

COLUMBIA LAND TRUST

Fieldbook

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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.

The Importance of Oaks

pg. 8





Jennifer Wilkerson on an outdoor adventure with her children

“We cannot conserve these lands without many individuals contributing their passion, skills, resources, and energy to what we do!”

The Power of People

As I wrap up my first year as Advancement Director and reflect on all that we have accomplished since I started in January, I am inspired by the power of people. Fostering connections with nature—inspiring people to care—is essential to our conservation work.

During my very first week on the job, I visited Cranes’ Landing in Vancouver and watched in awe as thousands of sandhill cranes flew overhead, wind whooshing through their magnificent wings.

As a nature-loving mama, I immediately loaded my family up to see these cranes and explain how the Land Trust farms this site specifically to serve as the birds’ winter home. My daughter was excited to learn that the cranes are as tall as she is (about four feet!) and my son identified with their shyness. Watching my kids watch the cranes underscored the power of even small nature moments within city limits! It is difficult for people to want to conserve nature if they don’t understand its importance or feel connected to it.

Cranes’ Landing is just one of hundreds of places conserved by Columbia Land Trust in perpetuity, and we cannot conserve these lands without many individuals contributing their passion, skills, resources, and energy to what we do. People including,

Heritage Circle members who have put Columbia Land Trust into their estate plans. These gifts are truly transformational, and we are immensely grateful to everyone who believes so deeply in our mission and work. This year, we received nearly \$1,000,000 in estate gifts, and 10 new donors included the Land Trust in their will. WOW!

Columbia Land Trust staff, our team works hard and with great joy! I am continually impressed by the commitment and attention to detail that goes into our stewardship work. Read about our latest restoration project in Wahkiakum County on page 4!

And of course **YOU, our generous supporters and friends!**

I hope to see many of you on this year’s Wild Splendor tours (see the back cover for details). Being together in nature benefits our hearts and minds, while reminding us of the many threats facing our ecosystems. It reinforces our connection to the natural world, and to each other. We are so grateful to have you alongside us.

– Jennifer Wilkerson, Advancement Director

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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.

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.



Cover photo: Klickitat River in fall. By Doug Gorsline
Inside cover: Yarrow growing in a Backyard Habitat



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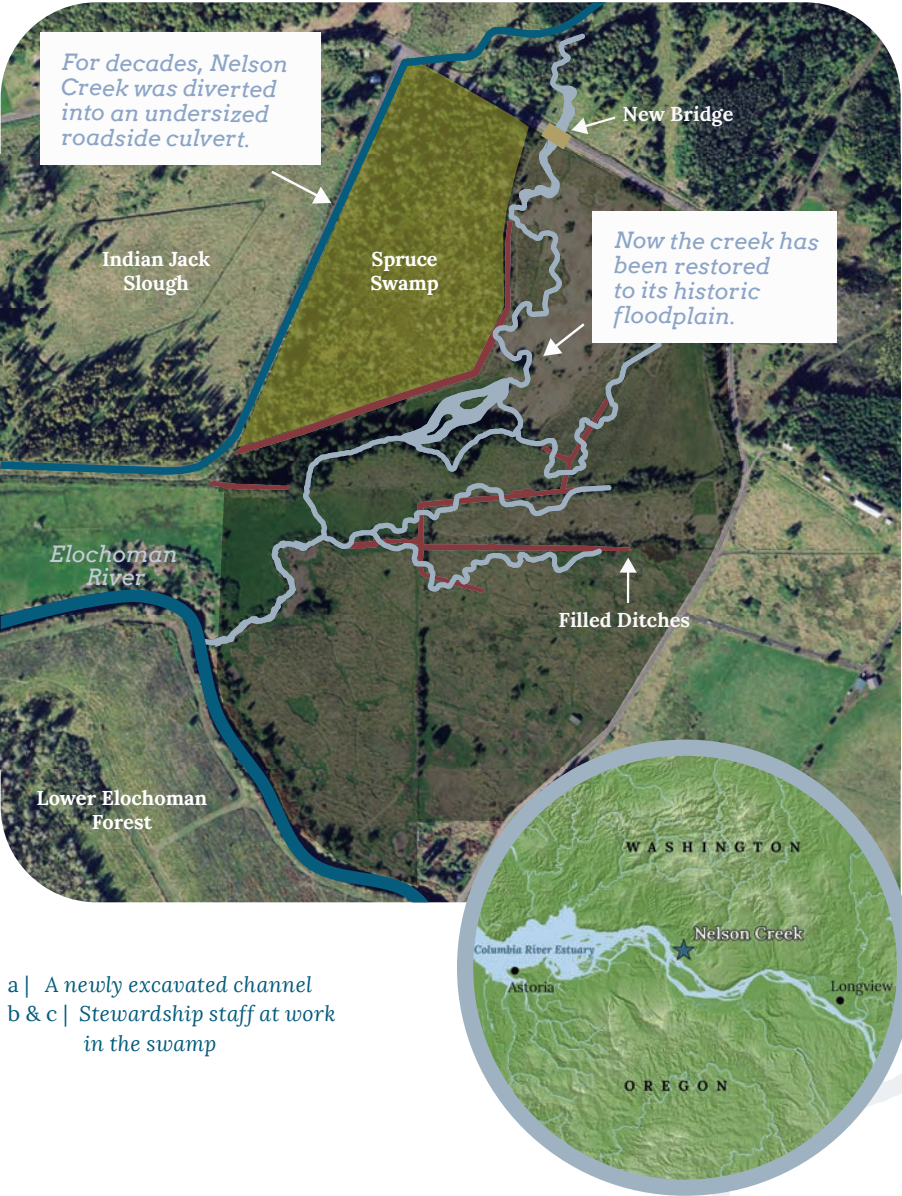
Restoration Along the Elochoman

