



# THE WEST EUGENE WETLANDS WETLAND WORD

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## We're on the Web!

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## River Otters In Eugene

Their presence is considered to be an indicator of environmental health in these ecosystems. Within the past two years, otter sightings have occurred in sections of Amazon Creek, including near the Wetland Project Office between Beltline and Danebo, Willow Creek Preserve, Delta Ponds, Willamette River and other nearby waters of the Eugene area.

-Judith K. Berg

## BOND MEASURE SUPPORTS OUTDOOR LEARNING, SPACE

This fall, the Eugene community has the opportunity to vote for investing in the future of open spaces—parks and natural areas where families can go to unwind and unplug.

Eugene Parks and Open Space Bond Measure 20-110 on the November 7, 2006 election ballot will authorize a maximum of \$27,490,000 of general obligation bonds to be used for land acquisition, creation of new school athletic fields, and the West Eugene Wetlands Education Center. The bond measure will cost the average home owner \$30 per year.

WREN has joined a diverse list of local organizations in supporting Eugene Parks Now, the group formed to campaign for the bond measure. Eugene is growing and land prices continue to rise, their website points out. Now is the time to support these projects.

“Eugene is the world’s greatest city for the arts and outdoors, and this measure gives people the opportunity to put an exclamation point behind that phrase,” said Liz Cawood, Eugene Parks Now Chair. “Plus, we’re a family-oriented town, and there is a lot in this measure for children—from artificial turf athletic fields to the West Eugene Wetlands Center. Not to mention the opportunity to preserve great places that families will be able to enjoy forever!”

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## RIVER “CLOWNS” ENTERTAIN AND HELP MAINTAIN HEALTHY HABITATS

by Judith K. Berg

Introducing the joyful, playful clown of the animal world, that can run and slide when the snow is deep or the mud is slick—the North American river otter.

Our freshwater, semi-aquatic otters have adapted to a variety of habitats, particularly riparian and wetlands. While traveling on land, otters walk, run or bound with a hump-backed gait. When swimming along the top of the water, their small flattened head can be seen just above the surface. Because their eyes and ears are on a plane with their bulbous nose, when in this position they can use all their senses. In fact, if they detect something, this curious animal may come up into a periscope posture to see what's happening! When otters dive, they can stay under water for three minutes and travel 6-7 mph. Their grace and agility underwater is unsurpassed. Otters are active 12 months of the year and can be seen at any hour of the day.



Two river otters basking on a log. Photo: Judith K. Berg

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*Judith K. Berg  
is a career wildlife  
researcher and  
author of the award-  
winning book "The  
Otter Spirit: A Natural  
History Story."  
She resides in Eugene.*

The *Wetland Word* is published quarterly by the Willamette Resources and Educational Network. Its purpose is to inform the community of events and restoration projects, and to increase understanding and appreciation of the West Eugene Wetlands. If you would like to be removed from the mailing list, please contact WREN. Contributors to this issue: Judith K. Berg, Holly McRae and Tim Whitley.  
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## otters, continued from page 1

However, in areas with more human habitation, early morning and late evening are the best times to see them. That doesn't mean this shy secretive species will suddenly appear. Otters are very mobile and have a long home range of several linear miles of waterway. Except for a female with her current young, they normally don't stay in one area for a prolonged period of time. Fish are the main staple of the otter's diet and are preyed upon in direct proportion to their availability and in inverse proportion to their swimming ability. Crayfish are also important to their diet, and, to a lesser extent, insects, amphibians, and invertebrates, but rarely birds and small mammals.

Not only are river otters a "flagship species" to water quality, but recent studies have documented that the aquatically derived nutrients from their deposits fertilize terrestrial vegetation that influences the prevalence and growth of particular plant species found in riparian and wetland habitats. This charismatic species not only brings us joy, but also continues to amaze us at its role in maintaining healthy fresh water systems.

