



Columbia Land Trust

# Conservation Report



2025-2026

Sometimes life has a rhythm to it. We begin the year with optimism, get swept into the pace of daily work, and pause to reflect as the year draws to a close.

**But 2025 felt different.**

The past year offered more than a few moments to question assumptions about where support for the environment and communities truly lies. With each challenge and uncertainty, though, reflection led us back to a reassuring truth: our values remain strong, and so do the people who uphold them. Columbia Land Trust was built with the long view in mind. Our mission—to conserve and care for the vital lands, waters, and wildlife of the Columbia River region—requires both steadiness and adaptability.

Our work is grounded in sound science, strong relationships, and collaboration. We are an opt-in organization, working with those who choose to join us, even when perspectives differ. By focusing on what unites us, our staff demonstrates that listening builds trust—and that shared purpose sustains both hope and ambition.

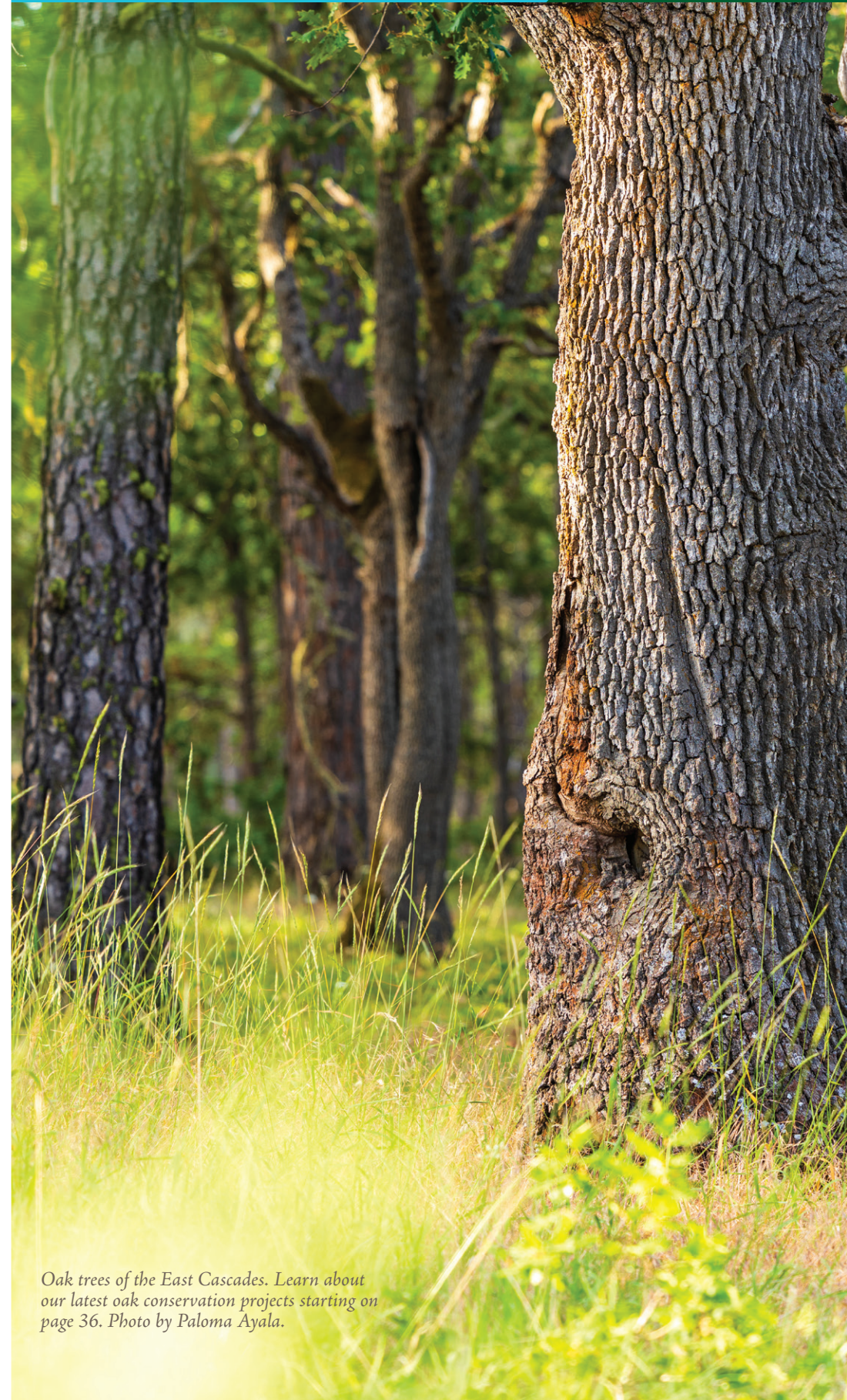
The impact of our collective effort is meaningful. Over the last year, we have conserved more than 3,000 acres across our service area, conducted prescribed burns on 127 acres to reduce wildfire risk and restore ecosystem health in the East Cascades, and continued rebuilding an oak prairie on the Tualatin River. These efforts matter—for biodiversity, for climate resilience, and for future generations.

These accomplishments reflect how well Columbia Land Trust is positioned as a trusted partner to ensure the Columbia River region will continue to thrive. As responsibility for caring for the land shifts increasingly closer to home, we are ready to lean into our communities—states, counties, cities, and households—who look to their backyards and backcountry with pride and care.

Looking ahead, I am hopeful and deeply grateful: for our staff and for every supporter who shares our commitment—again or for the first time—to this vital work. Thank you for helping to keep this special corner of our world connected, resilient, and thriving.

I hope you feel pride, as I do, in reflecting upon the achievements of this past year, and join our ambition to continue this urgent work across our region.

*Meg Rutledge, Executive Director*



Oak trees of the East Cascades. Learn about our latest oak conservation projects starting on page 36. Photo by Paloma Ayala.

# 2025 Impact



**3,021 acres conserved**  
across our service area



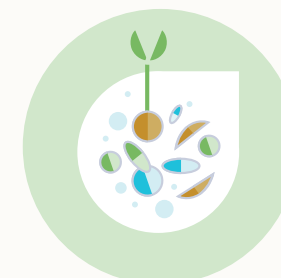
**20 years** of the Backyard  
Habitat Certification Program



**3,850 webinar views** as  
part of our Field Report series



**127 acres treated**  
with beneficial prescribed fire  
in the East Cascades



**1,387 pounds of seed**  
from 80 native species of  
wetland, prairie, and oak  
woodland plants installed at  
Rainbow Natural Area

WHERE WE WORK

Columbia Land Trust's  
priority conservation areas  
span five ecoregions

1 Coast Range & Estuaries



2 Willamette Valley & Puget Trough



3 West Cascades



4 East Cascades

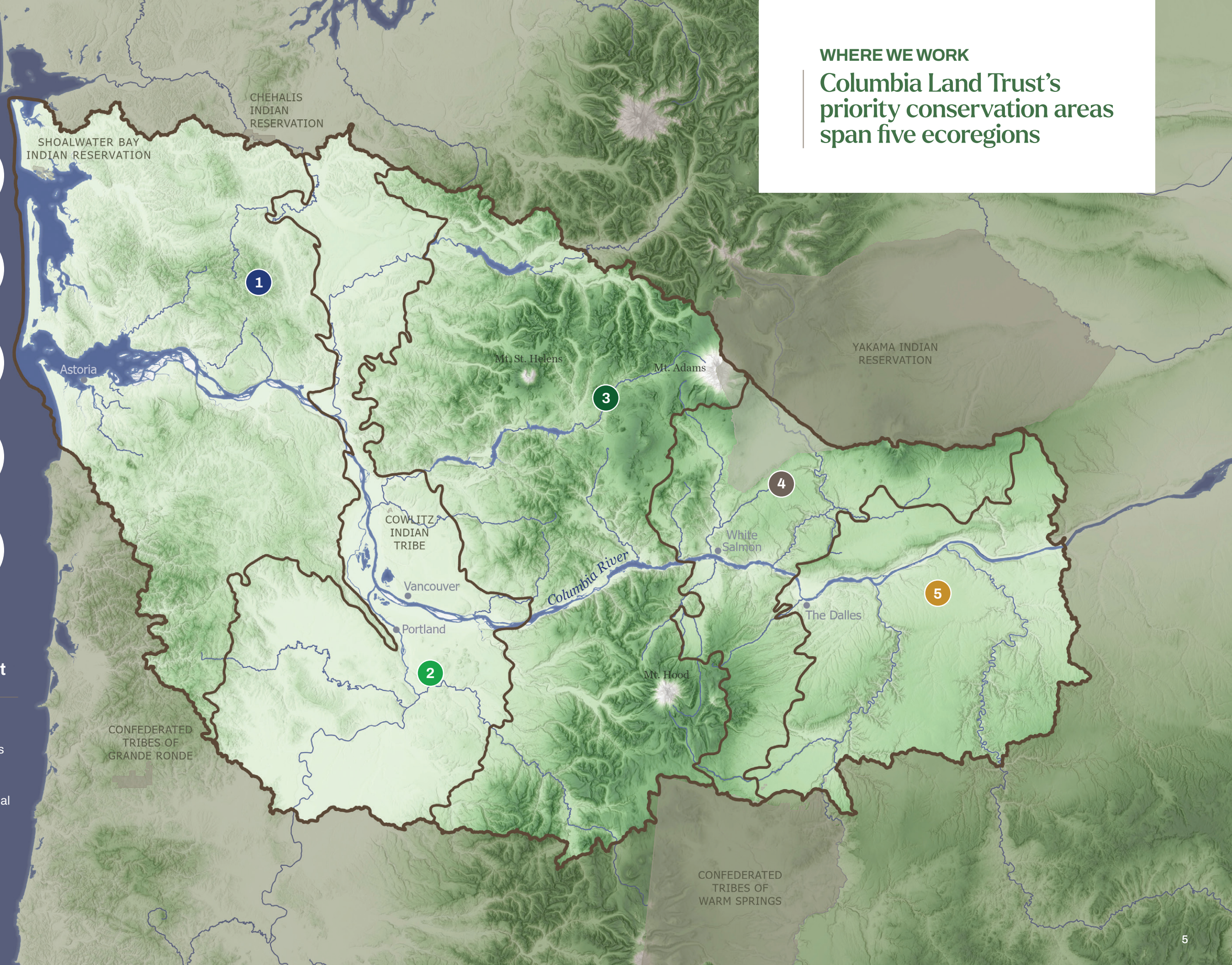


5 Columbia Plateau



Columbia Land Trust  
Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the lands and waters of the Columbia River region are the ancestral homelands of Indigenous peoples who have been living and working here from time immemorial and are the original stewards of these lands.



Stewardship staff travel by boat to Pierce Island for a day of planting, with Beacon Rock in the background.

## Our Approach

Columbia Land Trust has established priority conservation areas that are critical to ecosystems and wildlife throughout the region we serve, from rainy coastal mountains to the arid Columbia Plateau. To establish these conservation areas, we analyze the current presence of wildlife and habitat, landscape connectivity, and climate resilience. We are committed to fundamentally changing the pace and scale of conservation in the Northwest through collaboration and community engagement. Ultimately, our success is not measured in dollars raised or acres conserved, but in ecological integrity and healthy relationships between people and nature.

## Conservation Priorities

### Ecological Integrity

A state in which the nature of the Northwest is intact, functional, and supports a diversity of habitats, species, and processes. Landscapes with ecological integrity are self-sustaining; they are able to evolve and self-regulate within a natural range of variability.

