Since 2004, Willamette Partnership has been a regional source for innovative conservation solutions that work for both nature and people. Today, communities throughout the West are increasingly challenged to meet social and economic needs while protecting the natural ecosystems on which they depend. We believe it is more important than ever to find ways to improve environmental, social, and economic outcomes through coordinated and collaborative actions.

The successes and challenges we’ve had over the last 12 years have strengthened our core belief that improving conservation outcomes requires help from – and should provide benefits for – a broader set of people and communities than have traditionally been engaged in environmental work. Emerging information about the connections among seemingly disparate issues like impaired water quality, rates of depression and obesity, habitat degradation, and climate change show us just how tightly humans and nature are intertwined. As a result, our work depends on strong partnerships with a diverse set of thought-leaders from across sectors, including agriculture, forestry, government, tribes, business, nonprofit, industry, and health care.

As we learn more about the challenges and opportunities before us, our staff and board are taking this moment to renew our commitment to our mission. This Strategic Plan outlines who the Willamette Partnership is, the work we do, and how we plan to achieve our mission in the places we care about deeply. Our strategy is rooted in our core mission, vision, and values. It shows how we will help build the better world we know is possible.

We are excited about the next three years and beyond of working together to create healthier, more resilient, and more vibrant communities.

Jessica Hamilton, Board President
Bobby Cochran, Executive Director
I. WHO WE ARE

MISSION

To increase the pace, scope, and effectiveness of restoration and conservation to create benefits for both natural and human communities.

VISION

We envision a world in which people create resilient ecosystems, healthy communities, and vibrant economies by investing in nature. We are building a future in which people understand and value the benefits nature provides.

VALUES

As an organization and as individuals, we conduct our work in a way that embodies our values—values that are rooted in supporting our partners and all people to meet their full potential. These values commit us to active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with an increasingly diverse circle of partners. We work with our partners to better understand how our organization can increase and strengthen equity in everything we do.

Integrity is our inner compass, directing us to do what is right even when it is not easy. No matter where our work takes us, we stay on course by being honest, trustworthy, consistent, and fair.

Leadership means making the possible a reality. We use tenacity, creativity, and hopes for the future to carve out a pragmatic path forward.

Collaboration is the foundation we build on. Only when we listen, include others, and learn from diverse perspectives do we create lasting solutions to complex challenges.

Passion is the color of our work. Our purpose is vivid and our optimism vibrant, fueling our drive for progress.

Balance is the key to sustainability, both in nature and at work. We strive to harmonize social and economic needs with those of the environment. We also sustain our passion and effectiveness by nurturing our individual needs.
II. STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Willamette Partnership has built a track record of success around our ability to deliver practical solutions for a range of environmental issues, across geographic and political boundaries. We believe it is increasingly important to do this work in a way that cares for people – making communities more resilient and improving health, social, and economic outcomes.

To be effective and sustainable, those solutions must address the allocation of scarce natural resources in an integrated, holistic, and collaborative manner – working across jurisdictions and regulatory silos, looking for partners in new places, and building bridges that can sustain decades of change and adaptation. Getting there does not come easily. We approach today’s complex environmental challenges with skillful process design, deep technical expertise, and a willingness to lead.

In the years to come, we will focus on three key strategies for achieving these goals and applying our unique brand of equitable, integrated, and durable solutions. These strategies are where we want to concentrate our time and attention. They represent areas of work where we see significant opportunity to use our skills and expertise to further our mission and create positive conservation outcomes with and for a diversity of communities. We do this work throughout the West with a significant focus on Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.
1. BUILDING SMARTER INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure – from highways and commuter rails to wastewater treatment and electricity generation – forms the backbone of communities. Over the course of the next few decades, it is estimated that $204 billion in investment will be needed to update water infrastructure, $8.1 trillion for transportation, and $2.5 trillion for electricity generation and transmission. These investments will be needed both to meet a backlog of deferred maintenance and to meet the needs of a growing population and economy.\(^1\)

However, simply rebuilding a functional 20th-century-style infrastructure system will not be sufficient. We need to re-evaluate our assumptions about community needs, risk management, technology, and environmental conditions. Willamette Partnership is committed to helping craft an alternative, future-oriented approach to infrastructure investment. We will expand the use of natural infrastructure and help “green” gray infrastructure:

**Expand the use of natural infrastructure.** We believe nature is the original infrastructure and that using natural lands and systems – known as natural or green infrastructure – to meet societal needs can often provide broader and more sustainable benefits than many traditional, gray infrastructure approaches. The Partnership works to increase investment in natural infrastructure wherever we see an opportunity to create better outcomes at a similar or lower cost. We work with partners in local governments, utilities, and federal and state agencies to help recognize and promote the benefits of natural infrastructure and to remove technical and policy barriers to its use. We help quantify the benefits of these systems so that they attract investment and can be used to meet regulatory requirements. We are building an increasingly strong business case for decision makers and the public around the multiple social and environmental benefits that these approaches can provide.

**OUR STRATEGY ON THE GROUND**

Willamette Partnership is a leader in finding ways for public utilities to invest in upstream restoration instead of concrete chillers and other gray infrastructure to help meet their water quality needs. Oregon utilities have saved millions in sewer upgrades by investing in stream restoration that’s better for fish. We also built national policy templates for water quality markets to make it easier for utilities in other states to take a similar approach.

