



# STRATEGY

## FOR ACTION AND FIRST STEPS

### Oregon's Unique Natural Heritage

Oregonians have always been proud of the place they live; proud of the diversity of landscapes and people; and proud of Oregon's strong ties to fish and wildlife. The Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds and many other efforts exemplify Oregonians' willingness to get involved with conserving these natural values. Oregon needs a long-term conservation approach that builds on existing efforts and leverages new investments in its natural resources.

This Oregon Conservation Strategy celebrates Oregon's natural heritage by articulating goals and identifying actions that conserve and restore Oregon's species, habitats and ecosystems. It is not a regulatory document but instead presents issues, opportunities, and recommended voluntary actions that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of conservation in Oregon. The recommendations within the Conservation Strategy can be used to address species and habitat conservation needs, expand existing partnerships and develop new ones, and provide a context for balancing Oregon's conservation and development priorities.

Oregon is a 96,000-square-mile melting pot of traditions, cultures, ecological regions, geological formations and political ideologies. The state's natural, historical, and cultural features attract people from around the world to the deepest gorge--Hells Canyon; the deepest lake--Crater Lake; the largest geological fault in North America--Steens Mountain; the richest find of prehistoric fossils--the John Day Fossil Beds; 300 miles of rugged coastline; and 38 champions from the National Registry of Trees.

Geologically, Oregon is in a constant state of change. Colliding tectonic plates, volcanoes, glaciers and erosion mold and sculpt the Oregon landscape. The state's climate is shaped by its mountains. Storms arrive from the ocean, dumping 60-200 inches of rain annually in coastal areas and releasing most of the rest along the peaks of the Cascades. By the time the clouds reach the east side of the mountains, towns like Madras receive just 10 inches of rain per year. Varied climate and topography produce 1,500 different types of soils, representing most of the six soil categories found in the United States.

Oregon's history and identity are tightly tied to its natural resources. Place names like Beaverton, Bear Creek, Cape Falcon, Fox Hollow, Goose Lake and Troutdale speak to Oregonians' strong historic ties to fish and wildlife. Native Americans, fur trappers, pioneers, and today's bird-watchers and hunters all have appreciated sharing this landscape with wild creatures. In 2001, fish and wildlife-related activities contributed \$2.1 billion to the state's economy through fishing, hunting, and wildlife watching.

Oregon's varied geology, soil, and climate support a unique collection of species and habitats, which help define the state's culture and economy. Oregon's prosperity depends on use of land for agriculture, timber, industry, ranching and outdoor recreation. These working landscapes, along with wilderness and other natural areas, provide the rich mix of habitat that supports Oregon's fish and wildlife.

But, there are significant challenges to maintaining Oregon's fish and wildlife habitats. Some habitats have been fragmented or degraded by construction of towns and roads, alteration of river

### Strategy for Action: Summary and First Steps

systems, or intensive land management practices. Other areas have been completely converted to other uses. While not all land conversion results in habitat loss, the changes people have made to habitats can isolate fish and wildlife habitats into increasingly smaller patches, limit the functions that habitats provide for species, and ultimately make it more difficult for ecosystems to provide the services that define Oregon's history, culture, and economy.

Improvements in land management practices are beginning to improve habitat conditions. For example, historic overgrazing is declining as improved management techniques for rangelands are implemented. Important habitat areas are more often considered before roads and buildings are constructed, and water users are increasingly working together to restore more natural hydrologic systems in Oregon's rivers and streams.

Oregonians are working to sustain the state's fish and wildlife, but emerging challenges will require new adaptations. Oregon's population is growing, increasing the demand for housing, services and amenities. There were more than 3.5 million Oregonians in 2003, and the trend

indicates steady, rapid growth. The state's famous quality of life, in great part due to its mild climate, coastline, spectacular vistas, outdoor recreation, and cities known for their livability will no doubt entice more people. The Willamette Valley is home to 70 percent of Oregon's people and the population is expected to nearly double in the next 50 years. Bend, Medford, Ashland and Brookings are experiencing even greater population booms.

This Conservation Strategy provides an adaptive and comprehensive framework for continued positive action and new innovation. Building upon previous plans, it provides a menu of recommended voluntary actions and tools to help inspire local communities, landowners, and citizens to define their own conservation role.

Oregonians have long demonstrated their willingness to work together for the common good. Tapping that spirit will encourage new alliances, partnerships, coordination, and collaboration between agencies, tribes, organizations, businesses, and landowners to take care of Oregon's unique natural treasures.

The Conservation Strategy uses the concepts "sustainable" and "sustainability," as defined in Oregon Revised Statute 184.421(4): "Sustainability means using, developing and protecting resources in a manner that enables people to meet current needs and provides that future generations can also meet future needs, from the joint perspective of environmental, economic and community objectives."



Photo © Bruce Newhouse

