

Johnson Creek Problem Under New Attack

Legislation designed to curb flooding of Johnson creek is in the works at Salem, seeking to achieve by state law what could not be accomplished through a water-control district.

Amendments to H.B. 1108, now on the floor of the house of representatives, would allow use of the county service-district procedure to establish diking and flood-control works in control of water courses, such as Johnson creek.

The bill itself, H.B. 1108, deals with establishment of parks and recreation districts under the service-district law.

Swift action in tackling the problem is provided through an amendment attaching the emergency clause, which would make the measure effective immediately on being signed by the governor.

Groundwork on the Johnson creek problem was achieved in the house committee on local government, which last week drew an overflow crowd -- many of them from Gresham -- to the point where the committee chairman, Rep. Phil Lang (D-Portland) sought in vain to find a larger meeting room.

Rep. Betty Roberts, East County Democrat, conducted much of the questioning of witnesses dealing with the Johnson creek phase of the proposal. Reasons were aired for believing the county service-district method would succeed where the water control district approach has failed. After years of struggle, the Southeast Johnson Creek water Control district was dissolved on Jan. 3, with funds still in its treasury.

Alex L. Parks of Portland, an attorney who was a witness at the committee hearing, said law provides that some \$11,000 remaining in the water control district be paid to the counties involved, Multnomah

Proponents of flood-control through the Johnson creek district were defeated by refusal of property owners to finance the work and by failure to obtain easements allowing access to property necessary to undertake the work.

A county service district would be administered by the board of county commissioners and would apportion the cost of flood control according to benefits received, so that property more remote from the flood scene would bear less of the cost than that on the creek bank.

The magnitude of the problem and inadequacy of the water-control district were spread on the record by witnesses, although there was wide variance as to number of people involved.

Parks testified some 300 families were involved each year in flooding of the creek. But Willis Witter, 635 S. E. Park drive, Gresham, estimated 1000 families are involved, east of 82nd Ave. And Jerry J. Bell, who at 6101 S. E. 122nd

lives in the Johnson creek flood plain, put the figure at 3000 families.

Running through the discussion was the fact the U. S. corps of army engineers has \$1,500,000 available for use in Johnson creek flood control. Only thing needed to tap this reservoir is for a local agency to undertake a sponsor's role.

Parks told the committee "something has to be done about Johnson creek" but said under the old water-control district sentiment was 8 to 1 against voting a tax in that 1600 families were in the district while 300 families were involved. He pointed out Multnomah county has up to \$50,000 for flood-control, while cost of a project for the creek, he said, has been set at \$350,000. This, he said would burden each house with a \$70 levy annually, which he said they could not afford, many being on social security.

He proposed, therefore, that the \$50,000 ceiling on the county be raised to \$350,000. The higher figure as project cost he said was obtained from Rep. Howard Willits, East County Democrat.

Loren Kramer, assistant to the Multnomah county commission and county budget director, said the commission does not favor raising the ceiling to \$350,000. He said:

"This is a small area compared to all the county's responsibility, and how much are you going to spend on one particular project?"

The county commission does favor, he testified, handling Johnson creek flood control through a county service district. He added that the commission believes \$50,000 adequate for planning and to organize a district, setting forth its boundaries after a study of benefits to be derived.

The army engineers, he said, have completed the engineering study years ago, have updated it and doubtless would update it further once the project is launched.

The commission believes the burden of cost should be born by those benefitting and not spread beyond those beneficiaries, the cost to be proportion-

ate to benefits.

Rep. Willits asked whether there had been a study of extent property valuations would rise as result of effective flood control, and Kramer replied no such study had been made.

Witter, who lives on Johnson creek in Gresham, testified that 20,000 acres of drainage are involved in the problem, which is mainly one of clearing out the creek.

"The accumulation of silt has increased each year, and there are trees six inches in diameter growing out of that silt," he said.

"What we need is to remove the rubbish, widen the course and straighten the creek bed, because the damage comes from the water backing up."

Bell urged that the entire watershed be included and said the cost of flood control "would be destructive" to a minority group and he advocated that surrender of easements be made mandatory.

