

# ReDISCOVER Willamette Falls

If the Willamette Falls Legacy Project moves forward, four shared values will shape the future of the falls.



## Public access

Visitors will get a front-row seat to experience the Willamette Falls, the second largest-volume waterfall in North America. Cut off from public use for more than 150 years, the falls are one of the most scenic places along the Willamette River. They also provide an important opportunity for Oregonians to connect with the river, which is isolated from many of the communities along its route.

## Cultural interpretation

Future visitors will learn about the rich history of the Oregon City riverfront. Much like Celilo Falls in the Columbia River George, Willamette Falls served as an important cultural site for native tribes. The falls also tell the story of the area's industrial development - John McLoughlin built the Pacific Northwest's first lumber mill here. And, in 1844, Oregon City became the first incorporated city west of the Rocky Mountains. As the birthplace of Oregon, it served as a launching point for thousands of new Oregonians.

## Economic redevelopment

The Willamette Falls property will carry on a tradition of economic development along the riverfront, where mills thrived for more than a century. With the closure of Blue Heron Paper Co., Oregon City lost 175 jobs - a blow that must be made right through redevelopment. Returning part of the site to private developers, partners will ensure the transformation supports Oregon City's vision for the future and reinvigorates the downtown as a hub of employment, shopping, business, tourism and housing.

## Habitat restoration

Historically, the falls were surrounded by unique plants because of microclimates from the mist. Protecting the site provides an opportunity to reestablish native plant communities, enhancing this ecologically diverse stretch of the Willamette. Many rare plants thrive on river islands, in the Willamette Narrows and along Canemah Bluff. This land is also critical for water quality and wildlife habitat - every fish and lamprey that travels the river passes through or around the falls.



# ReDISCOVER Willamette Falls

A 23-acre industrial site along the Willamette River represents Oregonians' best chance to rediscover a cultural and scenic treasure: Willamette Falls. With a dynamic location and notable history, this former paper mill could someday serve as an economic engine, a waterfront destination, a unique habitat, a window into Oregon's past — and a bold step into our future.

To help make the transformation possible, Oregon City is leading a public visioning, master planning and rezoning process. The public will be invited to shape the site in collaboration with Oregon City, Metro, the State of Oregon and Clackamas County.

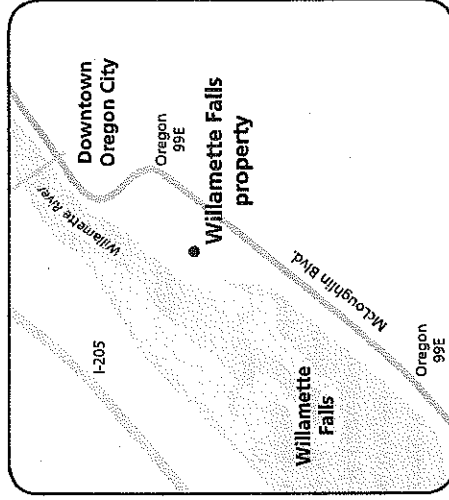
The resulting vision will facilitate rezoning, preparing part of the site for economic redevelopment and part for an outdoor destination. Public partners hope planning will create an opportunity to purchase the portion necessary to let visitors experience the magnificent Falls, offer cultural and historical interpretation, and restore habitat. By eliminating uncertainty, this work will prepare the rest of the site for private investment.

## Willamette Falls: steeped in history

Erupting from the Willamette River between Oregon City and West Linn, Willamette Falls is the largest-volume waterfall in the Pacific Northwest — and second only to Niagra Falls in all of North America. The Falls were an important place for fishing, trading and gathering of tribes for many centuries prior to white settlement.

Since the 1830s, the base of the Falls has been used for industry: a flour mill, a saw mill, a brick operation, a woolen mill and a paper mill. After more than 100 years in paper manufacturing, the site closed in February 2011 when Blue Heron Paper Co. went out of business and laid off 175 employees.

The property was put up for sale under the management of a bankruptcy trustee. With support from state agencies, Metro and Oregon City conducted extensive investigations of the site to assess its opportunities and risks. Through this public collaboration, the partnership gained a clearer understanding of the possibilities for reusing historical structures, options for managing stormwater, the extent of environmental conditions and the significant costs necessary to stabilize the site.



Public partners remain committed to reconnecting Oregonians with Willamette Falls and making the site attractive to private investors who can bring jobs and a dynamic vision to downtown Oregon City.

### Learn more

Contact Oregon City Community Development Director Tony Konkol at 503-496-1562 or [tkonkol@orc.gov](mailto:tkonkol@orc.gov).