

Rivers to Ridges

Metropolitan Regional Parks and Open Space Study

Regional Context

The Eugene-Springfield metropolitan region lies at the southern end of the Willamette Valley. Waters from the Willamette and McKenzie River systems flow from headwaters in the Cascade Range through our urban area. The Coast and Middle Forks of the Willamette River converge on the southern edge of the metropolitan region, and the McKenzie River joins the Willamette Main Stem on the northern edge of the region. Here the Willamette Valley, western Cascades, and Coast Range physiographic provinces converge. Forested hills frame much of the urban region. The metropolitan landscape is comprised of these rivers, hills, and the relatively flat Willamette Valley floor. In 2002, the metropolitan region's population was more than 275,000 with over 140,000 living in Eugene and over 50,000 living in Springfield.



Coast Fork Willamette River near Creswell

As the region continues to prosper and grow, open space will undoubtedly be lost, while at the same time recreational demand will increase. The challenge is to decide what open space areas are vital to maintaining the region's quality of life and to devise methods to ensure these areas remain intact for future generations. This is the goal of the Metropolitan Regional Parks and Open Space Study.

Study Background and Purpose

On a regional basis, parks and open space planning has occurred primarily at a local level without the benefit of a broader regional perspective. There is currently no single vision for the metropolitan region as a whole. This study begins the process of compiling such a regional vision while identifying both long- and short-term strategies for implementation.

On November 29, 2000, the Eugene and Springfield city councils, the Lane County Board of Commissioners, and the Willamalane Park and Recreation Board met jointly and agreed by unanimous consensus to proceed with and jointly fund a Metropolitan Regional Parks and Open Space Study.

Study Goals:

- *To create a regional parks and open space vision.*
- *To identify long- and short-term strategies for implementing the vision.*



Wild sunflower (Wyethia angustifolia)

Guiding Principles

for Park and Open Space Planning for the Eugene-Springfield Region

A number of local plans give direction and set policy on the subject of parks, open space, and recreation for the metropolitan region. These include the *Eugene/Springfield Metro Plan (1987)*, *Eugene Parks and Recreation Plan (1989)*, *West Eugene Wetland Plan (2000)*, *Willamalane Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan (1995)*, *Lane County Parks Master Plan (1980)*, *Central Lane Regional Parks Plan (1970)*, and the *Draft Region 2050 Goals and Objectives (June 2001)*. In addition, the *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* and statewide planning goals 3,4,5,6, 7, 8, and 15 all pertain to the region's parks and open space.

Although each plan gives unique and often specific direction on the region's park and open space system, several recurring themes can be found throughout most of these plans. *These common themes are being used as guiding principles for the development of a regional parks and open space vision and include:*

- Variety
- Scenic Quality
- Connectivity
- Recreation and Education
- Habitat
- Rivers, Waterways, and Wetlands
- Community Buffers

Variety

Provide a variety of open space types (agriculture, forest, natural areas, and developed parks) to serve the diverse needs of the community.



Bethel Park

Developed parks for active recreation



Agricultural land near Coburg

The working landscape (farm and forest lands)