## bond measure, continued from page 1

The following projects will receive support from the bond measure:

- ◆ The West Eugene Wetlands Education Center will enrich education opportunities for local schools, and provide classes and lectures for visitors of all ages. Phase 1 will include a field science laboratory for all ages, wetland and science exhibits, a natural resource library and gift shop, and feature the highest standard of sustainable design. (\$1.75 million).
- ◆ The purchase of 13 new neighborhood parks and two new community parks will help ensure that every neighborhood has a park within safe walking distance (\$10.5 million). By purchasing and developing additional land around Golden Gardens Park (\$2 million), we can create a safe place for people of all ages to recreate and enjoy nature.
- ◆ The purchase of almost 145 acres along the Willamette River and Ridgeline Trail Corridor will make critical connections to existing natural areas. This will allow easy access to outdoor experiences, while fish and wildlife are protected and water quality improved (\$7.75 million).
- ◆ New synthetic surface athletic fields will allow children and adults to play and be active all year. By building fields in partnership with Eugene 4J and Bethel School Districts, we leverage precious resources and ensure children have improved access to fields that keep them active and safe (\$5 million).

Please visit [www.eugeneparksnow.org](http://www.eugeneparksnow.org) for further reading about the bond measure and [www.wewetlands.org](http://www.wewetlands.org) to learn more about the West Eugene Wetlands Education Center.



## OTTER ENCOUNTER

Everyday that I commute to work along the Fern Ridge Bike Path, I am reminded why living in a city that values its open spaces is so wonderful. Thursday, September 28th was no exception. In Amazon Creek, near Bailey Hill Road, I noticed a large disturbance in the water, very different from what nutria make while swimming. As I approached, I saw that it was three otters, feeding on fish. I watched them eat and swim, during which time about 30 other onlookers joined me. What a rare treat for us all!

So the next time you are walking/biking along the Amazon, and you see movement in the water, don't assume its nutria, you may just be lucky enough to witness this beautiful animal in its natural habitat. Go otters!

-Holly McRae  
WREN Environmental Education Coordinator





### MEET THE WREN BOARD

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WREN is a private,  
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### Volunteer!

Contact  
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or (541) 683-6483



Photo: WREN

*Creating and supporting an education program and center that celebrates and encourages stewardship of the West Eugene Wetlands using resources and support from our community...*

## VOLUNTEERS REMOVE INVASIVE PLANTS AND CLEAN UP AMAZON CREEK ON PUBLIC LANDS DAY

by Windy Hovey

**M**ore than 50 people dedicated their time on a beautiful fall day, the last day of September, to lend a helping hand on National Public Lands Day. The Eugene site was in the West Eugene Wetlands. The diversity of volunteers was wide—ages four to eighty-five, clearing invasive plants and litter from along Amazon Creek.

City of Eugene Stream Team Coordinator Lorna Baldwin led the group, discussing safety and providing removal instructions.

Students in the Rachel Carson Center for Natural Resources Program wore big smiles, along with the bright orange Public Lands Day t-shirts that all volunteers received. Some took a large orange tool, referred to as a "weed wrench" to get at the blackberry and European Birch along the bank of Amazon Creek. The work area stretched from the Wetland Project office to west of Danebo Ave. Nelli Williams, one of the



*Eugene Stream Team Coordinator Lorna Baldwin gives the group guidance in safety and clean up. Photo: WREN*

exposure to open space. He had seen the article written by Diane Dietz and published in the *Register-Guard* the day before, connecting children's needs for open spaces, the topic of the popular book "Last Child in the Woods" by Richard Louv, and the opportunity National Public Lands Day offers the community each year.

At the end of the clean up, several large piles of blackberry, and other invasive species lay by the side of the bike path. The piles and bags of litter were hauled from the location. Volunteers stayed for socializing, free lunch, coupons for national park admission, raffle prizes and to view and discuss the model of the future West Eugene Wetlands Education Center on display. National Public Lands Day is the largest hands-on volunteer event across America. WREN worked together with BLM, Eugene Stream Team, Sierra Club Many Rivers Group and the Rachel Carson Program to coordinate this year's event. WREN is also celebrating its adoption of the section of Amazon Creek between Beltline and Danebo Ave for continuing cleanup. WREN thanks all those who helped make National Public Lands Day 2006 a huge success!



*"Let go root!" Caroline, four, assists her dad in pulling invasive Queen Anne's Lace along Amazon Creek, for Public Lands Day clean up. Photo: WREN*

Rachel Carson students, was putting serious muscle and energy into a thick branch with cutters. "People with anger management issues should do this," she said as she worked.

