

The Greater Forest Park Conservation Initiative

By **JIM CATHCART AND RENEE MYERS**

Woodland owners in the Pacific Northwest are familiar with the rigors and challenges of managing forestland sustainably to meet landowner goals and objectives. The first step is defining the goals and objectives and the forest conditions that achieve them; the second is knowing current conditions and identifying the management actions that will take current conditions to desired conditions. The third step is prioritizing these actions; the fourth step is securing the necessary means to implement priority actions; and the fifth step is to monitor the outcomes to verify that goals and objectives are being met. Once completed, the process is then renewed and repeated.



Jim Cathcart



Renee Myers

The process is never as neat and tidy as described above. A pressing

action, such as reducing wildfire hazards through thinning and fuels treatment, may be taken first. Landowners may not take the time to figure out goals and objectives; or those who do may not necessarily agree with one another if more than one member of the family is involved. In some cases, opportunity knocks and a landowner responds without a full understanding of the bigger picture. Success rarely occurs without some form of support or assistance.

The challenges you face as a woodland owner are no different than the

challenges government agencies, conservation organizations, woodland cooperatives, businesses, municipalities and community groups face when deciding how to sustainably manage a forested landscape consisting of multiple owners, forest types and jurisdictions. Success often cannot occur without some form of coordinated support, collaboration and assistance through partners.

The Greater Forest Park Conservation Initiative (GFPCI)—a 20-year, collaborative strategy to restore and protect over 15,000 acres of public



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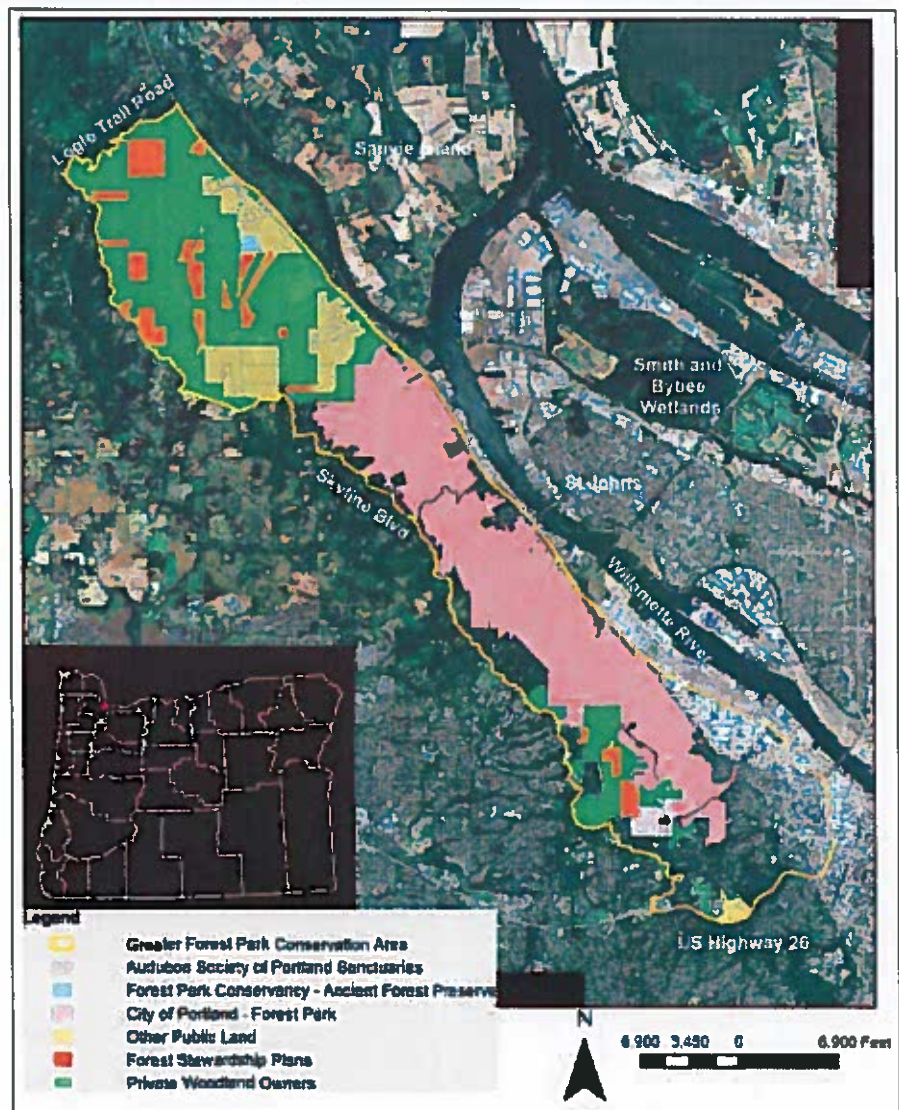


Figure 1. Greater Forest Park Conservation Initiative—Phase I Boundary.

