

News Release
September 29, 2009
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Land purchase opens door to major new state park along John Day River

Western Rivers Conservancy and Oregon Parks and Recreation Department collaborate to protect outstanding riverfront property

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department is proud to announce what could become the most important new state park in a generation with the purchase of over 2,400 acres along the lower John Day River from Western Rivers Conservancy.

A remarkably scenic new state park located between Wasco and Condon is being forged in collaboration with the private, nonprofit Western Rivers Conservancy. The new park will ultimately protect both banks of approximately 16 miles of the John Day River—the longest free-flowing river in the West—and offer extraordinary recreation on the river and in the surrounding hills.

“This is a park for the future, for people who know we become fully Oregonian when we enjoy the outdoors,” says Tim Wood, Director of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. “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.”

Sue Doroff, Western Rivers Conservancy’s Vice President, explains, “When this ranch came on the market, we knew that we needed to act quickly to conserve this special landscape. The John Day is an exceptional river that supports the healthiest runs of summer steelhead in the Columbia basin, and this ranch offers the opportunity to create a major new conservation and recreation area for fish, wildlife and people. Bringing these 16,000 acres of riverfront and hilly grasslands into the State Parks system is a huge benefit for both the John Day River and all Oregonians.”

Over time, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will spend Lottery funds— dedicated to improve and expand state parks by Oregon voters in 1998—to purchase 8,000 acres from the Conservancy, and work together to manage all 16,000 acres as a unit (the remaining 8,000 acres are grazing rights on Bureau of Land Management property). It would become the largest state park recreation experience in Oregon, and is adjacent to an existing state park property (J.S. Burres, a small river access point). On Friday, September 25, the Department purchased the first 2,443 acres from Western Rivers for \$2.3 million. The nonprofit is working closely with the Department to manage the entire property during the transition to benefit the landscape and the people who are destined to enjoy the opportunities afforded by this spectacular place.

The conservation opportunity for this property is significant. As a large, relatively intact natural river system with no history of hatcheries, remote from urban pressure, and high in restoration potential, the John Day is extraordinary for Oregon and the northwest. The John Day River hosts the largest remaining wild spring and fall Chinook runs in northeast Oregon, and has the healthiest run of wild summer steelhead in the Columbia basin. These and other threatened, at-risk, and desirable species— including Oregon’s largest herd of California big-horn sheep—will benefit from

the new state park. The park will also boast some of the best native grassland and sagebrush shrub-steppe habitat on the Columbia plateau.

Though the property is not yet open to the public as a state park, planning will begin shortly. The Oregon State Park and Recreation Commission approved a series of preliminary management goals for the property with its acquisition. These include habitat work, a small, vehicle-accessible campground and other boat-in camping and river-access opportunities, and hiking and other nature-based recreation. The park could open as early as 2013. People interested in staying in touch with the park planning process can sign up for a mailing list by sending an email to chris.havel@state.or.us. Western Rivers is conducting streamside restoration on portions of the property with help from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Gilliam County.

The new park will aim to preserve and enhance the low-key, natural, intimate quality of the landscape and river.

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Editors Note //

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Photos:

john-day-new-state-park-1.jpg, Courtesy Western Rivers Conservancy, Photographer Peter Marbach

john-day-new-state-park-2.jpg, Courtesy Western Rivers Conservancy, Photographer Peter Marbach

Location map:

<http://tinyurl.com/yafnrc8>

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The Western Rivers Conservancy is a Portland-based nonprofit with offices in California and Montana. The organization protects outstanding river ecosystems in the western United States, acquiring land to conserve critical habitat, providing public access for compatible use and enjoyment, and cooperating with other agencies and organizations to secure the health of whole ecosystems.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department manages a 100,000 acre state park system serving 2 million campers and 40 million day visitors, oversees the state scenic waterway program, recreation trails, the 362-mile public ocean shore, and the State Historic Preservation Office.