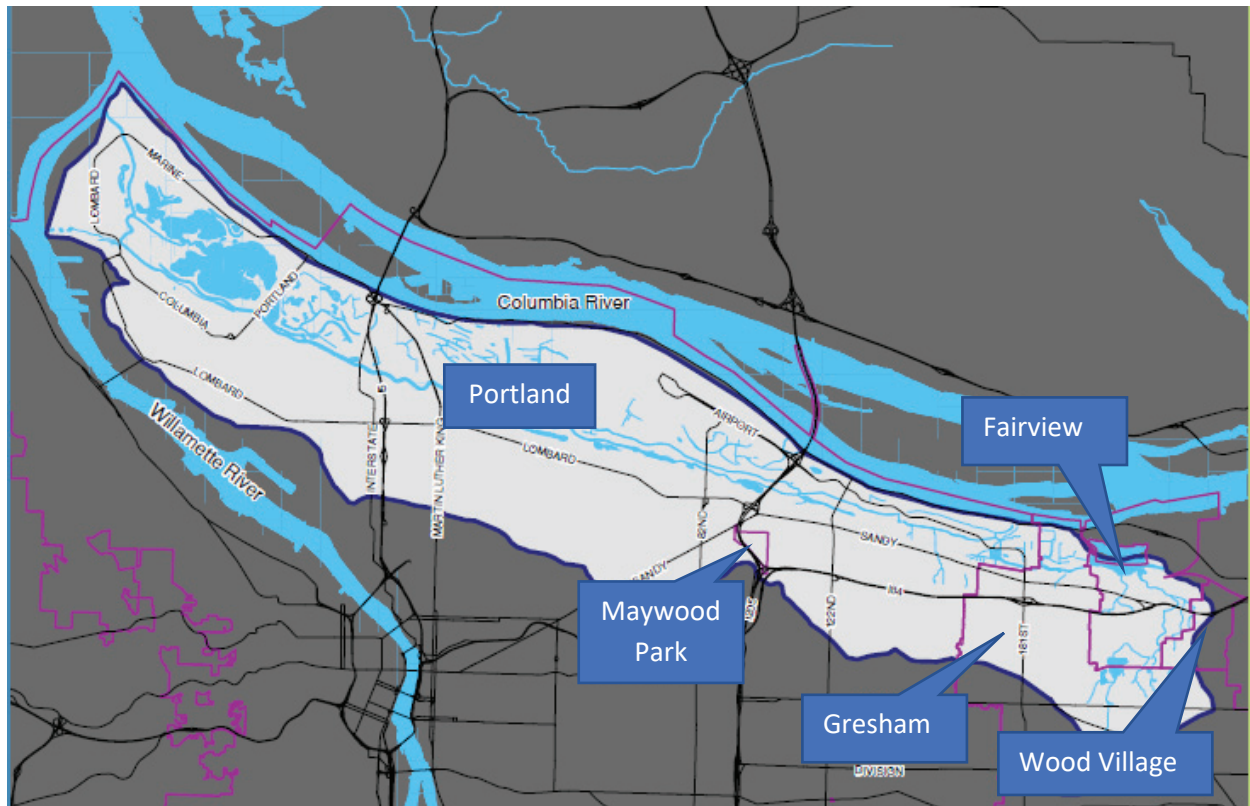




A Case Statement for

Safe Routes to the Slough

The 51-square mile Columbia Slough Watershed, identified on the map below, includes five different jurisdictions and is composed of two distinct geographic areas: the upland portion and the Columbia River floodplain. The upland is characterized by a mixture of residential and commercial development with potential for additional residential density. The floodplain is characterized by industrial and large-scale commercial uses, and includes Oregon’s largest airport. Pedestrian and bicycle connections between the upland and the floodplain and within the floodplain itself are very poor. This case statement for “Safe Routes to the Slough” highlights this lack of connectivity and advocates for solutions.



Map 1. The Columbia Slough Watershed spans five jurisdictions.

Public Open Spaces

Public parks and open spaces in the upland portion of the watershed for the most part identify as neighborhood parks with planned landscapes and active recreation facilities. Public access to these upland neighborhood parks is generally good, but varies somewhat from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Public open spaces in the floodplain are generally much larger, anchored by Kelley Point Park and Smith and Bybee Wetlands on the west, by Blue Lake Regional Park and the Sandy River Delta on the east, and connected by the Columbia Slough. In the past 30 years, the U.S. Forest Service, Metro, the Port of Portland, and local governments have invested significantly in natural areas and trails in the Columbia River floodplain. **Since 1990, the number of acres of publicly owned open space within the floodplain has increased by 482% to 5,150 acres.** The chart below identifies all 27 public open spaces in the floodplain. The 23-mile long Marine Drive Trail is approaching completion (87% finished by the end of 2020) and will tie many of these public spaces together.