### Climate Resilience

Resilience means that a system is able to deal with change (like fires and flooding) and continue to develop. Our definition includes human communities, and we work to build climate resilience by restoring natural systems that are capable of adapting to changing weather and climate. For example, a mature restored forest can reduce flood risk for downstream infrastructure.

### Climate Mitigation

The Land Trust takes action to slow the rate of climate change. Key strategies include protecting forests, forest fuels reduction, voluntary carbon market credit registration, and conserving sustainable agriculture. These efforts allow others to participate in climate mitigation, reduce risk of wildfire emissions, and uphold regional livelihoods.

### Connecting People to Nature

Connecting with people and building relationships is at the core of our work. Our conservation strategies will not be effective over time if we do not build broad, enduring support for conservation. Furthermore, our conservation work needs to respond and adapt based on mutual learning and understanding.



# A Hopeful Future for Our Fire-Adapted Forests

## Restoring Natural Rhythms

**In 2025, Columbia Land Trust made significant progress in our long-term effort to bring beneficial fire back to the dry forests of Washington's East Cascades.**

**T**he year began with the completion of a landscape-wide evaluation of the more than 17,000 acres of land we steward in Klickitat County, assessing current conditions and determining what treatments are needed to address forest health, resilience, spatial variation, and hazardous fuels issues. Across the evaluation area, findings revealed overly dense and uniform forests with an overabundance of small diameter trees and shade-tolerant conifers, and we identified 12,000 acres in greatest need of treatment. These conditions developed in response to decades of fire suppression and previous land management that focused on generating timber revenue. Our restoration goals include moving forests toward more open and patchy conditions that favor fire resilient trees like Oregon white oak and ponderosa pine.

We made major progress toward those goals, completing five prescribed burns across two conserved natural areas, restoring beneficial fire to a combined 127 acres of forest, and reducing the risk of high-severity wildfire. These burns were possible through collaboration with partners and are part of our long-term vision to restore a healthier, more natural rhythm to the fire-adapted forests of the East Cascades.

"The removal of fuels thanks to these burns can turn down the temperature and slow the rate of spread of future wildfires, reducing the risk of catastrophic fire carrying into neighboring homes and communities," said East Cascades Oak Partnership Manager Lindsay Cornelius.

At Bear Creek Natural Area, along the upper Klickitat River outside Glenwood, spring and fall prescribed burns

treated 52 acres of pine forest with beneficial fire.

At Bowman Creek Natural Area near Goldendale, the Land Trust burned 75 acres of oak pine woodlands over three days in October, our largest broadcast burn to date. The goal was the same: reduce understory fuels like duff and needle litter, which in their accumulated state can generate enough heat if they burn during summer months to kill mature trees, and to restore a more open forest structure to reduce competition stress.

Our stewardship team spent the last two years honing technical skills to bring prescribed fire back to our conserved lands, and we are continuing our learning journey which is rooted in years of research, training, and regional capacity-building. Subsequent burns will build on what we've learned—allowing us to refine our techniques, strengthen partnerships, and deepen our understanding of how fire can safely and effectively support the landscapes we manage.

### LOOKING AHEAD

#### A Community Wildfire Defense Grant Will Support Restorative Fire Efforts

In 2025, Columbia Land Trust was awarded a Community Wildfire Defense Grant, a competitive federal funding opportunity designed to help at-risk communities across the nation reduce regional wildfire severity. Our project area is one of the highest priorities in the Washington Department of Natural Resources' 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan for central and eastern Washington. This grant will advance fuels reduction and prescribed fire work and support our ability to collaborate with local contractors and partners to restore resilience at a landscape scale.

"This funding is an investment in the safety, health, and resilience of our

**We made major progress toward those goals, completing five prescribed burns across two conserved natural areas, restoring beneficial fire to a combined 127 acres of forest, and reducing the risk of high-severity wildfire.**

#### Across both sites, our prescribed burns helped:

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**Clear excess surface fuels across 127 acres of forest**, including dead needles, leaves, and woody debris that contribute to high-intensity fire

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**Reduce ladder fuels** that can carry fire from the forest floor into the tree canopy

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**Open the understory** by removing dense, woody vegetation that can increase the risk of extreme wildfire, while simultaneously supporting the growth of native grasses, wildflowers, and plants that provide nutritious wildlife forage

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**Improve tree health**, particularly for mature pines and oaks that rely on periodic fire to reduce competition

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**Protect communities and neighboring lands** by lowering the likelihood of extreme wildfire in neighboring forests

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**Provide hands-on training** for prescribed fire practitioners within the Land Trust and local partners

*Prescribed fire staff monitor the perimeter of a burn site.*



**With this funding, the Land Trust and our partners will be able to implement thinning, fuels reduction, and prescribed fire treatments on roughly 3,000 acres of high-priority forest in the upper Klickitat River watershed.**



entire community, including neighboring tribal forestlands, important habitats, rural towns like Glenwood, and important infrastructure like the neighboring fish hatchery,” said Lindsay. “These funds were allocated specifically to reduce the risk of high-severity fire in some of the most vulnerable forestlands in Washington.”

With this funding, the Land Trust and our partners will be able to implement thinning, fuels reduction, and prescribed fire treatments on roughly 3,000 acres of high-priority forest in the upper Klickitat River watershed.

This multi-year forest restoration project will support local contractors, practitioners, and community partners, as we work together to build a long-term, sustainable prescribed fire program that can serve the region for years to come.

“We cannot fully restore and manage these dry, fire-adapted forests of the East Cascades without a robust prescribed fire program, and we cannot have a robust prescribed fire program without strong partnerships and a long-term social and financial commitment to repeated thinning and burning,” said Natural Area Manager Adam Lieberg. “We are fortunate to have all those pieces in place at the moment, so it’s time to roll up our sleeves and get to work.”

These accomplishments show what’s possible when community members, local fire practitioners, tribal partners, and others work together toward a shared vision. We could not have completed these 2025 prescribed burns without our partners at Mt. Adams Resource Stewards and their capable stewardship crew. We would also like to thank the Klickitat, Wahkiacus, and Rural 7 Fire Districts who supported our burns with experienced personnel and fire engines, along with Skookum Resource Management, local volunteers, and members of the Mt. Adams Prescribed Burn Association who participated in burn operations.

With each acre treated, we see forests that are more open, more resilient, and better equipped to handle a changing climate. Improved habitat for wildlife can be seen in the weeks following each burn, as native plants grow where thick mats of pine needles and woody debris once covered the forest floor.

While there is much work to be done, there is more reason than ever to feel hopeful about the future of our fire-adapted forests—and the communities embedded in them—in the East Cascades.

*This page: Land Trust staff member Lindsay Cornelius unloads supplies. Opposite: The day of a burn begins with a briefing session with partners from Mt. Adams Resource Stewards.*



# Ensuring Restoration Success Through Monitoring

*This page and opposite: Wetland monitoring requires a combination of boats, waders, muck boots, and a variety of data collection tools.*

It was an exciting year for our monitoring program. We launched new systems, improved those already in place, and rolled them out at an unprecedented speed. This work took us across the Land Trust service area, from lush coastal wetlands to dry forests more than 150 miles to the east.

Why do we monitor? Because every landscape has a story to tell. By studying the land, we learn how it works, spot potential problems, and make sure our stewardship efforts are on the right track. When Columbia Land Trust protects a new property, we start with an ecological integrity assessment—a comprehensive health check that establishes a baseline and guides how we restore and strengthen the ecosystem over time.

Our ultimate goal? To make these landscapes more resilient. That means restoring diverse habitats and keeping a close eye on how well our efforts are working. Whether re-introducing tides to coastal wetlands, native plants to wet prairies, or fire to dry forests, our monitoring expands, too—because every action teaches us something new about caring for these lands.



## 2025 Monitoring Highlights

Completed Ecological Integrity Assessments (which **establish a baseline of ecological function** on sites new to our care) on **10** sites, spanning **8,250** acres and **12** ecosystem types.



Conducted Action Effectiveness Monitoring (which **tracks the impact of restoration projects in the Columbia River Estuary**) on six wetland sites, which included mapping **11** channel cross sections, deploying **21** water depth sensors, and measuring **20** sediment accretion transects.

Surveyed **10** vegetation plots to track **wet prairie restoration progress** at a site along the Tualatin River.

Developed and implemented a **protocol to monitor the effects of thinning and prescribed fire treatments** on our lands and inform future stewardship.

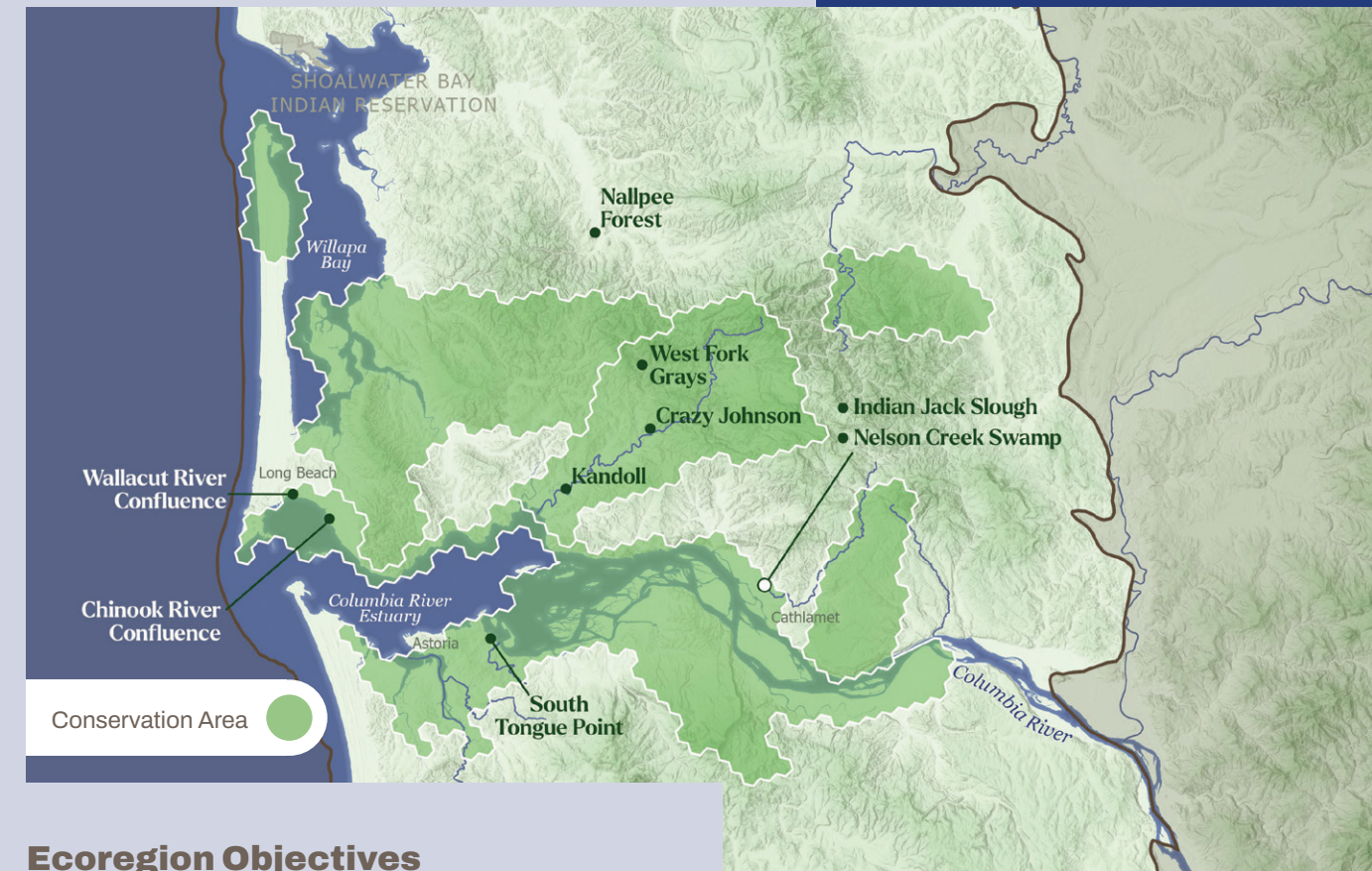
Monitored **burn severity and fire effects** across **127** acres at locations where the Land Trust has completed prescribed burns.