GRAPHIC COURTESY: WEST MONTANA SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

and private land in and around one of the nation's largest city-owned forests (see Fig. 1)—exemplifies the strength of cooperative partnership in bringing about success. Since 2011, 850 acres of private lands (residential and forest) have been managed under a voluntary conservation plan written to address the landowners' goals and objectives. Restoration activity on both public and private land includes over 27,500 mature native trees freed from invasive canopy weeds, over 1,100 acres of direct habitat restoration, and over 600 acres of non-commercial thinning for improved forest health, resiliency and habitat. This work builds upon direct conservation of important areas through public land acquisition and conservation easements. As the forest landscape benefits, so does the individual woodland owner, in that many of these accomplishments occurred on private land with the aid of financial and technical assistance.

Here is the story. Portland's Forest Park was a vision well before its time. As early as the 1860s, civic leaders sought to create the park as a natural reserve. In 1903, just before the Lewis & Clark Centennial Exposition in 1906, the city created a municipal park commission that hired John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to develop a plan for Forest Park. The plan was to acquire land through donations, transfers from Multnomah County and delinquent tax foreclosures. This effort, achieved through the energy of the park's community underwriter—Friends of Forest Park (then called the Committee of Fifty)—led to the adoption of a proposal by the City Club of Portland to combine parcels totaling about 4,000 acres to form Forest Park. Formally dedicated in 1948, the park has grown to 5,170 acres.

In 2008, the Friends of Forest Park became the Forest Park Conservancy; the name change reflected a maturity in the scope and interests of the organization. It was no longer about safeguarding Forest Park within its boundaries. Instead, the name change

highlighted that to safeguard Forest Park meant to safeguard the Greater Forest Park Ecosystem (GFPE). To do that required partners working in collaboration. In 2010, the Forest Park Alliance was formed and has grown to 15 different agencies, neighborhood associations, land trusts, conservation groups and other organizations (see sidebar).

Led by the Forest Park Conservancy, in partnership with the City of Portland Parks and Recreation, the Forest Park Alliance developed the GFPCI as the means to address threats to, and take management action to conserve and protect, the GFPE. Three threats were identified: invasive species; habitat loss, degradation, land fragmentation; and climate change. The goals of the GFPCI are to: (1) protect and improve water quality; (2) protect and improve wildlife corridors between Forest Park, the Coast Range, and the Willamette River; (3) maintain and

improve the structural diversity and resilience of forests; (4) maintain and improve habitats and (5) build strong community support.

Management action consists of the following conservation activities:

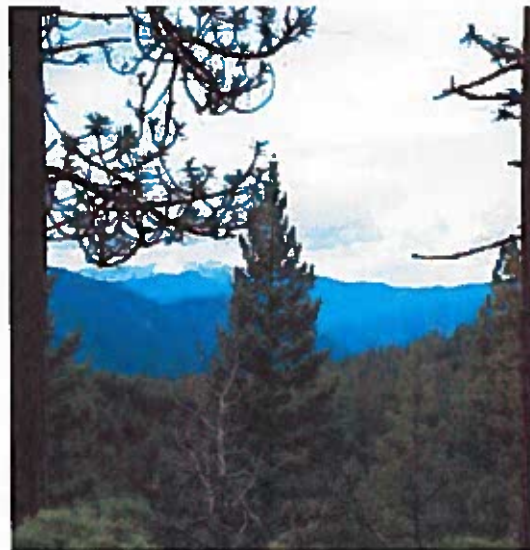
- **Protect and Improve Water Quality (Streams)**—assess and map habitat conditions, remove invasive plants, increase channel complexity (e.g., large wood placement, creation of side channels), conduct activities designed to eliminate waste and pollutant discharge into streams, control sediment runoff from roads and railroads, and restore native riparian plant communities.

- **Protect and Improve Wildlife Corridors (Connectivity)**—map and assess location of biodiversity and other wildlife corridors; assess road and trail impacts to corridors, including fish passage barriers, and adopt practices to mitigate negative effects; use land acquisition and conservation

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easements to permanently protect corridors; enhance corridor habitats, including pollinator habitat underneath powerlines; control and remove invasive plants, including canopy weeds such as ivy; monitor wildlife species presence and absence and identify causes of any decline; and minimize disturbances during key life stages, such as during nesting or migration.

