



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Portland is seeing success in keeping sewage out of the Willamette River with a system to keep rain runoff separate from sewage flows. Sewer dumps went unabated for 100 years before the city built a treatment plant in 1951.

Safe for Swimming

continued ▲ *from front*

An annual report presented by the City of Portland's Environmental Services in January said the projects completed to date have already reduced Combined Sewage Overflow volume into the Willamette River by about two thirds.

"Even though we still have about 50 CSOs per year, the volume has been reduced dramatically by our projects," he said. "So that means bacteria levels in the rivers are lower than they used to be."

According to Mann, once the project is complete there is expected to be just four sewer overflows every winter, and one every third summer.

The project has included the construction of seven tunnel access shafts, new connecting pipelines and the Portsmouth Force Main, which will channel sewage from the Swan Island Pump Station to the Columbia Boulevard Wastewater Treatment Plant.

According to the agency, ex-

posure to the bacteria is the greatest health risk and concern for people who swim within the Willamette's waters.

Drake said, however, after looking at the data collected from the site there is a minimal health risk by merely swimming within its depths.

...the community benefits because the projects employ a lot of people, and there was a lot of money spent in the local area from a project like this.

— **Linc Mann, the Bureau of environmental Services Spokesperson**

"Our data suggests it is very safe to swim in the river in the summer months," he said.

According to Mann, the city of Portland both historically exists and has a bright outlook for the future because of the Willamette

River. He said, however, the portion of the Willamette River that flows through the city was misused for a long time.

"When Portland was first built, all of the sewers were designed to drain into the river from houses and streets," he said.

Nearly 70 percent of Oregonians

live within 20 miles of the river, which with its tributaries, form the Willamette Valley and basin that contains two-thirds of Oregon's population, including residents of both Salem and Oregon's most populated city, Portland.

Mann said the sewage dumps went unabated for 100 years before the city built a treatment plant in 1951. "So it was decades of just funneling pollution into the river, and the river got pretty nasty for a while," he said.

Mann said one detail of the program, which includes dozens of projects, is the estimated cost throughout the 20 years is \$1.4 billion dollars. "That's a lot of money," he said. "But the community benefits because the projects employ a lot of people, and there was a lot of money spent in the local area from a project like this."

Throughout the years, a big portion of sewer rates, paid by residents quarterly, was dedicated to going towards CSO projects. Last month, the sewer rates were raised by 6 percent. Mann said, however, the rates have been increasing since they began the program.

"It has been a burden on sewer rate payers," he said. "But we like to look at this as an investment in a cleaner river, which is an investment in the whole livability for the

community."

While there are several portions of the project, including the main project on the east side of the river, yet to be completed, Mann said it has been really gratifying to see the plan come into fruition.

"We are finally at a point where we are going to wrap this up and move on into the future," he said. "We finished tunneling last October, and now we are connecting all of the combined sewers to the tunnel, which should be completed this fall."

Although during the wet season the propensity for CSOs become higher, the City of Portland has a River Alert Program, which issues a public advisory each time there is overflow into the river. The warning, which extends for 48 hours after the rain has stopped, the city said they recommend avoiding activities that during which, people could swallow the water.

For information regarding the River Alert Program or CSO advisory warnings, visit the city of Portland website or call 503-823-2479.

Surgeon Follows Heart to Mohave Dessert

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youth escape becoming a fatal statistic and explore other options.

Though Noble advocates military service as one avenue out of useless

street violence, he agrees it's not for everyone and he prefers to promote college upon not only his sons, but for all youth in the community.

Noble hopes to gain experience in the Navy as it relates to cardio

thoracic and heart surgery, and says, "Eventually I would like to come back home to Portland, Oregon and put that experience to good use."

Eager to stay close to his family, Noble chose 29 Palms out of his

three other choices of Fresno, Guam and Japan to complete his two years general surgery for the Navy. He will then return to the civilian world where he will continue specialty training in heart and lung medicine.

Prior to California, Noble must complete five weeks of military service in Rhode Island.

"All though I lived all over the country, Portland has always been a place I've call home," he said.