# Coast Range & Estuaries



Wetland at Chinook River Confluence.



## Ecoregion Objectives

**GIVE** rivers room to move and flood naturally, enabling them to support healthy salmon runs and riverside habitat without threatening communities and infrastructure.

**PROTECT** older forests, ensuring that large expanses are managed in ways that connect critical habitat areas, set the stage for more old forests, and support the survival of endangered species.

**INCREASE** the prevalence of tidal wetlands in the Columbia River Estuary and continue managing invasive species.

**CONSERVE** and restore the last remaining large, undeveloped properties containing coastal interdunal wetlands and lakes, associated forests, and beaches.

**STRENGTHEN** local economies and expand public awareness of conservation benefits by providing healthy and functional natural areas.

## Conservation

### Nallpee Forest

**Conservation Area:**  
Willapa River  
Pacific County, WA

**93 acres**

A generous donation of land from Steve Weisman, which included funding for future stewardship of the site, made the conservation of a 93-acre site along the Willapa River possible in 2025. Columbia Land Trust is selective with conservation donations that we accept: they must align with our strategic priorities, and we must be able to care for them in perpetuity, which is not a responsibility we take lightly. This site has a high level of ecological integrity and is home to an older forest with native understory, as well as springs and tributary streams that run to the Willapa River, fitting easily into our conservation goals for



this area. “It is easy to see why Steve wanted to see this land permanently protected,” said Coast Region Stewardship Manager Austin Tomlinson. “This place amazes me every time I visit. Seeing it throughout different seasons, the ecological diversity and microsites it holds become evident. It feels different from the surrounding landscapes, like you are in an oasis in the middle of a quiet valley.”

Although a majority of the forest is already on a trajectory towards achieving older growth habitat conditions, there are opportunities for future stand enhancement with a focus on promoting species and structural diversity. Periodic weed monitoring and management will also be a stewardship priority.

Over time, the Land Trust will advance both tribal uses and public engagement opportunities here. The latter has high potential given the site’s proximity to the Willapa Hills Trail, a 56-mile rail-to-trail that connects Chehalis with South Bend.

Permanently conserving this land will have long-term benefits for watershed processes, forest health, and soil retention, which improves water quality in the Willapa River. In turn, these benefits will improve and protect habitat for endangered marbled murrelet, as well as salmon and steelhead.

## Crazy Johnson (Expansion)

**Conservation Area:**  
Grays River

Wahkiakum County, WA

**152 acres**

The remote and rugged Grays River watershed is among the highest conservation priorities for Columbia Land Trust. Here, we work to conserve tidal wetlands, Sitka spruce swamps, and upland forests that regulate stormwater in the river’s estuary. We celebrated a victory in the Coast Range ecoregion last year with the purchase of 152 acres of forestland above the Grays River. This acquisition will permanently protect the upper reaches of Crazy Johnson Creek, which feeds into the West Fork Grays River and is one of the last few chum salmon strongholds on the entire lower Columbia River.

In addition to supporting endangered and threatened salmonid species, conserving this land will strengthen the Land Trust’s ongoing stewardship efforts in the area, enhancing water quality, riparian habitat, forest health, and flood protection for nearby communities. This project was made possible by The Conservation Fund (TCF), which took ownership of this site in 2023 as part of a larger acquisition

*A flock of waterfowl at Chinook River Confluence. Inset: Red coral fungus at Nallpee Forest. Left: Stewardship Assistant Lu Hernandez carrying wood at Crazy Johnson.*



across 20,000 acres of forest in Pacific and Wahkiakum counties. This parcel was sold to Columbia Land Trust for permanent conservation management, while most of the remainder of the land will be sold to Washington State Department of Natural Resources and permanently managed as working forest. “This milestone shows what’s possible when partners unite behind a shared vision,” said Kaola Swanson, Columbia Gorge Program Manager at The Conservation Fund. “By securing this forestland and transitioning it into permanent stewardship with Columbia Land Trust, we’re helping protect a critical salmon stronghold, strengthen climate-resilient forests, and support the communities that depend on healthy watersheds.”

The newly conserved parcel expanded the Land Trust’s existing 673-acre Crazy Johnson stewardship unit, located just to the south. It will be managed cohesively as a Natural Area, prioritizing habitat values. Our stewardship work will focus on the restoration and enhancement of both upland and riparian forest and shrubland. We will look to promote and foster tree species diversity, native understory growth, and structurally complex forest habitat that can support upland endangered species, including marbled murrelet. The conservation of this forest will also support river system function in waterways below the site.

This acquisition was the first project to be funded through a pilot program to expand eligibility to the State of Washington’s Clean Water Revolving Fund, managed by the Washington Department of Ecology. The land was purchased with a partially-forgivable loan from the revolving fund. The loan

and pilot program are being coordinated by Craft3, a nonprofit community development lending organization based in the Pacific Northwest. Core support for the pilot program also came from the Washington Association of Land Trusts and Sustainable Northwest. The remainder of the loan was paid off through a grant awarded by the Washington Salmon Recovery Funding Board\* and facilitated by the Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board.

## Stewardship

### Chinook River Confluence

**Conservation Area:**  
Columbia River Estuary  
Pacific County, WA

Columbia Land Trust conserved the 197-acre Chinook River Confluence site near Ilwaco, Washington in 2024 and our stewardship team recently completed our Ecological Integrity Assessment (EIA) of the site. An EIA is a comprehensive assessment of ecological values that we use as a benchmark for our restoration and land management. Chinook River Confluence is home to a dense Sitka spruce swamp and tidal marshes, which make it beautiful, but difficult to navigate. Since this is a newly conserved property, our goal in 2025 was to get more familiar with the landscape and ecology, finalize our management plan, and establish photo points for future monitoring. There are some non-native plants present that we will manage, including yellow flag iris, Japanese knotweed, and Scots broom. But overall, the ecological function of

*\*This funding is administered by the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office. The Mid-Grays River Conservation Area is supported with funding from Washington’s Climate Commitment Act. The CCA supports Washington’s climate action efforts by putting cap-and-invest dollars to work reducing climate pollution, creating jobs, and improving public health. Information about the CCA is available at [www.climate.wa.gov](http://www.climate.wa.gov).*



The site stretches along more than a mile of Baker Bay shoreline and is home to highly threatened tidal wetlands that support migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife.

this site is strong and it scored well on the EIA.

The site stretches along more than a mile of Baker Bay and is home to highly threatened tidal wetlands that support migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife. Half a mile of side channels provide resting and rearing habitat for salmon on their journey from the interior Columbia Basin to the Pacific Ocean. We hosted birdwatching tours here last year and saw species like American wigeons, northern pintails, brown pelicans, bald eagles, mallards, and common loons (which are listed as a sensitive species in Washington State).

## Crazy Johnson

**Conservation Area:**  
Grays River  
Wahkiakum County, WA

Our Crazy Johnson site increased in size in 2025, with the acquisition of another 152-acre parcel (see page 16). After originally conserving this site more than 15 years ago, we've been conducting forest restoration to work toward older growth conditions on this land that was formerly managed for timber harvest. After completing a thinning project on one 40-acre section, to remove overly dense trees and create room for light and understory plant growth, Chinook Indian Nation tribal members joined Land Trust staff to gather wood from the Douglas-fir, hemlock, and alder trees that were thinned. The group loaded two full trailers of wood and delivered them to the Chinook Indian Nation office in Bay Center for members to use throughout the year.

*Left: Land Trust Monitoring Program Manager Amy Borde examines a baby Sitka spruce growing out of an old rootwad that appears to have drifted onto the shoreline from the Columbia River at some point in time. There's also a small bayberry shrub growing on the rootwad. This is a classic example of how woody vegetation begins to establish on "higher ground" in marshes and wetlands, which is how shrub wetlands and spruce swamps are created.*



## Indian Jack Slough

**Conservation Area:**  
Lower Elochoman River  
Wahkiakum County, WA

At the beginning of 2025, with funds from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, we were able to get 66,000 plants into the ground in the newly restored 50-acre portion of Indian Jack Slough. In March, we completed amphibian egg mass surveys, which showcased many species utilizing the improved habitat. We found red-legged frog, northwestern salamander, chorus frog, and long-toed salamander egg masses. Then throughout the spring and early summer we realized just how wet the site was—but the plants appear to be doing very well in the low, wet areas. In November, we held a volunteer planting event with plants donated by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and planted wapato, small-fruited bulrush,

and slough sedge along the water's edge. In the spring, we also completed our annual western purple martin monitoring at this site, which houses two gourd towers. Each tower contains 15 sturdy plastic gourds, which provide nesting places for the martins in areas where large, natural tree cavities are scarce. We collected data from 23 occupied gourds, which is about a 70% occupancy rate!

"The use of these gourds underscores the importance of the work we are doing to enhance and expand habitat at Indian Jack Slough," said Natural Area Manager Katie Pierson. "A few weeks after checking the nest boxes, I saw a pair of purple martins investigating a natural snag near a large pond we created in a different area of the site. It is exhilarating to see new and old habitat components being used by wildlife."

## Kandoll

**Conservation Area:**  
Grays Bay  
Wahkiakum County, WA

Kandoll Farm continues to thrive and change with each new year. In 2025, we continued our ongoing work to manage reed canarygrass on site, using new treatment methods that have proven successful during previous research, in partnership with the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory. Kandoll was also one of the main sites included in our sediment accretion monitoring project, which you can read about on page 12.

*This page: Volunteers plant Wapato bulbs at Indian Jack Slough.*



### Nelson Creek Swamp

**Conservation Area:**  
Lower Elochoman River  
Wahkiakum County, WA

We completed our final year of plant maintenance at Nelson Creek Swamp, which underwent a major renovation in 2023 when we reconnected two miles of stream channel and tidal tributaries. The plantings continue to be super successful and aid in the changing of the ecological trajectory of the landscape. In the summer, we completed an Ecological Integrity Assessment, taking stock of the four different ecotypes found at the site. Our team also collected drone imagery of Nelson Creek, as part of our work to use aerial imaging to map plant species across large areas.

