

## Visioning the Future: Listening Sessions

# Meeting Summary

Following research, interviews, and a Visioning Open House for the Willamette Confluence area, the McKenzie River Trust held a series of small group Listening Sessions to explore solutions and actions for the Greater Mount Pisgah Area. Held March 2nd-5th, 2026, at the McKenzie River Trust office, the meetings sought to:

- **Collect targeted input** on draft vision, values, and strategies.
- **Brainstorm key actions** to implement the draft vision, values, and strategies.
- **Help build community networks** and increase partnership between McKenzie River Trust and project collaborators.

## Participants

Invitations were sent via email to 82 individuals, and 46 people participated. **The following organizations and groups were represented at the meetings:**

City of Eugene	Oregon Department of Forestry
City of Springfield	Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
Coast Fork Watershed Council	Springfield Public Schools
Eugene Water and Electric Board	Springfield Utility Board
Lane County Parks	Traditional Ecological Inquiry Program
Lane County Planning	University of Oregon
Long Tom Watershed Council	Upper Willamette Soil and Water
McKenzie River Trust	Conservation District
Middle Fork Willamette Watershed Council	Upper Willamette Stewardship Network
Mount Pisgah Arboretum	Willamalane Park and Recreation District

## Topics and Agendas

The five sessions were 2 hours each, included 10-20 participants each, and were held over 3 days. See below for a snapshot of the webpage invitation:



### Water Quality: Drinking Water Protection, Stormwater Management, and Water Filtration

03/02/2026, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

This session will focus on water quality and long-term natural resource planning. Conversations will include sourcewater protection projects and how natural lands and resources can benefit our community for generations to come. Staff and community members with unique expertise or insight into water quality, hydrology, water infrastructure, and water resource planning are encouraged to attend.



### Land Stewardship and Restoration: Floodplains

03/02/2026, 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

This session will focus on opportunities for land stewardship and floodplain and riparian restoration within the project area. Staff and community members with unique expertise and insight into floodplain restoration, hydrology, riparian habitats, and water resource management are encouraged to attend. *Space is limited, and we ask that organizations limit participation to two staff members.*



### Land Stewardship and Restoration: Oak and Prairie

03/04/2026, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

This session will focus on opportunities for land stewardship and restoration in upland oak and prairie habitats within the project area. Staff and community members with unique expertise and insight into upland habitat restoration and/or prescribed fire are encouraged to attend. *Space is limited, and we ask that organizations limit participation to two staff members.*



### Trails and Transportation

03/05/2026, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

This session will focus on existing and desired future trails and transportation investments within the project area. Staff and community members with unique expertise and insight into trail design and development, transportation planning and infrastructure, and accessibility are encouraged to attend.



### Community Connections & Environmental Education

03/05/2026, 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

This session will focus on opportunities to leverage outdoor spaces in the project area to promote environmental education, community volunteering, and interpretive programming. Staff, educators, and community members with unique expertise and insight into education and community engagement are encouraged to attend. *Space is limited, and we ask that organizations limit participation to two staff members.*

Session agendas included an introduction, a brief oral presentation, and both large and small group discussions. Example from the Water Quality session:

Envisioning a Future for the Willamette Confluence  
**Water Quality: Drinking Water Protection,  
Stormwater Management, and Water Filtration**

Monday, March 2nd, from 10am to Noon  
McKenzie River Trust Offices at 725 W 1st Ave in Eugene

10:00 Welcome and Introductions

10:20 Draft Values and Vision

10:35 Topic Overview

10:45 The Problem

How do we get from “now” to vision?

- What activities or land uses pose the greatest long-term risk to water quality in the project area?
- What limits our ability to improve our water systems?

11:00 Break

11:10 The Solutions (small groups)

What are the most significant actions we can take to solve the problems?

11:40 Large Group Debrief

11:55 Next steps

## Participant Input to Draft Values and Vision

Below are high-level notes on participant feedback for the following draft sections of the emerging Visions, Goals & Strategies document.