Parks & Natural Areas in the Columbia River Floodplain			
<i>name</i>	<i>owner</i>	<i>acreage</i>	<i>year acquired</i>
Kelley Point	Portland	104.16	1984
Smith & Bybee	Metro	1,959.22	1990
West Delta, Heron Lakes	Portland	340.36	1950
West Delta, PIR	Portland	291.15	1972
East Delta	Portland	86.79	1950
Lotus Isle	Portland	1.72	1992
Vanport Wetlands	Port of Portland	95.98	new
Columbia Arboretum	Portland	28.80	1999
East Columbia Wetlands	Portland (BES)	18.29	new
Flyway Wetlands	Portland	23.00	new
Broughton Beach	Metro	9.50	?
James Gleason Boat Ramp	Metro	7.80	?
Catkin Marsh	Metro/Portland	53.61	new
Whitaker Ponds	Metro, Portland	24.75	1998
Johnson Lake	Portland (PP&R)	2.85	new
Little Four Corners	Portland	1.92	new
Big Four Corners	Portland	160.00	new
Colwood Golf Course	Portland	48.00	2014
Columbia Slough Natural Area	Portland (BES)	24.06	new
Columbia Slough Natural Area	Portland (PP&R)	11.20	new
Blue Lake Park	Metro	181.29	mid 1960's
Columbia Shoreline	Metro	41.05	new
Chinook Landing Boat Ramp	Metro	47.19	late 1980's
Columbia Slough Water Quality Facility	Gresham	15.00	new
trail parcels for Marine Drive Trail	Metro	9.50	new
Columbia & Sandy Riparian Area	Port of Portland	170.00	2007
Sandy River Delta	US Forest Service	1,392.80	1991
		5,149.99	

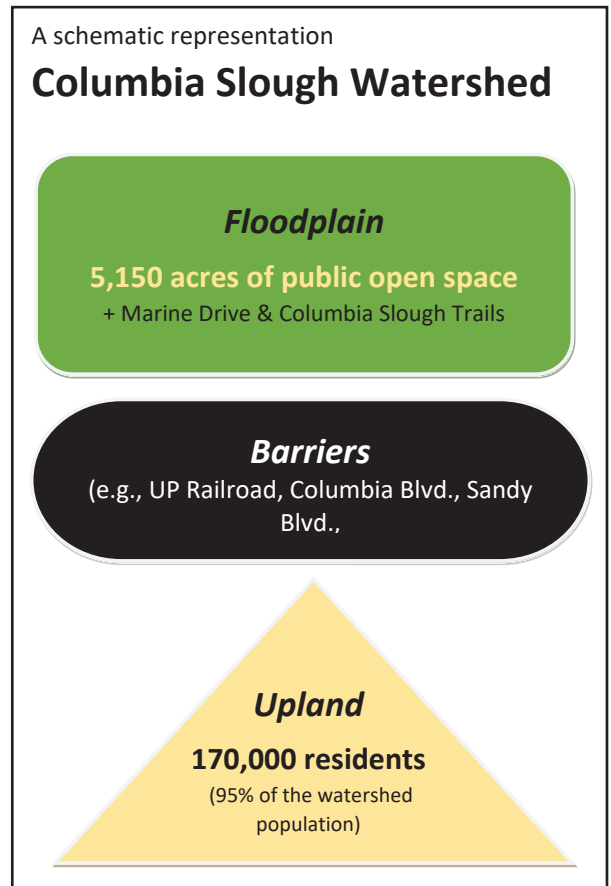
Proximity Does Not Equal Access

The long, narrow shape of the watershed belies the difficulty of walking and bicycling between the upland and the adjacent floodplain. High traffic corridors with infrequent crossings (e.g., Columbia Blvd, Sandy Blvd., Airport Way), major railroad lines, the I-84 freeway, and the Columbia Slough itself are real barriers to access. **Of the 180,000 people living in the watershed, 95% reside in the upland portion and are effectively cut off from the floodplain by these barriers.**

Over the 20-mile length of the watershed, there are now only two non-motorized access routes connecting upland residential areas to natural areas and parks in the floodplain: The Peninsula Crossing Trail and the I-205 Bike Path.

Other non-motorized access routes are possible. When completed, the North Portland Greenway and the Gresham-Fairview Trail will connect upland to floodplain. Additional non-motorized connections seem possible on levees at NE 142nd and near NE 223rd.

Some local jurisdictions are also working to improve on-street connections for bicyclists and pedestrians. On-street facilities on N Denver and NE Cully Blvd., for example, are partially completed. An aging 40 Mile Loop alignment along Marine Drive from Blue Lake to Troutdale is also partially complete.