"We have to cope with the water up above, not only that along the creek bottom," he said.

He said he found no condemnation powers in water control district law, and Kramer

said such power is provided in the law on county service districts.

Rep. Beulah Hand, (D-Clackamas) a committee member moved adoption of the amendments and reporting H.B. 1108 to the floor of the house with

a do-pass recommendation. The committee vote was unanimous.

Attending the hearing from the Gresham area were Mr. and Mrs. William Bradfield, Mr. and Mrs. Willis Witter, P. E. Carey, Mrs. Lonnie Wood, Earl Weedman and Rep. Willits.

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Dec. 1971



COME SUMMER, verdant boughs on the big tree in middle distance will comfort and cool the weary traveler along the southeast extension of Hood Ave. Right now, or as long as the freeze lasts, the surface is solid mud, marking completion by the city of Gresham of the leveling process in what old timers will remember as the badlands of Johnson Creek. Kent Cox,

Gresham public works director, said the next step is to install drainage pipes, some of which are seen at the left. Then material obtained from the sewage treatment plant excavation will be used as fill. "We hope to save the tree," Cox said of the big one.

(Outlook photo)

Changing scene Noted creek not all bad

Oregonian, Sept 5, 1978

By VIRGIL SMITH

Contributing editor, The Oregonian

Beautiful Johnson Creek!

It was 40 years ago at least when I was assigned to a Johnson Creek flood. I didn't hear a nice word said about that stream then and not since. But it has become notorious for, and noted only for, its flooding.

That flooding, incidently, isn't all that bad "in the big picture," but that's near the tail end of this account.



VIRGIL SMITH

With all that notoriety in mind, it struck me as a decent, even worthwhile, thing to do, to find out and write something nice about this stream. I didn't doubt I could find something because I hold as one of the eternal truths that nothing in nature is entirely bad.

I figured to follow the creek from its source to its mouth, which didn't record as a difficult undertaking since the creek drains about 45 square miles of land, all in civilized or settled country.

But I spent hours trying to find Johnson Creek's first trickle, working from maps which did not agree, then driving around and talking to people who didn't agree either. I think the source is in the vicinity of Cottrell School.

A place I was told was the source and which I would have liked to believe was a series of small ponds with fish in them and ducks and geese on them, off a road called Revenue on one map and Pleasant Home on another, but something else by the man who directed me there. But the owner of some of the ponds insisted they were on a tributary and not the main stream of Johnson Creek, which he declared was "on the other side of the hill." I gave up the search for the source figuring it couldn't be much and so hard to find.

Nowhere in its upper reaches does this creek amount to much. It is mostly in shadow, and slips under roads through culverts, with no where a name post.

Its thin stream of water, when I could find it, was turbid, which means that it looks dirty without seeming to carry sediment, and is not necessarily polluted.

It is not until it gets into Gresham, slipping into town along the railroad at the southeast corner, that the stream takes on character and attracts attention. Gresham tied and tamed a segment of it, altering its course to form an island and anchor a park. The park is a pleasant place to be, and the creek makes a positive contribution. Score one for Johnson Creek..

Elsewhere in Gresham, the creek, which doesn't penetrate the town very far before it turns back toward the hills to the south, displays some charm. It is the backyard border of some fine homes. Most of these are not precisely on the bank of the stream, but above, out of the flood plain. But the people like it, consider the creek an asset. Interesting in flood time.

Out of Gresham the creek makes a move toward Jenne Road, then bends westward and follows Foster Road for a dozen blocks or so. And here I got a surprise. The ponds at Lakeside Gardens I had assumed were an offspring of Johnson Creek are not: this water comes from a tributary of Johnson.

Again in its Foster Road segment, the creek gives a quality character to some homes. It is after leaving Foster and bending south toward Johnson Creek Boulevard that the creek does its mischief. This little stream which lies silent most of the time in a bed of lush vegetation has been known to leave that bed in the night to spill into cellars and seep beneath the doors of houses yards away.

