

# COLUMBIA SLOUGH WATERSHED COUNCIL

Annual Report  
July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020





# **COLUMBIA SLOUGH WATERSHED COUNCIL**

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Portland, OR 97218

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# OUR MISSION

*To protect and enhance the Columbia Slough and its watershed through community engagement, education and restoration.*

The Columbia Slough Watershed Council brings community members together to enhance the hidden gem we call the Columbia Slough. We improve water quality, heal damaged fish and wildlife habitat, increase public awareness, and advocate for a healthy watershed. Everything we do is possible thanks to the commitment of community members and engagement of local agencies and businesses.



## EVENTS



## STEWARDSHIP



## EDUCATION



## VOLUNTEER









## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear friends of the Columbia Slough,

I will be honest. This letter has been hard to write. Our fiscal year of July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020 includes the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. When I reviewed the first draft of this report, I was struck by how the final four months of the report period—March to July—loomed largest in each staff person’s mind as they wrote their section. In fact, when reading it, one could easily forget that the majority of the reporting period was under what might best be referred to as “normal” conditions, and that there had been eight months of routine and raucous community events, Slough School, and volunteer habitat projects before COVID-19 changed everything. But there were! And this report chronicles those highlights, as well as the many adaptations that we’ve made since the arrival of COVID-19 to continue working for the watershed.

Throughout the Council's 26-year history, we have found joy in bringing people and nature together. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck and all in-person gatherings were halted, we worried. What about the kids who were looking forward to celebrating the end of the school year with a canoe trip on the Slough? What of the English ivy encroaching on last year's native tree plantings? Fortunately, with the support of key funders, we have been able to adapt our work to meet the changing times and protocols. We’ve transitioned to working primarily from home and modified all in-person programming to protect public health, while still creating much-needed opportunities for community members to be active, give back, learn, and spend healing time outdoors.

The pandemic has hurt us all in different ways, but we recognize that communities of color have been disproportionately affected, with Black, Latinx, and

Native American people bearing a higher burden at every stage, from infection rates to access challenges for remote learning and less sense of safety when spending time in nature.

In this era of glaring inequities and heightened uncertainty, it is especially important to assert the Council’s values: We believe that everyone deserves to experience the solace of time in nature and to not be burdened by an unhealthy environment. We believe that the Columbia Slough is for all of us, and as an organization, we pledge to help make that a reality.

You can see the pledge in practice throughout the pages of this annual report. We’ve partnered with local organizations like *ViveNW* and the *Slavic Community Center* to create more welcoming events; helped to create green workforce development opportunities for youth of color through collaborations with *Verde*, *Voz*, and *The Blueprint Foundation*; and served primarily Title I schools and low-income students through our education program. This past year has made plain that a healthy, diverse community and a healthy Columbia Slough are inextricably bound to one another. We are committed to both.

Sincerely,

Cathy Kellon  
Executive Director





# EVENTS

## THE SLOUGH IS FOR EVERYONE

Our events provide free opportunities for individuals and groups to learn about and fall in love with the Columbia Slough watershed. From biking and birding to canoeing and clean-ups, there is something for everyone.

This year was full of family-friendly events and educational opportunities including our annual Regatta, offering fun and engaging opportunities for hundreds of individuals and families to discover the Columbia Slough and our watershed. As always, our Bat Night and Owl Prowl outings were a huge hit and filled up immediately, thanks to our local bird and bat expert, Elaine Murphy.

Of course, this year brought unexpected challenges so we found creative ways for people to safely explore the Slough, including a free canoe and kayak rental program, available to anyone and everyone interested in experiencing the Slough up close. We also started a new series of interpretive nature walks with supplementary online content. The lessons we have learned from this year will carry into future programming as we continue to adapt to changing times and respond to community needs.



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH SPOTLIGHT

The Council continuously works to strengthen the effectiveness of our outreach and education events, with a particular focus on improving accessibility and equity. Early this year, we had the opportunity to collaborate with representatives of the Latinx community to reflect on and improve upon one of our most popular educational workshops: Groundwater 101. With guidance from *Vive NW*, a local non-profit that focuses on diversifying participation in the outdoors, Latinx community members participated in the workshop and later came together for a facilitated focus group discussion to reflect on their experiences. We look forward to implementing the insights from this collaboration and explore ways to make this and other events more inclusive.





