

## **Appendix 7: Willamette Restoration Initiative Morphs into Willamette Partnership**

The Willamette Restoration Initiative was a creation of Governor John Kitzhaber. He appointed the Board of Directors, and directed the organization to develop a comprehensive conservation strategy for the Basin, with a special emphasis on water quality, fish and wildlife. The strategy became the Willamette Chapter of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, and an important element in Kitzhaber's agenda.

Drawing heavily from the scientific work of the Pacific Northwest Ecological Research Consortium, the Board and partners developed the basin-wide strategy, published it, and shared it with policy makers and resource professionals throughout the basin. Many of the 27 action items in the strategy have been at least partially implemented. Later, the organization received funding from the Northwest Power and Conservation Council to write the Sub-Basin Plan for Fish and Wildlife. It was completed in the fall of 2004, and serves as a very detailed document to help guide federal investments in wildlife habitat in the Willamette Basin.

During most of its existence, the fiscal agent for the Willamette Restoration Initiative has been the Mid-Valley Council of Governments in Salem. This arrangement was mutually beneficial and cost-effective for both organizations. However, it was sometimes unclear to financial supporters of the Willamette Restoration Initiative whether the organization was public or private, so a decision was made to file for 501(c)(3), tax-exempt status as a charitable organization.

There was also a need to gain some distance from the Governor's office to build a broader base of bi-partisan support. The Willamette Restoration Initiative was disbanded, and a new organization was formed, called the Willamette Partnership. The new board consists of mostly private-sector directors, many with ties to industries or landowners whose political support is essential for new conservation programs to be adopted and implemented. The mission of the new organization is to increase the pace, scope, and effectiveness of conservation in the basin by creating a "marketplace" in which buyers and sellers benefit from opportunities to make strategic investments in the highest priority habitats. This new framework will include both market-based strategies and streamlining of existing government regulatory and technical assistance programs to ensure better results at a lower cost.

Although the transition from the Willamette Restoration Initiative to the Willamette Partnership created some financial insecurity, there is great enthusiasm from the staff and board, and a strong commitment to a more focused, strategic organization. The work of the Partnership builds on the accomplishments of the Initiative, taking advantage of new opportunities to provide guidance and support for more coherent and strategic investments in conservation that will create a model for other regions.