

RIVERS TO RIDGES

Government and nonprofits band together for open spaces in Lane County BY STACEY M. HOLLIS

The first thing outdoorsy newcomers to Eugene might want to know is “Where are the parks?” and “What hiking spots are nearby?”

It can be a little confusing — who owns what and why one area is closed to hikers and another area isn’t — because a lot of different organizations and entities oversee Lane County’s recreational and conservation hotspots. Some have been set aside and left to the devices of nature while others are under active habitat management or undergoing recreational planning and development.

While parks are in high demand, each space requires its own share of management and restoration to maintain the health of the natural ecosystem it supports. This is where the collaborative efforts and vision of the growing Rivers to Ridges (R2R) partnership comes in.

R2R is a framework that brings together existing open spaces and targets future areas by uniting entities like cities, government agencies and conservation groups with public input. View the vision on a map and you see the interconnectedness of Lane County’s green spaces and waterways and the places where people can access these natural resources.

The R2R vision or partnership is “a blueprint, a vision that says, knowing what we know about what people like about this community and the resources that we have, what can we do when the opportunity comes up to ensure that my children, my grandchildren, their grandchildren can enjoy those same sorts of things,” says Joe Moll, executive director of McKenzie River Trust, one of the participating groups.

The “key players” in the R2R vision range across the entire political spectrum, and there’s a reason for that, says Jeff Krueger, senior landscape architect of Lane Council of Governments (LCOG). “We all ultimately have a similar underlying motivation for preserving beautiful places.”

Krueger describes the partnership as “not unlike the model used by the watershed councils, bringing all the key players together for collaboration and sharing of resources.”

He offers Arlie Land Company as an example of an entity that was motivated to join the partnership. “They were interested in participating in a sale of a portion of their property,” Krueger says, “and one of the incentives for them was just knowing that for future development, having a healthy open space system adjacent to development areas is really important for property owners today.”



R2R PARTNERS

Lane Council of Governments
McKenzie Watershed Council
The Nature Conservancy
City of Eugene
McKenzie River Trust
City of Springfield
Willamalane Park & Recreation District
Lane County Parks
Eugene Water & Electric Board
Willamette Riverkeeper
Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife
Metropolitan Wastewater Management Commission
Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
Long Tom Watershed Council
Coast Fork Willamette Watershed Council
Middle Fork Willamette Watershed Council

Krueger says that R2R is “strictly a voluntary collaboration of partners that have similar interests” with no funding requirements. He says that by “signing onto this conceptual vision,” new partners commit to R2R by offering support and working together toward “implementing the vision.”

“We joined the Rivers to Ridges partnership,” says Dana Detrick, coordinator and executive director of the Long Tom Watershed Council, “because our mission to improve water quality and fish and wildlife using local knowledge and voluntary action fits in well with the components of the R2R mission.”

Thanks to the partnership, the Long Tom council now works closely with the McKenzie River Trust.

McKenzie River Trust coordinator Liz Lawrence says the group can turn to Long Tom, “when we need resources or advice or a real working partnership on the ground, or if we don’t have the restoration capacity to do projects on the level that they can.” She adds, “We have the land and they have the technical know-how they can bring to the table to benefit the habitat and the fish and wildlife there.”

So what’s the future of R2R? “It ebbs and flows as different projects arise, different members of the partnership come together and work together,” Moll says, “On a regular basis the partners get together and share technical information or executive level folks get together and say ‘hey, here are the big-picture funding or legislative (developments) we see coming, here are opportunities, here are things we need to watch for.’ So it’s really a gathering place, a forum for sharing that information.”

“We realize we’ve all got different strengths,” says Val Rogers about the Rivers to Ridges partnership. Rogers is development director for Friends of Buford Park & Mount Pisgah. “For us, balancing recreation and habitat enhancement is right at the core of our mission so that’s always a big focus that people have to work with: how to make it work for both people and nature ... but we’re committed to exactly that.”

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For a map of the R2R vision go to: wky.ws/195

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