

Doug Weir, Conservation Champion

by Carolyn Myers Lindberg

Like many of our Conservation Champions, Doug Weir found his connection to nature at an early age. He grew up in the Santa Monica hills of Los Angeles and was immersed in the “back to nature” movement of the sixties. Weir found inspiration in the book, *Design with Nature*, by Ian McHarg and developed a strong land stewardship ethic. He says at that time population growth had skyrocketed and a lot of young people were getting involved in the environmental movement. It caused him to want to live closer to nature, which led him to Portland. Weir feels strongly about living in harmony with nature and spent years learning about Eastern traditions and working on environmental issues such as recycling. An avid bicyclist, Weir is also concerned about climate change and man’s impact on the earth. He says, “We have this really wonderful and beautiful place and we’re destroying it.” We only have so much time on this planet, he says, and that drives him to positively impact on the land and leave the world be a better place.



Weir has lived in the Homestead Neighborhood since 1988 and over that time he studied the history of the neighborhood and that of the entire Portland parks system. He read the influential Olmstead Report, a comprehensive plan for the city’s development of neighborhood and regional parks, scenic boulevards and pedestrian walkways, which was written for the Park Board (predecessor of Portland Parks & Recreation) by the Olmstead Brothers architectural firm in 1903.

The Olmstead brothers, John and Frederick Junior, were the sons of eminent landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmstead. The firm planned many of the nation’s parks systems and open spaces, including Central Park, Washington D.C. capitol grounds, Seattle and Chicago parks systems, and Palisades and Golden Gate state parks in California.

Weir says central to all of the Olmstead Brothers’ plans is the concept of moving people around natural areas, up and down hills and around bodies of water, exposing pedestrians to new discoveries along the way. In Portland, he says, the report envisioned two parkways coming out of the south end of the downtown Park Blocks by Portland State University, one parkway branching out to the south and the other traveling north into the hills. The idea was to take advantage of the views and provide a connection to nature. He says the Olmstead report was the founding document of the entire area and, while it has been revised and updated, is still used today.

Upon moving to Portland, Weir chose to live in a neighborhood close to Terwilliger Parkway, one of the areas developed in response to the Olmstead report. After a large commercial development was announced for the hill nearby, Weir became involved with the Terwilliger neighborhood group in 1991, which asked the developer to alter his plans and adhere to the Terwilliger Parkway land use guidelines. The project kept getting downsized and the developer eventually sold the land to Metro as part of the newly approved Open Spaces Bond measure. Weir says Kathleen Heineman spearheaded this battle and other Conservation Champions, including Richard Stein, were part of that group. After Heineman left, Weir took over as President and the group formed the non-profit Friends of Terwilliger (FOT) in 1992. He and others spent many hours helping pass the Open Spaces bond measure, identifying and assessing

parcels of land to be acquired and finding willing buyers. The group worked with private land owners and made sure their needs were met throughout the negotiating process with Metro, the City of Portland, and the Trust for Public Lands. A by-product of all that work, he adds, is that several new parcels of land were added to the neighborhood's natural area.

Later, Weir was the FOT representative on the steering committee for the Marquam Hill Plan, which helped guide the development of the South Waterfront, including the planning process for the tram. Weir says the development didn't bring the neighborhood everything it wanted, but some 40 acres of natural area were added to the Terwilliger area as a result of the negotiations, which eventually became Marquam Nature Park. Weir says it was remarkable that the neighborhood had the foresight to gain so much natural area because once an area has been developed, it's almost impossible to reverse it.

After all the additional natural space came into public ownership, Weir says many other residents got involved, including Robin Vesey and Anton Vetterlein (also Conservation Champions), who joined the FOT board in mid-1995. He says they all started thinking about stewardship and what they could do to protect and preserve what they had. He credits Robin Vesey with most of the early organizing that mobilized volunteers in the neighborhood to pull ivy through regularly scheduled work parties to clear invasive weeds.

Weir ended up returning to school for a second degree and left the FOT board shortly after the 2012 Terwilliger Parkway Centennial Celebration. He now works as the Finance Director of the Community Warehouse, an organization that provides upgraded used home furnishings to build strong foundations for residents in need.

Weir is delighted to see so many new, enthusiastic leaders getting involved in natural area restoration, joining the effort to, as he puts it, "leave the world a better place because you were here."