Although the flood is usually gone within hours, the pictures it provides are the most spectacular evidence of long or continued rains and have given the whole stream its bad reputation and nursed a continuing plea for stopping the floods as a public service.

While following the boulevard the creek mostly behaves. From Ardenwald as it continues down to McLoughlin Boulevard it occasionally gives some places, such as the Oregon Liquor Control Commission office, wet feet.

Finally the creek ducks under McLoughlin Boulevard, slips behind some buildings in downtown Milwaukie and fades away on a tiny inaccessible beach on the Willamette River.

Truthfully, Johnson Creek is never going to be a great attraction, but neither is it the ugly menace so often suggested. Gresham has dreams of a Johnson Creek greenway, encouraged by the attraction of its single park, and has acquired a bit of property to get it moving. The stream has pretty spots.

The cause of the turbidity has not been pinned down but Gresham planners permit no industry on stream, and are not aware of any polluters.

As for the flooding, the talk and the planning which has been going on for a generation can be stripped down to this:

Flood damage, while severe to some citizens and disastrous to a few, is, countywide, small. The people who suffer it cannot afford any of the measures suggested to stop the flooding, and the people who are not hurt are not willing to share the cost of flood control.

Most of the people now living in the flood plain knew of the risk when they moved in.

The problem may not be solvable short of clearing the flood plain of habitation.

Finally, my insurance agent tells me that all the people there can get flood insurance. It is a government subsidized policy any licensed agent can write. The cost he estimated at \$85 a year for \$35,000. So the issue is whether the pleasure of living along the stream is worth the cost.

pinion

Lee Irwin, *Publisher Emeritus*
Quinton Smith, *Editor*

Larry Walker, *Publisher*
Richard Seven, *News Editor*

Page 8A · Gresham, Ore., Tues., Dec. 8, 1981

Johnson Creek overflow nothing new

WATER — Every year, more or less, the folks who live along Johnson Creek have to contend with high water.

As of present writing, the clouds have broken and the creek is going down but this is a typical year. Like so many others in Oregon, Johnson Creek isn't able to contain all the water rushing downstream and the waters spill over the banks.

The high mark this year occurred late Saturday and since then, the waters have been dropping slowly.

Persons who live along the creek remember 1964 as the worst year for flooding. A heavy snowfall occurred just before Christmas and when the snow turned to rain, everything melted in a hurry. Damage was especially heavy in the Hoodland area an along the Sandy River. Johnson Creek poured over its banks in dozens of spots.

after hours



lee irwin

BLESSED EVENT — This is a little late in telling but Tom and Darlene Taylor welcomed their second child, an 8-lb., 10 oz. son, Brian Clayton, Oct. 30 in Tacoma.

Tom, now co-publisher of the Peninsula Gateway in Gig Harbor,

Wash., is a Gresham High and University of Oregon graduate and served for a time as editor of the Sandy Post.

Grandparents include the Walt Taylors of Port Ludlow, Wash. Brian also as welcomed by a sister, Nikki.

O TANNENBAUM — Harry and Ruth's Christmas Tree Farm located between Boring and Damascus gets a nice plug in the December issue of Oregon magazine. We quote:

"... Periodically a steam locomotive chugs out to the patch a mile away pulling three passenger cars with a capacity for 73 cutters. . . and two flatcars for the trees. Boys are on hand at both ends of the line to transfer the cargo to and from the train and finally to your car. Even the saws are furnished."

POLITICAL DEPT. —The so-called "helicopter" state Senate

district (No. 14), which stretches all the way from Sandy to Springfield, has drawn a good candidate in Silverton Publisher Joe Davis.

Joe has been publisher of the Silverton Appeal Tribune for 21 years and describes himself as a conservative. He has a wide range of civic duties and, we think, would be an excellent choice for the Republican nomination.

