



# Working Together for a Resilient Columbia Slough

## Identifying Shared Environmental Goals and Opportunities for Joint Action

Cover photo from annual festival, Regatta, on August 11, 2019 / Columbia Slough Watershed Council

**AUTHORSHIP**  
Barton Robison, Lead Author  
Sara O'Brien, Editor  
Carrie Sanneman, Editor  
Emily Irish, Report Design

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, the Multnomah County Drainage District (MCDD), Columbia Slough Watershed Council, and City of Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) asked Willamette Partnership to help collect information, priorities, and perspectives from a broad diversity of partners in the Columbia Slough watershed. The goal of these three organizations was to learn more about the priorities of partner organizations and identify opportunities to collaborate around environmental improvement goals in the Slough watershed.

Willamette Partnership interviewed stakeholders, community members, and agency partners across 22 different organizations to identify shared goals and priorities across the Slough. Those goals fell within three broad categories:

- 1. Restore water quality to levels healthy for humans and wildlife.** Many communities and a myriad of plant and animal species rely on the Slough and its ecosystem for sustenance. Partners highlighted a need for healthy water that supports and sustains these communities.
- 2. Create a thriving, inviting environment for people that actively promotes equitable, just, and resilient communities.** The Slough carries a history of harm that has had particularly traumatic and harmful effects on indigenous communities, Black communities, and communities of color. Stakeholders see sharing the history of the Slough and intentionally centering environmental justice in future decision making is necessary to create a more equitable future.
- 3. Restore critical habitat to create a protective and thriving habitat for fish and wildlife.** Several partners and stakeholders are already working on collaborative projects to restore habitat and connect habitat across the Slough. These groups asked for additional coordination and support for their efforts to make the biggest impact at a watershed level.

Out of these three goal areas, we identified four recommendations for next steps partners and stakeholders can take in the near-term. These recommendations align with stakeholder priorities and can help achieve shared environmental goals:

### Recommendation 1:

**Grow collaboration to address the houselessness crisis across the Slough.** Unregulated camping is a humanitarian issue that directly impacts a healthy environment in the Slough. Stakeholders expressed a need for the environmental sector to meaningfully engage in this issue and coordinate both as a sector *and* across sectors to mitigate the environmental impacts of this crisis while also contributing to humane, just, and equitable outcomes for houseless communities and individuals in the Slough.

### Recommendation 2:

**Engage partners and stakeholders to create an integrated water quality & watershed restoration plan for the Slough.** Partners identified a need for a Slough-wide plan to better understand where restoration and water quality interventions can have the greatest impact on outcomes. Collaboration and engagement among these stakeholders and others will be needed to create a plan that helps coordinate efforts across jurisdictions and between public and private partners.

### Recommendation 3:

**Build capacity for coordinated funding and implementation efforts.** A multitude of community-led organizations and agencies are already providing services in the Slough related to education, water quality improvements, and habitat restoration, but a lack of steady funding can be a barrier to consistent implementation. Stakeholders suggested that funders across the Slough coordinate to ensure consistent funding is available for these services.

### Recommendation 4:

**Support and create more opportunities for communities to joyfully connect with the Slough.** Stakeholders expressed that there remains a lot of opportunity to increase the number of people who know and care about the Slough. Increased funding and capacity for recreational and educational programming will be key to making this happen. These joyful connections can directly impact the communities who live in and around the Slough and lead to more equitable health outcomes for these people.



*Photo from annual Stewardship Saturday event at Heron Lakes Golf Course in partnership with The Blueprint Foundation, February 22, 2020 / Columbia Slough Watershed Council*

So many partners and communities are working together on these goals and opportunities today. As we continue to deepen and invest in this collaborative work, we can help make the Slough a healthier, safer, and more resilient place to call home.