



# WEST MULTNOMAH Soil & Water Conservation District

WMSWCD.ORG

## Summer 2016 Newsletter



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Plant showy milkweed to  
attract butterflies this summer!

## Prepare for Summer!

### ***Conserving water***

*By Mary Logalbo, Urban Conservationist*

We have some great tips to help you save water and money this summer! Simple steps can make a big difference in using water more efficiently.

1. Select plants that need little or no summer watering. You can choose from a long list of beautiful native plants that are adapted to our local climate and soil conditions thus needing little to no water after they are established! Make sure you plant "the right plant in the right place" so it can thrive – take shade and soil conditions into account when making your selections. There are many native trees, shrubs and ground covers to choose from, including a host of sun-loving grasses and wildflowers. A great resource is our new publication, [The Meadowscaping Handbook](#).
2. Look at how much water you use on your lawn and consider letting it go brown. Lawns typically use 2 ½ to 3 times as much water as many other plants in the landscape – [current research](#) shows as much as 30 % of that water is lost through runoff and overwatering.

3. Determine your water use by purchasing a simple water gauge. Also, if you don't mind a brown lawn and a few more weeds most lawns will be green again in the fall when the rain returns. If you [go brown](#), you can always reseed in the fall to make sure your lawn is full and lush.
4. Watering efficiently can greatly impact your water use. The keys to success are to water at the right time of day (morning or night) and to use the most efficient irrigation system. Water before 10 a.m. or after 6 p.m. when temperatures are cooler and there is less wind so the water doesn't evaporate quickly. Deep infrequent watering of established plants (e.g. 2 times per week) will help roots grow deeper, thus needing less water. Keep in mind that new plants, vegetables and potted plants will require more frequent watering. When choosing a sprinkler or irrigation system, select one that sends large drops of water close to the ground (e.g. drip or soaker systems) rather than misters, which lose a lot of water through evaporation.



For more information on conserving water go to [Conserve H2o](#).

### ***Monitor plants for summer stress***

By Laura Taylor, Conservation Technician & Ed. Coord.

If you've planted native trees or shrubs in the last year or so, these hot dry summer months are a critical hurdle for their growth. While proper planting choice, technique and timing go a long way toward ensuring the survival of your plants, there are things you can do now and through the rest of the summer to help them survive and thrive.

- Keep weeds at bay. Weeds compete with your plants for scarce water and nutrients so make sure your plants, not the weeds, get the water. Maintain a buffer at least two to three feet in radius around each plant that is free of weeds or grass. Figure 2 shows a thriving young Oregon white oak. Note that the grass was killed around it so it could access all the available water in the soil. Drought tolerant plants such as oaks can often make it through summer without any supplemental watering.



- Mulch for water conservation. Mulching in a two or three foot radius around each plant is an excellent way to help the soil retain water, increase soil organic matter, and inhibit weed growth. You can use compost, wood chips (receive free wood chips from your local arborist through [Chip Drop](#)), weed-free leaf mulch from last fall, seed-free straw, or get creative with other sources of mulch. Be sure to keep mulch from touching the plant's stem directly as this leads to stem rot and disease.
- Monitor your plants. Throughout the summer, take a look at your plants at least every few weeks to catch any signs of drought stress in time to take action. Look for drooping or wilted leaves, shriveling stems, and fading leaf color. If leaves are crisp and stems are shriveled and sunken looking, it may be too late. Figure 1 shows a plant that's died due to drought stress. Poor planting technique (not closing the planting hole sufficiently) probably contributed. Wilted plants may still have some life left in their roots and be able to re-sprout from the base next spring. Some plants may also enter dormancy if it becomes too dry in late summer or early fall. In this case, they may lose their leaves but the stem will still look firm and have live buds. This is a natural adaptation many native plants have for our area, so don't be alarmed if you see this.
- Water deeply and infrequently if needed. If plants are looking drought stressed and you have the ability to water them, it's important to do so in a way that will encourage them to develop a strong deep root system that eventually allows them to survive the summer without supplemental watering. Don't water plants that don't look stressed. Water drought stressed plants once a month from July or August through September. When watering, soak the soil around the plants enough for the water to sink deep into the soil encouraging the plant's roots to follow. If you only water enough to moisten the surface of the soil, this will encourage the plant to develop a shallow root system making it more prone to drought stress in the future.



