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Willamette Partnership's Bobby Cochran selected by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to join its Culture of Health Leaders program

Cochran joins a cohort of 50 leaders working to develop innovative tools that enable people to live longer, healthier lives

Sept. 12, 2016 (Portland, Oregon) — The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation today announced that Bobby Cochran, executive director of Willamette Partnership — a Portland-based environmental nonprofit — has been selected from more than 500 applicants to become part of its esteemed Culture of Health Leaders program.



Cochran will join a cohort of 40 leaders working across many sectors to develop innovative tools that enable people to live longer, healthier lives. He will receive an annual stipend of \$20,000 to cover time and expenses related to the three-year program, which includes trainings related to change leadership, health policy, mentoring and executive coaching. As the only delegate from Oregon, and only one of five from the West Coast, Cochran hopes to position the Pacific Northwest as a leader linking healthy environments to healthy people.

“The inspiration and vision these leaders bring to our program is astounding, and they come at health and equity from every angle,” says Brian Smedley, Culture of Health Leaders co-director and executive director and co-founder of the National Collaborative for Health Equity. “They will redefine the way leaders in every field use their innovation and influence to shatter the status quo on health in our country.”

For more than a decade, Willamette Partnership has worked with community leaders to build a business case for conservation by helping them quantify the economic and social benefits of environmental protection, also known as ecosystem services. In recent years, the organization has partnered with Portland State University, Oregon Public Health Institute and others to

increase awareness about one of the most tangible social benefits of conservation: improved public health.

“When people talk about why they like nature, they mention things like clean air, clean water and wild places to play. These are the same things Willamette Partnership has worked creatively and collaboratively to protect over the last decade,” Cochran says. “Bringing health and equity into the conservation conversation is not a new concept, but ensuring actual results requires new thinking. I’m honored and excited to learn from the nation’s top health experts about how we can ensure Oregonians have access to clean air, clean water and natural places in the future.”

Ninety-five percent of U.S. adults, 91 percent of adolescents and 58 percent of children don’t meet the daily recommendations of physical activity. Numerous studies have shown that people who live near green spaces live longer lives. “Bobby’s leadership has shown our board and stakeholders the exciting new opportunities connecting conservation issues and human health,” says John Miller, President, Wildwood/Mahonia and Willamette Partnership Board President. “Improving people’s lives through the health benefits of access to open space adds a wonderful dimension to our work and brings inspiring new partnerships.”

According to Oregon Public Health Institute’s chief operating officer, Cyreena Boston Ashby, “Willamette Partnership is a valued partner and a catalyst for change. Bobby is an extraordinary leader who listens attentively to the needs of stakeholders and empowers them with the knowledge and skills they need to reach their goals. Under his leadership, the Health and Outdoors Initiative has raised awareness about the health benefits of spending time in nature, and is building evidence to support that theory.”

Willamette Partnership was an early pioneer of evidence-based programs geared toward water quality improvements, wetlands restoration, and habitat conservation. It applied those same principles when developing the Health and Outdoors Action Framework, a blueprint for communities seeking to use positive health outcomes as a way to generate interest in preserving green space. The goal: Get more people outside, more often — especially within communities experiencing significant health disparities.

To test its theory, Willamette Partnership has linked up with a diverse group of partners, including Oregon Public Health Institute, Providence, Oregon Community Health Workers Association, Oregon Healthiest State, and REI. Over the next year, public health organizations in three communities — Hood River, Baker City and Southeast Portland’s Jade District — will monitor how connecting people to forested trails, tree-lined streets, community gardens and public waterways impacts their overall well-being. They hope to show that improved health isn’t the only positive outcome.

“By increasing access to green space and outdoor recreation, communities become better equipped to improve their health and well-being,” says Duncan Wyse, President, Oregon Business Council. “We know that better health and livable communities create a more productive workforce, which has a positive economic impact. We are especially excited about the leadership role community health workers and groups like Willamette Partnership are playing in improving the health of Oregonians.”

About Willamette Partnership

Willamette Partnership knows that people need nature and nature needs stewards. Since 2004, we've been working with forward-thinking communities to create evidence- and market-based opportunities that lead to increased conservation. Willamette Partnership helped protect vital sage grouse habitat while improving farmers' and ranchers' livelihoods. We helped the City of Medford redirect \$16M of improvements from its wastewater treatment plant to invest in river restoration projects that improve outcomes for fish and taxpayers. We regularly convene stakeholders from across county and state lines, from opposing industries and from seemingly unrelated disciplines to give them the tools they need to protect natural areas. Willamette Partnership Executive Director Bobby Cochran is a *Culture of Health Leader*, a new program co-led by the National Collaborative for Health Equity and CommonHealth ACTION with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. For more information, visit www.willamettepartnership.org.

About Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

For more than 40 years the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve health and health care. We are working with others, including the American Heart Association, to build a national Culture of Health enabling everyone in America to live longer, healthier lives. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org. Follow the Foundation on Twitter at www.rwjf.org/twitter or on Facebook at www.rwjf.org/facebook.

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