



**INCREASING THE PACE, EXPANDING THE SCOPE, AND  
IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CONSERVATION**

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## **RESTORING WATERSHED HEALTH – SYNTHESIS OF STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS FROM NOVEMBER 2004 -FEBRUARY 2005**

Rivers and the watersheds that feed them are living organisms influenced by large and small impacts and afflicted by a wide assortment of ailments from pollution to pressure caused by population growth. As with human beings, treating isolated problems can improve conditions in rivers and watersheds, but fall short of producing overall health.

Complex systems such as the Willamette River Basin require a holistic approach to restoration. New tools, new partnerships and new perspectives must be developed. The reward for undertaking this new course to watershed health is more cost-effective environmental investment – and broader consensus among ratepayers to support that investment.

Today, Oregon municipalities, sewer and water ratepayers, industry and farmers are paying millions of dollars to clean up and reduce pollution flowing into the Willamette River and its tributaries. Reducing pollutants entering the river is useful, but doesn't address other critical dimensions of watershed health such as restoring riparian areas, cooling water or augmenting stream flow. Subtler actions, often requiring voluntary action and a commitment to larger objectives, are needed to achieve these benefits.

For example, a cooperative arrangement between a heavy manufacturer and nearby farmers can reduce industrial effluent that heats the river by applying those discharges instead on land to recreate riparian complexity and improve fish habitat. Avoided costs for the manufacturer can enable financial arrangements with farmers to pay for stream bank set-asides with vegetation that cools river water. Formal regulatory policies that focus on single objectives are incapable of encouraging or providing incentives for such flexible, dynamic and affordable solutions that produce a richer set of benefits, for less cost.

Other cooperative arrangements might involve the exchange of environmental credits among a municipality, an industry and farmers to divert industrial gray-water discharges for irrigation or wetlands mitigation. This can provide low-cost relief for a municipality facing wastewater treatment load limitations. The exchange also can be tied to cost-effective wetlands restoration and freeing up in-stream water to bolster stream flow in critical periods.

**WILLAMETTE PARTNERSHIP**  
**PACE, SCOPE, EFFECTIVENESS**

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Imagine a series of such cooperative arrangements along the full reach of the Willamette River that generate positive environmental benefits and stretches existing investments in public and private water treatment facilities.

Imagine on a grander scale a program in which cooperative approaches – combined with regulatory controls – are the main strategy used to restore river health. We could write another chapter in the Oregon Story about environmental leadership, as well as set a new standard for environmental stewardship in the nation.

This is much more than wishful thinking. These innovative, cooperative approaches are being pursued and put into effect already in the Tualatin River Basin under a first-of-its-kind, integrated federal watershed management permit issued to Clean Water Services.

The key difference in the Willamette Basin is the involvement of multiple local, state and federal jurisdictions with a role in preserving water quality. The Willamette Basin needs an organization that represent a confluence of interests that can aspire to and move toward a coordinated, cost-effective management plan for ecosystem health that should – and can – define Oregon’s commitment to environmental quality.