### *Introduction*

The Coast Fork and Middle Fork of the Willamette River flow together through a large fish and wildlife habitat conservation area near Springfield and Eugene, Oregon, known as the Willamette Confluence. The Willamette Confluence property adjoins a popular Lane County Park and is rich in biodiversity, beauty, and opportunities for community connections. Agencies, nonprofit organizations, Tribal governments, landowners, and community members are collaborating to envision a future for this 1,300-acre area that ensures its ecological integrity through shared stewardship. This draft document is a work in progress, as we incorporate feedback from many partners.

#### **Participant input:**

- Just use “community members,” don’t include a laundry list of stakeholders
- Whole document: struggled with the flowery language.
- Be clear about past harms to Indigenous Knowledge and about how conflict has been addressed.
- We need a Framework to address conflicts; we need “sideboards.”
- Create more emphasis on the BIG PICTURE, how the site fits in relation to the larger context. McKenzie River Trust can influence beyond the Willamette Confluence property. (collab)
- Describe history and pre-history: river mining, resource extraction, etc...

### *Guiding Values*

- **Healthy lands and waters** for community resiliency and sustainability.
  - Add “ecosystem.”
  - Add “Ecosystem resiliency” - holistic approach, “novel ecosystems”, adaptive management
  - Wildlife? Aquatic? Is this all human? x2
  - Add “community and cultural resiliency...” and “multi-generational sustainability.”
  - Diversify “community” - tie into nature and ecology

- Add “thriving ecosystem.”
- **Collaboration and broad community participation** in land stewardship.
  - Add “agency”
  - Stewardship is overused. Maybe “Care”
  - “Community” is humancentric, does not reference ecosystem x2
  - Use a lay term instead of “stewardship.”
  - Define “collaboration” - collaborative stewardship means something specific x2
  - Land is a relative, not just humans
- **Stewardship guided and informed by diverse knowledge systems** and ways of knowing.
  - Add “diverse knowledge systems, including Indigenous Knowledge keepers, and ways...”
  - Stewarding what? Conservation vs public access
  - What do “diverse knowledge systems” and “traditional knowledge” mean?
  - Add “Regional Indigenous knowledge and cultural connection.”
- **Welcoming**, safe, managed public access.
  - “ecosystem managed”
  - Public?
  - Define “managed” x2
  - Define how it is not a park, add “limited within easement constraints.”
- **Connection** to larger community conservation efforts.
  - Add “habitat connectivity, adaptive management, and ecosystems.
  - Add “larger community and Tribal conservation...”
  - Add “adaptive management”?
  - Add “region-wide”

### **General comments:**

- Add more nature and biodiversity references. Currently, they are too people-focused x3
- Add “maximize ecosystem function.”
- Add “Engaging care for circles of kinship.”
- Words like “community” may not reach Tribal communities
- Add: “protect riparian, floodwater storage for plants and wildlife. ”
- Add “reduce wildfire in upland oak” somewhere
- Do people have an equal say? (stakeholder priorities?). How about Indigenous relations?

- Adaptive management is lingo, but should it be included?
- Be more specific about "inclusion."
- Add "creating caring community."
- Add "land restoration" and "ecosystems."
- Add "tending of place."
- Add "connecting to place."
- Consider the 4 Rs: relationship, reciprocity, responsibility, restoration
- Add "balance connectivity" - between critters and people

## Vision

*The future of the Willamette Confluence includes:*

- **Rivers meandering** across floodplains, nourishing fisheries, plants, and wildlife, and providing clean, plentiful drinking water.
  - Key issue
  - The "meandering" concept may be in conflict with SUB infrastructure
  - Reference "connectivity"
  - Clarify "nourishing fisheries."
  - Clarify where drinking water comes from (groundwater)
  - Add "across floodplains, wetlands, ..."
  - Add "reliable drinking water."
  - Are "meandering rivers" possible at the Willamette Confluence site?
  - Add "wetlands and ponds" somewhere
  - Add "store floodwater" and/or "recharge groundwater."
  - Add "riparian"
- **A matrix** of fir forests, oak savannas, woodlands, and prairies, tended with a wide range of stewardship approaches.
  - Add "conifer forests, mixed oak savannas."
  - Delete "fir," they won't survive climate change
  - Add "protecting riparian areas."
- **A safe, welcoming place** for people to immerse themselves in nature.
  - Key issue
  - Add "in nature, and recover cultural practices."
  - Implies uncontrolled public access
  - No access = protects the drinking water source