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\(^1\) American Society of Civil Engineers. 2016. Failure to Act: Closing the Infrastructure Investment Gap for America’s Future.
Help “green” gray infrastructure. Sometimes investing in the concrete and steel of gray infrastructure really is the best solution. The Partnership works with state and federal agencies, local planners, infrastructure developers, and private landowners to ensure that gray infrastructure for energy, water, and transportation is planned, sited, and designed to minimize harm to human and natural communities and to provide benefits that are sustainable and equitable. Where unavoidable impacts occur as a result of new or improved infrastructure, the Partnership helps develop compensatory mitigation policies, programs, and projects that deliver a net conservation gain along with social and economic benefits.

OUR STRATEGY ON THE GROUND

Where necessary infrastructure, like roads or energy transmission lines, impact natural systems, Willamette Partnership can provide mitigation options that return greater ecological benefits. The Oregon Department of Transportation and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife are using technical tools we built to better site road, energy, and conservation projects for migratory fish and sage-grouse.

2. WORKING LANDS CONSERVATION

Working lands – the farms, forestlands, and ranches that produce essential benefits such as food, fiber, and other commodities - are vital to the social and economic fabric of the West. For many, they define a way of life, a tradition that spans multiple generations, forming the foundation of rural communities.

Working lands also play a critical role in conserving wildlife habitat, clean water, and open spaces. With the majority of habitat and species found on private lands, we must sustain healthy, functioning ecosystems in a way that is compatible with farm and forest production. In addition, the trend of aging farm and forest landowners means strategies are needed to bridge the generational gap that faces working lands.

Given these challenges, the Partnership is working collaboratively with our partners in agriculture and forestry, conservation nonprofits, and local, state, and federal governments, to increase investment in working lands conservation. We will make a strong business case for working lands conservation and increase investment in sustainable management of agricultural and forestry lands:
Make a strong business case for working lands conservation. Our work demonstrates that economic and ecological values can be mutually supportive, and that resilient ecosystems provide tangible benefits for landowners and rural communities. The Partnership works with our partners to build programs that make conservation an asset for working landowners.

OUR STRATEGY ON THE GROUND

Willamette Partnership worked with vineyard and small forest owners in the Willamette Valley to design the Oak Accord, a voluntary agreement to protect and restore imperiled white oak ecosystems. Every signatory commits to a net gain of oak habitat, and the Partnership is helping landowners communicate and market their commitment to conservation.

Increase investment in sustainable management on agricultural and forestry lands. The Partnership helps create mechanisms that make stewardship of working lands a practical and economical choice. This includes the expanded use of innovative market-based approaches, from eco-labeling to environmental crediting, as well as increasing funding for – and improving outcomes from – voluntary conservation programs.

OUR STRATEGY ON THE GROUND

Willamette Partnership is a national leader in establishing rigorous standards for water quality trading markets. These markets are a way for landowners to sell their verified restoration outcomes in the form of a credit, which industries can then buy to meet their regulatory needs. Each water quality market Willamette Partnership sets up directs a flow of new investment to streamside landowners to restore and steward their riparian areas.
3. CREATING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Many of our toughest conservation problems are rooted in balancing diverse and sometimes conflicting goals at the local level. Local governments have limited resources with which to address competing mandates, policies, and community needs. The Partnership sees a unique set of opportunities at the local level to apply our expertise in ecosystem services and nature-based solutions to help build local communities that are livable, equitable, sustainable, and resilient in the face of significant challenges.

Building on the infrastructure and working lands strategies outlined above, the Partnership will work closely with a diverse set of partners in urban and rural communities, including city, county, and tribal governments, social nonprofits, health care providers, public utilities, social justice organizations, neighborhood associations, and businesses. We will build a role for the environment in community development and link health to the outdoors:

Build a role for the environment in community development. We aim to bring the perspectives and tools of environmental management to help build stronger, more resilient communities. Our projects demonstrate that stewardship of natural resources is a critical part of an equitable strategy to community development needs, including affordable housing, job creation, and health.

Link health to the outdoors. Access to green space is a key determinant of public health. Time spent in nature can reduce many chronic diseases and improve mental and physical health outcomes, in rural and urban areas alike. We are building a business case for why it is important for both conservation organizations and health-care providers to invest in a clean environment as part of our health infrastructure.

OUR STRATEGY ON THE GROUND

We are co-leaders of the Oregon Health and Outdoors Initiative. As part of that collaborative initiative, our partners at Sierra Club Outdoors, Latino Outdoors, and Next Door Inc. launched LatinXplorers, a program aimed to break down the barriers keeping people in Hood River Valley from hiking and recreating in nature. Providence Health will track the health outcomes of the program and help build the case for investing in nature to improve public health.
III. MAKING A DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

We envision a world where people invest in nature because we understand and value the benefits that natural systems provide and where those investments pay dividends toward resilient ecosystems, healthy communities, and vibrant economies. This strategic plan is designed to move us in that direction.

This is how we imagine it looks like for Willamette Partnership and our partners to be successful over time:

- The tools and policy exist that allow rivers and forests to compete on an even playing field with concrete and steel for infrastructure investment;

- A clear and strong business case for how conservation helps working lands generates the incomes needed to sustain seven more generations of farmers, foresters, and ranchers;

- More – and more diverse – models of cities, farms, forests, and ranches choose to invest in clean water, wildlife habitat, and green spaces for people;

- Communities invest in the environment explicitly to create better, more equitable human health outcomes;

- And, the right mix of relationships, policy templates, and implementation tools exist to create more and bigger success stories throughout the West.