- **Maintain and Improve Structural Diversity (Forests)**—aggressive removal and control of canopy weeds and priority Early Detection Rapid Response (EDRR) plant species, such as garlic mustard and knotweed; forest thinning operations to improve stand vigor and native plant understory development; creation of snags, down wood and other unique habitat features; native plant restoration along edges, such as the establishment of pollinator hedgerows; and creation of ponds.

- **Maintain and Improve Habitats (Habitat Diversity)**—assess and map special habitats (e.g., pockets of old growth, mature riparian forest, meadows, oak woodlands, wetland and ponds), and unique habitat features (e.g., individual legacy oak trees, large snags and down wood, and remnant old growth trees); use conservation easements to protect special habitats on private land; develop forest stewardship plans to adopt practices to identify, protect, enhance and restore unique habitat features on private lands; inventory current habitat conditions; and develop desired conditions for expanding habitats, and unique habitat features, on both private and public lands.

Woodland owners within the GFPE can be proud that their lands are the first in the area to demonstrate the tools and practices (including the use of herbicides) necessary to successfully implement conservation activities.

Examples are canopy weed removal, eradication of EDRR invasive plant populations, forest thinning and the establishment of pollinator hedgerows along habitat edges. Woodland owner accomplishments play a key role in securing the community license for taking similar action on publically owned lands. Likewise, the ability of public land managers to implement conservation activities across larger acreages than typically held by the private woodland owner serves as a demonstration and catalyst for conducting complimentary treatments on surrounding private lands.

In summary, large-scale landscape restoration efforts such as the GFPCI cannot succeed when undertaken by one entity alone. Collaboration through partners is a necessary requirement and an underlying value. The future is bright. Through federal State and Private Forestry funding from the U.S. Forest Service, the Oregon Department of Forestry has committed \$300,000 in Landscape Scale Restoration grant funding to the Initiative. The NRCS gives priority to woodland owners within the



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GFPCI Partners—The Forest Park Alliance

- Audubon Society of Portland
- City of Portland, Bureau of Environmental Services
- City of Portland, Parks & Recreation
- Columbia Land Trust
- Forest Park Conservancy
- Forest Park Neighborhood Association
- Friends of Trees
- Linnton Neighborhood Association
- Metro Regional Government—Parks and Nature
- Oregon Department of Forestry
- Portland Parks Foundation
- Portland State University
- Skyline Ridge Neighborhood Association
- The Intertwine Alliance
- West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District

GFPCI for cost-share assistance under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program through the Lower Willamette Basin/North Coast Basin Structural Diversity in Forests Conservation Implementation Strategy. In addition, partners are seeking funds from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to enable pollinator habitat restoration underneath power lines.

Not only does the GFPCI serve as the tool for prioritizing and coordinating conservation activities; it also serves as the vehicle to tell the larger, more comprehensive story of the significance of the GFPE. In this regard, additional federal funding is being sought to connect the urban populace—especially underserved communities and communities of color—to this important resource. One goal is to engage youth in natural resource conservation disciplines through paying jobs. Woodland owners serve as both contributors to, and beneficiaries of, this larger effort. ■

JIM CATHCART serves as district manager and chief executive officer for the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District; a special governmental district providing technical and financial conservation assistance to private landowners, businesses, non-governmental organizations and educators to ensure healthy soil, clean water and diverse natural habitats within Multnomah County west of the Willamette River, all of Sauvie Island including the Columbia County portion of Sauvie Island and the Bonny

Slope region of Washington County. Jim has been in this position since January 2016. He can be reached at 503-238-4775 Ext. 106 or jim@wmswcd.org. RENEE MYERS has worked in the environmental conservation field for the past 17 years and has been leading the Forest Park Conservancy since 2012. Her background includes extensive experience in watershed management, working on large scale forest, stream, and river restoration initiatives. During the past

four years, she has been leading a large-scale collaborative conservation initiative called "The Greater Forest Park Conservation Initiative" to help protect and restore the greater Forest Park ecosystem. She spent many years working and living in Montana before moving to Portland in January 2011. She loves running, hiking, fishing, gardening with her kids and riding her motorcycle. Renee can be reached at 503-223-5449, ext 105 or renee@forestparkconservancy.org



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