- Framework needed, an Indigenous set of standards: welcoming for whom? Address conflicting world views. Human/non-human. Describes the decision process and commitments.
- We don't have enough resources/staff to support "welcoming safe."
- Offer more opportunities: campsites, outdoor activities such as archery, paddlesports, and fishing.
- **Teaching and learning** opportunities, both supported and celebrated.
  - Add "Teaching, learning, creative, and cultural opportunities."
  - Add "intergenerational learning space."
  - Avoid the word "education."
  - Add "land is our relative." Consider: what do we want this land to teach us? Our responsibility is 100 years.
- **Co-stewardship approaches** to caring for land and water.
  - Joint management?
  - What does this mean? Use lay language, such as collaborate.
  - Lack of clear determination on Tribal access
  - What is the role of Tribes in relation to access?

**General comments:**

- Language doesn't reference or imply limitations due to easements. How does that work?
- How do agriculture and WVI connect to this vision? What is the wildlands/urban interface?
- Add "Protecting rivers, floodplains, and riparian areas to enhance (or improve) plant and wildlife habitat while providing clean drinking water.
- Connect nature and culture; don't separate them or pit them against each other.
- Be sensitive about how the plan relates the Willamette Confluence to the larger area.
  - Remember to "zoom out" and include upstream projects and opportunities
- Don't use the word "matrix." How about "mosaic"
- Remember "humility" as a learning tool
- Integrate "Seasonal water connections:"
  - Fish (migration, avoiding stranding)
  - NW pond turtles (breeding, nesting, basking)
- Add "creating caring community."
- Match goods to ownership, including a tax lot map in planning documents

# Solutions and Actions Brainstorm (small group conversations)

## Water Quality

### **General comments:**

- Work on a watershed scale, and work toward options that benefit multiple stakeholders

### **Infrastructure in relation to river dynamism:**

- Evaluate site options for river dynamism throughout the region. (think big picture, not just the Willamette Confluence site)
- Develop agreements between McKenzie River Trust and SUB regarding decision-making. Consider utilizing a decision matrix such as the Long Tom Prioritization Framework. Memorialize collaboration through shared agreements.
- Collaborate on floodplain feasibility and modeling (SUB, etc.)
- Look for opportunities that benefit both McKenzie River Trust and SUB
- Avoid changes to geomorphology that would impact the river intake
- Work collaboratively on changes for point of diversion permitting for emergency planning:
  - Emergency response to channel migration
  - Relocation of intake to increase capacity

### **Flood control and sediment**

- Manage sediment from dams
- Coordinate with Corps to understand sedimentation
- Focus on large floodplain restoration projects upstream of the Willamette Confluence, on the Coast Fork, and the Middle Fork.
- Monitoring and sediment transport study.

### **Fire protection**

- Maintain adequate water resources for firefighting
  - Prepare for maximal load: storage, system supply, consider turnover
- Wildfire resiliency actions
  - Protect facilities
  - Collaborate with fire districts and ODF
  - Improve fire resilience through fire breaks and strategies

- Fuels reduction with partners
- Actively manage powerlines

### **Spills**

- Strategies for spill protection (what are these?)
- Geographic response plans and dedicated anchor points
- Ensure vehicle access

### **Access and security**

- Minimal access helps maintain water quality
- Regular managed access helps deter illegal activity, such as camping and vandalism
- Focus on education programs that teach about drinking water protection
- Communicate between agencies regarding site situations, perceived threats
- Perimeter protection while maintaining natural elements
- Develop reporting methods, share between agencies
- Work collaboratively with Willamalane and others to keep the buffer undeveloped and intact.

