

Chapter 1: Executive Summary

The Habitat Management Plan for Lane County’s Howard Buford Recreation Area (*Plan*) is designed to guide Lane County land managers, park stakeholders, agency partners, and interested park users in managing and sustaining the 2,215-acre Howard Buford Recreation Area’s valuable aesthetic and natural resources and their enjoyment by the public.

This visionary document identifies high priority goals and strategies for application of available resources, and a focus for collaborative partnerships and future grant writing efforts. With this *Plan* in hand, park managers, partner agencies, and volunteer groups can work together more effectively to secure funding to sustain the park’s diverse habitats, for the public to enjoy long into the future.

Howard Buford Recreation Area (HBRA) and the greater Middle Fork-Coast Fork Willamette confluence-area is recognized in the 2006 Oregon Conservation Strategy, as well as the 2016 revision, as a Conservation Opportunity Area—a location “that provide(s) good opportunities to address the conservation needs of high-priority habitats and species” (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2006). More than 1,000 acres of prairie, savanna, and oak woodland are found within HBRA. With only about two percent of the Willamette Valley’s original prairie and savanna and 10 percent of floodplain forest habitat remaining, HBRA is home to some of the largest remnants of these habitat types in public ownership. . In 2010, The Nature Conservancy purchased more than 1,200 acres of similar habitat immediately adjacent to HBRA (the preserve was later expanded to 1305 acres). This presents extraordinary new opportunities for restoration and protection of significant contiguous acreage of these rare habitats. A fundamental challenge of park management in HBRA is to balance the recreational needs of park visitors with the conservation needs of plants and wildlife—some of which are listed as rare, threatened, or endangered.



Each year, an estimated 400,000 people visit HBRA to enjoy its diverse natural beauty.

1.1 Conservation Vision

The planning process and associated public input resulted in the creation of the following *Conservation Vision* for Howard Buford Recreation Area:

Conservation Vision for Howard Buford Recreation Area

The Howard Buford Recreation Area will be managed to conserve and restore prairie, savanna, woodland, forest, and river habitats in ways that enhance visitor experience, compatible recreation and educational uses described in the HBRA Master Plan (1994).

The uplands shall sustain increasingly rare Willamette Valley habitat types including a mosaic of open prairie, savanna, and oak woodland in portions of the park where these habitat types occurred historically. Conifer and mixed forest shall be retained and enhanced in upland portions of HBRA, particularly in portions of the park that historically supported forest conditions. The lowlands shall sustain healthy riparian (streamside) and aquatic habitats and processes. These native habitats shall



conserve common and rare native plants and animals, including federally and state-listed threatened and endangered species.

Habitat restoration shall provide significant increases in quality and/or extent of priority habitat to support a diversity of wildlife species, particularly those that were historically more prevalent throughout the Willamette Valley. Restoration will also lessen the threat of severe wildfire through reduction of dense, brushy fuels in prairie, savanna, and oak woodland habitats

1.2 Management Goals

Fifteen management goals and associated strategies were developed to provide measurable milestones on the road to achieving the Conservation Vision. Refer to Chapter 6 for a complete list of the strategies and projects associated with each goal, as well as a brief description of the conservation targets each goal is designed to address.

- **GOAL 1:** Provide a safe and positive visitor experience in Howard Buford Recreation Area.
- **GOAL 2:** Educate park users about the unique natural values that make the HBRA and the broader Mount Pisgah area a priority for conservation.
- **GOAL 3:** Maintain and improve the park's trail system to minimize ecological impacts while providing views of and access to HBRA's diverse habitats.
- **GOAL 4:** Minimize adverse impacts of park management on conservation targets.
- **GOAL 5:** Restore and enhance prairie, savanna and oak woodland habitats by reducing encroaching woody vegetation.

- **GOAL 6:** Achieve significant restoration of prairie and savanna, oak woodland, and wet prairie habitats in HBRA.
- **GOAL 7:** Achieve significant restoration of chaparral habitat in HBRA.
- **GOAL 8:** Manage for diverse native plant communities within each conservation target habitat.
- **GOAL 9:** Increase the size of wet prairie habitat patches.
- **GOAL 10:** Locate and, to the extent feasible, reduce populations of feral or harmful non-native animal species impacting each conservation target.
- **GOAL 11:** Locate and reduce the presence of habitat-modifying, non-native plant species within each conservation target habitat.
- **GOAL 12:** Remove fish passage barriers from the lower mile of creeks and streams in HBRA that flow into the Coast Fork of the Willamette River.
- **GOAL 13:** Improve ecological health of creeks and streams.
- **GOAL 14:** Improve ecological health of riparian floodplain habitats.
- **GOAL 15:** Manage habitats in the North Bottomlands Stewardship Zone to be mutually compatible with recreational activities identified in the 1994 HBRA Master Plan and the recommendations of the Large Events Task Force (2015).

