



# Walama Restoration Project

Fall 2005

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PO Box 894, Eugene, OR 97440

541-484-3939

[www.walamarestoration.org](http://www.walamarestoration.org)

## Reweaving the Vanishing Prairie

If anyone has walked or biked by the Nearby Nature House in Whilamut Natural Area (formerly East Alton Baker Park), they may have noticed 15,000 square feet of clear plastic staked and buried along the edges into the ground. If anyone walks by there now, they will see thousands of transplanted native grasses and herbaceous plants throughout the formerly tilled, covered, and sun baked area. **WRP's goal was to smother invasive grasses with the plastic and solar heat to make room for rare native plants~ a difficult task in the face of the various noxious weeds nearby.**

Whilamut Natural Area Butterfly Area is located near Autzen Stadium and has been designated by the City of Eugene to be restored as an upland prairie habitat. Upland prairies, which once covered a large portion of the Willamette Valley, are now at the utmost brink of disappearing due to colossal commercial and residential development, fire suppression, and agricultural conversions. **According to the Oregon Biodiversity Project, upland prairie ecosystems have been reduced to small fragments totaling less than one tenth of one percent of their native region.** Upland prairies, which primarily consisted of bunchgrasses and forbs, provided abundant habitat for numerous terrestrial species and contributed to the mosaic of fire dependent ecosystems that once intricately weaved the tributaries of the Willamette River from south of Cottage Grove up to the Columbia River bottomlands north of Portland.

With the support from our members and the Spirit Mountain Community Fund, WRP initiated a seed collection project in 2004 where thousands of native upland prairie seeds from over two dozen species were collected, cleaned, and propagated with the aid of students from three elementary schools. Fortunately, we had a high germination rate that produced thousands of delicate (and not so delicate) seedlings perfect for the Whilamut Natural Area Butterfly Meadow.



*Network Charter School student planting brodiaea bulbs.*



We could not have finished planting all of those seedlings without the help of the enthusiastic school groups who aided our crew. **High school students from the Network Charter School joined us twice to help the crew pull up, scrub, and preserve the plastic (a dirty job!) for future solarization projects.** The students came out two weeks later and scrupulously weeded returning vetch and planted hundreds of transplants. Network Charter School Instructor Billy Hughes explains, "They are a really conscious group of kids and are learning a lot from participating in this project. "We were impressed with their motivation to work diligently on the project!"

Soon after Halloween, twenty-five students from the Village School joined us at the site and planted hundreds of seedlings in under 2 hours! We were especially excited to work with these fourth graders since almost all of them spent a day last year with our crew collecting, cleaning, and planting native seeds for our staff to propagate. The students obviously did an incredible job at seed saving and we are honored to provide them with an opportunity to plant these newly grown seedlings back into the ground. The cycle of restoration has now completed its first generation of life for rare prairie plants, with the prospect that ecosystem awareness will expand within the human cycle of our younger generations growing up in the valley for years to come.

## Our Mission

The Walama Restoration Project (WRP) is a community organized non-profit, founded in 2001, and dedicated to the enhancement, rehabilitation, and restoration of the waterways, forest, and grassland ecosystems within and adjacent to the Willamette Valley. WRP provides a crucial community service by actively maintaining the unique and fragile ecosystems in this valley. In addition to ecosystem restoration, our organization develops and implements educational outreach programs for school groups and the public to encourage local eco-system awareness.

mosses renew their emerald glory, and licorice ferns wave fully expanded fronds from moss-covered maple branches. All of this activity reminds me that fall is not just for admiring. As the soil moistens and spring-flowering plants hide safely below the ground, I can remove invasive plants from the woodland floor without fear of breaking or trampling precious trilliums or fairy bells. Many plants are best transplanted now or in the near future, when their tops are dormant and their roots are beginning their new season's growth. Oregon iris is one that can be quite fussy to work with at other times of the year. Native plants newly set in the still-warm soil will be watered by Mother Nature and will be partially established before next summer's drought. Seeds collected in the late summer and planted outside will receive winter's cooling, making them ready to germinate by spring.



*Fall amanita in the Cascades*

Meanwhile, the leaves keep falling, providing a perfect mulch for planting areas. They immediately give protection to the soil from winter rains and will give protection for plant roots from freezing and thawing. In time, myriad creatures and microorganisms break down the leaves, returning their minerals to soil. We must be careful, however, not to cover evergreen herbaceous crowns, which can struggle and even die under a dense mulch layer.

Fall is a time for renewal: Seeds germinating, new plants establishing, nutrients recycling. I try to pick up Nature's cue and garden in harmony. Fall is also a time for reflection. I am filled with gratitude for the miracle of life, for the exquisite beauty around me, for wonderful friends and family, and that I have been granted another day to enjoy it all.

It is appropriate that a day set aside for giving thanks should come in the fall. Happy autumn, happy gardening, and happy thanksgiving! - **Evelyn Hess, WRP Board President.**

**WRP would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the volunteers, collaborative partners, and other contributors who helped make our projects possible. A special thanks to the following:**

Amy Rowe, Lydia Bartholow, Edison Elementary School, Eileen, Eugene Village School, Fred and Sandra Austin, Friends of Hendricks Park, Ginny Alfriend, Keith from Hendricks Park, Lorna Baldwin, McKenzie School District, Mountaineers Foundation, National Forest Foundation, Network Charter School, Susan Fritts

We also want to say thank you to our over 1,200 contributing members. Without community support, we would not be able to fulfill our mission as educators and land stewards. We send our deepest thanks to you all!