### **Groundwater retention**

- Actions to recharge groundwater include:
  - Dynamic floodplains
  - Functional infrastructure at SUB water intake
  - What else?

### **Listen/learn/share**

Articulate connections between drinking water quality and restoration work

## **Floodplains**

**Explore constraints:** water intake, gauge station, bridge, roads, etc.

- Costs and benefits
- Value of existing infrastructure as compared to different locations
- Consider a longer timeframe - 50-100 years? (currently defined as a 20-year vision with a 5-10 year action plan)

**Research and understand ways to address floodplain channelization** through the NOAA feasibility study

- Identify and prioritize the best locations, consider points of connection for Coast Fork
- Engage adjacent private landowners to explore opportunities for habitat connectivity, including points of connection between the river and on-site ponds.
- Connect with private landowners

### **Ponds**

- Regulate thermal controls
- Define value in flood storage, habitat for waterfowl, and other elements
- Learn about change over time: anticipate shape change?
- Identify methods to bring it “more into connection.”

### **Increase native plantings and work with soil regeneration**

**Emerald Ash Borer (EAB):** understand travel mileage proximity for action. Support knowledge of action in network. Early detection.

**Collaborative LONG-TERM vision process** with 50-year horizon line  
(listen/learn/share)

- Consider priority areas for activities between Dexter and the Confluence. Ask “Is this the place?” for high-priority activities in the long term.
- “Resiliency planning” - long-term
- Stay in long-term connection with Corps on new & ongoing projects and processes. Connect with the Corps sustainable river program.
- BPA: (currently maintains powerlines for invasive species)
- Develop an interagency agreement to treat invasive species, support natural fire breaks, and include checks and balances to ensure compliance and prevent fires.

**Climate change and Invasive species** (add this to Strategies)

- List, plan for the future. Example: Cottonwood generation is directly tied to flooding

**Use a collaborative approach**, include organizations with a number of interests in the area:

- Stewardship of aquatic resources
- "Adopt a section of river" - patrol, cross-jurisdictional
- Coordinate timing and start upstream
- Fish species in ponds are in the river

**Stand replacement: cross-generational**

- WC, UO, COE, MRT, LC

**Define highest value as "wildlife"** - (wildlife includes fish)

**Indigenous involvement**

- "Community" doesn't always mean Tribal Nations
- Add "Caring for circles of kinship."
- Culture and nature are interwoven
- Add "...and multigenerational, sustainable, cultural resilience."
- Add "Indigenous Knowledge" to goals/strategies
- Add "recover cultural practices" to goals/strategies
- Add the value of other water features, besides floodplain restoration, such as wapato, plants used by indigenous communities. Rx/Cultural Rx in maintaining wetlands

**Focus on the Coast Fork** - water quality concerns

**Benefits to Wildfire management:** Floodplain restoration provides natural fire breaks

**Restoration** = floodplain restoration, the only way to restore the WC area.

**Groundwater:** understand the relationship between groundwater replenishment on the SUB property and pollutants (including potential toxins in the ponds). What is the role of the EPA?

**Education and outreach**

Identify farmland invasives and increase agricultural education

## Oak and Prairie

### **Land management**

- Logging uplands
- Brush management
- Slash management/mulching
- Invasives management
  - EDRR (stands for Early Detection and Rapid Response), define the role of herbicides
- Access to qualified, skilled contractors
- Introducing plant diversity
- Seasonal animal grazing

### **Infrastructure investments**

- Ability to move equipment while protecting sensitive areas

### **Land acquisition and easements** for habitat reconnection

**Collaborate on resources**, funding, and stewardship: HBRA, MRT, Arboretum, other non-profits, and organizations.

- Foster burn leadership
- Tap into existing partnerships (example: LC and MRT)
- “Groundswell of energy to grow capacity”
- Willamette Valley Oak Cooperative: participate to secure funding for partnership programs such as full-time fire personnel, OWEB (qualify)
- Investment partnerships (funding)
- Collaborate across boundaries
- Retain staff year-round, for restoration and fire work
- Invest in fuels management year-round
  - Set a schedule, do sections at a time, promote off-season burning, and work with ODF