### South Tongue Point

**Conservation Area:**  
Columbia River Estuary  
Clatsop County, OR

South Tongue Point near Astoria, Oregon is a beautiful 82-acre parcel on the Columbia River that provides one of the last feeding opportunities for juvenile salmon migrating downriver before they enter the open ocean. Columbia Land Trust helped conserve this site in 2021 and, since then, our partners at Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce have completed a tidal wetland restoration project here. Our stewardship staff assisted researchers from Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) in collecting invertebrate and algae samples at South Tongue Point, in order to study the effectiveness of placing large wood

structures in tidal wetland restoration projects, through the lens of the food web. Large wood has historically been abundant in tidal wetlands and serves as an important habitat feature. It is thought that tidal wetland restoration projects should incorporate the reintroduction of large wood to increase habitat quality for juvenile salmonids, but as with all restoration strategies, it is important to monitor the results and refine the process.

### Wallacut River Confluence

**Conservation Area:**  
Columbia River Estuary  
Pacific County, WA

Since 2012, Columbia Land Trust has been working to enhance intertidal wetland habitat, restore natural hydrologic processes, and control non-native plants like gorse, Scots broom, and yellow flag iris at this 117-acre site. This conserved wetland is important for many species of wildlife species. Our trail cameras at this site recorded footage of ducklings, great blue herons, deer, coyotes, beavers, and bald eagles, in addition to the Roosevelt elk, American back bear, amphibians, and four federally threatened salmonid species that benefit from this site. We are exploring how we could improve pollinator habitat here and take advantage of a drier meadow portion of the site.

### West Fork Grays River

**Conservation Area:**  
Grays River  
Pacific County, WA

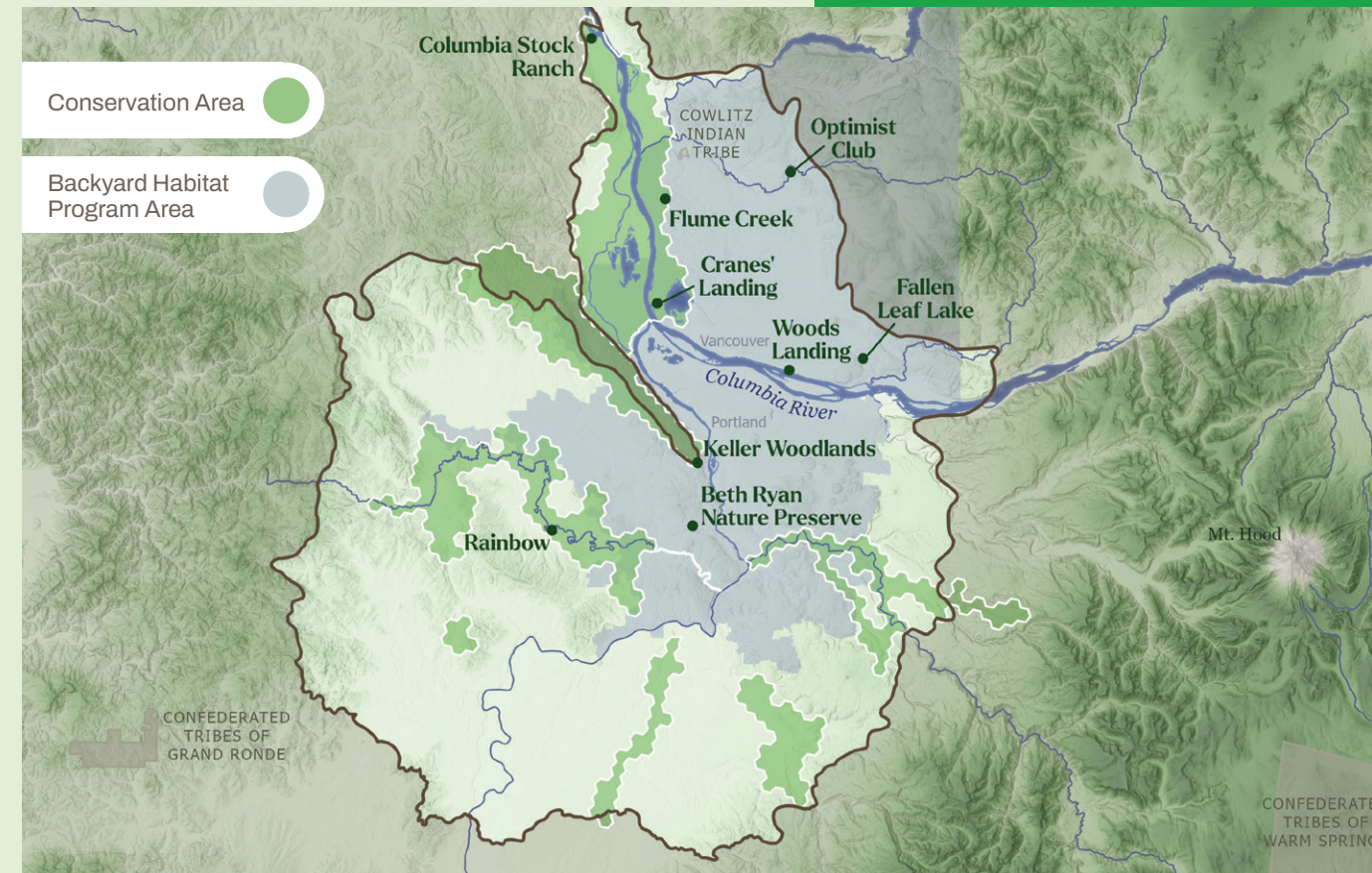
We have planted more than 10,000 Douglas-fir, hemlock, cedar, alder, and big leaf maple trees at this conserved site with steep slopes in Pacific County, Washington. Our stewardship team is working to reforest the landscape here, in areas that were harvested before



Columbia Land Trust acquired the land in late 2023. This project area is within the 1,103-acre site that connects two large blocks of state-managed forest and creates an important habitat corridor for wildlife. As these trees grow over coming decades, habitat conditions will improve for several species of wildlife, including endangered marbled murrelet that utilize these coastal forests for nesting.

*This page: Henderson's checkermallow at Wallacut River Confluence. Opposite: A view across Wallacut and wildlife seen on a trail camera there.*

# Willamette Valley & Puget Trough



## Ecoregion Objectives

**RESTORE** the health and function of the floodplains, forests, and wetlands associated with our rivers.

**PROTECT**, maintain, and restore oak and prairie habitats.

**MAKE** urban areas more conducive to wildlife through thousands of naturescaped properties that allow pollinators, resident and migrating birds, and other wildlife to move across the landscape.

**BUILD** strong partnerships between agriculture and conservation communities to benefit wildlife habitat, movement, and migration.

**PROVIDE** meaningful opportunities for people to connect to nature throughout both cities and natural areas.

## Conservation

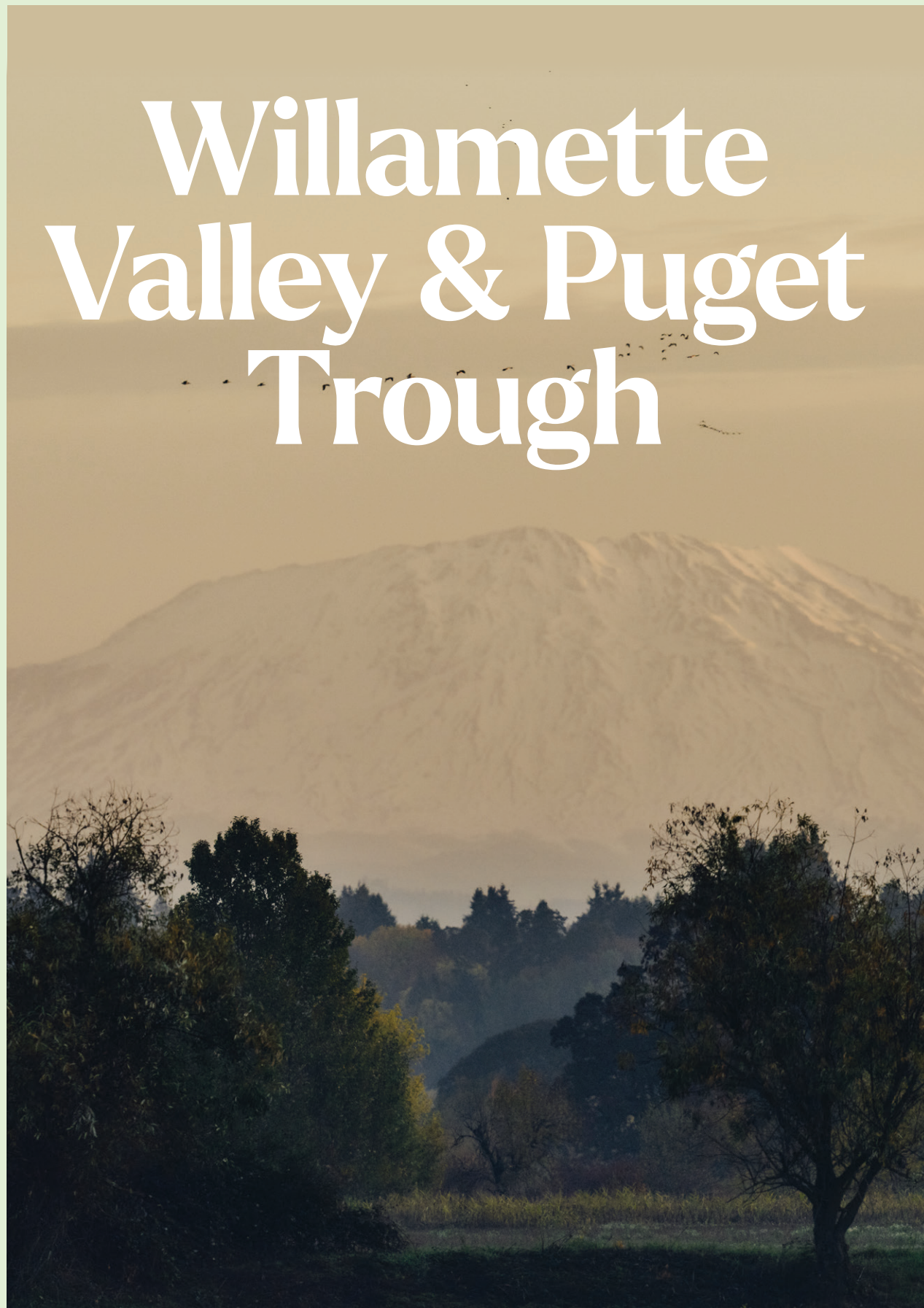
### Fallen Leaf Lake

**Conservation Area: Lacamas Prairie**  
Clark County, WA

**43 acres transferred**

In April 2025, Columbia Land Trust transferred our 43-acre Fallen Leaf Lake property in Clark County, Washington to the City of Camas, for permanent protection as public park land. The 15-acre site is adjacent to the 119-acre Fallen Leaf Lake Park system, near Lacamas Lake, in an area with beloved local trail systems and natural beauty.

Fallen Leaf Lake is surrounded by mature deciduous and evergreen forest, with habitat for birds and wildlife. This site was originally conserved by the Land Trust in 1999 under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City, funded by the Clark County Conservation Futures program. The



Sandhill cranes fly in front of Mt. St. Helens.

MOU agreement stated that Columbia Land Trust was to be interim holder of the property, eventually transferring it to the City for permanent ownership.

“There has been a long and synergistic partnership between Columbia Land Trust, the City of Camas, and Clark County,” said Land Trust Valley Region Manager Jen Zarnoch. “Collaborating has helped to advance critical conservation projects.”

The Land Trust held the site as part of a long-term strategy to maximize funding and leverage resources for additional conservation and restoration projects in Camas.