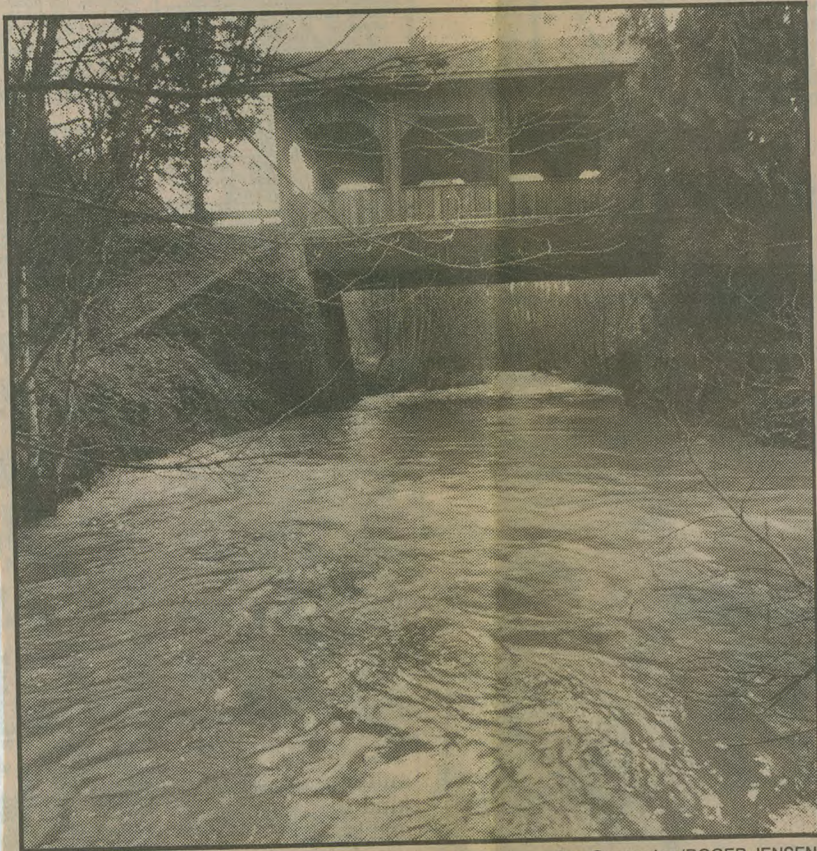
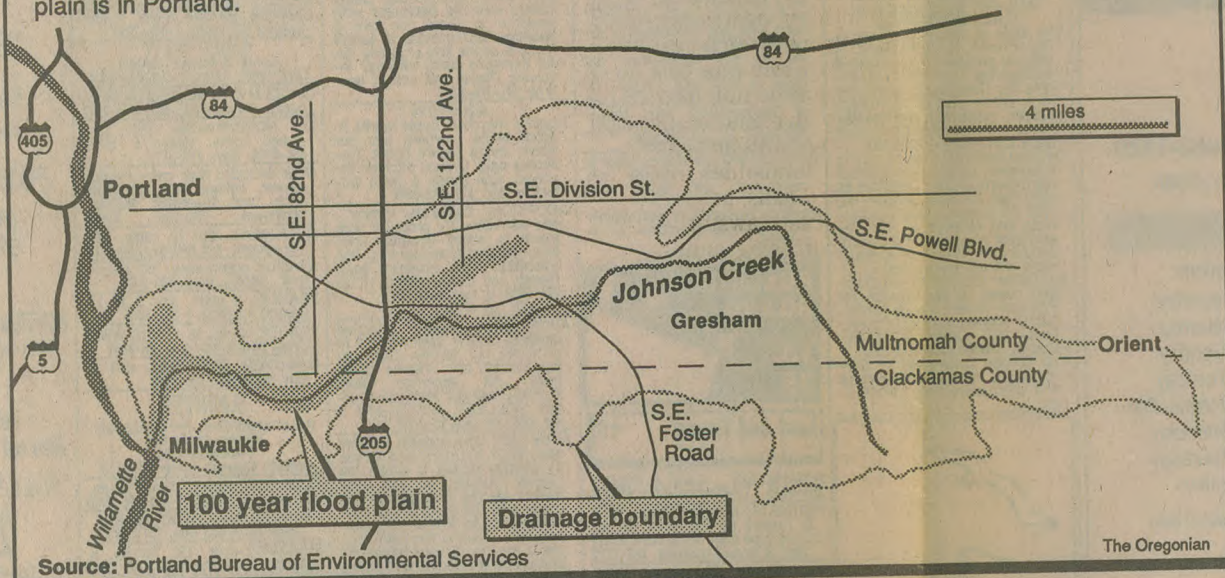
REAL ESTATE — The Daily Journal of Commerce reports that this is a buyers market as far as property on the coast is concerned.

