

THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY OAK ACCORD

THE ISSUE

Oak woodlands and oak savannahs are a defining feature of Oregon's Willamette Valley. Large heritage oaks underlain by native prairie grasses are a familiar and picturesque backdrop to many local vistas. In addition to their majestic beauty, native oak woodlands are important habitat for a number of wildlife species. The trees themselves are excellent nesting sites for birds while the ecosystem surrounding oak trees provide a range of additional benefits from preventing soil erosion to filtering water and providing forage for grazing animals.

Despite the important biological and cultural value of oaks, there is currently no protection for them in Oregon, and decline of this ecosystem type is happening at an accelerated and concerning rate. Loss and fragmentation of oak habitat can be attributed to several factors including fire suppression, urban and rural residential development, and conversion of native habitat to support agricultural production.

Estimates put the remaining amount of oak woodlands in the Willamette Valley at approximately 28,000 acres or less than 7% of its historic range. With 98% of remaining oak and prairie habitat found on private lands, landowners and managers are critical to the long term sustainability of these important ecosystems.

Top photo courtesy: George Centry/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

THE OPPORTUNITY

The Willamette Valley Oak Accord is a voluntary agreement that brings together local landowners around a commitment to protect and restore oak habitat. It is inspired by local landowners' vision that management of vineyards and forestland takes place in harmony with healthy, sustainable oak habitat. The Accord creates a mechanism to introduce new Willamette Valley landowners to the need for and importance of oak woodland conservation and creates a stewardship standard for existing land managers and owners.



Acorn woodpeckers are one of many species dependent on oak habitat. Photo courtesy: Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

THE COMMITMENT: OAK ACCORD

Signatories of the Oak Accord include vineyards, forestland owners, and any other landowner who wants to protect oak in the Willamette Valley.

Oak Accord signatories commit to:

- Undertaking a baseline assessment of the condition of oak habitat on their property.
- Improving oak habitat where feasible (through onsite restoration or through offsite creation, protection and restoration).
- Repeating assessments every five years.
- Submitting results to the Oak Accord secretariat (Willamette Partnership) for tracking and accounting.

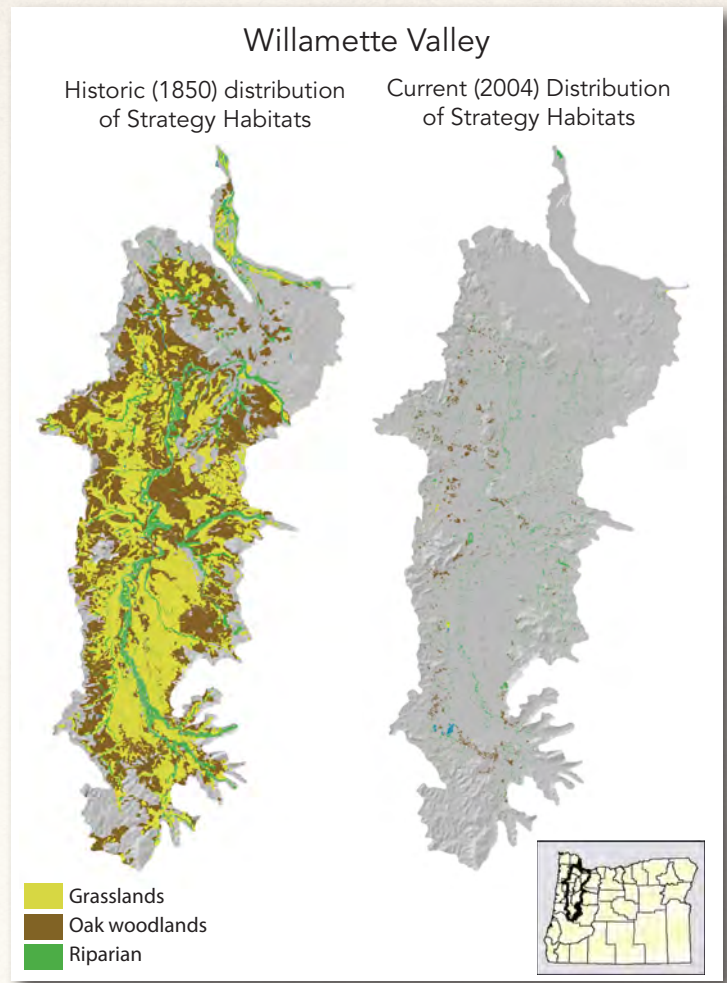
Oak Accord signatories receive:

- Information that quantifies the benefits of their stewardship activities and communicates their commitment to oak conservation.
- An Oak Steward Certificate at a Gold Level (recognition of onsite conservation) or Platinum Level (recognition of on- and offsite conservation).
- Educational, communication, and promotional materials to be used with customers, colleagues, agency staff, and others.

A number of tools are available to provide landowners with meaningful guidance and support around oak conservation. The Oregon Conservation Strategy outlines management approaches to addressing some of the priority issues related to oak. Willamette Partnership's Oak Habitat Metric is a tool that can measure baseline conditions and track progress towards meeting conservation goals, allowing landowners to quantify and communicate the benefits of their stewardship activities in terms that are meaningful to stakeholders – from customers to certification bodies to natural resources agencies.

For more information contact:

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ODFW Conservation Strategy. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2006. Data Source: Oregon Natural Heritage Information Center, 2004.

THE PLAN

The goal of the Accord is to generate both support for and awareness of the need for oak conservation with stakeholders throughout the Valley. The Accord was formally signed by 38 signatories in March 2017 with new signatories continuing to come on board. Work is already underway to connect the Accord to existing certification standards for forest and wine industries.

Salmon-Safe is integrating an oak conservation requirement into their Farm Certification Standards, widely used in the wine industry, while LIVE is determining what role oak restoration efforts can play in meeting requirements for the Ecological Compensation Area. The Grande Ronde Tribe is expressing support for the Accord by featuring Oak Accord wines in their Spirit of the Mountain restaurant.

The people who live, work, eat food, drink wine, and enjoy the fruits of the Willamette Valley understand the value of sustainability and are ready to support a commitment to conservation. Beyond the potentially meaningful contribution to local biodiversity values in the region, this is also the start of a great story – how local landowners came forward and united to voluntarily protect an iconic species in the Willamette Valley.