

LPRO: LEGISLATIVE POLICY AND RESEARCH OFFICE

STATE PARKS AND RECREATION

BACKGROUND BRIEF

HISTORY AND OVERVIEW

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. The 1925 legislature also authorized the use of state highway funds for these purposes, so in these early years, funding to grow the system to a network of over 200 park areas came from a combination of State Highway Funds (from gasoline taxes), private land donations, and federal funds.

During the early 1980s, voters separated the park system from Oregon's transportation system, eliminating access to the State Highway Fund for parks purposes. In response, the legislature created the [Oregon Parks and Recreation Department](#) (OPRD) in 1989, distinct from the Oregon Department of Transportation.

In 1998, voters approved Measure 66, which amended the constitution to dedicate 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 constitutional dedication of lottery funds by 2014. Measure 76, approved by voters in 2010, accomplished this by amending the Oregon Constitution to continue the dedication of 7.5 percent of net Lottery Fund revenues to OPRD. The agency has not relied on General Fund dollars since the beginning of the 1999-2001 biennium, with the exception of the creation of the Office of Outdoor Recreation in 2017. Oregon's park system depends almost entirely on Lottery funds and Other Funds; Other Funds revenues come mainly from park user and other fees, transfers of recreational vehicle registrations, and all-terrain vehicle fuels tax revenues.

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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. 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: create one new state park per year for the next 10 years. Between 2004 and 2013, OPRD added nine new parks under the Park-a-Year program.

Oregon State Parks System

OPRD manages a park system that encompasses 113,142 acres, including the following:

- over 250 park areas, 220 of which have developed facilities and/or other improvements;
- fifty-eight campgrounds or other overnight accommodations (28 are 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 362 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 receives more than 50 million visits a year, among the top in the nation. Most state park visitors—approximately 65 percent—are from Oregon, but 15 percent are from Washington, 10 percent from California, three percent each from Idaho and British Columbia, and the remaining four percent are from other states and

countries. The state park system generates an estimated \$1.1 billion a year in direct and indirect 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 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.

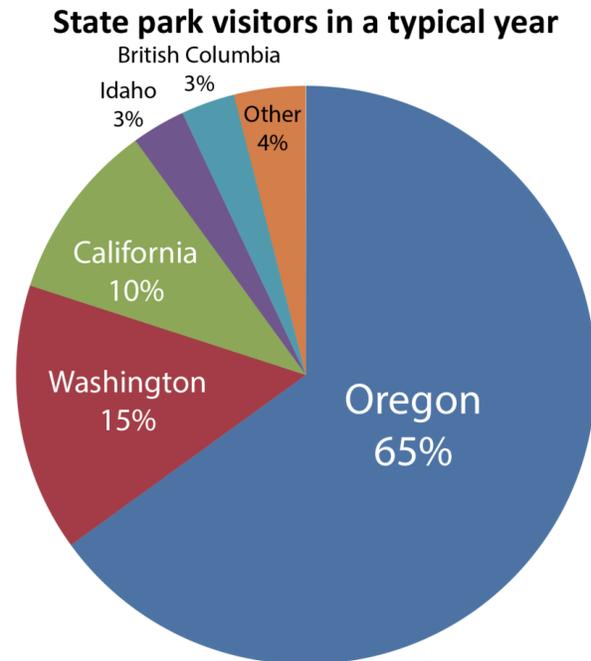
Scenic Bikeways

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.

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



Source: OPRD 2017-19 Budget: Overview

easements. ORTAC reviews applications submitted by local scenic trail proponents and makes recommendations to the Commission for scenic trail designation. Current designations include:

- Oregon Coast Trail – 15 sections – Clatsop, Tillamook, Lane, Douglas, Coos, Curry Counties
- Cape Falcon Trail (portion of Oregon Coast Trail) – Tillamook County
- Ecola Trail (portion of Oregon Coast Trail) – Tillamook County
- Cape Sebastian Trail (portion of Oregon Coast Trail) – Curry County
- Humbug Mountain Trail – Curry County
- Cape Lookout Trail – Tillamook Trail
- Saddle Mountain Trail – Clatsop County
- Dinah Moe Humm – Kiwa Butte Trail – Deschutes County
- Sterling Mine Ditch Trail - Jackson County
- Metolius-Windigo Trail – Deschutes County
- South Shore Phillips Lake Trail – Baker 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).

WATER TRAILS

Water trails are stretches of rivers, shorelines, or lakes that have been mapped 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 nine [designated water trails](#) in Oregon:

- Rogue River Water Trail,
- Alsea River Water Trail,
- Deschutes River Paddle Trail,
- Lower Columbia River Water Trail,
- Northwest Discovery Water Trail,
- Sandy River Water Trail,
- Siuslaw River Water Trail,
- Tillamook County Water Trail, and
- Willamette River Water Trail.

State Scenic Waterways Program

Oregonians voted two-to-one to establish the [Oregon Scenic Waterways Program](#) in 1970. 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 waterways. The program currently includes 22 waterways totaling 1,200 miles. 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. A candidate study is currently underway for a 17-mile section of the Nehalem River in Clatsop and Tillamook counties.

GRANT PROGRAMS

OPRD provides both funding assistance and outreach to Oregon's local communities through five recreation grant programs and six heritage grant programs. Since 1999, hundreds of recreation and heritage grants worth more than \$125 million have been awarded to cities, counties, nonprofits, and other groups. 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) Opportunity 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 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 by 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 guides the LWCF program and other OPRD-administered grant programs. It also provides recommendations to the state park system operations, administration, planning, development, and recreation programs.

OPRD 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.

General roles include assisting local and tribal governments; state and federal agencies; local historical societies, museums, and preservation organizations to preserve their historic sites and records; educating the public; promoting heritage tourism; and revitalizing historic districts and local economies.

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. 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.

OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

In 2017, with the passage of [House Bill 3350](#), the legislature established the Office of Outdoor Recreation (**Office**) within OPRD. The Office's purpose is to elevate outdoor recreation in every corner of the state. By collaborating with local, state, and federal agencies, nonprofits, and recreation-dependent businesses, the Office will develop and promote policies, legislation, and management practices that improve access, encourage public participation, and protect natural resources.

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