Returning Nelson Creek
to its Historic Path to
Restore Wetlands and
Improve Fish Habitat

BY KELSEY FARABEE

Nelson Creek—a tributary of the Elochoman River—was diverted from its historic path into a culvert and roadside ditch for over 70 years. The ditch and culvert were both too small to contain the creek’s winter flows, which led to the over-flooding and decline of an adjacent Sitka spruce swamp and reduced the quality of in-stream habitat for Coho (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) and steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) salmon, rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and native lamprey.

To change that, in May Columbia Land Trust and contractor Evergreen Developers broke ground on a floodplain restoration project that includes the construction of a new 50-foot bridge for Nelson Creek to flow beneath and the excavation of about two miles of stream channel and tidal tributaries. In addition to improving habitat for salmonids, the project will restore over 150 acres of habitat for threatened Columbian white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus leucurus*). Before restoration, the site had few mature trees and was dominated by reed canarygrass and other weeds. Our work will restore the floodplain to historic conditions, which included an old-growth Sitka spruce swamp, complex marsh channels, and emergent wetlands. The project required a lot of soil to be moved, as the new main creek channel ranges from six to ten feet deep, old irrigation ditches need to be filled in, and topographic complexity was restored to land that was flattened for agriculture.



a | A newly excavated channel
b & c | Stewardship staff at work
in the swamp



a |



b |

“Because of the presence of salmon in the watershed, I would expect migrating salmon to find their way into the new channels as early as this fall.”

Simon Apostol, Natural Area Manager

“We have historic maps so we knew approximately where Nelson Creek originally ran,” said Natural Area Manager Simon Apostol. “Starting in the 1900’s the creek’s location was altered over the years by agriculture and road construction.”

Excavation work wrapped up at the end of September, and the newly dug channels will fill in with water quickly, thanks to a high water table, daily tides, and coming fall rains. “Because of the presence of salmon in the watershed, I would expect migrating salmon to find their way into the new channels as soon as this fall,” said Apostol. “The channels we created will allow adult salmon to access upstream spawning

habitat and provide a place for juveniles to rest, grow, and feed on their journey to the ocean.”

Apostol described what the site will look like as nature continues to shape the landscape; “As willows, spruce, and other plantings grow up, beaver are sure to create numerous dams across Nelson Creek and the tidal tributary channels, which will spread water across the floodplain and increase channel complexity and the amount of in-water habitat available to fish, especially in the winter and spring.”