# 1,593

TOTAL EVENT PARTICIPANTS

# 44%

IDENTIFIED AS BLACK, INDIGENOUS, OR PERSON OF COLOR\*



# 25%

SPEAK ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE\*

\* BASED ON SAMPLE OF ATTENDEES WHO COMPLETED OPTIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

*Aquifer Adventure was a new event for us this year and it was great! ZAPs learned about aquifers, green cleaners and water conservation, and were able to provide programming in Spanish. It was a large, lively event and the ZAPs enjoyed it."*

- Aquifer Adventure ZAP Youth Volunteer Group



# STEWARDSHIP

## HELPING A HIDDEN GEM SHINE

Our Stewardship program works with local agencies, businesses, and community members to enhance critical native habitats across the watershed. With hands-on support from volunteers and green workforce development crews, we install rain gardens, pull trash from the Slough, and restore natural areas.

# 12,669

NATIVE PLANTS INSTALLED

# 16,000

SQUARE FEET OF INVASIVE WEEDS REMOVED



## GREEN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

For many of our habitat enhancement projects, we partner with nonprofits that mentor, train, and employ people of color and low-income community members in environmental careers in order to provide local, living-wage jobs and give youth an opportunity to acquire skills and connections to prepare them for professions in the environmental sector.

This year, we worked with the *Blueprint Foundation* to engage youth in the design and installation of floating engineered wetlands. The participants tested multiple design mock-ups before building four to scale, installing them at Whitaker Ponds, and monitoring them for stability and ecological impact. We also partnered with *Verde* on their 'Labor to Leaders' program. Through this collaboration, Council and *BES* staff facilitated natural resources project management training, which included creating planting plans and leading youth crews. We also had the opportunity to work with *Voz* to lead crews in a restoration skills workshop. The enhancement and protection of urban habitat is an important way to support the local economy and community members.





# 324

CUBIC FEET OF TRASH  
REMOVED



# 13

PUBLIC  
STEWARDSHIP  
EVENTS



*"There's something very humanizing about putting on gloves with 50 other people and digging holes for two hours while it's raining. I think that even the simple act of planting native shrubs and flowers has really lasting impacts and is an investment not only in our watershed and natural areas, but in our communities and future generations."*

- Anthony Thorn, Stewardship Volunteer



# EDUCATION

## INSPIRING FUTURE STEWARDS

Our Education Program, also referred to as Slough School, helps youth understand their connection to the land and water in their communities while giving them opportunities to be environmental stewards of the watershed.

Slough School programming is free for all K-12 students who attend school within the Columbia Slough watershed. Our program helps fill the gap in environmental education opportunities by prioritizing Title I schools. In the classroom and out in the field, students explore the living and nonliving parts of this urban ecosystem, gain knowledge of current and past environmental issues, and participate in projects to improve their local environment.



## DISTANCE LEARNING

In response to the global pandemic, our Education team quickly pivoted this spring from hands-on classroom activities to online video lessons and downloadable activities. Our new Slough School Online website page provides parents, teachers, and students with the resources they need to continue their educational journeys from home.

**3,799**  
ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL  
STUDENTS



**661**  
MIDDLE AND  
HIGH SCHOOL  
STUDENTS



**354**  
SCHOOL STAFF  
AND ADULTS



## SLOUGH SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT



**4,460** TOTAL NUMBER OF YOUTH CONTACTS

**69%** STUDENTS OF COLOR

**88%** LOW-INCOME



**1,500**

NATIVE PLANTS  
PLANTED BY STUDENTS

**20** SCHOOLS AND ORGANIZATIONS SERVED



*"Your lesson on Vanport was totally rad and I loved it. You had the kids so involved. You are a natural teacher, girlfriend."*

- Slough School Parent



# VOLUNTEER

## HELPING HANDS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Each year, hundreds of community members contribute their time and talents to make the Columbia Slough watershed a better place. From pulling invasive plants to hauling garbage to teaching kids about ecology, our volunteers make a big difference.

2019-20 was no exception. We kicked off the year with two of our big summer festivals, Regatta and Aquifer Adventure. When fall arrived, our stewardship season went into full swing with nearly 500 volunteers caring for sites throughout our watershed. Then, spring came and COVID-19 arrived in our community. Many of our usual volunteer events had to be cancelled or adapted to accommodate safe social distancing practices. In response to this challenge, we began offering smaller, more intimate volunteer opportunities, as well as online resources to facilitate independent community service projects. We also began planning this year for a new program to recruit and train bilingual paddle leaders in collaboration with *Vive NW* and *Slavic Community Center of NW*.

Despite new challenges in 2019-20, our volunteers contributed thousands of hours to help fulfill our mission to protect and enhance the Columbia Slough watershed.



