conservation, and the Land Trust will collaborate with the Wianckos and future generations on management strategies for the entire area, anticipating that these relationships will ebb and flow over time, just like the natural processes we are working to protect.

In addition to building a stewardship plan for future habitat enhancement projects, and Land Trust team is

developing a community engagement plan to create opportunities for people to connect with nature at Nestwood Forest. “We are doing a lot of outreach to figure how to best engage with different groups and inform our public access plan,” said Emily. “We are prioritizing outreach to Tribes and Indigenous communities, as well as the local community near Corbett and organizations that serve historically marginalized groups across the Portland metropolitan area, since Howard Canyon is only a half hour drive from the city.”

“This project is particularly important because of the rapid population growth of the Portland-Vancouver metro area,” said Dan. “Maintaining large, intact natural areas like Nestwood Forest is essential for mitigating the impacts of climate change, and has many other benefits for nearby communities, large and small.”

When the project was completed at the end of last year, Dennis, Cynthia, and Columbia Land Trust staff gathered together atop Ross Mountain to celebrate. “It was very touching,” Dennis said, “to look around the circle and see these young professionals, whose job it is to care for this land that Cynthia and I love so much, and to hear them individually express their own love for Nestwood Forest. Thank you, Columbia Land Trust!” 🌿

*Generous support from the Wiancko Family, East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District, The Conservation Alliance, and Killian Pacific made this conservation project possible. We’d also like to thank former Columbia Land Trust Executive Director Glenn Lamb, who dedicated years of work to this project.*

# BENEFITING WILDLIFE ON LAND AND WATER

## Land management practices help Pacific salmon thrive

By Max Diaz

**T**wo Columbia Land Trust sites, Cranes’ Landing, located west of Vancouver, Washington and Columbia Stock Ranch, located north of St. Helens, Oregon, both received Salmon-Safe certification at the end of 2022! Founded by river and native fish conservation organization Pacific Rivers in the 1990’s, Salmon-Safe is now an independent nonprofit whose mission is to transform land management practices so Pacific salmon can thrive in West Coast watersheds. The nonprofit works with landowners to reduce watershed impacts through site-specific certification, led by an independent team of scientists.

At Cranes’ Landing, the Land Trust farms about 400 acres of foraging and loafing habitat for thousands of migrating sandhill cranes that visit the site each year between October and April. After an assessment, our team was pleased to learn that our land management strategies were already aligned with the best practices required for Salmon-Safe certification. For example, we avoid overworking the

soil by mowing, tilling, and rotating crops like wheat, corn, oats, alfalfa, and sunflowers, which require less water to grow. Berms that we installed and planted with native trees and shrubs prevent erosion and provide habitat for native pollinators and other wildlife, increasing the site’s biodiversity.

“The Land Trust has been stewarding Cranes’ Landing to benefit cranes and other wildlife for seven years, and working with the Salmon-Safe team was an affirmation that our stewardship practices also care for the downstream watershed,” said Natural Area Manager Sanoe Keliinoini.

“We are thrilled that Columbia Land Trust has committed to Salmon-Safe certification practices across the Cranes’ Landing and Columbia Stock Ranch parcels,” said Brian Muegge, Salmon-Safe Certification Specialist. “At Cranes’ Landing, our conversations with the Land Trust stewardship team focused on farming practices that further enhance water quality, water quantity and landscape-level biodiversity. At Columbia Stock Ranch, in addition to applying Salmon-Safe practices to protect watershed health, the Land Trust is continuing their efforts to bolster threatened Columbian white-tailed deer habitat.”

Salmon-Safe’s work began with Wilamette Valley farms, but over the years has developed certification programs that address negative watershed impacts across the urban-agricultural continuum.

“Columbia Land Trust is leading the way among land trusts in applying






*A creative configuration of alfalfa, corn rows, and spring wheat, along with a fallow field on one side. Rotating crops and giving some fields a break between growing seasons helps improve soil health.*

Salmon-Safe’s certification tools to expand and promote watershed-friendly and climate resilient agriculture,” said Muegge.

The Pacific Northwest is one of the last remaining wild salmon strongholds in the continental United States and Salmon-Safe is working to inspire landowners to improve land management practices so that Pacific salmon can thrive. Cranes’ Landing and Columbia Stock Ranch are now among 95,000 acres of Salmon-Safe certified lands throughout the West. 🌿



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Landscape spotlight:

# The Pacific Flyway

**I**n 2019, researchers and conservationists sounded the alarm when a scientific study\* revealed that North American bird populations have plummeted by three billion since 1970—that is one-in-four birds gone. Without action, these declines will likely accelerate, and Columbia Land Trust is dedicated to conserving our region's critical habitat, for birds and other wildlife.

The Pacific Flyway is an essential pathway for neo-tropical migratory birds, including songbirds like warblers, tanagers, vireos, hummingbirds, and even some hawks and owls, as they seasonally travel thousands of miles between the rainforests of South and Central America and the

temperate and boreal forests of the U.S. and Canada. But the Flyway is only as strong as each stop along the birds' journey.

Critical connecting habitats are being lost at an unprecedented rate due to land use conversion as well as impacts from climate change including drought, disease, and wildfire. Lands that Columbia Land Trust already cares for, as well as priority areas we are actively working to conserve, are located right in the heart of the Flyway. These are critical places for migrating birds to rest, forage, and nest.

Permanent conservation of critical habitat is essential to ensuring our region's diverse and abundant wildlife populations continue to thrive. 🌿



A Western tanager.  
Photo by Eric Bjorkman.

\* For more information visit:

[www.birds.cornell.edu/home/bring-birds-back](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/bring-birds-back)  
[www.fws.gov/program/bring-birds-back](http://www.fws.gov/program/bring-birds-back)