The next step is the planting of nearly 200,000 native trees and shrubs.

A combination of quick-growing willows and alders and slower growing conifers will provide shade over the streams and Elochoman riverbank. The conifers will eventually drop branches and become logs that will fall into the waterways and provide structure and habitat complexity.

“Additional goals for the revegetation phase of this project include controlling invasive species to promote long-term biodiversity and site health, and providing forage and cover for deer, which prefer to browse shrubs like dogwood, salmonberry, and willows over pasture grasses that have low nutritional value,” said Apostol.

The Nelson Creek restoration project will create new river channels and greatly improve wildlife habitat, but what about the creatures who currently call the creek home? To make sure the fish and other wildlife aren’t disturbed by excavation work, our stewardship team carefully performs what we call “fish salvage,” collecting and releasing them in a nearby waterway with comparable habitat or further downstream, safely away from construction!



c |

Recognizing Our Shared Past to Improve Our Shared Future

The Confluence Project Shifts the Narrative Around the Columbia River

BY MAX DIAZ

Just a few hundred yards from Columbia Land Trust's main office at Fort Vancouver lies the Confluence Land Bridge, where art, nature, and infrastructure combine to celebrate the Indigenous people who have stewarded this land since time immemorial. Lined with native plants and basalt columns carved with indigenous artwork, the 40-foot-wide pedestrian bridge arcs over Washington State Route 14, connecting the historic fort with the north bank of the Columbia River. The Welcome Gate by artist Lillian Pitt (Wasco, Yakima, Warm Springs) greets visitors, just as the Chinook people welcome a visitor arriving by canoe.

The Land Bridge is one of five completed art installations by the Confluence Project, a nonprofit working to connect people to the history, living cultures, and ecology of the Columbia River system through Indigenous voices. Founded by the late Jane Jacobsen, an active member of the Vancouver community and founding member of Columbia Land Trust, Confluence was created with the goal of shifting the narrative surrounding the Columbia River to one that centers the voices of the native people, rather than the voices of European explorers.

Since becoming Executive Director in 2014, Colin Fogarty has led the organization to develop meaningful tribal partnerships and find creative ways to connect people to place through art and education. In addition to art installations like the Land Bridge, Confluence offers youth education and professional development programs for teachers in local schools, and community programs like storytelling events and educational road trips. The organization has even compiled a

“Part of the point of Confluence is listening to and learning from Indigenous people who have taken care of this landscape for 16,000 years and done it well.”
Colin Fogarty, Executive Director, Confluence Project

digital library of interviews with more than forty Indigenous Elders and leaders from Columbia River tribes, preserving their important stories.

Confluence, which celebrated its' 20th anniversary in September, collaborates with tribal partners to create opportunities to explore the deep, interconnected relationship between people and nature. “Each one of our programs is a starting point on a journey to a more inclusive understanding of where we're all from,” said Fogarty. “That journey begins with recognizing our shared history and our shared future.”

For example, Fort Vancouver sits atop a prairie where Indigenous people used fire to cultivate Camas, a traditional food prized for its edible root. “Part of the point of Confluence is listening to and learning from Indigenous people who have taken care of this landscape for 16,000 years and done it well,” said Fogarty. “It's a reciprocal relationship—the land takes care of us and we must take care of the land.”

f | The Land Bridge allows pedestrian passage over Washington State Route 14



This large construction effort also presented a valuable opportunity in the Land Trust's ongoing efforts to work with a diverse array of partners and contractors. We were excited to work with minority-owned contractor Evergreen Developers, LLC, led by Jeremy Tjaden, on this important restoration effort. Despite early challenges caused by the extremely wet spring, construction was generally smooth and on schedule.

“Evergreen is a member of the National Association of Minority Contractors of Oregon, a group that has been invaluable in our efforts to develop a new, more inclusive approach to designing and building our restoration projects,” said Stewardship Director Ian Sinks. “These new partnerships have made our work more effective, and we were honored to be recognized by the Portland Daily Journal of Commerce as a 2022 Building Diversity honoree for our work with Evergreen.”