1.3 Moving Forward

Effective partnerships have been a key feature of the management of the Howard Buford Recreation Area since the park was established in 1972. Achieving the ambitious vision set forth in this *Plan* will require these partnerships to grow broader and deeper. The *Plan* provides the basis for that growth, and a solid framework for Lane County Parks and its partners to pursue the financial resources necessary for successful implementation.

1.4 Stakeholder Groups

At the outset of the planning process, HBRA stakeholders, including the Mount Pisgah Arboretum and the Lane County Sheriff's Mounted Posse, were invited to briefings on the project and to public input sessions. These groups are integral to the ongoing operation of HBRA.

Mount Pisgah Arboretum, a non-profit organization, is a 209-acre, living tree museum on the west slope of Mount Pisgah within HBRA. The Arboretum operates through a 50-year lease with Lane County, which was initially established in 1973, and is responsible for habitat management within the Arboretum Stewardship Zone (see chapter 7). The primary purpose of Mount Pisgah Arboretum is nature education. Habitat management efforts are aimed at providing dynamic outdoor classrooms for teaching about local ecology. The Arboretum offers a wide range of both structured educational programs and informal learning opportunities for visitors of all ages, and is currently developing a series of interactive nature exhibits.

The **Lane County Sheriff's Mounted Posse** was established in 1941, and was originally created to serve as both a community service group, and to assist the Sheriff, such as with search and rescue efforts. The posse operates the horse arena located in the North Bottomlands in HBRA as a training facility and hosts a series of regular events, and schedules regular trail rides to patrol park trails.

The mission of the **Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah** (the Friends), founded in 1989, is to protect and enhance native ecosystems and compatible recreation in the Mt. Pisgah area. The Friends is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization working to conserve the Mt. Pisgah area's incredible botanical, wildlife and recreational values. The Friends mobilizes funding, scientific expertise and volunteers to improve the botanical, fish, wildlife and recreational resources throughout the 4,700 acre greater Mt. Pisgah area.

The Friends is a separate organization distinct from the Mount Pisgah Arboretum, working to care for the 2,100 acres in Buford Park outside of the Arboretum Stewardship. Though separate organizations, together they help care for Buford Park's natural and recreational values in partnership with Lane County, the landowner.

1.5 The Planning Process

The *Plan* was developed using the [Conservation Action Planning](#) process, or CAP. The CAP methodology is a science-based planning analysis developed by The Nature Conservancy and other land managers. The CAP process is an analytical methodology that allows a team of technical experts from diverse disciplines to work through a series of analytical steps that result in a set of priority strategies and actions to achieve conservation goals.

1.6 Methodology

Consistent with the CAP methodology, the Friends, with Lane County assistance, convened an inter-agency Technical Advisory Group (TAG) with diverse expertise to work through the planning process. The TAG held seven facilitated meetings to develop and review detailed conservation planning information. The TAG developed specific "conservation targets" for HBRA. Conservation targets are aspects of biodiversity or related habitat management focus. Conservation Targets in this plan include priority ecological communities or habitat types that are found within HBRA, as well as endangered, threatened, or at-risk native plant and animal species. Conservation targets are utilized in the planning process to guide development and analysis of conservation strategies in HBRA.

From the overall list of conservation targets identified for HBRA, the TAG selected nine targets as "focal conservation targets". These are chosen to represent the full array of biodiversity and habitat management priorities found in a project area. The focal conservation targets represent 1) habitat types identified as important for conservation within the Oregon Conservation Strategy for the Willamette Valley Ecoregion; 2) habitats that provide important aquatic, wetland, and upland ecological functions; 3) federally listed species or species petitioned for listing; and 4) public uses that benefit from a landscape rich in native biodiversity. In the planning process, the focal targets are the basis for setting goals, carrying out conservation actions, and measuring conservation effectiveness.

