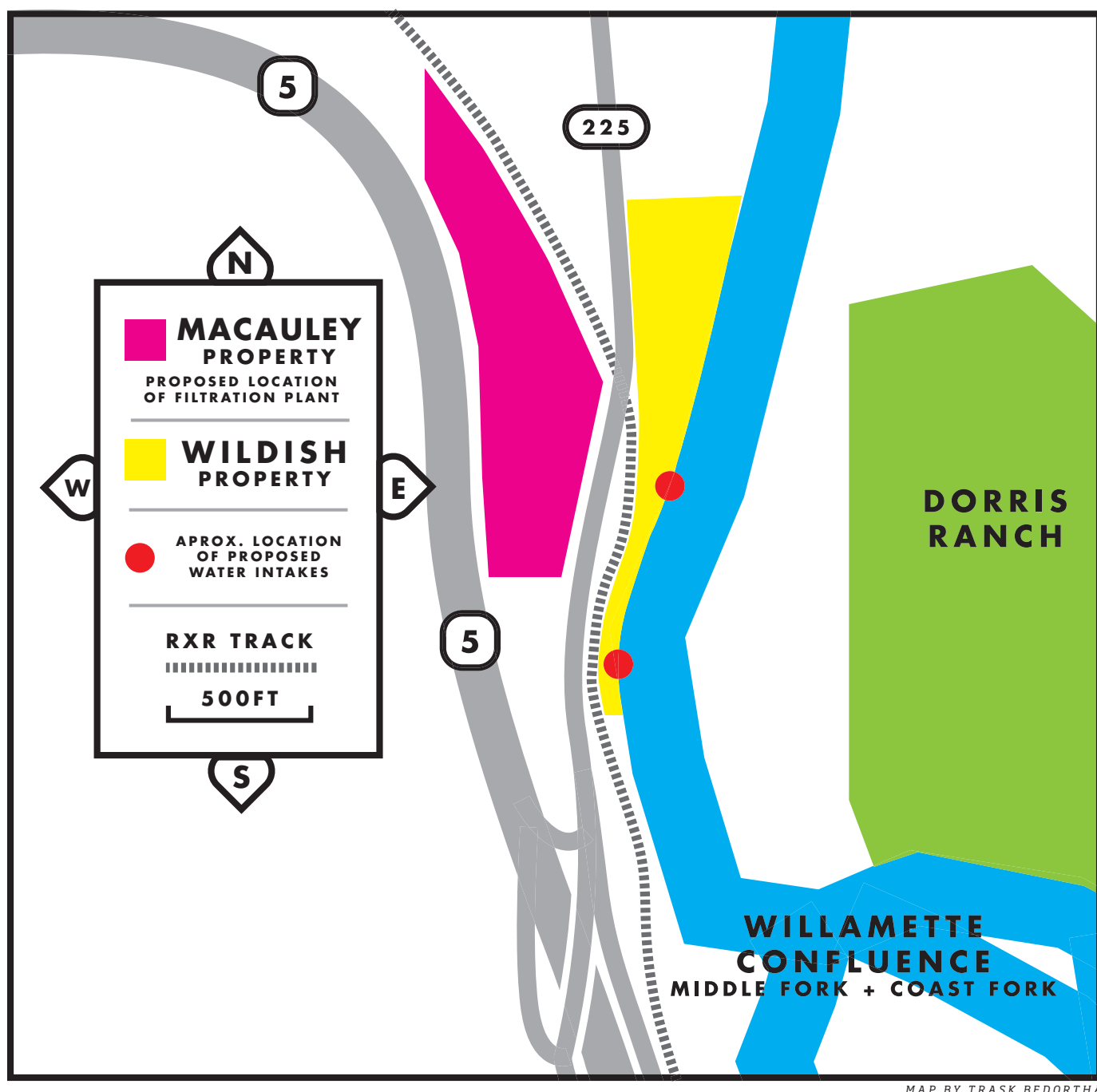




river really starts to run through town — to help avoid the major stormwater outflows in downtown Springfield and Eugene.

Priority dates on water rights matter because they mean that those with older rights have priority over newer rights. “The permit language for the Willamette restricts our withdrawal during very low water conditions,” Parisi says.

EWEB will pull its water from just below the confluence of the Coast and Middle forks of the Willamette River.

At the Nov. 10 water forum EWEB’s water engineering supervisor, Wally McCullough, said that water from the Willamette would in the future enter the system at a rate of one to two million gallons per day. And Parisi says EWEB would be capable of treating the full 19 million gallons a day that it has the right to.

It has not yet been determined where in EWEB’s water system it would enter.

You can’t get a permit for water you are not using, Mattick says.

A Point of Diversion

On a chilly November day, the Willamette River flows swiftly by the graveled road near the planned intake. Canada geese paddle in the river and a red-tailed hawk wings its way through the trees.

Fans of nude sunbathing might recognize the area where EWEB plans to pull water from the Willamette. It’s upstream from Glenwood near the area known as the Willamette Confluence. Glassbar Island, once home to nudity aficionados, is nearby.

Informal access to Glassbar on foot — it’s a state park that can only be reached by boat — was cut off in 2013

100 years of ‘polluted Willamette’ headlines have etched a public perception of the river as a potential threat to public health – even though in other parts of the U.S. and world, the upper Willamette would be considered near pristine.

when restoration work in the area began. That restoration work is a key element in cleaning and cooling the water in the Willamette River.

Unlike the McKenzie, touted for its clean, clear waters, the Willamette has been maligned as polluted for decades. The majority of that pollution, however, is downstream in urban areas such as Portland. Sarah Dyrdaahl of the Middle Fork Watershed Council says the Middle Fork largely flows through protected lands with its headwater in the Willamette National Forest. One of the headwaters is

Waldo Lake, “some of the clearest, cleanest water in the world,” she says, and the other is in the Diamond Peak Wilderness Area.

“From a water quality perspective, the Middle Fork water is quite nice,” Dyrdaahl says.

She says that Oakridge, West Fir, Lowell and Springfield draw from the Middle Fork. Adding Eugene “seems to fit.” Dyrdaahl says EWEB is a good steward of its water source.

Karl Morgenstern, EWEB’s source protection coordinator, says the utility is working on coordinating water source protection efforts with cities that pull from the Willamette downstream, like Corvallis, Wilsonville and Sherwood.

“It’s fantastic if we get all our utilities to think in the same vein,” Dyrdaahl says, “proactively protecting the source before it’s degraded.”

The Coast Fork of the Willamette tends to be warmer and shallower, but Morgenstern says he is still studying the dynamic between the two rivers and which water dominates at a given time.

The Middle Fork tends to dominate, but a flood event could affect that. The Coast Fork has a couple dams on it, and the Middle Fork has Hills Creek, Lookout Point and Dexter reservoirs; flows are controlled by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Fishermen tend to release resident fish, such as bass caught from the Cottage Grove Reservoir on the Coast Fork, because they pick up naturally occurring mercury. But “mercury has not been detected in any of the 18 water samples collected at the proposed intake site over the past three years,” Parisi says.

Morgenstern says that because Hwy. 58 and a rail line run alongside the Willamette, it faces possible oil and coal cars in addition to the tanker-trucks that run next to it and