

Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission

September 20, 2023

Agenda Item: 6b

Action

Public Comment Allowed: **Yes**

Topic: Natural Areas Registration – Kingston Hills State Natural Area

Presented by: Noel Bacheller

Background: The Oregon Natural Areas Plan lists the rare species, ecosystems, and geological features present in Oregon and where they are represented by protected lands. OPRD maintains the Oregon register of State Natural Areas and is responsible for processing nominations and petitions received to voluntarily add lands to the register.

“Registration” and “dedication” are two vehicles for inclusion of properties on the register, with dedication being the more permanent arrangement. Privately owned lands that are protected through registration or dedication receive a waiver of land use conversion property taxes. Publicly-owned lands are registered because of ecological value without receiving a tax benefit. In all cases of registration, or dedication, the subject properties are required to be of high or unique ecological value.

The types of habitat that are eligible for inclusion on the register are described and cataloged in the State Natural Areas Plan as “ecosystem elements”. When enough examples of a particular ecosystem element are registered, that type is considered adequately represented and further registrations are no longer allowed for that element. Find more information about the Natural Areas Program from the Oregon Natural Areas Plan at

https://inr.oregonstate.edu/sites/inr.oregonstate.edu/files/2015_or_natural_areas_plan.pdf

Per legislation, the steps in processing registration nominations are as follows: OPRD Stewardship staff and the Oregon Biodiversity Information Center (or a convened review board, at OPRD discretion) collaboratively review petitions for meeting the requirements of the State Natural Area Plan. If the subject property meets the requirements and intent of the Plan, OPRD Stewardship staff bring the proposal for registration to the Parks Commission for final decision regarding registration.

In July of 2018, OPRD staff received a petition to register a private parcel in Linn County. The property was in the process of being transferred to the Greenbelt Land Trust for long term management and restoration. A brief description of the property, its ecological value, context, and reasons for registration are included as an attachment. This property, known as the Kingston Hills property, forms a 406-acre addition to the existing Kingston Prairie Reserve property that is already registered as a State Natural Area, and which was recently transferred to Greenbelt Land Trust. OPRD Staff reviewed the petition and concluded that portions of the subject property are of high ecological value and meet the intent of the State Natural Areas Plan. Other portions of the subject property were to be restored to high ecological value from their current status as agricultural fields and could be reasonably expected to provide eligible natural area conditions with active restoration.

Because this property's management as a natural area required conversion of agricultural fields to native prairie through active and intensive restoration, this property was "provisionally registered" with a requirement that the landowners check back in with OPRD after 5 years to verify restoration success. These five years have now elapsed. Because of delays in starting restoration related to acquisition and grant funding availability, the fields are scheduled to begin transition out of agriculture in Fall of 2023. Restoration is behind schedule by 5 years.

Prior Action by the Commission: The "Kingston Hills addition" was provisionally registered by the Commission in 2018. Adjacent property formerly owned by The Nature Conservancy (the Kingston Prairie Reserve), and now by Greenbelt Land Trust, was registered by the State Land Board in 1997 (when the State Natural Areas program was administered by the Department of State Lands).

Action Requested: Staff recommend that the Commission renew the provisional restoration to allow for another 5-year period of restoration. After 5 years, the property could again be assessed for restoration success and potential full registration status.

Attachment: Registration background

Prepared by: Noel Bacheller

OREGON PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
OREGON REGISTER OF NATURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES
SUMMARY FORM