**Fig. 1**

### ***Fire Safe Information Night***

*By Michael Ahr, Forest Conservationist*

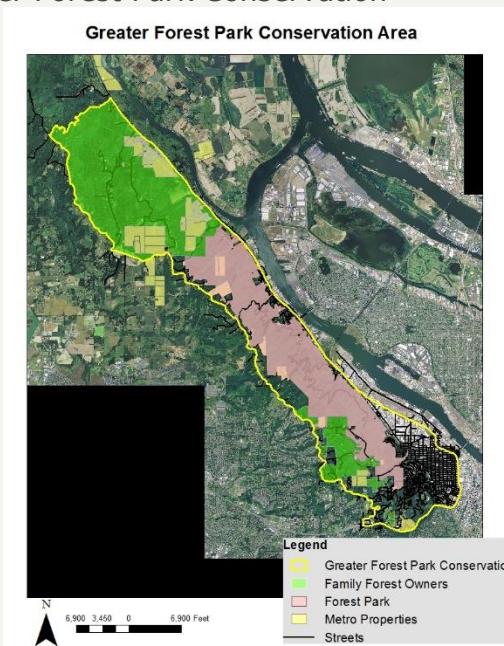
Thanks to the Skyline Ridge Neighbors Community for attending our Fire Safe Information Night on June 8 at the Skyline Grange. Staff from West Multnomah

Soil & Water Conservation District were joined by forest officers from Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) as well as Cody Chambers from Forest Park Conservancy.

Forest officers, including Kevin McLaughlin (503/359-7458), from the ODF Forest Grove District shared information about backyard and agricultural burning in the West Hills. They also discussed home improvements that can make your house more resistant to fire. They pointed out that embers floating through the air from a nearby fire can ignite leaves in the gutter, an attic vent, or material on your deck. They also talked about keeping vegetation cut back from the house and roof and also discussed practices that can reduce fire risk deep in the forest.

West Multnomah SWCD Forest Conservationist Michael Ahr presented some opportunities for landowners to get technical and financial assistance on restoration work in their forest and home. The Conservation District is sharing a \$300,000 grant with ODF and Forest Park Conservancy to assist landowners with fire risk reduction projects in the Greater Forest Park Conservation Area. See the map to determine if you're in the focus area. Grant funds will be used to help people treat flammable vegetation near the house and replace it with fire safe plants. The District is also eager to help with further woodland management planning and larger scale forest health projects such as thinning and invasive species control.

If you're interested in doing some work to reduce fire risk near your home and elsewhere on your property, contact Michael Ahr at 503/238-4775, ext. 109. He can put you in contact with ODF for a property assessment, after which you'll receive a full report that can be used to partially fund some of the recommendations made. If you live outside the Greater Forest Park Conservation Area, the District has other programs that can assist you in managing your forest land.



### **Get to know the native plants along your stream**

By Kammy Kern-Korot, Senior Conservationist

With the early, warm spring we had this year, many plants leafed out and

started flowering and fruiting early in the season. If you spend any time along a stream or wetland, you have likely enjoyed the shreddy bark and white puff flowers of Pacific ninebark; the small, dark fruit of twinberry; and the bees enjoying clusters of small white flowers on Oceanspray. You may also see new fruit on native Oregon grape, the pretty red bark of red-stem dogwood shrubs, and willows such as Pacific willow, with its long narrow leaves. Keep an eye out for red elderberry with clumps of small red fruit; dainty whitish-pink Snowberry flowers, which are good for native pollinators; and even the "cotton" fall from cottonwood trees.



Other iconic wetland or riparian plants include the shrubby Douglas spirea, with its pretty pink cone of flowers, and the vitally important Oregon ash tree, which could be subject to the devastating emerald ash borer if it arrives in firewood transported from other states. These trees, along with Cottonwoods, are the primary tall structure of wetland and riparian forests and are useful for bank stabilization. Well drained and shady riparian areas also support lots of Western red cedar, a lovely native conifer that was used by Native Americans for items such as canoes, homes, masks and totem poles. Red alder is another dominant riparian tree species. Even Oregon white oak - an extremely drought tolerant, culturally significant and beautiful native deciduous tree - grows in the drier or well drained, sunnier parts of the riparian zone.

Our native black cottonwood, *populus trichocarpa*, is a particularly interesting wet-soils tree because it's classified as dioecious (or "two houses"), meaning the male and female flowers are on separate trees. Both types flower, but only the females bear cotton. After receiving wind-borne pollen from male trees, they develop small capsules that split open in May - June. Cottonwood trees can grow to 200 feet tall, have deeply furrowed bark, and large dark, triangular or heart shaped leaves. They sprout easily from stumps or cuttings and are an extremely important wildlife tree, especially for nesting herons.