### **Process for wildfire protection and prescribed fire:**

- Plan a road-access system (build new accesses, decommission others), then remove trees and manage with fire.
- Integrate into local and regional fire planning documents and processes (EMS)

### **Create a fire authority for the WC area**

- Develop a fire crew for protection, fuels management, and prescribed burns. Have a suppression team on hand to respond to emergencies.
- Develop a relationship with Eugene Springfield Fire, develop contracts with fire districts
- Exemptions for burn bans
- Foster burn leadership
- Remove liability barriers (work through ODFW, TIEP, watershed councils)
- Expand burn windows (currently they are only a few weeks)
- Identify burn breaks
- Use precedent projects near transmission lines
- Cultural burning vs. prescribed burning: different processes
- Social license to burn (Marcola Fire Dist)
- Permitting through ODF is required

### **Floodplain reconnections**

- S bottomlands
- Small stream restoration (low-tech, process-based, Beaver Dam Analog (BDA))
- Sinuosity: (river length per distance traveled?)

### **Communications**

- Rework public perceptions of "forest."
- Increase public education in relation to burning
  - Define "good fire."
  - Tailored to each community (Marcola is an example)
  - Focus on "fuels management" because people understand that this "makes communities safer."
  - Collect testimonies to elevate stories of healing, avoid trigger words
  - Reference that "firs are dying" - example is the South Hills

### **Regulations and legislation**

- Incentivize converting conifer forest to oak through the land use/permitting/zoning process.
- Develop an "oak-deferral" program, similar to the forest deferral program, providing tax deferral status when landowners convert from conifer to oak.

### **Indigenous representation**

- Recognize Indigenous values/vision, then integrate into goals and actions.
- Recognize “Sovereignty” in the Goals
- Create a framework for collaboration
  - Shared grammar, terms defined, example is TPAD commitments

## Education

### **Evaluate the impacts of potential restoration activities on access and educational programs**

**Develop a framework for best practices.** Work toward a flexible, phased framework. Example: Oregon North Coast Plan.

**Provide public education about site access:** “rules with context.”

Utilize education to **develop land stewards of the future** - recognize this overlap

### **Provide common messaging across partners and organizations.**

- Create a communication plan
- Avoid jargon
- Message positive
- Plan for the long game
- Identify target audiences based on communication goals
- Make language specific to your audience

**Focus on Fire messaging** - least understood, most needed

### **Education programming:**

- Maintain roads and trails that provide access to a variety of habitat types
- Infrastructure: provide a space to store supplies for educational programming on-site.
- Materials: Create curriculum and information about the WC site for educators

**Collaborate with the City of Springfield on messaging** - people view the WC property from across the river. An opportunity for positive communications.

**Turn trespassers into volunteers.** Quiet = special quality of the site. Host an “open day” for the public. Opportunity to educate about the larger area.

**Create more open access.** Currently, access is limited to specific groups. If you don't fit into one of those groups, you can't learn about the site.

**Removal of people = removal of capacity to care for the land.** Connects to decolonizing. “Stewardship of care”

**Exclusivity adds to desire**

**Be in relationship with the river,** “river guardians”, and more designated sites on the river.

**Time on land under supervision.**

**Participation/education ideas:**

- Recognize the rhythms of nature
- Create opportunities to get perspective from the river and to get people on the river.
- Dynamic seasonality: Plan for when certain activities are appropriate. What is allowed when? Holistically, still impacts land.
- Keeping people from connecting with the river creates a conflict.
- Finding ways to participate with the rhythms of the land, through parts being open to the public seasonally
  - Intentionally worded, designated letting people know about seasonal closures
  - “Multiple gates” - areas open to the public based on the season
- Use signage to educate people about access impacts
- “Circles of relationality”
  - Open days, such as Green Island, manage the gate (staffing is a challenge)
- When students become the teachers (play, share)
  - Sharing through art and stories
  - Teach older students how to lead field trips for elementary students. “The best way to learn is to teach.”