848

TOTAL VOLUNTEERS

3,012

VOLUNTEER HOURS



## PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

**55th Cascadia Scouts** is a traditional scout group founded in 2013 in North and Northeast Portland. The group is open to all genders and ages, and has core values of democratic participation and social justice. Throughout the years, the Scouts have volunteered at events such as Holiday Tree Toss, Regatta, and Great Slough Clean Up, and often bring their own canoe fleet to join the efforts. When the Council started socially distanced volunteer opportunities during the pandemic, 55th Cascadia jumped back into their canoes for one of our adapted Great Slough Clean Up events.

*“Our Scouts have a lot of fun at Council events, whether being a boat concierge at Regatta, removing trash, or planting trees. Many Scouts start with us as young as 5 years old and get to see the positive impacts of having a long-term relationship with the Slough.” - Ethan Jewett, Co-Founder and Scout Leader, 55th Cascadia*



## PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

When COVID-19 struck in March, we at the Council immediately asked ourselves: “How can we fulfill our mission and connect with community members to care for the watershed while keeping everyone safe?” It turns out that we were not the only ones asking that question. Watershed groups across the metro region started to email and Zoom with each other and came up with an answer: Together for Watersheds — a collaboration of 27 watershed organizations. We take turns creating and sharing accessible online content with ideas for exploring your backyard, projects to improve local habitat, and tours of metro natural areas. The pandemic has been challenging, but our fellow watershed groups remind us that we are all in this together.

Join “Together for Watersheds” on Facebook for educational and inspiring videos to enjoy from home.



**32** PADDLE TEAM MEMBERS

## VOLUNTEER HOURS

123  
OFFICE HOURS

283  
SLOUGH SCHOOL HOURS

1,141  
COMMUNITY EVENT HOURS

1,468  
STEWARDSHIP HOURS

*"My kids and I learned that just as we enjoyed the Slough, it was our responsibility to give back to this wonderful piece of nature within our city that could also be accessible to others in our communities. So for more than half of a decade we have been volunteering with the Council."*

- Mauricio Somilleda





# VIRTUAL SLOUGH CELEBRATION GALA



To protect public health, we could not gather in person as usual for the annual Slough Celebration Gala in April, but we did not want the year to slip by without recognizing the contributions of community members who have improved the health of the Slough. Staff and board rallied to create “Alt Gala,” an event delivered entirely online, complete with a virtual auction, live video stream, and real-time trivia for program viewers. Those who tuned in enjoyed remarks from Council staff and board members, stories from volunteers, and words of congratulations for our Henrietta Award winners. Despite the unusual circumstances, our first ever virtual Slough Celebration Gala was a humbling and welcome reminder of just how deeply our friends and neighbors care for the Slough.

## HENRIETTA AWARD WINNERS

While 2020 has been a challenging year on many levels, this year also highlighted the leaders, visionaries, activists and community educators that continue to provide hope for our future. We are proud to recognize two of those individuals as our 2020 Henrietta Award Winners: Nestor Campos and Reed Wagner.



**Reed Wagner, *Levee Ready Columbia***

Reed Wagner served as the former Executive Director of the *Multnomah County Drainage District (MCDD)*. While at *MCDD*, Reed jump-started the modernization of the 100+ year old levee system that shapes our watershed. A key part of this work involved co-founding *Levee Ready Columbia (LRC)*, a partnership of over twenty public, private, and community organizations dedicated to finding cooperative solutions to the levee management system. In 2019, legislation passed in the state capitol that enabled the creation of a new district to replace the existing four drainage districts and expand its mandate to include environmental and social justice goals alongside flood protection. This was a culminating achievement for Reed, *MCDD*, and all of the *Levee Ready Columbia* partners. Thanks to Reed’s collaborative spirit and *LRC*’s perseverance, there is hope for more holistic floodplain management in the Columbia Slough watershed.



**Nestor Campos, *Verde***

Nestor Campos is a community activist in the Cully neighborhood, trained agricultural engineer, and the Education Manager for *Verde*. For nearly 15 years, Nestor has been providing holistic environmental education services to the Latinx community in Portland and empowering residents to engage in conservation action, including pioneering a residential rain garden program for Cully homeowners. For a decade he has also been instrumental in the success of the Council’s annual *Explorando el Columbia Slough* event, a bilingual nature festival designed to connect watershed residents to the nature in their backyards. Whether Nestor is working to address issues of social justice and environmental sustainability, training youth of color in building rain gardens, or offering planning and translation support for community events, Nestor’s leadership is a gift to everyone.



