



LPRO: Legislative Policy and Research Office

STATE PARKS AND RECREATION

BACKGROUND BRIEF

Oregon's state park system originated in 1921 when the State Highway Commission was authorized to acquire properties dedicated to the protection of roadside forests and scenery. The legislature expanded that authority in 1925 to include acquisition, improvement, maintenance and supervision of land for parks, parking places, camp sites, public squares and recreation grounds. In addition, the legislature in 1925 authorized the use of state highway funds for these purposes, so in these early years, state highway funds from gasoline taxes, private land donations and federal funds provided the necessary funding to grow the system to a network of over 200 park areas.

During the early 1980s, voters removed the park system from the State Highway Fund. In response, the legislature in 1989 created the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) as an entity separate from the Oregon Department of Transportation. Throughout the 1990s, General Fund support for OPRD declined as other demands for state moneys increased.

In 1998, voters approved Measure 66, which amended the constitution and dedicated 15 percent of Oregon Lottery funds to state

parks, beaches, habitat and watershed protection. The 15 percent is split 50/50 between OPRD and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. In order to maintain lottery funding, Oregon voters had to reauthorize the constitutionally dedicated

lottery funds by 2014. Measure 76, approved by voters in 2010, amended the Oregon Constitution to continue the dedication of 7.5 percent of net lottery fund revenues to OPRD. Today, lottery funds account for approximately one-third of OPRD's biennial budget and, along with state park user fees and recreational vehicle license fees, are a primary funding source for the agency.

OPRD's responsibilities include managing Oregon's system of state parks, as well as ocean shores, natural areas, scenic waterways, recreation trails, state recreation areas

and historic, archeological and cultural preservation programs. The State Parks and Recreation Commission (**Commission**) sets policy and approves major actions of OPRD. The seven Commission members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.

In May 2004, Governor Ted Kulongoski announced a new goal for OPRD - to create

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one new state park per year for the next 10 years. In 2004, OPRD broke ground on Stub Stewart State Park in Washington County, the state's first new full-service state park in 30 years, which opened in 2007. OPRD has moved forward with Governor Kulongoski's goal, opening:

- [Sunset Beach State Park](#) on the northern Oregon coast in 2005;
- [Fort Yamhill](#) near Grand Ronde in 2006;
- [Thompson's Mills](#) historic site south of Albany in 2007;
- [Crissey Field](#) near Brookings in 2008;
- [Iwetemlaykin State Heritage Site](#) near Joseph in 2009;
- [Beaver Creek State Natural Area](#) near Waldport in 2010;
- [Bates State Park](#) northeast of John Day in 2011; and
- [Cottonwood Canyon State Park](#) southeast of The Dalles in 2013.

In September 2014, OPRD purchased a 357-acre property on the northern coast, and is in the process of developing a master plan for what will be Oregon's newest state park – Sitka Sedge Natural Area.

OREGON STATE PARK SYSTEM

OPRD manages a park system that encompasses 108,654 acres (as of June 2013), and includes the following:

- Over 250 park areas, 219 of which have developed facilities and/or other improvements;
- Fifty-five campgrounds (28 open year-round and 38 have reservable sites that charge an overnight site rental fee);
- Approximately 5,500 standard campsites (including improved tent, primitive and hook-up sites) 48 group camp areas, and

350 specialty sites (including yurts, log cabins, tepees and horse camp units);

- Day-use areas at nearly all state parks; and
- Facilities that include 57 reservable day-use areas at 17 parks, and 39 reservable picnic shelters at 24 parks.

Other recreation facilities include ocean beach access, recreation trails, boating and fishing docks, and river access points. Special facilities include:

- Silver Falls conference center, youth camp and group indoor, overnight facilities;
- Eleven group meeting halls;
- Eight interpretive centers/museums; and
- Two historic inns.

OPRD also manages Oregon's 382 miles of ocean shores, as well as the Willamette River Greenway (3,838 OPRD-managed acres).

There are numerous volunteer opportunities available through OPRD, including Park Host, Adopt-A-Park, Friends' groups, Junior Rangers and annual clean-up programs.

The park system serves more than 42 million people a year, among the top in the nation, and generates an estimated \$735 million a year in community economic benefits.