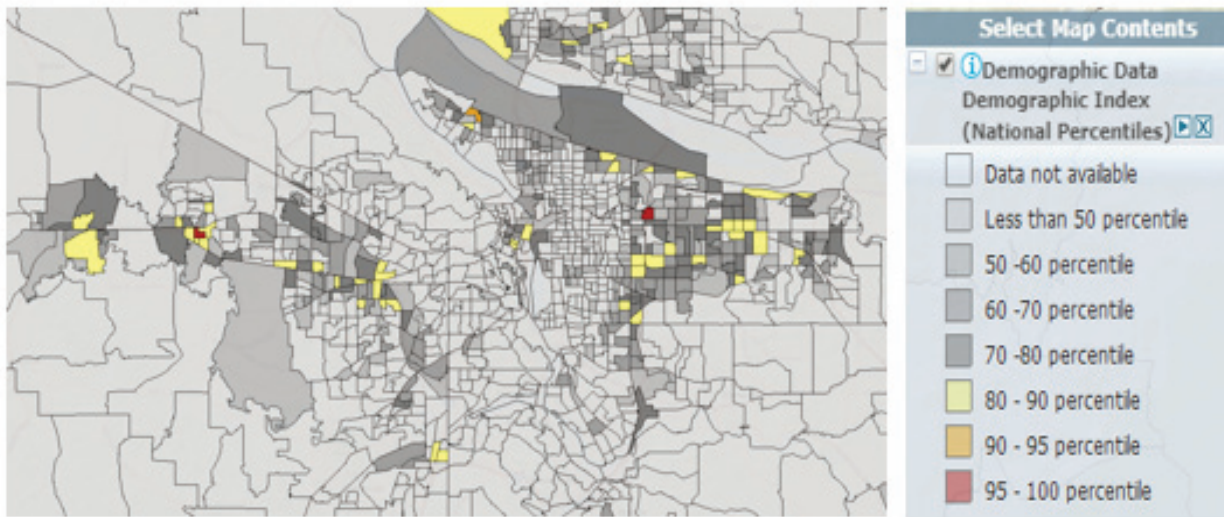
Map 2, showing existing connections (orange labels) and some of the potential connections (yellow labels.)

“Safe Routes to the Slough” for Underserved Populations

Who would be served by completing trail systems and creating additional safe connections between upland residential areas and the floodplain? As maps 3 and 4 indicate, Columbia Slough watershed residents are some of the most racially and ethnically diverse in the region. Household incomes are generally low, and are extremely low in some areas. An area of high racial and ethnic diversity also extends southward to adjoining portions of the Johnson Creek watershed.

Improving connectivity across the formidable barriers identified above and improving connectivity among public open spaces in the floodplain will provide “safe routes to the slough” for many thousands of people now unable to reach significant natural areas and trails in a safe manner.

MAP 3: Portland Metropolitan Region Demographic Index



MAP 4: Columbia Slough Watershed Demographic Index



In east Portland and Gresham, the Columbia Slough watershed (above the blue line) includes a significant portion of high demographic index census blocks, and is directly adjacent to other high index census blocks in the Johnson Creek Watershed. (The demographic index is calculated by adding the percent non-white + the percent poverty, and then dividing by 2.)

Sources: US Environmental Protection Agency, EJSCREEN2017, www.epa.gov/ejscreen, on 2/6/2019. Demographic index calculated from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2011-2015. Watershed boundary line is approximate as copied from the Columbia Slough Watershed Council website

Roles for Metro Bond Measures

With the prospect of two Metro-sponsored bond measures on the horizon, the first for parks, trails, and natural areas and the second for transportation infrastructure, it seems like an opportune time to determine which funding source or what combination of funding sources might help make “safe routes to the slough” happen. Citizens look at trails, walkways, and bike-lanes as one integrated system, while agencies often struggle to get out of their silos. Metro and local jurisdictions could break new ground here by figuring out how to make it work for a deserving community.

Providing funds to help upgrade the education center at Whitaker Ponds, a location where Metro was an early investor in land acquisition and restoration, would be another great way for Metro to continue its investment in the Columbia Slough Watershed.

Columbia Slough Watershed Council – learning center renovation

Whitaker Ponds Nature Park is an active location for environmental education and volunteering opportunities thanks to the work of the Columbia Slough Watershed Council, Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R), and Portland Bureau of Environmental Service. For years, the Council has made use of a converted small residence on the property as the launching pad for its programming, working closely with City bureaus, community groups and agencies to improve water quality throughout the watershed while also bringing thousands of area K-12 students to parks in the floodplain to discover wildlife and explore recreation opportunities. The Council is committed to racial and social equity and for many years has hosted the *Explorando El Columbia Slough*, attracting many new area families. The converted residence is over sixty years old (built in 1954) and is in need of major repairs and upgrades. With the recent park entrance and parking improvements made by PP&R with Metro Nature in Neighborhoods capital funding, it’s now time to upgrade the existing infrastructure at Whitaker Ponds Nature Park to fulfill its potential as a true learning center.

https://www.columbiaslough.org/about_the_council/

Our Recommendation: Establish a Columbia Slough Watershed Target Area

40 Mile Loop volunteers have been following Metro Council’s recent work sessions regarding a prospective November, 2019 bond measure for open spaces, trails, and parks. The Council’s new policy directions to improve access to nature for racially and ethnically diverse populations, and to fund a more robust trail program are very encouraging.

The 40 Mile Loop Land Trust believes that access projects are exactly what is needed in the Columbia Slough watershed and recommends the watershed as an area of emphasis or, to use the language of prior bond measures, a target area for the bond measure. People living and working in the watershed and adjoining areas would benefit greatly from the completion of regional trails linking public open spaces in the floodplain, from the development of additional safe connections between upland neighborhoods and the floodplain, and from an upgraded watershed learning center at Whitaker Ponds Nature Park.

40 Mile Loop Land Trust • www.40mileloop.org

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