The lower Elochoman River has long been a priority area for the Land Trust, in part because its location within the Columbia River estuary provides critical habitat for migrating and rearing salmonids from throughout the entire Columbia basin. It is also one of few remaining habitat areas for Columbian white-tailed deer, whose low elevation habitat along has been severely altered by agriculture and urbanization. Nelson Creek and two other Land Trust sites in the lower watershed (totaling about 600 acres) build off conservation efforts at the adjacent 6,000-acre Julia Butler Hansen National Wildlife Refuge, expanding the cohesive deer habitat.

“This project builds on a long history of restoration and conservation in the watershed, and after five months of construction I look forward to moving into the planting phase and watching as wildlife move back into the improved habitat,” said Apostol.

d | Bridge construction
e | Native Oregon Grape (Mahonia aquifolium)

Thank you to the many partners involved in this restoration project:

- Evergreen Developers
- Wahkiakum County, who worked diligently with us through the planning and permitting process.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in particular the Partners Program and staff at Julia Butler Hansen National Wildlife Refuge, who have provided support and advice for the management of Columbian white-tailed deer habitat.
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, for assistance protecting and relocating fish and lamprey.
- Inter-Fluve, Inc, for leading the design process.
- Cascade Bridge, LLC, Otak, Inc, for the design and construction of the Nelson Creek crossing.





The Importance of Oaks

\$7.1 Million Will Advance Conservation, Stewardship, Outreach, and Monitoring on Oregon White Oak Landscapes

In early August, the East Cascades Oak Partnership (ECOP) was awarded a \$7.1 million grant from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), as one of five new awardees supporting healthy watersheds across the state.

The partnership works on the east slopes of the Cascades, where the Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*) can be found in a variety of settings, from a lone, massive tree in a native bunchgrass savanna to thousands of oaks huddled together on an exposed slope, dwarfed by strong winds. Among many benefits, Oaks provide shade in harsh environments, support first foods important to Indigenous peoples, provide a scenic backdrop for hiking and mountain biking trails, can function as a buffer against catastrophic wildlife, and support hundreds of species of wildlife with their acorn crops, fungal and plant associations, and abundant cavities.

In the East Cascades, biodiversity and climate resilience are threatened by

fire suppression, development, overgrazing, and passive management, but ECOP is working to change that. Columbia Land Trust is the fiscal and administrative sponsor of the six-year old partnership, which grew from an initial \$10,000 exploratory grant from Pacific Birds into a robust group of more than 25 tribal, public, and private entities collaborating to restore fire-adapted conditions, protect biodiversity, and maintain climate resilience.

“This funding will facilitate a landscape level monitoring approach to the geographically unique Oregon white oak plant community east of the Cascades, while also connecting a network of partners who manage and enhance oak plant communities on public, state, and private lands,” said Whitney Olsker and Christina Mead, respectively a silviculturist and botanist with the Mt. Hood National Forest.

The wide-ranging partners work together to leverage resources, share knowledge, and implement conservation strategies that will protect

“[We] look at conservation through the lens of human interaction... approaching conservation that can leverage positive outcomes for humans and nature.”

Lindsay Cornelius,
Partnership Manager, ECOP

vulnerable oak habitats and encourage more sustainable human interactions with these important resources that vital to ecosystems and economies.

“ECOP looks at conservation through the lens of human interaction,” said Partnership Manager Lindsay Cornelius. “People have a variety of needs and interests across oak landscapes and there are different ways of approaching conservation that can leverage positive outcomes for humans and nature.”

Climate modeling completed by The Nature Conservancy predicts that portions of the East Cascades with a high diversity of soil types, microclimates, and low levels of development will have higher resilience to climate change. Protecting and restoring connected landscapes to ensure plants and wildlife have the space and opportunity to adapt is central to the vision and work of both ECOP and Columbia Land Trust.

“In a time of changing climate, this [initiative] is well suited to support biodiversity in oak woodland and prairie habitats, and help protect vulnerable communities from catastrophic

wildfire,” said OWEB Executive Director Lisa Charpilloz Hason. “The partnership will engage a broad diversity of people, and OWEB is excited to join them as a funding partner over the next six years. OWEB is committed to investing in conservation that helps communities mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.”

