

Year IN Review

2023-2024 HIGHLIGHTS



Lower Columbia
Estuary
Partnership

Letter from the Director

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE LOWER COLUMBIA,

TWO YEARS AGO, we moved our Estuary Partnership office from Portland's west side to the east of the Willamette River. Among the many changes, one that stands out is my desk's new location. Now, I sit right by the front door, witnessing the daily flow of my dedicated colleagues.

From my vantage point, I see the Community Programs team with their binoculars and bird guides, the Monitoring and Research team with their water quality equipment and waders, and the Restoration team with their hard hats and safety vests, ready to reconnect rivers to their historic floodplains.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) has made waves across our program areas. Passed in 2021, this historic legislation redefines infrastructure as more than roads and bridges: it's a bioswale filtering pollutants from parking lots before stormwater enters a creek, it's a river reconnected to its floodplain that restores the water table and protects against flooding, it's understanding the wetland carbon cycle so future restoration projects can be designed to maximize carbon sequestration. It's truly amazing what this landmark legislation is doing in our region.

In this Annual Report, and in those to come, you'll see some of the impacts of the BIL, along with many other funding partnerships that make our work possible. I witness the results of these investments every day from my desk.

E. Elaine Placido

E. ELAINE PLACIDO, DPA | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The National Estuary Program

The Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership is a 501(c)3 nonprofit and a National Estuary Program. The National Estuary Program was authorized in 1987 by amendments to the Clean Water Act that created place-based, collaborative programs to support our nation's most critical estuaries. The Columbia River estuary is one of 28 "estuaries of national significance" across the United States. Estuaries are critical ecosystems that feed us, drive our economy, nourish abundant fish and wildlife, and provide a home to vibrant river and coastal communities. The States of Oregon and Washington and the US EPA established the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership in 1995 to address the numerous issues facing the river, from habitat loss to toxic contamination to climate change.

In November, the Estuary Partnership hosted the Association of National Estuary Programs Tech Transfer gathering. Over 60 leaders from National Estuary Programs shared resources, ideas, and collaborated on key issues that connect our work. The gathering balanced indoor meeting time with field trips to Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge and to our sister agency the Tillamook Estuaries Partnership.



Community-led Climate Resiliency

We held community workshops in Baker Bay and Grays Bay to understand and identify local priorities, to discuss how flooding and sea level rise may affect these priorities, and to create resiliency ideas. Through these workshops, we developed concepts to boost sea level rise and flooding resiliency in accordance with community visions and scientific information. This project was in partnership with Washington Sea Grant, Pacific Conservation District, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.



Researching the River

Our Ecosystem Monitoring Program entered its 14th year. Our team studies relatively undisturbed sites and sites that have undergone restoration to understand how vegetation communities, sediment, water temperature, and more factors influence habitat quality. The Estuary Partnership is the only organization that tracks habitat conditions along the lower Columbia.



Engaging Students

More than 350 5th grade students in Kelso and Longview schools received enriching outdoor education thanks to a grant from the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office's No Child Left Inside program. Each class receives a series of lessons tailored to their classroom needs, followed by two field trips to explore Seaquest State Park and paddle on Silver Lake.

- 3,190 students learned outdoors with our Educators during the 2023-24 school year.



THE LOWER COLUMBIA RIVER stretches 146 river miles from the mouth of the river upstream to Bonneville Dam. Over three million people live in the area. Our staff stay busy restoring rivers, cleaning stormwater, educating students, engaging volunteers, and advancing scientific research.

Here are just a few highlights from our work this year.



Greening Our Schoolyards

A \$4.3 million grant from EPA's Columbia River Basin Restoration Program is supercharging for our School Stormwater Reduction Program. This program's on-the-ground stormwater infrastructure projects will green schoolyards by reducing toxic stormwater pollution, urban heat island impacts, and asphalt coverage at over a dozen schools.



Paddling with Purpose

Our 29-foot Big Canoes make exceptional memories for paddlers of all ages. This year, we added water quality testing to our Big Canoe program to expand learning for paddlers. From the canoe or from a beach accessed by the canoe, participants are testing water temperature, turbidity, pH, and dissolved oxygen. Water quality testing makes our Big Canoes an even better outdoor learning laboratory.

- More than 2,200 people paddled our Big Canoes in 2023-24.



Connecting with the Columbia

Stewardship at Steigerwald: Community members and groups continue to make a difference at the site of the largest habitat restoration project in the lower Columbia River's history. Through tree planting and plant stewardship efforts, guided hikes, and art classes, the Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge continues to be a wonderful place to connect with nature.

- 574 volunteers engaged
- Volunteers and students planted more than 19,000 native trees and shrubs.



Restoring Habitat



We secured full funding and completed the final designs for the Campen Creek Reconnection Project, a 9-acre floodplain reconnection and restoration project

located in Washougal's Mable Kerr Park. Campen Creek is the most urbanized portion of the Gibbons Creek watershed – Gibbons Creek flows through the recently restored Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge. By restoring a highly urbanized stretch of Campen Creek, we are improving the water quality of the creek that flows through the wildlife refuge, expanding walking trails, removing hazard trees within the park, and planting over 20,000 native trees and shrubs.

- Since 2000, 38,861 acres have been restored across the region.





Mission To restore and care for the waters and ecosystems of the lower Columbia River, for current and future generations of fish, wildlife, and people.

INVESTMENTS IN THE WATERS AND ECOSYSTEMS OF THE LOWER COLUMBIA RIVER IN 2023-2024

In 2023-2024, we raised \$7.26 for every \$1 from the US EPA National Estuary Program, leveraging \$6.177 million and creating 54 jobs. With the economic multiplier, that is a total impact of \$12.07 million across our region.

BASE FUNDERS

Oregon State • Washington State • US Environmental Protection Agency

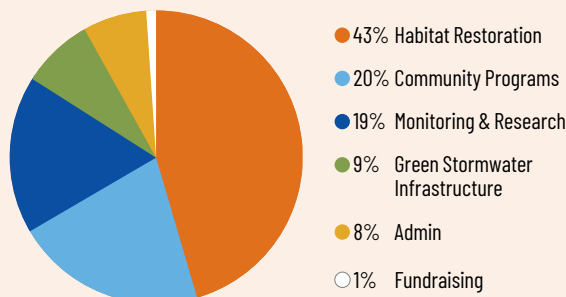
GRANTORS

US EPA • Bonneville Power Administration • Washington Recreation and Conservation Office • Washington Department of Ecology • US Forest Service • Floodplains By Design • Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District • Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board • Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office • Oregon State Marine Board • Gray Family Foundation • Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board • City of Vancouver • Clark County • Port of Vancouver • Clackamas Water Environment Services • East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District • Metro • Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District • City of Portland, Bureau of Environmental Services • Camas-Washougal Community Chest

CORPORATE DONORS & SPONSORS

Conсор • Wolf Water Resources • Inter-Fluve Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde • Portland General Electric • NW Natural • Otak • Port of Portland • Aquatic Contracting • Ash Creek Forest Management • ESA | Environmental Science Associates • KPFF • Lewis and Clark National Historical Park • Metro • Parametrix • Tidewater Barge Lines • The Mitzvah Foundation • Neil Kelly

WHERE 2024 FUNDS WENT*



DONATED VOLUNTEER INVESTMENTS

	Hours	Value
Board Members	374	\$29,920
Professional Services	1,913	\$130,715
Student Service Learning	10,732	\$160,980
Parent and Teacher Volunteers	3,276	\$109,713
Planting and Community Volunteers	2,296	\$47,679
Other Goods and Services	-	\$6,837
TOTAL	18,591	\$485,844

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