Prices are at low levels and if you have wanted a coastal cottage for years, now may be the time to buy. Middle-scale homes (\$60,000 to \$80,000) are moving slowly, if at all. Homes at the bottom and top of the scale are moving well.

Lee Irwin is publisher emeritus and editorial writer of The Gresham Outlook.

JOHNSON CREEK BASIN

Portland, Gresham and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are studying Johnson Creek and the surrounding drainage basin area to find out what improvements are needed for flood control in the area. The drainage basin extends from the Orient area to the Willamette River. Most of the area directly in the 100-year flood plain is in Portland.



The Oregonian/ROGER JENSEN

Several days of rain have swollen Johnson Creek under the Cedar Crossing bridge near Southeast 134th Avenue. Controversial flood control measures for the creek are being studied once again.

Engineers taking fresh look at ways to prevent floods

By MAYA BLACKMUN
of The Oregonian staff

Twenty-six miles of Johnson Creek are being studied again for flood control improvements, and officials are taking a fresh look at a plan that was scrapped 10 years ago because of public protest over its costs.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers first devised a plan for the area in 1950, but it has never been implemented. Most recently, the Metropolitan Service District tried to create a local improvement district in 1980 to assess property owners to finance the project. But strong opposition forced Metro to drop the plan and the project died.

But the problems of flood control have not gone away, and Portland city officials approached the Army Corps of Engineers in 1987 to take up the matter again.

The Corps of Engineers received \$152,000 a few weeks ago to re-evaluate the 40-year-old study.

"I think it's more responsible to prevent problems rather than to react to them after they cause mass property damage or possibly loss of life," said James Soli, water resources engineer for Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services.

But Soli acknowledged that people find it hard to plan for natural disasters that may not happen in their lifetime.

"Something that catastrophic doesn't happen all the time, but I think it's appropriate that we do plan and prepare for it," Soli said. "And I believe it's the same with the Johnson Creek Basin."

The creek runs through Portland, Gresham, Milwaukie, and Multnomah and Clackamas counties. The drainage basin, an area of about 35,000 acres with runoff which feeds into the creek, extends from Cottrell, an unincorporated area east of Orient, to the Willamette River. About 75 percent of the approximately 2,000 acres directly in the 100-year flood plain is in Portland. That area would be covered with water by a severe flood expected to occur once every 100 years. Soli said the last flood of that magnitude occurred in the 1890s.

The flood-control study, which was last updated in 1975, will examine changes in the flood plain and how well the plan meets the communities' needs. It is expected to be finished in December, said Gene Pospisil, chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers coastal and flood plain management branch in Portland.

Gresham has joined Portland in signing a letter of intent to support the re-evaluation. Milwaukie and

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Attention returns to

METRO/NORTHWEST

Johnson Creek

Clackamas County also have been approached by the Corps of Engineers and Portland to get involved.

The local governments and the Corps of Engineers also will consider other ideas in looking at water quality, environmental resources such as fisheries and wetlands, and how improvements would be financed.

Soli said the group plans to approach the issue by identifying the problems and outlining a range of alternatives and their costs. With that information, the cities and counties then would be able to decide whether to enact the improvements — and how.

But both Portland and Gresham officials emphasized that a new project would not be financed as Metro proposed 10 years ago. And Soli added that in view of the possible benefits, the costs would be relatively low.

"At this time I don't think there's any way we're going to do a basin-wide local improvement district," Soli said.

Soli said the public would be involved in decisions concerning any potential project. He said environmental groups are being consulted.

In Gresham, a citizens committee already is meeting to come up with a way to finance storm drain improvements.