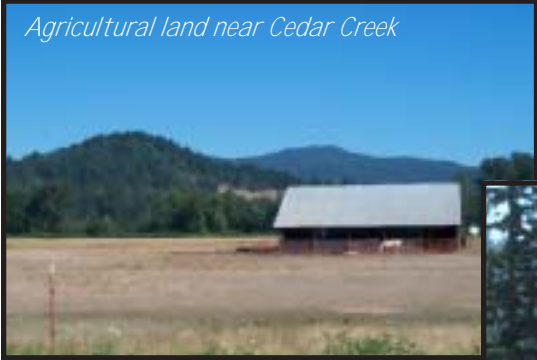
Meadowlark Prairie - West Eugene



Natural areas

Scenic Quality

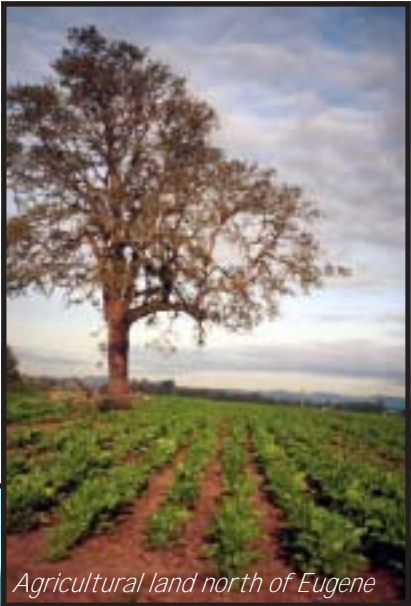
Protect, conserve, and enhance elements of the natural and historic landscape that give the region its uniqueness and sense of place, including forested hillslopes and ridges, river and waterway corridors, agricultural lands, vistas, and unique natural features.



Agricultural land near Cedar Creek



Thurston Hills



Agricultural land north of Eugene

Connectivity

Provide uninterrupted open space and recreational corridors or greenways that link park and recreational facilities, schools, wildlife habitat, and natural resource areas, including connections between urban areas and open space on the urban fringe.



Island Park



Ridgeline Trail - Eugene

Recreation and Education

Provide a variety of regional recreational opportunities to meet the diverse needs of residents and visitors in the region and utilize open space lands in and around the metro area for the interpretation of natural resources and historically important cultural resources.



Habitat

Protect and enhance a variety of habitat types including unique or at-risk plant and wildlife communities. In our region, oak savanna, wetland and upland prairie, and riparian forest are all considered critical habitats.



Rivers, Waterways, and Wetlands

Protect, conserve, and enhance rivers, waterways, and wetlands and associated floodplains for their habitat, flood protection, water quality, recreation, and scenic values.



Community Buffers

Maintain open space between the metro area and nearby small cities in order to preserve community identity and protect farm and forest values and operations.



The Vision

The Working Vision Map (right) is a consolidation of ideas generated during the visioning process including a multi-jurisdictional staff work session held on December 7, 2001, input from the *Rivers to Ridges* public workshops held on January 23, 2002 and May 22, 2002, and input from various interest groups receiving presentations between September 2002 and January 2003. The vision map is a guide for future park and open space protection and does not change existing plan designation or zoning in any of the areas identified. The legend categories include:

Existing Open Space Anchors

These include existing regionally significant public parks and open space areas that form the foundation of the existing open space system. These include areas such as the Dorris Ranch Park, Buford Recreation Area, Spencer Butte Park, Island Park, Alton Baker Park, Delta Ponds, the west Eugene wetlands, the Willow Creek Natural Area, Elijah Bristow State Park, Armitage Park, and Fern Ridge Reservoir.

Potential Future Open Space Anchors

These are areas that have been identified as potential key additions to the regional park open space system based on ecological, scenic, recreational, or cultural values.

Key Future Upland Connections (greenways)

These are primarily ridgeline corridors that could be used to connect major open space anchors and serve as recreational corridors.

Key Water-Based Connections (blueways)

These are linear corridors that follow major rivers and creeks. These corridors typically include the riparian zones and floodplains associated with creeks and rivers and are well suited for habitat protection and restoration.

Existing Recreational Trails

These include the existing major multi-use paths and trails within the study area and provide both recreational and transportation uses.

Potential Future Recreational Trails and Pathways (opportunities)

These potential recreational trails and pathways could provide access to and between major open space anchors and would be sited to avoid impacts to sensitive habitat and private property.

Community Buffers

This symbol indicates critical areas needed to provide separation between the metro area and nearby small cities. In most instances these separators or buffers could take the form of agricultural or forest lands, riparian corridors, or other natural areas.

Community Gateways

These are major entry points into the community and have the potential to provide a scenic entry point and a clear urban-rural transition.

Highly Visible Scenic Resources

These are generally forested hillslopes and buttes that are highly visible from population centers.