TRAILS PROGRAMS

OPRD manages a number of different trail programs offering a variety of recreational opportunities throughout Oregon.

Oregon Recreation Trails Advisory Council

The Oregon Recreation Trails Advisory Council (ORTAC) was established in 1971 as part of the Oregon Recreation Trails System



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Act. The impetus of the Act was to provide for the ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs of an expanding resident and tourist population and to promote public access to the outdoor gems of Oregon.

ORTAC consists of seven members; at least one from each congressional district and not less than two members from separate counties bordering upon the ocean shore. Members of ORTAC are appointed by the Commission, serve at the pleasure of the Commission for four-year terms and are eligible for reappointment. ORTAC designates state significant trails to highlight the best urban and scenic trails in Oregon.

SCENIC BIKEWAYS

An Oregon Scenic Bikeway is a designated bike route on existing roads and paths that provides access to national, state or regional resources. The route is on public lands, rights-of-way, or on existing easements on private property and open to the public. The volunteer, 11-member Scenic Bikeway Committee reviews applications submitted by local bikeway proponents and makes recommendations to ORTAC for bikeway designation.

Oregon's Scenic Bikeways program is intended to offer the best of Oregon's scenic, historic, natural and cultural experiences – from the seat of a bike. Each Bikeway is categorized according to its level of difficulty as mild, moderate, challenging or extreme. Each Bikeway has a ride description and route information, and more information can be found at the RideOregonRide webpage.

SCENIC TRAILS

An Oregon Scenic Trail is a non-motorized trail that provides access to outstanding scenery. Those routes chosen for Oregon

Scenic Trail designation provide access to national, state or regional scenic resources of superlative quality. They may be a single trail or combination of trails, over one mile in length, and must be open to the public and substantially complete. Scenic Trails lie on public lands or public rights-of-way or easements. ORTAC reviews applications submitted by local scenic trail proponents and makes recommendations to the Commission for scenic trail designation. Current designations include 15 sections of the Oregon Coast Trail, the Metolius-Windigo Trail in Deschutes County and the Sterling Ditch Mine Trail in Jackson County.

REGIONAL TRAILS

Oregon Regional Trails are non-motorized trails that provide close-to-home recreational opportunities while connecting communities, recreation sites, schools and other destinations with other significant trails. Regional trails are over five miles in length, open to the public, substantially complete, and lie on public lands or public rights-of-way or easements.

ORTAC reviews applications submitted by local regional trail proponents and makes recommendations to the Commission for regional trail designation. There are currently 5 designated Oregon Regional Trails:

- Bear Creek Greenway Trail (Jackson County);
- OC&E Woods Line State Trail (Klamath County);
- 40-Mile Loop Trail (Portland Metro Area);
- Banks-Vernonia State Trail (Washington and Columbia Counties); and
- Willow Creek Canyon Trail (Jefferson County).



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WATER TRAILS

Water trails are stretches of rivers, shorelines, or lakes that have been mapped out with the intent to create an educational, scenic and rewarding experience for recreational canoeists and kayakers. OPRD defines water trails as “corridors between specific locations on a lake, river or ocean.” Water trails are primarily designed for small watercraft such as canoes, kayaks, rafts and drift boats and offer a variety of challenge levels. They must include safe public put-in and take-out sites, parking, restrooms and, in some cases, day-use sites and overnight campsites. There are currently 9 [designated water trails](#) in Oregon.

STATE SCENIC WATERWAYS PROGRAM

Oregonians decided to protect special waterways in 1970 when they voted two-to-one to establish the Oregon Scenic Waterways Program. The program seeks to balance protection and wise use through cooperation between federal, state and local agencies as well as individual property owners and those who recreate along a waterway. The program currently includes 21 rivers, totaling 1,177 miles, and Waldo Lake. Under direction from the legislature (ORS 390.855), OPRD is required to periodically study new waterways for potential inclusion in the program. To assess the eligibility of waterways for inclusion in the program, the following general criteria are established in state law: free-flowing nature of the waterway; scenic quality (as viewed from the river); and natural and recreational resources (including the ability of the waterway and its setting to sustain recreational use).

In 2016, Governor Kate Brown designated two new State Scenic Waterways on portions of the Chetco and Molalla Rivers for their outstanding scenic, fish, wildlife, geological,

botanical, cultural and outdoor recreation opportunities. They are the first additions to the program since 1988.

