

**Willamette Restoration Initiative. *Restoring a River of Life: The Willamette Restoration Strategy*. Oregon, 2001.** (Reviewed by Susan Mershon)

Available online from [www.oregonwri.org](http://www.oregonwri.org) under “publications”

This report contains the “Recommendations for the Willamette Basin Supplement to the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds.” The Oregon Plan dates from 1997, when it was passed by the Oregon State Legislature. It is a plan to improve water quality to protect salmon. The Oregon Plan has produced books of hard facts as well as pamphlets educating the public.

This report is authored by the citizen's board Willamette Restoration Initiative (WRI), created in 1998 by Governor John Kitzhaber. The board includes a 26 member board of directors from many disciplines. Its purpose is to "promote, integrate, and coordinate efforts to protect and restore the health of the Willamette Basin." (3-3) The WRI has no legal authority. These recommendations won't be acted upon without the state approval.

The *Strategy* states that we aren't doing enough about the Willamette Watershed's serious problems. We aren't working together to change the situation. This report is intended to be a catalyst for action.

There are many different government agencies that deal with the Willamette, and they relate in confusing ways. The *Strategy* tries to make the relationships clearer, and establish a common agenda.

The report identifies 27 Critical Actions (“What we need to do and why”). They are organized under 4 categories:

1. Clean Water
2. Water Quantity
3. Habitats and Hydrologic Processes
4. Institutions and Policies

Additionally, the report profiles existing river conditions and discusses the unique role of the WRI trying to bring everything together. It provides ways to measure the progress of restoration efforts.

Some specific land use issues, from the Actions, are:

- o Educating real estate developers and builders, and providing incentives for good practices.
- o Landowner incentives to improve riparian lands.
- o Improving water management efforts and working with the Army Corps of Engineers regarding flood

control reservoirs and fish passage.

- o To “support basinwide scientific investigations of how to restore floodplain function.” (Look into restoring some historic floodplains).
- o Land use planning.

## **Critique**

This *Strategy* is essential reading. It deals specifically with the Willamette and tries to be comprehensive. It is authoritative in tone, yet its recommendations aren't law.

It is well-organized, with stand-alone sections that mean you don't have to read the whole 240 pages. First, everything is summarized in layman's terms. Technically detailed chapters come later.

It is not a primary source of data on the watershed; it uses data gathered by other organizations as its starting point.

It seeks to organize the many river agencies into a larger plan. Much of the time it urges further research in specific directions, and increased support of existing programs. The WRI wants to expedite saving the river.

The *Strategy* seeks to change the status quo, but neither is it radically environmentalist. The diverse board tries to balance all issues. Representatives come from Weyerhaeuser, farms, power companies, SOLV, OSU, Metro, the DEQ, and others.

While the other components of the Oregon Plan look at everything from the perspective of creating a good watershed for salmon, the WRI *Strategy* deals with many more interests. Salmon are not the only reason that a healthy watershed is important.

I don't know the current status of the Oregon Plan and I am unsure if the Strategy was adopted. Regardless, it is a good source of information and issues to pursue for further research. It is good to see what important actions these diverse interests have agreed on.

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