“The City of Camas has long benefited from our partnership with Columbia Land Trust and the transfer of Fallen Leaf Lake is another example of that,” said Bryan Rachal, Interim Director of Camas Parks and Recreation.

The conservation of this site at Fallen Leaf Lake was one of the Land Trust’s first projects, and part of our work to provide natural spaces close to home and places for recreation in local communities. Fallen Leaf Lake and its trails are beloved community resources. The region’s wildlife also benefits from

the protected lakeside forest habitat in an area that is being rapidly developed.

The transferred site spans the north, west, and south sides of Fallen Leaf Lake Park.

## Backyard Habitat Certification Program

**Conservation Area: Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties, OR and Clark County, WA**

**3,688 acres enrolled**

The Backyard Habitat Certification Program is co-managed by Columbia Land Trust and Bird Alliance of Oregon. In 2026, the program will celebrate its 20-year anniversary. What began as a grassroots effort in west Portland now operates throughout the urban and suburban parts of four counties in Oregon and Southwest Washington. To date, more than 14,660 households are enrolled, stewarding over 3,600 acres, with more than 1,000 additional people enrolling each year. Participants act as partners in conservation by planting native plants, removing

plants that can harm the ecosystem, eliminating pesticide use, managing stormwater on site, and stewarding wildlife. Each participant receives technical assistance, coupons to 19 partnering nurseries, access to over 130 resources, a sign, and a warm welcome into the Backyard Habitat community. The program invites neighbors to share resources and work together to build wildlife corridors. Enrollment of community sites like apartment complexes, businesses, schools, places of worship, community gardens, and any other site that allows a gathering space for the community is encouraged. These spaces are particularly important for renters and others who may not have access to nearby greenspaces.

In the summer of 2025, BHCP kicked off a strategic planning process to identify current and future priorities. These include providing additional support to participants facing barriers, incorporating climate resiliency into the framework, further growing connection to and within the BHCP community, and ensuring a sustainable funding model that meets the program’s goals. These priorities will result in healthier and more resilient communities where people feel connected to the land and each other, with a sense of reciprocity guiding their actions as they care for their yards and greenspaces.

Backyard Habitat has continued to strengthen its collaboration with Verde PDX, a nonprofit based in NE Portland that serves communities by building environmental wealth through social enterprise, education, engagement, and advocacy. Through our collaboration, 12 BIPOC and/or low-income households in North, Northeast, and East Portland are enrolled in BHCP each year and receive free raingardens and naturescape installations. Through these projects, BIPOC youth and adults from two workforce development programs—Connecting Canopies and Multnomah Youth Cooperative—learn green job workforce skills through trainings and providing support on planting days.



Clockwise from top left: A new fern planting, volunteers pulling English ivy, and a Pacific giant salamander at Beth Ryan Natural Area. Opposite: A Backyard Habitat participant celebrates certification.



## Stewardship

### Beth Ryan Nature Preserve

**Conservation Area: N/A**  
*Clackamas County, OR*

Volunteers gathered again at Beth Ryan in March with our partner, Oswego Lake Watershed Council, to pull weeds and improve habitat for wildlife at this neighborhood natural area in Lake Oswego. Deer, salamanders, and resident songbirds are some of the wildlife that thrive in this three-acre forest and wetland. The plants installed by volunteers in fall of 2024, including oak trees, shrubs, and wildflowers, are growing and slowly filling in the new nature patch established along the walking trail. We are planning to host more volunteer opportunities at this site in 2026.

### Columbia Stock Ranch

**Conservation Area: Columbia River Lowlands**  
*Columbia County, OR*

Last year was an exciting one at Columbia Stock Ranch, a 920-acre site in Columbia County, Oregon. We conducted a complete botanical inventory of the property (funded by the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts) that tallied 259 individual species of vascular plants, and four non-vascular plants, and led to the surprising discovery of a robust population of water howelia (*Howellia aquatilis*). This is a rare, threatened species that was once thought to be extirpated from Oregon, and the discovery was even more surprising given the plant’s location in a minor, disturbed, wet swale.

The plant survey was conducted by Jason Clinch of Three Creeks Consulting and two volunteer botanists, Deanna Michinski and Rick Shory, who discovered the water howelia. The survey also helped us identify all the ash trees on the site, as we prepare for the impending appearance of the emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*).

Our stewardship work also included the removal of 3,440 feet of fence, dismantling and removing two old homes and the non-native trees surrounding them, mowing 192 acres to manage non-native species, maintaining 20 acres of recent plantings, and preparing another nine acres for future restoration in an area we hope to cultivate with native grasses for pollinator habitat. We plan to install 2,600 native plants in early 2026 and are doing extensive monitoring and wildlife surveying, with a focus on Columbian white-tailed deer, to track current site usage.

In the fall, we welcomed about forty people to Columbia Stock Ranch when we hosted a birding tour with the Forest Stewardship Guild and Oregon State University extension service.

## Cranes' Landing

**Conservation Area:**  
Vancouver Lowlands  
Clark County, WA

Columbia Land Trust is entering its tenth year of managing and monitoring the Cranes' Landing property in the Vancouver Lowlands for the benefit of Washington state-endangered sandhill cranes (*Antigone canadensis*). This year, about 389 acres of this 527-acre site were farmed with select crops. Some, like peas and alfalfa, were chosen to help improve soil conditions by im-

proving nitrogen levels (natural fixers) or increasing organic content by tilling under the green foliage. Monitoring Scientist Cindy McCormack's observations of the cranes and their usage of the farm fields continue to be incredibly valuable to inform our stewardship actions each year. In January, key berms around the exterior of the site were planted with native shrubs. Volunteers with the Watershed Alliance of Southwest Washington harvested materials on-site and then immediately planted 650 willow stakes. These planted berms shield the cranes from road and pedestrian traffic and noise, since they are easily startled. Another benefit of these planted willows is that their growth will help to direct the birds to rise more sharply as they fly out of the fields, preventing bird strike fatalities in nearby powerlines. November saw its highest number of cranes at the property, averaging 2014 cranes a day, feeding, loafing, and socializing. That is the third highest number of cranes ever seen at Cranes' Landing! The birds continue to love the yellow nutsedge, probing in the ground for nutlets and invertebrates to eat so they can be well-fed for their eventual migration.

## Keller Woodlands

**Conservation Area:** Forest Park  
Multnomah County, OR

For the last decade, Columbia Land Trust has worked to restore and maintain habitat in Keller Woodlands, a 40-acre urban forest along SW Terwilliger Boulevard in Portland's Southwest Hills. The Land Trust plans to develop a walking and hiking trail through the forest that will connect to neighborhood walking routes and public trails in Marquam Nature Park. In 2025,



A pair of banded Sandhill cranes that Land Trust staff have seen return to Cranes' Landing for multiple years. The female (colored band on the right) was banded in 2008 in British Columbia, and is paired with a banded male (white band on the left).

Columbia Land Trust worked with Trailkeepers of Oregon and Portland Parks & Recreation to finalize the trail location and design, with input from neighbors. We are currently working to secure permits from the City of Portland, with trail construction planned for 2026.

### Optimist Club

**Conservation Area:**  
East Fork Lewis River  
Clark County, WA

At the Optimist Club Youth Camp's forested property, where we hold a conservation easement, we planted trees in an area that has been impacted by the death of mature Douglas-fir trees due to root rot and subsequent invasion by non-native brush like Scots broom and Himalayan blackberry. Our 2025 planting was made possible due to the hard work of staff, volunteers, and contractors who cleared non-native weeds in previous years, and funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. We planted western white pine, ponderosa pine, and western red-cedar, tree species that are resistant to the root rot that is killing Douglas-fir on the site. The objective is to maintain a forest to benefit wildlife, ecosystem function, and the many community members who enjoy and learn from this rustic camp property.

*This page: Natural Area Manager Emily Matson plants seeds during restoration at Rainbow Natural Area. Opposite: Spawning chum salmon at Woods Landing.*

**We are mid-way through a multi-year renovation effort with the goal of establishing wetland, prairie, and Oregon white oak habitat across a 50-acre field along the Tualatin River. We seeded more than 80 wetland and prairie plant species, including wildflowers, sedges, rushes, and grasses—totaling 1,300 pounds of seed.**



### Rainbow Natural Area

**Conservation Area:** Tualatin River  
Washington County, OR

In October 2025, we completed a second round of planting at Rainbow, where we are mid-way through a multi-year renovation effort with the goal of establishing wetland, prairie, and Oregon white oak habitat across a 50-acre field along the Tualatin River. We seeded more than 80 wetland and prairie plant species, including wildflowers, sedges, rushes, and grasses—totaling 1,300 pounds of seed. Our project partner, Hoffman Farms, drilled and broadcast the seed using a no-till seed drill. Scholls Valley Native Nursery created the seeding plan and provided much of the seed. In December, as water from the Tualatin River began flooding the lower portions of the site, staff and volunteers planted two more species—Columbian larkspur in the forest understory along the river, and foothill sedge in the freshly seeded field. The field was already covered in swaths of bright green from the seed that we sowed two months prior.

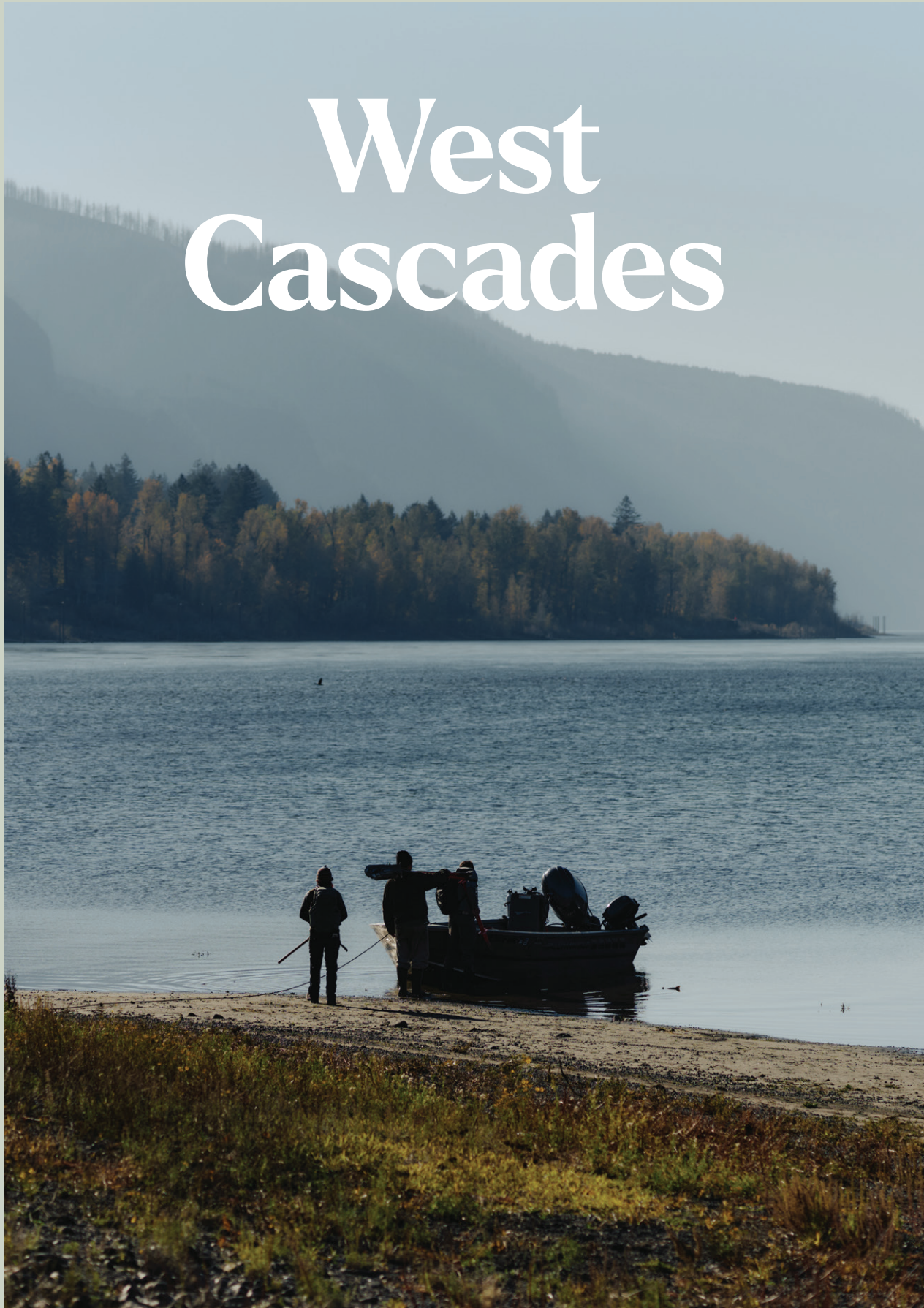
Meanwhile, our partners at the Tualatin Soil & Water Conservation District are caring for the forest along the river, including planting trees under a canopy of Oregon ash that will likely be lost to emerald ash borer in the future. Our restoration work at Rainbow, and at other places like it, supports cool, clean water, wildlife habitat, and thriving ecosystems.