GRANT PROGRAMS

OPRD provides both funding assistance and outreach to Oregon’s local communities through a series of grant programs. OPRD currently administers five recreation grant programs and six heritage grant programs, which combined give millions of dollars annually to grant project sponsors. The recreation grant programs are intended to help acquire, develop, rehabilitate and maintain local parks. They also help advance the development of recreational trails and provide supplementary funding for hiking, biking, and equestrian use and for all-terrain vehicle (ATV) recreational projects. Current grant programs include:

[ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE \(ATV\) GRANTS](#)

Provides funding for off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation, including operating and maintaining public OHV areas; acquiring, planning and developing new OHV areas; hiring law enforcement and emergency services; and promoting ATV safety education. Grant funds come from ATV user permit sales and a percentage of gasoline tax money.

[COUNTY OPPORTUNITY GRANTS](#)

Awarded to Oregon counties for acquiring, developing, rehabilitating and planning park and recreation sites that provide, or will provide, camping.

[HERITAGE PROGRAM GRANTS](#)

Provides funding for various types of historic preservation and heritage-related projects through various grant programs: Preserving



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Oregon Grants, Certified Local Government Grants, Historic Cemetery Grants, Heritage Grants, Museum Grants and Veterans' and War Memorial Grants.

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (LWCF) GRANTS

These federally funded grants provide state and local governments funding for acquiring and developing public outdoor recreation areas.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT GRANTS

Funded from voter-awarded Oregon Lottery money, these grants go to projects that acquire, develop or rehabilitate parks and recreation areas and facilities.

RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM (RTP) GRANTS

These federally funded grants provide awards for recreation trail-related projects such as hiking, running, bicycling, off-road motorcycling and ATV riding.

To remain qualified for federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) funding, OPRD prepares a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan ([SCORP](#)) every five years. In Oregon, the plan functions not only to guide the LWCF program, but also provides guidance for other OPRD-administered grant programs. It also provides recommendations to the Oregon State Park System operations, administration, planning, development and recreation programs.

OPRD recently completed a statewide 10-year plan for recreational trail management, entitled [Oregon Trails 2016: A Vision for the Future](#). The plan guides the use of the state's Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and ATV grant funds, and provides information and

recommendations to guide federal, state and local units of government, as well as the private sector, in making policy and planning decisions. Besides satisfying grant program requirements, a primary intent of the plan is to provide up-to-date, high-quality information to assist recreation providers with trail planning in Oregon. Further, it establishes a review process for potential State Scenic Waterway corridor additions.

HERITAGE PROGRAMS

OPRD's Heritage Programs Division, which includes the State Historic Preservation Office, Heritage Commission and the Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries, operates a number of cultural and historic preservation programs. This division is also in charge of administering the National Historic Preservation Act, archaeological site assessments and permits and related state and federal tax incentive programs.

STATE FAIR AND EXPO CENTER

The Oregon State Fair began in 1858 as an agricultural exhibition and expanded in 1977 to include an exposition center. In 2005, the legislature merged the Fair and Exposition Center. However, in 2013 the legislature passed Senate Bill 7, transitioning the Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center from a state agency to a public corporation administered by the Oregon State Fair Council. The Council assumed responsibility for Fair and Expo Center operations from OPRD in 2014.

STATE PARK FUNDING

The 2015-17 legislatively adopted OPRD budget of \$201.9 million is distributed as follows:

- Direct Services: \$99 million (49 percent)



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- Community Support and Grants: \$37 million (18 percent)
- Central Services: \$34.4 million (17 percent)
- Park Development: \$25.1 million (12 percent)
- Director's Office: \$4.8 million (2 percent)

The 2015-17 legislatively adopted revenues of \$237.4 million are distributed as follows:

- Oregon Lottery: \$84.7 million (36 percent)
 - Park User Fees: \$44.0 million (18 percent)
 - Beginning Balance: \$39.4 million (17 percent)
 - Other: \$25 million (10 percent)
 - RV Registrations: \$19 million (8 percent)
 - Federal: \$12.3 million (5 percent)
 - ATV: \$9.2 million (4 percent)
 - Trust & Dedicated Funds: \$3.7 million (1 percent)
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