You may also see some non-native plants in your streamside or wetland areas, such as *impatiens capensis*, known as "touch-me-not" or jewelweed, and produce small yellow-orange flowers. While the hummingbirds like them and they do occupy bare soil, they can become quite dominant. Pull them by hand in the moist soil along streams if you want to free more space for native

plants. You will likely also find mats of invasive reed canary grass and patches of Armenian blackberry, both of which can be somewhat shaded out by planting natives. Other nuisance weeds in streamside areas include poison hemlock (which is particularly abundant and robust this year), Canada thistle, herb Robert, and shiny geranium. The last two can be hand-pulled when the soil is soft, as can weedy bindweed or morning glory, which wraps itself around desirable plants. If you have the particularly tenacious and spreading Japanese knotweed, call the Conservation District for help!

For more information on native plants that grow along streams in our area, and for help restoring your streamside area or wetland, see our [Healthy Streams Program](#).

### ***Growing Grass: Pasture management tips***

*By Scott Gall, Rural Conservationist*

Someone once said, "Pasture management is not about how to raise animals, but how to grow grass." The key is to think about the grass as if it were a crop and the animal is simply the way to harvest. Just like corn, wheat, squash, wine grapes or any other crop, grass responds to changes in soil conditions, amendments such as fertilizer, and impacts from farm operations.

The primary key to a healthy pasture is overgrazing, but the issue is usually overlooked by landowners and managers. Resting pastures and managing grass height will maximize growth and forage. This is as easy as following the "3 to 8 rule". Take animals off the pasture when they've eaten the grass to 3 inches high; put them back on when it is 8 inches high. When grass is grazed too low, the grass doesn't have enough energy to regrow. But if the grass gets too tall, it will start to put energy into seeds (which for our season and grass type means going dormant). Be aware that you may have to feed your animals hay and grain to supplement their dietary needs – even in the middle of the summer.



Another often overlooked aspect to pasture management is soil fertility and health. Regular soil tests give you the information you need for an informed nutrient management plan and maximum grass production. Western Oregon grasses grow fast so they need more nitrogen; just remember that nitrogen is highly mobile in soils which can lead to wasted money and impaired water quality in nearby streams and wells. In addition, most western Oregon soils tend to be on the acidic side. Lime, properly applied in the fall, can greatly boost productivity.

Finally, regularly grazed pastures can be hard on soil. Clover adds not only a free source of nitrogen, but diversity below ground which promotes a healthy and more vibrant soil ecosystem. Likewise, adding organic matter from sources such as composted manure can increase the long-term productivity of the soil. It's best to avoid grazing during the winter or rainy seasons. Winter grazing damages pastures, promotes weeds and compacts the soil. The bottom line is that animals do not get much feed in the winter in relation to the amount of energy they use getting it.

Most barns and farm operations need to supplement feed, but by maximizing the production of a grass crop, the need for supplements is lower. Treat grass like any other crop; know the nature of the plant, manage its needs and promote soil health. In the end the rewards are higher production and decreased cost.

### **Weed Watch: *Impatiens balfourii***

By Michelle Delepine, Invasive Species Program Coord.

*Impatiens balfourii* is an escaped herbaceous annual popping up in a few different places around our District, including Tryon Creek, the Riverview Area and Skyline Blvd. This perennial herb was introduced as an ornamental, but is now invading natural areas in Portland and California. Unlike other invasive impatiens species, which are primarily a problem in wet areas, *impatiens balfourii* appears to thrive in drier habitat as well. Here are its characteristics:



- Flowers: Showy blossoms are pink and white, with yellow dots and a straight spur
- Height: 1 ¾ to 4 feet tall
- Leaves: Oblong to egg-shaped; serrated margins
- Seeds: Pods are elongated and will propel seeds when touched
- Best time to spot: Right now! (Early to late summer)

*Impatiens capensis* is another non-native, invasive impatiens present in our area; however, it is widespread across the region and is not a focus for "early detection, rapid response" efforts. *Impatiens capensis* has yellow-orange flowers with dark orange or red spots and a hooked spur. Leaf margins on *I. capensis* may appear wavy, with rounded serrations.