### Woods Landing

**Conservation Area:** N/A  
Clark County, WA

At Woods Landing, a small but impactful conserved property that is home to one of the last remaining chum salmon spawning sites on the lower Columbia, we continued our work to manage unwanted blackberry plants and other non-native species. Progress was aided by multiple volunteer groups who helped pull blackberry and add mulch around native plantings we installed. Per tradition, in the winter we welcomed several groups here to witness the annual spawning spectacle.

# West Cascades



Stewardship staff unload their boat at Pierce Island in the Columbia River.



## Ecoregion Objectives

**ENSURE** large swaths of both public and privately owned forestlands are intact and functional, connecting habitat for migratory species.

**HALT**, the net loss of older forests and increase the number of forested acres managed toward old-growth forest habitat.

**PROTECT** important rivers for salmon and steelhead by removing barriers to migration, improving river conditions, and restoring floodplains.

**CULTIVATE** local and regional public support for conserving working forestlands by demonstrating their economic and recreational value.

## Conservation

### Salal Flat

**Conservation Area:**  
East Fork Lewis River  
Clark County, WA

**64 acres**

Columbia Land Trust celebrated the conservation of an additional 64 acres along the East Fork Lewis River in eastern Clark County in April 2025. This outcome was the result of a generous land donation from a family that has cared for this place for more than 100 years. The conserved land spans both sides of the river and protects instream habitat, as well as upland forest. It is adjacent to the Land Trust's Copper Creek property to the east and just upriver from Horseshoe Falls, which we conserved in 2024. State land is to the south and, together, these areas create a strong, connected corridor for wildlife.



The East Fork is one of a small number of designated wild gene bank streams in Washington—an undammed river with no hatchery salmon populations that offers a sanctuary for wild fish and their genetic diversity. This status makes it important for the recovery of Endangered Species Act-listed Lower Columbia River steelhead. It supports five native salmonid runs, but only winter and summer steelhead make it all the way to Salal Flat.

*This page: The Sandy River seen from Barlow Trail. Inset: Removing non-native plants from the Barlow Trail shoreline. Opposite: Planting Wormskiold's northern wormwood at Pierce Island.*

The East Fork Lewis River is a priority conservation area where we are focused on preserving riparian and aquatic habitat. Conserving this site also advances the conservation goals of Clark County, the Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board, and Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

The Land Trust's initial stewardship efforts will involve the demolition of a few existing primitive structures, weed control, and some small-scale re-forestation and planting. In the long term, we'll prioritize stewardship activities that benefit steelhead.

## Stewardship

### Barlow Trail

**Conservation Area: Sandy River**  
*Clackamas County, OR*

The Barlow Trail property in the floodplain of the Sandy River is a great example of how communities show up to support natural spaces that are important to them. A major fish habitat restoration project was completed years ago at this site, but ongoing effort is required to keep the ecosystem healthy so it can support fish, wildlife, and people. Each year, we remove persistent weeds like Scots broom, ensure that planted trees are surviving, repair signs and keep walking paths open, clean up trash, remove hazard trees, assess wildlife risk, and monitor vegetation and wildlife use patterns to understand where and when we need to respond. It's a labor of love to be sure, and at Barlow Trail we are lucky to have Land Trust staff, neighbors, arborists, and volunteers that support this annual work and care deeply about this conserved stretch of an important river.

### Howard Canyon

**Conservation Area: Sandy River**  
*Multnomah County, Oregon*

At Howard Canyon, a forested site in the Columbia River Gorge outside Corbett, Oregon, yearly maintenance included mowing and brushing the forest roads and trails. Deep soils and high soil moisture drive rapid vegetation growth here in the spring and summer. In 2025, we continued to remove Himalayan blackberry and plant native vegetation along Big Creek and the adjacent slopes, working with neighbors to expand this work farther upstream. With funding through the Coalition for Oregon Land Trusts, we completed a comprehensive botanical survey this year, identifying more than 240 plant species and numerous lichens, bryophytes, fungi, moss, and slime



molds. This species richness indicates a high level of biodiversity. Volunteer botanists lent their time, energy, and expertise to collect the data.

Additionally, our Land Trust monitoring team assessed ecological conditions across the property's forest stands. Combined, all this information helps us understand the composition and condition of the forest and wetland habitats across the site, allowing us to plan and fundraise for future forest management and riparian restoration. In 2025, we continued to connect with Tribal Nations, community groups, and potential partners to understand how Howard Canyon can meet their needs and interests. Their feedback will be important in creating a long-term public access plan in the years to come. On Earth Day 2025, we welcomed a large group of enthusiastic volunteers to help with the removal of Himalayan blackberry, freeing up space for native plants to establish.

### Pierce Island

**Conservation Area: Beacon Rock**  
*Skamania County, WA*

Land Trust staff, volunteers, and partners continue working to increase the population of Wormskiold's northern wormwood (*Artemisia campestris var. wormskioldii*) at Pierce Island. This rare plant is endemic to the Columbia River region and listed as endangered in both Oregon and Washington. With expert guidance from Humble Roots Native Plant Nursery, we planted another 300 seedlings on Pierce Island in fall 2025. We also observed that the plantings from 2022 and 2023 are still doing well.

### Pine Creek East

**Conservation Area: Mount St. Helens**  
*Skamania County, WA*

Trees continue to grow at Pine Creek East, where we are working to restore older growth forest conditions, looking many years into the future. This forest growth benefits a myriad of wildlife species, including federally threatened

bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), by improving water quality. Last fall, staff paid a visit to the confluence of Pine Creek and the Lewis River to observe bull trout congregating before they continue their upstream journey to spawn. Through a grant from U.S. Fish & Wildlife, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe's Natural Resources team has been evaluating and inventorying American beaver habitat in Southwest Washington and found some suitable habitat within the Pine Creek watershed on Land Trust property. This project increases our shared ability to leverage strategic beaver relocations to Pine Creek, and their presence in the future would offer potential long-term environmental benefits to Pine Creek.

### Wildboy Creek

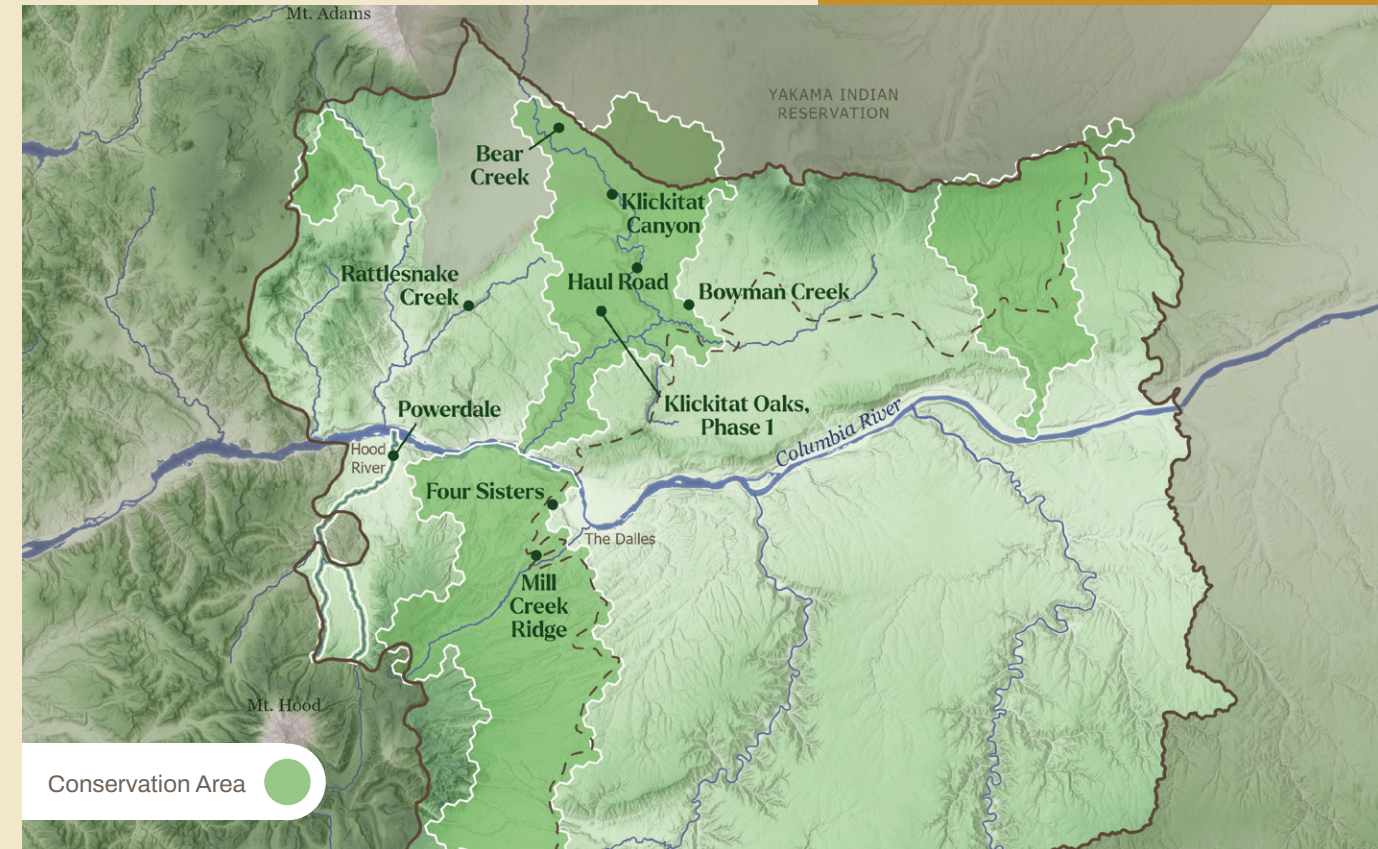
**Conservation Area: Washougal River**  
*Skamania County, WA*

It has officially been one year since the dam removal and restoration of Wildboy Creek, in partnership with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe. This past winter saw more planting of willow along the stream margins, to accelerate shading and eventual cooling of the reconstructed tributaries. The atmospheric river event in mid-December led to Wildboy Creek running full to the banks, but the restoration structures all seemed intact afterwards; this provided a good benchmark for future extreme weather events. Now that the busy construction season is over, lots of wildlife have returned and made appearances here, including elk, cougar, and mountain beaver. Our collaboration with the Cowlitz Indian Tribe continues with planning for future restoration on another section of Wildboy Creek. The Tribe also continues to conduct eDNA sampling to monitor for new fish returning to the creek after the dam removal. Our 2026 stewardship efforts will likely include thinning work in the surrounding forest.