Pospisil said the plan that Metro started with in 1980 would have cost about \$9 million. He didn't have a firm figure of how much it would cost today. If that plan is used, local governments would have to pay between 25 percent and 50 percent of the project cost, including easements. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would come up with the remainder. But he added that the problem continues to get worse. As land is developed, it absorbs less

water, he said.

"... Runoff will increase," Pospisil said. "And the flood potential will become all the greater."

Don McIntire of Gresham, who led the effort 10 years ago with the Up the Creek Committee to stop Metro's financing scheme, said he remains skeptical of the danger.

"It's just government trying to find something to do," he said.

Johnson Creek fish runs may get Metro's aid

The government entity is likely to remove two small dams in the water off Ambleside Drive

By CATHERINE TREVISON
THE OREGONIAN

GRESHAM — Just yards from an old brick factory, a city maintenance shop and busy Hogan Road, the water off Ambleside Drive is calm and beautiful.

Here, Johnson Creek forks around a small island. Two small dams still its clamor, pushing the water back into a gently curving pool. The deep green cones of Hogan cedars spike the basin, where a few acres of public open space wrap around several homes.

This is gorgeous. But, it isn't natural. Neighbors say the dams were built as footings for a bridge at least 50 years ago, and people drove across them to reach their homes.

Metro's just gotten the money that will let it adjust this setting to the tastes of steelhead and cutthroat trout. It wants to plant the banks inside the open space with native trees and shrubs, scoop out years of mushy sediment, knock out the dams, and let the creek run free.

Cutthroat are becoming so rare around Portland that federal government is considering whether the trout is a threatened species. And, steelhead, already on the threatened list, also live in parts of Johnson Creek.

"Removing the dams don't solve the problem at all. It's just one of the challenges fish have," said Greg Wolley, an associate regional planner with Metro's regional parks and green-space team.

Other problems, too

Fish in the creek also suffer from erosion, warmed-over water, farm pesticides and fertilizers, and oily runoff from roads and parking lots. On one recent visit, upstream erosion turned the creek the opaque brown of a cloudy latte.

That's why some neighbors doubt that Metro's plan will help.

"I don't argue with them, because it's not on my property," said Clarence Allesina, 87, who first lived in the Ambleside area in 1939. However, "I think they're whistling Dixie if they think this is going to help fish."

In 1939, salmon spawned outside Allesina's home — after the dams had already been built, he said. He remembers having to watch his dogs to keep them away from the carcasses of the spent adults. But, by the mid 1940s, the salmon were gone — probably the victims of mill pollution downstream, he says.

Years later, local teens angled for cutthroat near his home, but he hasn't seen any of those fish since the 1960s, he said.

However, a U.S. Forest Service survey found cutthroat in the Ambleside area in 1995. Steelhead also are found on parts of the creek, at least as far up as Crystal Springs, Wolley said.

Despite nature documentaries that show salmon leaping past grizzly paws, biologists say that any obstruction more than 6 inches tall can be a problem for the fish seeking food or a spawning ground.

"I'm not aware of all the barriers between here and the headwaters, and here and the mouth," Wolley said. "But, we can do what we can, on our property."

Some Metro workers had mixed feelings about buying



open space on Ambleside last year, because decades of homeowners had already landscaped and altered the area. But, Wolley said, the dam removal gives Metro a good chance at helping nature out.

The dams are small — about 4-feet tall and 12-feet wide. The one on the north channel is 4-feet thick with concrete pools, which may have once functioned as a fish ladder, built into the side. This dam abuts the retaining wall of a nearby home, which is being undermined by the creek, Wolley said. The dam to the south is made of earth, coated with a thin layer of concrete and a log.

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board has given Metro \$70,000 toward the \$105,000 price tag for the project. Before work begins, a Metro study will predict how the creek speed and direction will change. Metro doesn't want to cause problems for neighboring landowners who fear a faster stream will erode their banks or undermine their walls, Wolley said.

Metro must also ask the Division of State Lands, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the city of Gresham for permission before it starts work. The dams won't be removed until next year at the earliest, Wolley said.