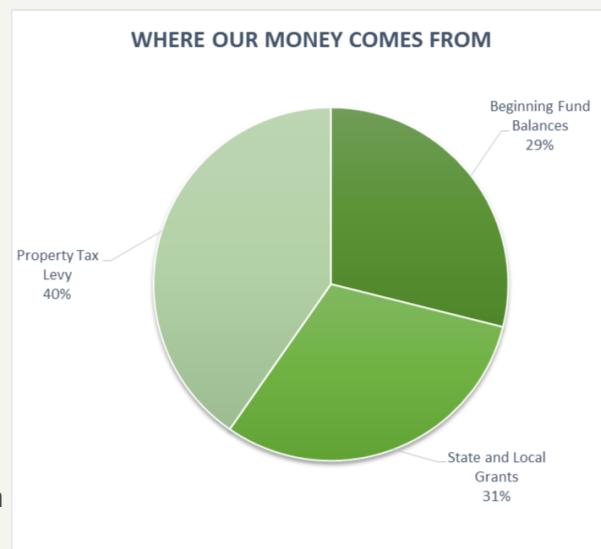
Please report suspected sightings to [oregoninvasiveshotline.org](http://oregoninvasiveshotline.org)!

### ***Adopted budget for FY2016-2017***

*By Michele Levis, Controller and Budget Officer*

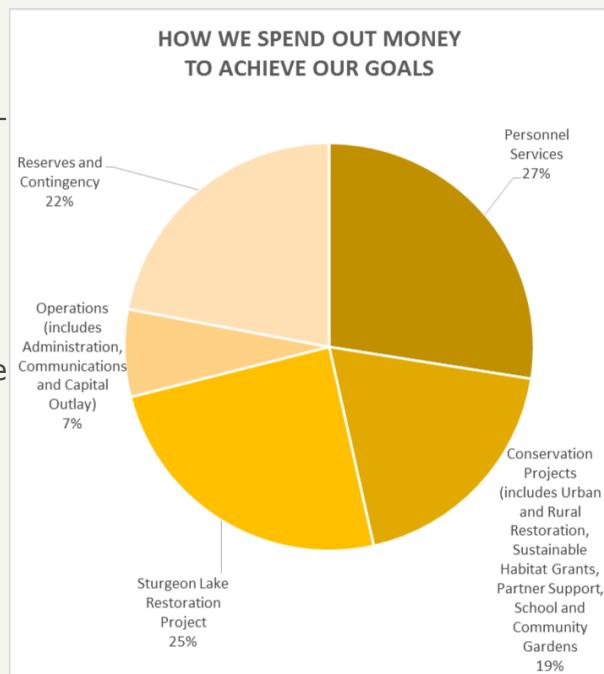
By unanimous vote, the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District Board of Directors on June 2, 2016 adopted the District's \$3.6 million operating budget for Fiscal Year 2016-2017, which runs from July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017. The budget addresses increasing demands placed on the District as it grows by securing more grants, reaching out to new communities and taking on more projects.

Our resources in FY 2016-17 include \$1.5 million in property tax revenues, levied at a rate of \$0.075 per thousand dollars of assessed value. These funds represent 40 percent of our resources for the coming year. The remaining 60 percent will come primarily from grants and contributions, of which almost \$1 million are related to our Sturgeon Lake Restoration Project, and from a healthy beginning fund balance of over \$1 million.



Our on-the-ground conservation actions will be increased and we'll continue to work with our constituents to provide natural resource education and technical

assistance. Our largest conservation project, representing 25 percent of our budget in FY 2016-17, is a multi-year effort to restore 3,200 acre Sturgeon Lake, which sits at the heart of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's 11,500 acre Sauvie Island Wildlife Area. The lake is threatened with sediment infill due to the lack of sediment flushing. The District is the non-federal sponsor for this US Army Corps of Engineers led restoration effort, which centers on improving salmon habitat by restoring the Dairy Creek inlet and channel and the Reeder Road crossing. This will connect Sturgeon Lake with the tidal influences and runoff flows of the Columbia River as well as provide for juvenile fish access to the lake during low summer flows.



For additional information, please see our [Budget Message and Adopted Budget Documents](#).

### ***Featured species: Willow flycatcher***

By Anna Freitas, Field Intern

If your summer activities include floating, kayaking, swimming, or hiking, keep an eye out for the Willow flycatcher (*Epidonax traillii*). The greyish-green birds with rounded wing tips are only about 6 inches long. They lay their eggs in mid-to-late June, primarily in riparian areas with moderate canopy cover. The call of the Willow flycatcher is described as "A wheezy fitz-bew or pit-speer" ([Audubon Field Guide](#)).