Sam, age five, gripped some cutters that were almost the same length as he was, and tackled the blackberry like a professional. His dad, Mark, said he had a lot of experience from clearing blackberry on their own property.

There were many young ones in the crowd, receiving a healthy dose of the outdoors and sunshine. Four-year old Caroline pulled European-introduced Queen Anne's Lace from the side of the bike path, assisting her father who brought her for the cause of helping the environment, and



## REVIEW OF “LAST CHILD IN THE WOODS: SAVING OUR CHILDREN FROM NATURE-DEFICIT DISORDER” BY RICHARD LOUV

*reviewed by Tim Whitley*

Some of the fondest memories of my childhood are of the fun things I did outdoors after my mom said, “Go outside and play.” With neighborhood friends, I roamed the woods, climbed trees, built forts and played kick-the-can until I was summoned home to dinner. Other adults my age had similar experiences in nature, spending hours exploring natural areas near their homes. Unfortunately, many adults’ memories of outdoor play end with wistful head-shaking, a sigh and the lament, “Too bad our kids can’t do that anymore.” And everyone sadly nods in agreement.

Richard Louv, author of “Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder”, talks with parents, children, teachers, scientists, religious leaders, child-development researchers and environmentalists about how the link between today’s children and nature has been severed. According to Louv, this separation from the natural world has some serious side effects, including a diminished use of the senses, attention problems and increased emotional and physical afflictions. In my own experience as an environmental educator, I have seen how the natural world is a powerful motivator for students of all abilities. Direct contact with nature can often improve self-esteem, reduce stress and increase creativity. A student who routinely struggles with traditional school assignments often flourishes when introduced to the same curriculum using the outdoors as a learning mode.

Today’s kids are, as Louv says, “increasingly disconnected from the natural world.” Instead of passing the summer months hiking, camping and telling stories around a campfire, they are more likely attending computer camps or weight-loss camps, leaving them thinking of nature as more of an abstraction than a reality. Shouldn’t we be worried that a 2002 British study revealed that eight-year-olds could identify Pokemon characters far more easily than they could name an otter, a beetle or an oak tree? Louv’s book provides insight into this problem, which he calls “nature-deficit disorder,” as well as solid advice on possible solutions.

When Louv was growing up, the children who wanted to stay indoors were considered the “weird” ones. “The woods were my Ritalin,” he said. “Nature calmed me, helped me focus.” Nature-deficit disorder is not a medical condition, but a description of the symptoms that are displayed when children are cut off from nature. How did this happen? Louv indicates that it is partly due to the proliferation of technology. Cable TV, video games, iPods and the Internet have all reduced the time children spend outdoors. Kids in this electronic generation may be able to recite data about the Amazon rainforest, but they’ve spent no time in the nearby woods. In one interview, a fourth grader in San Diego said,

“I like to play indoors ‘cause that’s where all the outlets are.”

Louv points out that societal issues are also partly to blame. These include parents’ fear of the threats posed to their children by traffic, strangers, Lyme disease, mosquito-borne viruses and other hazards of the natural world. In the author’s words, “We have scared children straight out of the woods and fields.” Schools further alienate children from the natural world with their emphasis on more and more homework, their structured schedules and their lack of access to natural areas. Even neighborhood associations and city governments have put in place legal restraints that have restricted children’s outdoor play. It is not unusual for trees in parks or playgrounds to be cordoned off, preventing tree climbing and possible lawsuits. There are communities that prohibit the construction of even the simplest tree house without the proper building permit. Even good intentions have unintended consequences: Laws designed to protect endangered flora and fauna have eliminated or restricted access to large areas of coastline, meadowland and wilderness.

Louv argues for a return to a society where all citizens are aware of and have an appreciation for nature. Recognizing that “parents already feel besieged by the



*“We have scared children straight out of the woods and fields.” -Richard Louv*

difficulty of balancing work and family life,” nature can be viewed as an antidote to many of the problems he identifies. He urges parents to be aware of the distinction between a “constructively bored mind” and a “negatively numbed mind.” He holds that constructively bored kids “eventually turn to a book, or build a fort, or pull out the paints and create.” Negatively numbed minds are primarily the result of hours of television and video games. Often the numbness wears off when the electronic devices are no longer available.