# East Cascades & Columbia Plateau



*Spring in the East Cascades.*



## East Cascades Objectives

- PROTECT** and restore major east-side rivers and key tributaries.
- PRESERVE** oak woodland habitat systems and opportunities for wildlife migration and movement.
- MAINTAIN** the integrity of unique transition zones between riverside and upland habitats, high and low elevations, and wet and dry climates.
- COLLABORATE** with local stakeholders and increase public awareness about the benefits of oak woodlands, sustainable forestry, river conservation, and ecological processes.
- SUPPORT** community leaders in championing conservation strategies and leading implementation.

## Columbia Plateau Objectives

- PROTECT** intact and functional prairie and shrub-steppe habitat from land-use conversion and degradation.
- RESTORE** native plant species, habitat functions, and ecological processes on affected lands.
- RAISE** awareness of the benefits of conservation in prairie and shrub-steppe landscapes.
- INVEST** time in the area to learn more and build relationships to determine how we can be most helpful in local conservation efforts.

## Conservation

### Capital Campaign

**Conservation Areas:** Columbia Gorge, Conboy Lake, Klickitat River, Little White Salmon River, Lower White Salmon River, Major Creek, Rattlesnake Creek, Sandy River, Wasco Oaks, Washougal River, and Wind River

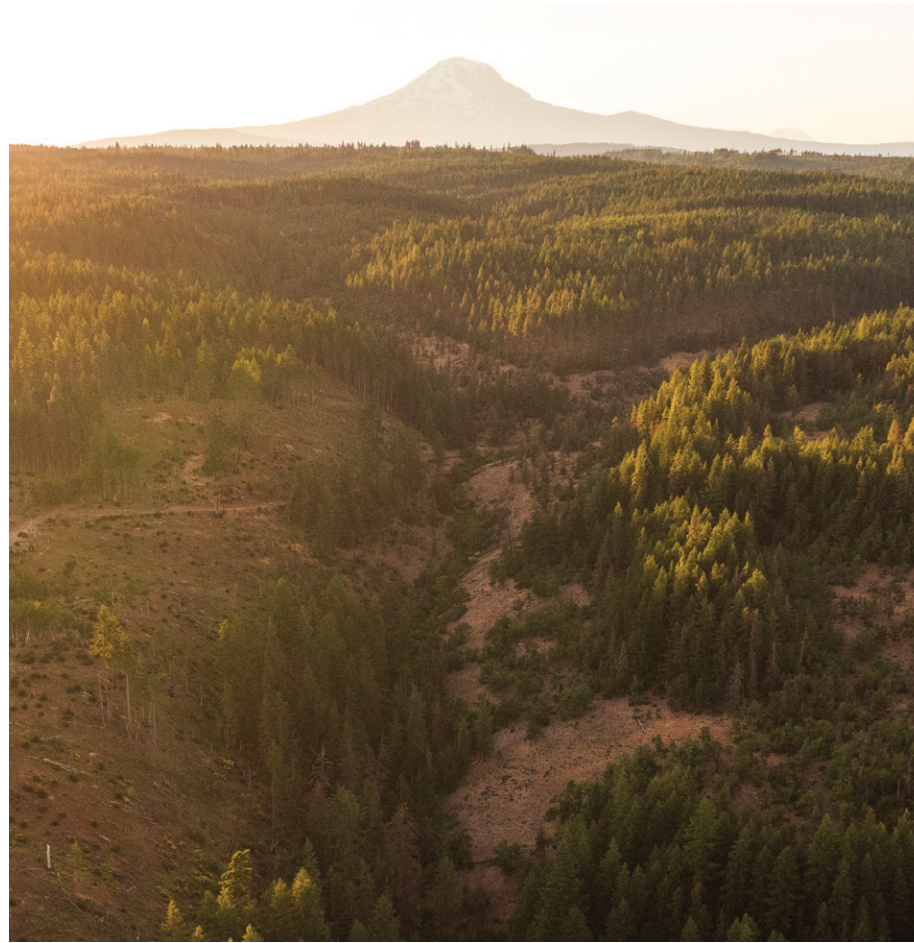
*Klickitat and Skamania Counties in WA; Hood River, eastern Multnomah, and Wasco Counties in OR*

**75,000 acres**

Columbia Land Trust is in the early, quiet phase of an ambitious, \$120M capital campaign to conserve 75,000 acres in the Columbia River Gorge by 2028. If successful, this project will permanently protect priority habitat and working forests from development and fragmentation—in both Oregon and Washington—and ensure the careful stewardship of these lands into the future. Enduring benefits include keeping critical wildlife corridors intact, retaining public access to the forests and rivers we all love, supporting watershed health and climate resilience, strengthening local economies, and advancing tribal goals.

To finance this monumental conservation effort, we are pursuing a combination of public grants, foundation grants, and individual donations. In the first four years of the campaign, we have raised more than \$97M in public funding and another \$8.7M in private philanthropy.

In 2025, we secured a milestone \$9.3M award from the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy grant program to conserve 14,000 acres in Oregon, including productive conifer forests, biodiverse oak woodlands, and the last major, privately-owned parcel in The Dalles Municipal Watershed. The largest city in Wasco County, The Dalles, gets roughly 80% of its water supply from surface water sources within this watershed—the vast majority of which will now be managed either



by the city or the U.S. Forest Service for protection of drinking water quality.

This grant award helps us hold together a continuous forested landscape that supports an international migratory corridor for neo-tropical birds, vital winter range for culturally important deer and elk, and local jobs in the timber and recreation industries. Located in the ancestral territory of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, the project also permanently secures access for cultural uses.

This January, we celebrated the permanent conservation of Klickitat Oaks, Phase 1. Nestled between disconnected public lands, this project site is the first of three planned phases to conserve 8,000 acres of important Oregon white oak habitat over the next three years (more details on page 37).

We will continue to build on the momentum of these latest milestones in our ongoing partnership with The

Conservation Fund and Twin Creeks Timber / Green Diamond Resource Company, to realize the capital campaign's large-scale vision for conservation in the region.

### Haul Road (Expansion)

**Conservation Area:** Klickitat River  
*Klickitat County, WA*

**37 acres**

With the conservation of this 37-acre parcel, Columbia Land Trust has completed conservation of a critical reach of the Klickitat River. The Land Trust has a long conservation legacy in the Klickitat River watershed, which is the longest free-flowing tributary to the Columbia River in Washington State and the site of one of our most impactful restoration projects ever—the removal of eight miles of private road that re-

connected the river with its floodplain. Now, 18 years after initially purchasing the Haul Road property, this critical inholding acquisition completes our original conservation vision. The newly conserved 37-acre parcel sits almost entirely within the floodplain and includes naturally functioning riparian systems, as well as an important side channel for salmonid spawning and juvenile rearing, with cold water, shade, and clean gravel.

Columbia Land Trust already manages the lands to the north and south of this property, which is also bounded by Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife land to the east.

Because of its immediate proximity to existing Land Trust stewardship units, the previous owners had allowed us to do restoration work here during the Haul Road removal, so the site has minimal immediate stewardship needs. Going forward, it will be managed as part of the surrounding Haul Road stewardship unit, with a focus on controlling weeds, encouraging riparian vegetation, and supporting floodplain habitat.

This project was completed with funding from the Washington Salmon Recovery Funding Board. We would also like to thank Michael, Bob, and Jim Van de Vanter for working with us to conserve this land that has been important to their family.

### Klickitat Oaks Phase 1

**Conservation Area:** Klickitat River  
*Klickitat County, WA*

**2,666 acres**

Columbia Land Trust made a strong start to 2026 with the conservation of Klickitat Oaks, Phase 1 in early January. Perched above the Klickitat River in south-central Washington, this large and scenic site is home to priority oak and pine woodland habitat and is a strategic link in wildlife migration corridors, including the Pacific Flyway.

**In 2025, we secured a milestone \$9.3M award from the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy grant program to conserve 14,000 acres in Oregon, including productive conifer forests, biodiverse oak woodlands, and the last major, privately-owned parcel in The Dalles Municipal Watershed.**



*This page: Fall colors at Klickitat Oaks, Phase 1. Photo by Ian Shive. Opposite: A forested canyon at Sunset, looking at Mt. Adams.*



Balsamroot in bloom at Mill Creek Ridge. Inset: Wasp galls on an oak leaf.

Klickitat County hosts some of the most extensive and highest quality Oregon white oak habitat in the state of Washington. Oaks are fire and drought tolerant, so conserving landscapes like this one is a powerful step in increasing this region's climate resilience. The newly protected site benefits at least 15 priority wildlife species, including western gray squirrel, Lewis's woodpecker, acorn woodpecker, mule and black-tailed deer, northern spotted owl, and golden eagle, and connects state-conserved lands to secure a travel corridor for larger mammals.

This 2,666-acre parcel is the first of three phases which the Land Trust intends to conserve over the next few years. Together they will cover about 8,000 acres of ecologically and culturally important land, and secure public values forever. Strategic, landscape-scale projects like this are the most effective way to maintain biodiversity and ecological integrity, and conservation at this impactful scale is not possible without strong partnerships. Columbia

Land Trust's acquisition of Klickitat Oaks, Phase 1 would not have been possible without the support of Yakama Nation and The Conservation Fund.

Yakama Nation chose to allocate a portion of the funding they received through an America the Beautiful grant award to support this project because of its alignment with core cultural priorities, which include protecting the water, fish, wildlife, plant life, and ecological integrity of the Nation's ceded lands for future generations. Yakama Nation Department of Natural Resources staff also provided early support for the property's conservation in the form of habitat assessments and wildlife use data. Going forward, we will continue to rely on this expertise to inform stewardship planning. The Conservation Fund facilitated this success as part of a long-term collaboration with the Land Trust (read more in the Capital Campaign section on page 36).

Funding for this project came from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's American the Beautiful program (subgrant awarded via Yakama Nation). Additional lead gifts came from by Atira Conservation, The Conservation Alliance, Hollis Foundation, Marcia H. Randall Foundation, Maybelle Clark MacDonald Fund, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and Vancouver Audubon Society and Mary Ann Goodrich, in addition to support from other private foundations and individual contributors.