The Willow flycatcher is a vulnerable species, according to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife [Sensitive Species List](#), due to threats to their habitat. Healthy forests and streams can protect our local populations.

Most of the Willow flycatcher's diet consists of insects, usually caught mid-flight rather than gleaned off bark or leaves. This means that slow moving water and some gaps in the forest canopy provide excellent food sources for them. However, too much open space limits available nesting habitat. Willow

flycatchers build nests in the forks of tree and shrub branches 1-3 miles above the ground in riparian and upland habitats. Too much open area however can attract cowbirds, a parasite species that lays eggs in the nests of other birds, abandoning their young to foster parents, at the expense of the host chicks.

Landowners with grazing livestock can protect Willow flycatchers by limiting grazing in areas that could be nesting habitat, especially between June and late August. Landowners can also work with local organizations such as West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District to create resources for Willow flycatchers by planting or thinning trees and shrubs as needed and improving stream health.

### ***Landowner Feature***

*By Carolyn Lindberg*

#### **One person's trash...**

When SW Portland resident Margaret Schonhofen looked into the ravine and creek behind her home, she saw through the invasive ivy and clematis covering the trees and hillside. She recognized an undeveloped asset with immense value. Over the next 3 ½ years, Margaret and her homeowner association's Forest and Stream Committee would help shepherd the restoration of a 7 acre swath of natural area in the Wilcox Estates neighborhood between SW Patton and Thomas Roads.



It started with the simple act of pulling invasive weeds behind their house. In the process of trying to figure out what to plant in the place of weeds, Margaret and her husband Mike realized how connected they were to the hundreds of neighbors with land along the greenspace. They called West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District and asked Urban Conservationist Mary Logalbo to conduct a site visit. Mary told them there was grant money available but only if the project was much larger than first envisioned. Unfazed, Margaret beefed up the Forest and Stream Committee and convinced the Wilcox Homeowners' Association to okay the project. She then applied for and received a \$10,000 grant from the Conservation District. Over the years, the project and grant would increase.

Invasive weeds, such as ivy, blackberry, laurel and holly, were removed along with many more invasive plants discovered along the way. Without them, the forest was opened to sunlight, rainwater and nutrients to support the more

than 10,000 native plants that would eventually be installed in the forested area, thanks to the Conservation District, contract crews and Clean Water Services. The Audubon Society of Portland also provided invaluable assistance. Experts from Forest Park Conservancy provided technical support and worked with neighborhood volunteers to put in a four-season looped trail through this now functional forest ecosystem. The Neighborhood Committee also installed fencing for safety and to help keep visitors from straying off on the new trail.

All of this happened with the coordination and inclusive management of Margaret Schonhofen, who says communication is critical to this kind of project. She says, "You have to bring everyone along with you to get full participation and to make sure that all neighbors know what's going on, can easily get engaged and have ownership of the project." She made sure that work parties were fun and varied and that some ended with beer tasting (for adults only!). Local school children also worked in the area for service learning credits. Margaret says she's learned a great deal about invasive species, native plants, planting conditions and schedules but the best part is getting to know her neighbors and the natural resource professionals she's met along the way.

Now, when she and Mike are relaxing on their deck overlooking the forest and creek, she hears families walking the trail with their children and neighbors showing friends and visitors the incredible greenspace they helped create. And she no longer sees tires and garbage...only the white blossoms of native Pacific ninebark and a gray squirrel scampering up a hazelnut tree.

## **Calendar**

- **Wednesday, August 17th** - School & Community Garden Workshop. Teachers and garden volunteers are invited to a free soil health workshop from 9 am - 1:30 pm at Forest Park Elementary School. [Registration required](#).



Neighborhood volunteer Karen Suher & Cody Chambers of FPC lay the framework for the looped trail



The finished trail!

- **Saturday, August 20th** - Multnomah Days! Join us at our booth in the Multnomah neighborhood to learn about conservation tips and activities in your community!
- **Saturday, October 29th, Let's Celebrate!** Join us at the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District Annual Meeting & Open House, as we show off our conservation work and celebrate our success with District residents and partners!

***Enjoy your summer!***

Prepared by Carolyn Myers Lindberg, Communications Coordinator