- Example of sharing and teaching: The Migrant Education Program is an existing program that serves as an example of high school students learning to lead field trips for elementary students.
    - Currently only 4 days over a couple of weeks, which would be easier with 1 week of longer days
    - Supports students leading family tours throughout the year
  - Opportunity for bilingual walks
- Sharing what we learn from the land with each other
  - Some share through presentations, community service, and restoration
- Desire to share what is happening with donors and need to address uncertainty about sharing to promote access
- “Lifelong learners” is a successful existing program with a waiting list for volunteers, with success through word of mouth, currently leading Dragonfly tours and Beaver nights.
- A visitor center would offer more of a presence to responsibly manage

**Consider infrastructure limitations:**

- Parking lost, old bridge, road

**Use presentations to share what we learn** (community service, restoration)

## Transportation

**Transportation to/from: improvements**

- Bike lanes/sidewalk: 30th to Seavey to WC
- Lower speed limit
- LTD bus service

**Opportunities through the acquisition of adjacent properties:**

- Opportunities on unencumbered parcels
- Connections to Glassbar
- Guistina property adjacent to HBRA
- Black Oak Basin (ped connections to Dorris, under I5)
- Hall Road/ped connection to Seavey

## **Maintain and grow connections to agricultural programs and projects**

- FFLC youth farm location on Seavey

## **Safety/access**

- Neighbor relations: Understand concerns re. Transportation and access
- Liability for recreation activity
- Evaluate and understand perceived risks re. human interactions
  - An increase in people increases safety: the eyes on the street concept
  - Maintain current McKenzie River Trust guided access- it is valued by communities, such as youth/teachers, LGBTQ community members, and people who use mobility devices
  - Provide controlled access: “No access = uncontrolled access” or “access nowhere = access everywhere”
- Continue to manage safety and access:
  - Integrate/share apps that report activity (example: EWEB)
  - Consider safety cameras (HBRA success story)
  - If new policies are instituted, monitor and report to the public to show impacts/lack of impacts
  - Increase coordination between Lane County and McKenzie River Trust re. Access management
- Consider new access options such as:
  - Indigenous
  - Pond fishing
- Suggested process:
  1. Approach with curiosity
  2. Identify natural barriers, such as I5
  3. Describe the costs and benefits of each barrier (barriers help access management, but they also disconnect ecological systems)

**Recognize and work with existing restrictions** to movement in the larger area: I5, RR, the river itself, encumbrances, lack of parking area, old bridge

- Old bridge: necessary access, 90% of MRT outreach. Liability: not good for floodplain

## **Design for connectivity: ecological, human**

- Recognize the differences between areas: upstream has whitewater, spacing

- Create more habitat in the lower zone
- Focus on natural trails more upstream
- Understand the negative impacts of trails (study in Salem re. Turtle impacts due to the visibility of people walking/biking. Negative impacts of dogs (scent changes affect the behavior of wildlife)
- Reverence for the river due to interaction
- Road system acts as a really great trail (permission recreation) OPRD doesn't do.

### **Utilize Partners**

- EWEB: setback along Glenwood section (southern end of Glenwood, spurring pos movement north), including signage
- OPRD: RR acts as a trail, cuts through Russell Creek. (nowhere for the trail to go, Wildish lands and Weyerhauser). Pinch point, lots of partners, look at ownership.

### **Create legal camping spots upstream.** Legal campsites are already used.

- OPD could be a concessionaire for glamping options. Pay, permit, reserve. State Parks: mandated with a nature trail.
- Legally, you can camp below the high water line (not everyone knows this). The dynamic floodplain shifts where campsites are.
- What does regulation and implementation look like? Willamette Riverkeeper trail group. Designate sites with consideration for wildlife. River use happens year-round.

### **Counteract habitat impacts of unregulated camping** (how can we counteract the impact?)

- Reduce trash. Example Trashy Tuesday
- Incentivize access to places!
- Where diverse groups are using places for self-governance