1. NATURAL AREA NAME: Santiam-Kingston Hills
2. LOCATION: Linn County, about 4 miles south-southeast of Stayton, T9S, R1E, located in Sec. 17, 18, 19 and 20
3. SIZE: 406.19 acres
4. OWNERSHIP: James and Linda Sander (Greenbelt Land Trust)¹
5. CONSENT OF OWNER (PRIVATE), DATE: July 12, 2018
6. REGISTER CATEGORY: Registered State Natural Area
7. PRINCIPAL NATURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES: Willamette Valley Ecoregion: Douglas fir-bigleaf maple forest with some grand fir- #7; Oregon white oak-Douglas fir/snowberry woodland- #9; Oregon white oak/grass savanna- #11; Oregon white oak/poison oak-snowberry/blue wildrye woodland- #12; Roemer fescue valley grassland- #14; tufted hairgrass valley bottomland prairie, with vernal pools and brush prairie- #24; tufted hairgrass-California oatgrass bottomland prairie- #25; and riparian area dominated by Oregon ash, black cottonwood and snowberry- #34.
8. SPECIAL SPECIES: *Oncorhynchus mykiss* pop. 31 (Steelhead (Upper Willamette River ESU, winter run)); *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha* pop. 23 (Chinook salmon (Upper Willamette River ESU, spring run)); *Oregonichthys crameri* (Oregon chub- adjacent property's backwater habitat supported by year round spring on this natural area); *Actinemys marmorata* (Western pond turtle); *Progne subis* (Purple martin).
9. EVALUATION OF CRITERIA FOR REGISTRATION
 - A. PRIORITY IN PLAN: Willamette Valley (WV) #9 is an unrepresented, High Priority natural area need (page 61). WV #34 is a second unfilled, High Priority need (page 62), and WV #14 is an important type already assumed to be protected at this site. The other listed ecosystem types present, WV #7, 11, 12, 24, and 25 are adequately represented at other locations.
 - B. ADEQUATE REPRESENTATION: Currently, the size, scope and condition of this property provides adequate representation of Willamette Valley type # 7, 11, 25 and 34, the last of which is not represented on a natural area elsewhere in the ecoregion. The high priority ecosystem type # 9 will only be adequately represented after restoration, since its current condition precludes adequate representation.
 - C. DEGREE OF DISTURBANCE: This property contains high quality, minimally disturbed natural habitats, along with areas currently used for agriculture and lacking natural values. All farmland areas at the site will be restored to grassland prairie in the near future. Greenbelt has been highly successful in large scale restoration projects and will have a detailed management plan to address restoration needs.

¹Greenbelt Land Trust plans to purchase the 406.19 acre property from owners Jim and Linda Sandner no later than January 31st, 2019, and intends to keep this property on the register, and perhaps pursue dedication.

- D. VIABILITY: This site is one property within a complex of other protected lands totaling nearly 1,000 acres of land protected and managed for fish and wildlife.
- E. UNIQUE GEOLOGICAL VALUES: None known.
- F. PRIORITY FOR SPECIAL SPECIES: All three fish species, Steelhead, Chinook salmon and Oregon chub, are priority species on list 1. Western pond turtle and purple martin are also prioritized on list 2 of taxa.
- G. SPECIAL SPECIES PROTECTION CAPABILITY: The site provides incremental protection of an important stretch of the North Santiam River downstream of the Big Cliff and Detroit dams, which provides habitat for recovering Chinook and Steelhead populations, Oregon chub, and Western pond turtles. Its floodplain forest and associated open water provides habitat for purple martin, which is not currently present but likely to occur after restoration. Rare plant species including Bradshaw's lomatium (*Lomatium bradshawii*) and the Willamette Valley daisy (*Erigeron decumbens*), not currently present are likely to occur after restoration of the grassland component of the property primarily due to the connections this property provides to the adjacent high quality prairie habitat at Kingston Prairie Preserve (registered property with the Natural Heritage Program) .
- H. MANAGEABILITY: Greenbelt Land Trust, upon ownership, will manage the property in conjunction with 155-acres of adjacent protected land. The Greenbelt is formulating a management plan to identify appropriate actions to steward and restore the Santiam-Kingston Hills property and to meet the conservation purposes of the project.
10. SPECIAL REMARKS OR COMMENTS: This site reduces fragmentation of habitats by preserving and restoring diverse habitats within a network of protected conservation areas in the North Santiam River watershed and will provide an expansion of the Kingston Prairie Preserve (already registered in the program). The area is within two Conservation Opportunity Areas identified by ODFW: Santiam Confluence (COA 078), and Kingston Prairie-Scio Oak Pine Savanna (COA 079).
12. DATE OF ORBIC STAFF APPROVAL: July 18, 2018.
13. SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Oregon Natural Areas Program, PO Box 751, Mailstop: INR, Portland, OR, 97207; Greenbelt Land Trust, PO Box 1721, Corvallis, OR 97339.
14. IMPORTANCE OF THE SITE IN LAY TERMS: Located along the lower North Santiam River, the parcel is a relatively large conservation property for the Willamette Valley. It contains remnants of native vegetation and has the opportunity to restore more native vegetation to create a mosaic of prairies, savannas, oak woodlands, riparian forests, and river channels, all within a complex of other nearby areas dedicated to wildlife conservation. The site hosts a variety of native wildlife including Chinook salmon, winter steelhead, Oregon chub, western pond turtle, and over 50 species of birds documented last spring including purple martin, western meadowlark, yellow-breasted chat, and willow flycatcher, as well as raptors, waterfowl, and neotropical migratory songbirds. Blacktailed deer and Roosevelt elk also inhabit the property and find refuge in the woodlands and riparian forests.