To help a bored child see that nature is an option worth pursuing, Louv has created a list of strategies caring adults can employ. He encourages adults to spend more time with children. Take them on walks in the nearest natural area, and limit the amount of time they spend watching a screen. Remember that special outdoor space you knew as a child and look around your neighborhood for a similar place to share with a child. Your job, he says, as a caring adult isn’t to hit them with another “fine educational opportunity,” but to show them that even the vacant lot behind your house is a cool place to visit. Avoid forced marches in favor of relaxed saunters with no particular goal in mind. One of his easier suggestions is to introduce children to gardening, having them plant seeds that germinate quickly and mature into plants that yield fruits or vegetables that are favored foods.

Louv’s book provides a much-needed look at the rift



*Photo: WREN*

between children today and nature experience. He shows that it’s still possible for any parent, grandparent or other caring adult to reconnect children with the natural world. To re-create that sense of wonder about the world we live in that is so beneficial for children as well as adults, one just needs to open the door and step outside. So this holiday season, why not substitute the gifts of nature for those all-too-typical electronic gifts?

*Tim Whitley is president of WREN and director of the Rachel Carson Center, a natural resource program within Churchill High School. This article was originally published in the winter 2006 issue of Forest Magazine. Copies of “Last Child in the Woods” are available locally at J. Michaels Books, 160 E. Broadway.*



Volunteers assisted The Nature Conservancy in collecting camas bulbs in a recently plowed field along Willow Creek Road in west Eugene. TNC hosts work parties on the second Saturday of each month February-November. Activities include native seed collection, invasive plant removal, native plantings and general land and stewardship activities. For more information, contact Matt Benotsch at [mabenotsch@tnc.org](mailto:mabenotsch@tnc.org) or 915-7459.

*Left: Volunteers collected camas bulbs from a field along Willow Creek Road during the September Saturday work party. Photo: Jason Nuckols*



## EVENTS

### Wednesday, Oct. 25, 6-7 p.m. —Volunteer orientation meeting

Do you enjoy working and learning about the outdoors? Join us for an informal meeting to learn more about volunteering with WREN. Credit is available to UO and LCC students, as well as some stipend money. Contact Liz Myers at 683-6483 to register.

### Sunday, Oct. 29, 10 a.m. - 4p.m.

Visit the WREN booth at the Mt. Pisgah's Mushroom Festival & Plant Sale !

### Saturday, Nov. 4, 10a.m.-noon —“A Beaver’s Tale” Family Program

Hear stories and learn about the variety of unique adaptations that are required for the Beaver’s lifestyle, and why it is called the “Full Beaver Moon.” We will take a short walk to look for signs of this nocturnal animal. Meet at the West Eugene Wetlands Yurt, and please dress appropriately; we will spend some time outside regardless of weather. To register contact Holly McRae at 683-6494 or [wew@wewetlands.org](mailto:wew@wewetlands.org) . FREE!

### Saturday, Nov. 18 —Lane County Audubon Society Wetland Bird Walk

Join local expert Steve Gordon on a bird walk through the wetlands. A \$3 donation is suggested. For more information contact Dael Parsons at 338-0313 or [daelparsons@comcast.net](mailto:daelparsons@comcast.net) .

### Saturday, Dec. 2, 10a.m.-noon —West Eugene Wetlands Work Party

Join us as we clean up along Amazon Creek as part of WREN's adoption of the Amazon Creek section between Beltline and Danebo Ave.

### Saturday, Jan. 13, 10-11:30a.m. —Volcanoes, Lava and...Wetlands?

What do the West Eugene Wetlands have to do with Crater Lake? Why do the wetlands have so much water in the winter? Children ages 8-12 are invited to come discover how the ground beneath us shapes our everyday lives through a morning of exciting geology activities. Meet in the West Eugene Wetlands Yurt. To register, contact Holly McRae at 683-6494 or [wew@wewetlands.org](mailto:wew@wewetlands.org) .

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