Metro planner Greg Wolley stands on a small dam in Johnson Creek near Ambleside Drive looking downstream. The leafy setting is beautiful, but it's not a natural habitat for the area's threatened fish, Wolley said. Metro wants to remove two small dams to make the creek friendlier to fish.

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Metro buys 5.6 acres along Johnson Creek

Officials says purchase will help protect wildlife, water

Metro Regional Government last week bought 5.6 acres south of Gresham in order to preserve green space, wildlife and protect water quality.

The property acquisition is part of Metro's effort to protect land along Johnson Creek and the Springwater Corridor Trail, said Karen Kane, Metro spokeswoman.

Located on Southeast Telford Road, the property includes more than 1,000 feet along Johnson and Sunshine creeks, both of which support Chinook, Coho, steelhead and cutthroat trout. It also boasts forests of alder, cottonwood and scattered Douglas fir trees that protect and improve the creeks' water quality.

Because this sort of riparian habitat has decreased significantly statewide, it receives special attention in the Oregon Conservation Strategy, a blueprint for protecting native fish and wildlife, Kane said. Such areas in Western Oregon support a variety of animals, including more than 200 bird species.

"The wildlife that makes this

to have a home here, thanks to the protection of natural areas like this one," said Metro Council President David Bragdon. "And that's good news for all of us who enjoy the outdoors."

Walkers, joggers and bicyclists pass the property on the Springwater Trail, which follows Johnson Creek on its path from Gresham to the Willamette River.

Metro paid \$378,000 for the land, which is next to a 2-acre natural area already owned by Metro. Money for the purchase comes from the 2006 natural areas bond measure, which has allowed Metro to preserve 165 acres in the Johnson Creek area to date.

"Collectively, all those acres have a big impact on the Johnson Creek watershed," said Metro Councilor Rod Park, who represents East Multnomah County, where the property is located. "The community has embraced this creek and cares deeply about its long-term health."

The 2006 bond measure funds land acquisition and capital improvements that protect water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, enhance trails and wildlife corridors and provide greater connections to nature in urban areas throughout the Portland-metropolitan area.

Outlook - 3/1/13

Volunteers to flood Johnson Creek with TLC

By MARA STINE
The Outlook

More than 100 volunteers will provide an estimated \$20,000 worth of labor when they dig in this weekend to help restore Gresham's part of the Johnson Creek Watershed.

From 9 a.m. to noon, Saturday, March 2, volunteers will be planting as part of the Johnson Creek Watershed Council's 15th annual "Watershed Wide" event.

The large-scale community volunteer day spans 12 different sites across the 54-square-mile watershed, about a third of which is in Gresham.

"With 350 to 400 volunteers each year donating a cumulative 1,200 hours to the event, the positive impact to the health of Johnson Creek is significant," said Amy Lodholz, volunteer and outreach coordinator for the Johnson Creek Watershed Council. "It could not be achieved as quickly without the massive volunteer support."

Volunteers are teaming with members of the Johnson Creek Watershed Council and staff from the city of Gresham to plant more than 8,000 native

trees and shrubs and remove hundreds of pounds of invasive plants like blackberry and ivy.

Of the 12 sites, four are in East Multnomah County — Clatsop Butte in outer Southeast Portland, Eagle Woods Natural Area in Gresham, Hogan Creek/Johnson Creek confluence in Gresham and Good Shepherd Church.

Good Shepherd Church, at 28986 S.E. Haley Road in Bor-ing, is new to the annual event.

"It's a brand new relationship between the church and the creek, and I am certainly enjoying it," said Jamie Killgore, the church's groundskeeper. "It has been rewarding, just in the short time we have been working, to see the new birds and wildlife along the creek."

Forty volunteers are needed at just this location to plant sedges and shrubs in the wetlands on the church grounds.

To sign up to volunteer, call Lodholz at 503-652-7477, or go to jwcw.org/register-for-watershed-wide-march-2-2013 to sign-up for the location of your choice.

Wall Street Pizza also is providing free lunch to volunteers.