## Letter from the President

Fall in the Willamette Valley is a feast for the senses. Lingering golden leaves and naked stems in rainbow colors make me gasp as they glow in the low sun's slant-ways light. Crunching through piles of fallen leaves, inhaling the musty fragrance of mushrooms poking through the forest duff, listening to the bouncy trill of the wrentit and the resonate "hoo-hoo" of the Great Horned owl, I glut myself on the abundance of the season.

With the return of the rains, native plants begin to push out new roots,

## Land Restoration at the Crest of the Cascades

By Stephanie Schroeder

Exuberant smiles and attentive eyes greeted me when I first met with Kurt Cox's 7<sup>th</sup> grade science group at McKenzie Mid/High School in Blue River, Oregon. This particularly considerate group of students was anxiously waiting to help me set up stacks of screens, bowls, tarps, and a tall fan for their first winnowing workshop. After I showed the students a grocery bag full of dried lupine pods, collected by WRP technicians in late summer

at elevations as high as 6,500 feet, they quickly got to work, meticulously separating the pods with the aid of various equipment, to reveal hundreds of smooth colorful sub-alpine lupine seeds.

Mario's introduction to native ecosystems began when his parents carried him through the Olympic Mountains on hiking trips before he could even walk. He was born and raised on the Olympic Peninsula in Sequim, Washington where he quickly grew an appreciation for the land in its natural state. WRP quickly grew a similar appreciation for Mario when, on his first day of work in September 2003, he gladly hauled huge piles of poison oak down the eastern slope of Skinners Butte at an upland restoration site. Since then, he has become a key member of WRP's workforce, from weeding invasive grasses and removing blackberries in the field to teaching school groups on how to plant native shrubs and herbaceous plants. He is known for his dedication on the crew and for providing crewmembers with ample knowledge on his latest lingo. Quotes Mario, 'From growing up near the Olympic rainforest I became used to the rain, so Eugene's weather still hasn't harshed me out. When I moved to the Willamette Valley, I was hyped to be able to restore native habitats with WRP.' In Mario's free time, he enjoys creating art, cooking, gardening, playing music, skateboarding, going to festivals, and enjoying nature. Thank you Mario for the tight times as a sog dog shlogging in the shlarmy shwagmire to kick it in heady places...nice! (translation- 'thanks for working your hardest with WRP in various imperiled habitats throughout the valley' - please contact Mario for more information on dialect).



Thanks to support from the **National Forest Foundation** and **The Mountaineers Foundation**, WRP's dreams of extending our efforts outside of the Willamette Valley in Lane County have finally come true. In July 2004, we initiated a dialogue with botanist Susan Fritts of the McKenzie Ranger District regarding the impacts of visitors on trail systems in the Willamette National Forest. **Our conversation resulted in an idea that would link habitat restoration with rural youth education in a pioneering project to improve ecological diversity in a portion of the Three Sisters Wilderness Area.** With the approval of the ranger district's lead wilderness ranger, we decided to take a low impact approach towards restoring two degraded creek side campsites near the Pacific Crest Trail by using methods such as seed collection, propagation, transplanting, and light soil scarification to rehabilitate portions of the chosen sites. **We expect the successful documentation of this project, along with community support and youth participation, will aid in expanding the recovery of highly impacted campsites and trails within the Three Sisters Wilderness.**

Our partnership with McKenzie School District has become an essential component of our wilderness restoration project. Kurt Cox's 6/7<sup>th</sup> grade science group will meet weekly in 2005-06 with WRP staff to learn Cascade ecology, basic botany, propagation methods of native seeds, and local ecology of the Obsidian Falls region in the Three Sisters Wilderness. Additionally, the students will conduct yearlong research by studying the growth of the lupines and other sub-alpine plants in their classroom and adjacent greenhouse. Furthermore, they will aid in the advancement of the McKenzie Ranger District's goals for restoring highly impacted pristine areas by presenting their results to the district botanist at the end of the school year. We are excited to have the opportunity to work with these



McKenzie MS students cleaning lupine seeds

### Thank You FOHP!

Walama Restoration Project would like to thank Friends of Hendricks Park for their generous donation to support our Hendricks Park ecology program at Edison Elementary. We are currently hosting workshops for three classrooms at the school that focus on native plant ecology, habitat/wildlife relationships, and nature discovery. If you would like to contribute to our program or would like to get involved as a volunteer at Hendricks Park, please contact Stephanie Schroeder or visit our website at [www.walamarestoration.org](http://www.walamarestoration.org).

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students and look forward to the scientific discoveries that they will disclose to us. We hope that they will join us in planting next fall!

WRP has additionally collaborated with multiple community stakeholders including the **mid-Oregon Pacific Crest Trail Association**, the **Emerald Empire Back Country Horsemen of Oregon**, and the **Willamette National Forest Volunteer Group** to secure long-term stewardship efforts in maintaining the Obsidian Falls region of the Three Sisters Wilderness. If you would like to be involved or contribute information for this project, please contact me at



Walama Restoration Project

P O Box 894

Eugene, OR 97440

## **Community Supported Rehabilitation and Native Re-vegetation of Our Watersheds.**

Walama Restoration Project relies on community support to continue facilitating our educational programs. If you would like to become involved by volunteering at a work party or by making a tax-deductible contribution, please fill out this form and send to:

**Walama Restoration Project  
PO Box 894  
Eugene, OR 97440**

### **Yes! I would like to be a supporter!**

- Limited income \$15
- Individual \$35
- Family \$50
- Sustaining Member \$100
- Sponsor \$500
- Other amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### **Yes! I want to volunteer!**

name \_\_\_\_\_

address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



*Katie Root from the Network Charter School planting native bunchgrasses*

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