# THANK YOU TO OUR PROGRAM PARTNERS

*The Columbia Slough Watershed Council aims to strengthen the accessibility and inclusivity of our events and programs by collaborating with diverse community organizations, Title I schools, and government agencies. We thank our new and returning program partners for their ongoing support:*



## SCHOOLS

Alliance High School at Meek  
Central Catholic High School  
César Chávez School  
Clinton Dart School  
De La Salle North High School  
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School  
Fairview Elementary School  
NAYA Many Nations Academy  
POIC at Rosemary Anderson High School  
Portland Village School  
Prescott Elementary School  
Reynolds Learning Academy  
Rigler Elementary School  
Rose City Park Elementary School  
Russell Elementary School  
Sabin Elementary School  
Salish Ponds Elementary School  
St. Rose School  
St. Andrew Nativity Middle School  
Woodland Elementary School

## BUSINESSES

ACME Storage  
Apex Companies  
Brown and Caldwell  
GCR Tires  
Hydro  
Maul Foster & Alongi  
McKinstry  
Mead & Hunt  
Portland General Electric

## AGENCIES

City of Fairview  
City of Gresham  
East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District  
Multnomah County Drainage District  
Portland Bureau of Environmental Services  
Portland Bureau of Transportation  
Portland Parks & Recreation  
Portland Water Bureau

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Audubon Society of Portland  
Betties360  
The Blueprint Foundation  
Club Aves  
Friends of Nadaka  
Multnomah Youth Commission (MYC)  
Native American Youth & Family Center (NAYA)  
Outside In  
People of Color Outdoors  
Portland International Academy  
Slavic Community Center  
Together for Watersheds Collaborative  
SOLVE  
Unite Oregon  
Verde  
Vive NW  
Wisdom of the Elders  
Zoo Animal Presenters (ZAP)  
55th Cascadia Scouts



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Alder Creek Canoe and Kayak  
American Chimney & Masonry  
Annie Bloom's Books  
Apex Companies, LLC  
Artichoke Music  
Artistic Bliss  
Audubon Society of Portland  
Autumn Lindseth & Scott Schlieff  
Bart's Barber Shop  
Boeing Company  
The Bullitt Foundation  
Casa Bruno Wines  
Charles Starkey  
City of Fairview  
City of Gresham Environmental Services  
City of Gresham Water Resources  
City of Portland BES  
Colleen McClain  
Columbia Sportswear  
CommuniCare  
Concordia Wellness  
Contech Engineered Solutions  
The Dinner Detective  
DIY Bar  
Earth Day Oregon  
East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District  
East Portland Action Plan  
East Portland Community Office  
Ednallyn Reyes  
Everett House Healing Center  
Fairview Lake Property Owners Association  
Freeland Spirits  
Gallery Theater  
Garden Fever!  
Garnish Apparel  
Glowing Greens Miniature Golf  
Gray Family Foundation  
Grocery Outlet  
Hand2Mouth Theatre  
Joan D. Albertson  
KEEN  
Kenton Antiques  
Kenton Cycle Repair  
Kenton Hotel  
Kenton Liquor Store  
Laughing Planet  
Leach Botanical Gardens  
Little Red Press  
Maryhill Winery  
Maul Foster & Alongi  
McKinstry  
McKinstry Charitable Foundation  
McMenamins  
Meei Lum  
Metro  
Meyer Memorial Trust  
Miller Nash Graham & Dunn, LLP  
Multnomah County Drainage District  
New Deal Distillery  
New Renaissance Bookshop  
New Seasons  
Next Adventure  
Nossa Familia Coffee  
NW Discoveries  
Oregon DEQ  
OMSI  
Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board  
Oregon Zoo  
Owens Corning  
Pals Mushrooms  
Parametrix  
Pittock Mansion  
Plan-it Earth Designs  
PNW Metal Recycling  
Port of Portland  
Portland Art Museum  
Portland Baroque Orchestra  
Portland General Electric  
Portland Japanese Gardens  
Portland Nursery  
Portland Timbers & Thorns FC  
Portland Trailblazers  
Portland Water Bureau  
Portland's Culinary Workshop  
Ralph and Adolph Jacobs Foundation  
Rex Ounekeo  
Sharon Hocking Interiors  
She Shreds Magazine  
Sherwood School District  
Songbird Healing Arts  
Speck's Records & Tapes  
Thicket Consults  
Trailblazers Foundation  
Traveling Julie Photography  
Troy Clark  
Tulani Freeman  
Wet Planet Whitewater  
Willamette Valley Vineyards  
Wonder Ballroom  
Working Class Acupuncture



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*Thank you to all of our seasonal, temporary, and interim staff who help keep us moving!*





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[WWW.COLUMBIASLOUGH.ORG](http://WWW.COLUMBIASLOUGH.ORG)









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