With this infusion of funding, ECOP will be able to protect 15,000 acres of habitat from conversion, reverse the effects of fire suppression on 17,000 acres, strategically deploy outreach to engage private landowners, lower barriers to the use of prescribed fire, expand access to native plant materials, and implement new monitoring and assessment tools. The funds will also enable the partnership to hire additional staff and create new tools, like a website to help land managers determine the historic condition of specific sites to inform future management.

“In a short time, the East Cascades Oak Partnership has made leaps and bounds in increasing awareness around oak ecosystems and their important functions,” said Chase Brown, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife White River Wildlife Area Manager. “These recently awarded funds will enable us to implement on-the-ground landscape scale restoration projects. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is extremely excited to be a part of this partnership and will use the funding to create healthier, more fire resilient ecosystems.”

“This is an important moment,” said Cornelius. “We are overcoming misperceptions that oaks east of the Cascades are not important for conservation because they are smaller in stature and are locally abundant, when in fact they are critically important for migratory and resident birds, pollinators, and wildlife precisely because these oak habitats are still meaningfully connected. This OWEB investment, along

NEW FUNDING WILL ALLOW THE PARTNERSHIP TO:

Protect 15,000 acres of habitat from conversion

Reverse the effects of fire suppression on 17,000 acres

Strategically deploy outreach to engage private landowners

Lower barriers to the use of prescribed fire

Expand access to native plant materials

Implement new monitoring and assessment tools

with the award to the Klamath Siskiyou Oak Network, signals an important shift that oak landscapes are finally getting conservation attention at the state level. “Working together with the people who live in these landscapes, helping them see the value and vitality of these important plants and animals, and understanding the reciprocal relationship between nature and people—that is our privilege and our responsibility. We are ready.” 🌱

Partners that will directly support project implementation include Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, Oregon State Parks, USFS – Mt. Hood National Forest and Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, Columbia Land Trust, Oregon Department of Forestry, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service. 🌱

g | An intersection of oak woodland and conifer forest





h |

DISCOVER TWO NEWLY CONSERVED SITES



i |

1. East Fork Lewis River: Optimist Club Youth Camp

nature access + community partnerships

Columbia Land Trust helped permanently protect a forested youth camp in the heart of Clark County, in partnership with the Optimist Club of Vancouver. The 46-acre parcel sits along the East Fork Lewis River adjacent to a popular county park, in an area that is a conservation priority for both the county and the Land Trust due to ecological importance and development pressures.

“The conservation of this camp builds on decades of work to create a 14-mile greenway along the East Fork,” said Conservation Director Dan Roix. “This was an incredible opportunity to ensure that future generations of youth will be able to engage with nature in a powerful way.”

The Optimist Club's rustic camp is free to youth-serving organizations and welcomes about 700 campers annually. The new conservation easement will facilitate the camp's continued operation and maintain wildlife habitat values.

“The club chose to work with Columbia Land Trust to protect this special place to benefit youth in our community and to protect this vital watershed in an increasingly urban setting” said Club Secretary/Treasurer Mary L. White.

Land Trust Real Estate Transactions Coordinator Pamela Swearingen shared her family's experience, “Growing up in Clark County, my son's Boy Scout troop used the Optimist Club camp to practice outdoor skills and earn merit badges. It was incredible to have such a beautiful place available and it was an honor to work on this project and help conserve the camp forever.”

The camp remains private property, not open to the public, but interested youth organizations may reach out to the Optimist Club of Vancouver by emailing Mary at myotismary22@msn.com.

Funding was provided by Clark County's Conservation Futures Program.

2. Grays River: Fossil Creek salmon spawning + habitat connectivity

Another newly conserved site along Washington's Grays River contains the headwaters of Crazy Johnson Creek, one of the most important areas for chum salmon in the entire Columbia River basin. During spawning seasons the creek roils with salmon, and maintaining this ecosystem will be a key priority of our stewardship efforts. The site also protects existing marbled murrelet habitat and promotes watershed health, benefiting human communities. Columbia Land Trust has been working in the Grays River watershed since 2000, and has protected and restored numerous tidal wetlands, allowing the river to return to its historic floodplain and providing habitat for salmon, waterfowl, and many other species. The 342-acre Fossil Creek plot neighbors existing conserved lands, allowing our team to build off existing management goals and build connectivity within the landscape.

