

The Oregonian

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2009

METRO

B

NEWSROOM: 503-221-8100
NEWSROOM@NEWS.OREGONIAN.COM

NEWS FROM THE PORTLAND AREA AND THE NORTHWEST

Wild, scenic riverside will be new park

Recreation | Oregon buys the first part of a large site along the John Day

By **ERIC MORTENSON**
THE OREGONIAN

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department announced Wednesday it has bought the initial piece of what eventually will be the state's largest recreation site: 16,000 acres along a 16-mile stretch of the lower John Day River.

The department, using Oregon Lottery money, paid \$2.2 million for the first 2,403 acres of 8,000 acres owned by the Portland-based Western Rivers Conservancy. That group bought the property for \$7.8 million in 2008 when a cattle ranch came on the market.

The department, aware of the property's potential value as a park, tracked the purchase and afterward began negotiations with the conservancy.

Please see **STATE PARK**, Page B4

State park: Plans include car camping, aquatic uses

Continued from Page B1

The property, along the border of Sherman and Gilliam counties, is adjacent to another 8,000 acres owned by the federal Bureau of Land Management. Western Rivers Conservancy owns the grazing rights on that land, assuring it also will be reserved for recreation.

The combined properties lie between Wasco and Condon on both sides of the John Day River. The waterway is the longest remaining free-flowing river in the West and hosts the largest wild spring and fall chinook runs in northeast Oregon. It also has what may be the Columbia River basin's healthiest run of wild summer steelhead.

Sue Doroff, the conservancy's

vice president, said in a news release that the group recognized the "exceptional" nature of the John Day River property and acted quickly when the ranch came on the market.

The parks department had targeted the John Day region for parks development, spokesman Chris Havel said.

"Western Rivers Conservancy was ready and able to move on the property, and it was good fortune for everybody that they were able to bring money to the table and purchase the property," he said.

In a prepared statement, parks department Director Tim Wood said, "I think our descendants will look back on this moment as a pivotal time in the conservation and recreation history of the John Day River."

The property is expected to open as a state park in 2013. The department intends to use

lottery funds to buy the rest of the property over time.

Preliminary plans approved by the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Commission include car camping and boat-accessible camping sites, hiking and other recreational options.

Havel said the site is "magnificent," with the wild river bending through towering hills, rock formations and grasslands. The park site is less than three hours' driving time from Portland, he said.

He said the stunning scenery of the

John Day country may surprise Oregonians who haven't ventured to that part of the state.

"I look forward to seeing the look on people's faces when they discover this property," he said.

Eric Mortenson: ericmortenson@news.oregonian.com;
503-294-7636