### Mill Creek Ridge Conservation Easement

Conservation Area: Wasco Oaks  
Wasco County, OR

10 acres

In October, Columbia Land Trust's dedicated supporters and long-time champions of Mill Creek Ridge con-

servation, Bruce Lumper and Marolyn Wilks, donated a conservation easement on ten acres of their undeveloped property to Columbia Land Trust. Located above the Mill Creek Valley outside The Dalles, Oregon, this land hosts dramatic wildflower-covered slopes and scattered Oregon white oak and ponderosa pine savanna. The conservation easement property is directly adjacent to the Land Trust's 400+ acre Mill Creek Ridge Natural Area, so this easement extends that existing refuge for native plants and unrestricted wildlife travel over the ridge. Going forward, the Land Trust will manage this site as a cohesive part of the larger Natural Area, while continuing to work closely with Bruce and Marolyn. Over the years, they have volunteered countless hours to help with stewardship projects along Mill Creek Ridge, and we are pleased to welcome them into our community of conservation easement landowners.

## Stewardship

### Bear Creek

Conservation Area: Klickitat River  
Klickitat County, WA

A typical prescribed fire sequence begins with thinning, cutting, and piling, followed by pile burning in year two and broadcast burning in year three. Across the Land Trust's large and remote Bear Creek site, we implemented all three of these different stages in 2025.

In May, we conducted a successful 15-acre broadcast burn at Bear Creek, which is located near the Klickitat River outside Glenwood, Washington. This treatment was an important step towards our desired future condition of a more open and patchy ponderosa pine savanna. This project was funded by the Washington Department of Natural

Resources and conducted with local partners from Mt. Adams Resource Stewards (MARS), Skookum Resource Management, and the Mt. Adams Prescribed Burn Association.

This was our second prescribed burn within the stewardship unit and was located just south of where we completed a previous broadcast burn in fall 2023. Warm spring temperatures with low wind made for good burn conditions. Objectives included removing organic material—leaves and needles—on the ground, removing smaller-diameter trees that developed in the absence of low-intensity fire, and knocking down ceanothus, a large shrub, to prevent its overtaking of the understory. While providing forage for wildlife, ceanothus burns very hot and can contribute to wildfire severity. Following this burn, we could immediately observe desired effects. The Bear Creek burn removed ladder fuels across 15 acres, lowering the risk of future high-severity wildfire.

In the fall, we conducted another broadcast burn at Bear Creek, with similar objectives, and worked with MARS to burn thousands of piles of previously thinned logs, as part of a forest health and fuels reduction project. The logs had been curing since they were cut and piled in the fall of 2024. At the same time, another crew was cutting and piling across 290 acres of forest that was previously overstocked with small-diameter trees. This multi-phase project is funded by a Landscape Scale Restoration grant from the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Partners program.

### Bowman Creek

Conservation Area: Klickitat River  
Klickitat County, WA

We implemented successful fall broadcast burns at Bowman Creek, working with Mt. Adams Resource Stewards and other local partners. These burns were conducted in areas identified



Top: Staff inspect new plant growth at Bear Creek months after a prescribed burn. Bottom: Two volunteers locate Western gray squirrel nests at Bowman Creek.



as high priority stands for dry forest restoration treatments. You can read about the outcomes and our larger goals around utilizing prescribed fire on page 8. We also conducted our biannual Western gray squirrel (*Sciurus griseus*) surveys last March, with a group of volunteers helping survey and catalog trees throughout the site that are used for nesting by the state-endangered squirrels.

## East Cascades Oak Partnership

**Conservation Area: East Cascades Klickitat and Skamania Counties, WA, and Hood River and Wasco Counties, OR**

Thanks to the unique conditions created by the Columbia River Gorge, the East Cascades enjoy some of the easternmost extent of Oregon white oak trees which support wildlife including pollinators, songbirds, deer, elk, turkey, and bear. But oaks need our help to protect them.

With leadership from Columbia Land Trust, the East Cascades Oak

Partnership (ECOP) works to leverage funding opportunities and elevate stewardship of these keystone habitats. We restore oak understory, steward forest health, and improve fire resilience. From the Mt. Hood National Forest, to the White River Wildlife Area and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, the partnership is moving the dial toward landscape-scale restoration and thoughtful stewardship that connects habitats and improves climate resilience.

In 2025, the partnership obligated nearly \$3 million toward oak conservation. Highlights of this planned work include: \$1,016,000 for fuels reduction and forest health treatments on the White River Wildlife Area; \$100,000 for aerial herbicide treatments to control weedy plants on 900 acres of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation (this also includes a monitoring component to measure herbicide persistence in cultural foods and medicines); and \$320,000 for cross-boundary forest health, weed, and prescribed fire treatments in the

Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area across multiple ownerships.

In 2025, partners achieved over 3,700 acres of thinning and forest health treatments and 270 acres of understory restoration. Over 200 oak monitoring plots have been installed, increasing our cross-boundary learning and helping us make more effective land management choices. ECOP membership grew to over 450 and new core partners join us each year. We also launched an immersive website that shares management guidance and conservation resources, tailored to the unique oak habitats of the East Cascades.

In 2026, the partnership will direct over \$1 million toward oak restoration in the Mt. Hood National Forest, Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, and private landowners' oak stewardship in Wasco County. We will continue working with urgency to help people understand the value of oaks and enable land managers to conserve and care for these incredible habitats.



savanna understory restoration work. Our multi-pronged approach includes targeted herbicide treatments to control invasive rush skeleton weed, followed by planting with a diverse mix of native grasses and wildflowers. To support these efforts, native seed was collected on-site in fall 2025 by volunteers and Land Trust staff. We plan to use the seed we collected and plant it back at Mill Creek Ridge in early 2026. All invasive species control and restoration activities at Mill Creek Ridge are part of a multi-year effort that includes ongoing monitoring and follow-up treatments to minimize the impact of invasive species and support long-term restoration success.

## Klickitat Canyon

**Conservation Area: Klickitat River Klickitat County, WA**

Last fall, a dry forest restoration project began at our Klickitat Canyon stewardship unit to create a shaded fuel break along the Glenwood Highway. This is a multi-phased project that includes commercial logging, hand thinning, and broadcast burning across 152 acres between the highway and the rim of the Klickitat River canyon. A logging contractor has been busy thinning small- and medium-sized trees to reduce the crown fuels. Next year, hand crews will thin hazardous levels of ladder fuels in the under- and mid-stories of the forest and begin prepping control lines for future broadcast burn treatments. The skid trails and staging areas that were used for equipment access during the project were re-seeded by stewardship crews at the end of 2025.

*This page: Collecting tall woolly buckwheat seed at Mill Creek Ridge for use in future restoration projects. Opposite: Mt. Adams behind fall oaks.*

## Four Sisters Natural Area

**Conservation Area: Wasco Oaks Wasco County, OR**

In 2025, stewardship efforts at the Four Sisters site focused on reducing the cover and extent of non-native cereal rye grass (*Secale cereale*) through a targeted broadcast application of a grass-specific herbicide. This approach effectively reduced cereal rye while allowing native and non-target vegetation to persist. Additional stewardship actions included the installation of a laydown fence at the southwest corner of the property. The fence can be lowered during seasonal deer migration to maintain an important wildlife corridor and raised during other times to prevent neighboring cattle from entering the site.

## Haul Road

**Conservation Area: Klickitat River Klickitat County, WA**

In early summer, a local contractor was hired to treat invasive weeds along

the Haul Road restoration corridor, which runs along the Klickitat River and focuses on the area where the Land Trust previously removed eight miles of unused roadway to restore floodplain function. This wraps up a five-year post-restoration effort to help the plant community in the restoration zone recover. After completing a summer vegetation survey, we decided to implement a fall treatment to manage a few populations of later growing weeds. In the fall, crews also put in a long week of planting native forbs and shrubs to build on previous restoration efforts. They also selectively cut trees and used them to add woody debris to some of the more sparse areas of the restoration corridor. Adding wood to the river like this increases habitat complexity for fish.

## Mill Creek Ridge

**Conservation Area: Wasco Oaks Wasco County, OR**

Stewardship efforts at Mill Creek Ridge continued to advance our oak

## Powerdale

**Conservation Area: Hood River**  
Hood River County, OR

In partnership with the Hood River Watershed Group and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, we continued planning for the restoration of a site selected as the highest priority for habitat enhancement during a 2024 assessment of aquatic habitat restoration opportunities throughout the Powerdale Corridor of the lower Hood River. The project will create and reconnect side-channel and floodplain habitat to benefit salmon, steelhead, and other aquatic species. Construction will occur in summer 2026 or 2027, depending on how long permitting takes.

In collaboration with those same partners and Hood River County, we also began planning for the eventual removal of the defunct powerhouse and restoration of a more natural riverbank in that area. This will be a multi-year process with in-depth considerations for maintaining and improving public access to the river, while also restoring fish and wildlife habitat.

Along the forested canyon rim on the west side of the Hood River, Land Trust property borders a dense urban residential development. Non-native plants, including Himalayan blackberry, are abundant at the forest edge. In spring 2025, after years of weed control work to prepare the site, volunteers helped us with our first planting of native shrubs to replace the aggressive invasive plants. In the fall, with support from Roundhouse Foundation and Jubitz Family Foundation, we kicked off a multi-year project to reduce wildfire danger for the adjacent neighborhood and improve wildlife habitat, by replacing even more invasive plants with natives. This project is one piece of a much larger collaborative effort among multiple agencies and landowners to increase wildfire resilience in Hood River County.

*Lupine in the understory at Rattlesnake Creek.*



## Rattlesnake Creek

**Conservation Area: White Salmon River**  
Klickitat County, WA

Nestled in the southeast portion of the White Salmon River watershed, this conserved site is home to 917 acres of mature oak, fir, and pine forest and provides important habitat and habitat connectivity for a diverse array of native fish and wildlife species, including ocean-run steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*).

In the summer, stewardship staff worked with local volunteers to remove about 0.7 miles of abandoned PVC pipe from the Rattlesnake Creek floodplain. The pipe removal effort was part of a larger, ongoing restoration project aimed at enhancing floodplain habitat along Rattlesnake Creek. “Rattlesnake Creek and its floodplain are in better shape now thanks to the hard work of these volunteers!” said Natural Area Manager Adam Lieberg.

Following initial phases in 2024 and early 2025, contractors—assisted by Yakama Nation fisheries staff—completed the third and final phase of low-tech, process-based wood enrichment restoration in Rattlesnake Creek last fall. All three phases resulted in utilizing over 850 trees, carefully selected from onsite, to create a variety of log jams up and down just under a mile of stream habitat. These structures mimic natural process and improve overall

watershed dynamics by slowing, spreading, and sinking surface water, while at the same time increasing the quantity and quality of pool habitat, which are important features for anadromous fish and many other aquatic species.

Partners at Washington Recreation and Conservation Office, Mount Adams Institute, Yakama Nation, and other local volunteers made these projects possible.

## Summit Creek Natural Area

**Conservation Area: Klickitat River**  
Klickitat County, WA

Stewardship staff worked with local and regional forestry consultants to implement an ICO harvest at our Summit Creek Natural Area. ICO stands for Individuals, Clumps, and Openings, and means that crews specifically mark trees to cut in a way that will leave a variety of gaps and openings in the forest that resemble the species composition and spatial variation of pre-European settlement conditions. This thinning project at Summit Creek will take place on 300 acres of even-aged and overly dense stands that were identified as a high priority for dry forest restoration treatments in the landscape evaluation. This silvicultural approach will create a structurally complex forest stand that will be more resilient to future wildfire and will put us in position to implement prescribed at this site in coming years.



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