“Fossil Creek and the ecological processes the site supports align with the long-term community-based conservation strategy we are working on in the Grays River watershed,” said Stewardship Director Ian Sinks. 🌿

Project funding came from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, Washington Coast Restoration and Resiliency Initiative, Salmon Recovery Funding Board, and the Land Trust Alliance Resilient Landscapes grant program.

“This was an incredible opportunity to...benefit future generations of youth, allowing them to engage and connect with nature in a powerful way.”

h | A rustic structure at the Optimist Club camp

i | A fish bearing stream within the Fossil Creek site

From Forest to Front Yard



j |

A New Backyard Habitat Demonstration Site Offers Native Plant Inspiration

BY KELSEY FARABEE

Native plants are the backbone of a healthy ecosystem, and in the Portland metropolitan area we are lucky to have many organizations and groups working to promote and plant native species.

Friends of Tryon Creek (FOTC), based in Tryon Creek State Park, is a long-time collaborator with the Backyard Habitat Certification Program (BHCP), which is co-managed by Columbia Land Trust and Portland Audubon. Since 2012, FOTC has led Backyard Habitat site visits and outreach in Lake Oswego and promoted the program at their events, which support their mission to inspire every community to identify, cultivate, or reclaim their relationship with nature.

Recently, FOTC has been restoring a section of the park near the Nature Center, with the goal of highlighting the overlap between what grows in the forest and what can grow in a yard and other urban and suburban landscapes. The area originally had a trail running through it, and for a time functioned as an open space where groups would congregate, until FOTC and Oregon State Park rangers decided to replant



k |

“Thriving backyard habitats extend the ecological benefits of Tryon Creek State Natural Area for wildlife, pollinators, and all nearby neighbors.”

with natives and create an educational “demonstration site” with signage and plant identification placards.

“This site is a great way to showcase the direct connection between backyard and forest habitats,” said Amy Stout, Friends of Tryon Creek Engagement Coordinator. “This idea began with our staff and spread to volunteers and nursery partners who envisioned how

a diverse array of native plants would provide a wonderful learning opportunity and inspire park visitors. It will connect people to everyday actions that can improve our shared environment.”

Depending on soil conditions, many plant species visible from the trails at Tryon also thrive in local yards and gardens. Evergreens like Oregon grape and salal and ground cover layers like Western red columbine and fringe cup improve habitat for wildlife, and plants like trillium, fawn lilies, tiger lilies, and Fairy Bells create beautiful springtime blooms.

The Tryon site was BHCP certified at the Silver level, with three canopy layers, a storm water management system, and two wildlife stewardship practices in place. (There are window decals to prevent bird strikes, and they ‘leave the leaves’ to create invertebrate habitat and improve soil.)

“The staff at Friends of Tryon Creek and Oregon State Parks have created an incredible new demonstration garden that is accessible and approachable,” said Susie Peterson, Backyard Habitat Program Co-Manager. “FOTC does an amazing job of creating welcoming spaces for anyone to visit and learn more about the native plants and animals we have in our region.”

Thriving backyard habitats extend the ecological benefits of Tryon Creek State Natural Area for wildlife, pollinators, and all nearby neighbors. If you live in Lake Oswego and have questions about the Backyard Habitat Program, contact backyardhabitat@tryonfriends.org.

We invite you to visit Tryon Creek and check out the certified site and programs which include summer camps, guided nature walks, community ecology talks, and native plant sales! www.tryonfriends.org 🌿

j | Signs helps visitors identify native plants

k | Friends of Tryon staff members help with planting. Courtesy of Friends of Tryon Creek



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Wild Splendor ²⁰²²

This year we're hosting **three types of tours** to celebrate the land, water, wildlife, and people of the Pacific Northwest!

In addition to the popular chum salmon and sandhill crane tours, we added a hike at a soon-to-be conserved site outside Corbett, Oregon. These opportunities to foster connections with nature, and with each other, would not be possible without the generous support of our sponsors.

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