The focal targets include six habitats, one federally endangered plant, one rare bird and, to integrate and value compatible recreation, "visitor experience." The specific focal conservation targets are:

- Upland prairie and savanna
- Oak woodland
- Wet prairie
- Bradshaw's lomatium (*Lomatium bradshawii*)
- Buckbrush chaparral
- Willamette riparian systems and associated floodplain
- Creeks and streams
- Oregon Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus affinis*)
- Visitor experience

Additional "nested targets" are identified in Chapter 4 of this document. Nested targets are rare or at-risk species or ecological communities whose conservation needs are similar to one or more focal conservation targets. It is expected that these species and communities of interest will benefit from strategies that address focal targets. Recognition of nested targets helps to ensure that strategies implemented to benefit focal targets also provide a wider range of benefits to HBRA's natural features.

As part of the CAP methodology, the "viability" of and "threats" to the focal targets were assessed in order to establish clear goals and strategies (Chapter 6) for the desired future conditions for each target. Viability is defined as the status or health of a plant or animal species or habitat type. Viability is an indication of the ability of a conservation target to withstand or recover from disturbances or other alterations, and thus to persist in to the long term future. Threats are factors that directly or indirectly degrade or reduce the health of a conservation target. Identifying the important threats to conservation targets is a key step toward identifying effective conservation strategies.

Once the 15 management goals were identified, the process developed stewardship project recommendations, along with recommended best management practices and a "Stewardship Tool Box" (Chapters 10 and 11). The *Plan* calls for monitoring and adaptive management (Chapter 12) so that implementation actions may be adjusted to changing conditions and emerging information.

This plan has undergone extensive review and refinement. The Lane County Public Works Department performed a technical review of an early draft of the *Plan* from in 2011. In 2012, habitat planning was postponed due to insufficient funding. In 2015, Lane County resumed the planning process, collaborating with Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah to complete the *Plan*. Version 2 of the *Plan* was released for public review and comment on May 6, 2016, and comments were received until July 31, 2016. The current version of the *Plan*, Version 3, reflects the input provided by the public and stakeholders during this public review process. The Lane County Parks Advisory Committee (PAC) will review this draft and may recommend that the *Plan* be approved by the Lane County Board of Commissioners.

This *Plan* identifies strategies for habitat management within to effectively guide the use of funding and labor on the part of Lane County and partners within HBRA. The work plan identified in Chapter 10 constitutes a set of tasks to support the continued viability of the conservation targets present at HBRA. Maps showing desired future habitat conditions are intended to provide a template for achieving the conservation vision for HBRA. However, the maps do not constitute a financial commitment to

implementing the necessary habitat improvements on a fixed timeline. Nor are the maps intended to describe future habitat conditions in any given portion of the park with certainty, given the financial and ecological variables that guide any course of habitat restoration. As such, this document is intended to be a technical document in support of administrative actions, and is not a land use planning document.

1.7 Public Input

During the planning process, Lane County, the TAG and Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah collaborated to:

- Host two public workshops: March 19, 2009 and June 2, 2009,
- Publish displays and informational materials on the internet,
- Obtain a major article in *The Register-Guard* (March 27, 2009),
- Host an informational booth at the Mount Pisgah Wildflower Festival in 2009, and
- Host two stakeholder meetings, Nov 12, 2008 and Sept 3, 2009.

During 2016 and 2017, Lane County solicited comments through:

- Stakeholder meetings,
- Outreach to the general public, park neighbors and other stakeholders through website postings; flyers at park kiosks; print, TV, and radio stories in May 2016,
- An informational booth at the May 19th 2016 Mount Pisgah Wildflower Festival,
- Three public park tours in June 2016, two public tours in 2017 (July and August respectively),
- An online survey to which there were 51 respondents
- A public open house at Harris Hall on May 25th to provide information and solicit public feedback,
- Review by members of the inter-agency Technical Advisory Group, which met on May 5, 2016,
- Review by Parks Advisory Committee, including a public comment opportunity,
- A public open house to showcase the draft *Plan* and highlight in what ways public comment shaped the final document, and
- Review and approval by Lane County Board of Commissioners, including additional opportunities for public comment.

1.8 Chapter 1 References

- Lane County Parks Division and Cameron & McCarthy Landscape Architects. 1994. Howard Buford Recreation Area Master Plan. Lane County Parks, Eugene, Oregon.
- Lane County Large Events Task Force. 2015. - Findings and Recommendations of the Lane County Large Events Task Force. Lane County Parks, Eugene, Oregon.
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2006 and 2016. Oregon Conservation Strategy. 9, 11, 234-245.