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Riverside Parks

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Riverside Parks

In September 2018, Vancouver, Washington, celebrated the opening of its new Waterfront Park. The 7.3-acre park sits on the Columbia River just west of I-5 and south of downtown Vancouver. The park is part of a high-density, mixed-use urban redevelopment project. Built on the site of a former lumber mill, the total project spans thirty-two acres on twenty-one city blocks. New streets connect the park with downtown and manicured underpasses to make the trip attractive to visitors. High-end office, apartment and condominium buildings with ground floor restaurants line the park. The new residents can overlook the manicured lawns and playgrounds and gaze across the river to Oregon.

Three of the major rivers in the greater Portland region, the Columbia, Willamette, and Sandy run through the greater Portland region. There are more than 12,736 acres of riverfront parkland along those rivers in Multnomah, Clackamas, and Clark Counties. Many of the state, federal, and regional parks were developed to protect natural lands and wildlife from encroaching development. Parkland along the Sandy is mostly natural, providing visitors' access to the water. Beaches along the Sandy are popular for swimming, wading, and tubing. Regional, state, and federal government operate these parks on the Sandy. The same is true for most of the riverfront parks in the region. Less than 15 percent of the riverfront acreage is in municipal parks.

Riverfront parks run the gambit from unimproved natural areas to fully planned and managed urban parks. They reflect our changing relationship to the rivers and the varying ways we enjoy and participate in nature. Many of the region's smaller

river – front parks were created in the face of rapid residential and commercial development. Vancouver’s Waterfront Park is the latest in a series of parks built on reclaimed industrial land. Like Vancouver, Portland and Oregon City are working to redevelop industrial lands into new parks and open spaces. The redevelopment of Oregon City’s Willamette Falls is underway and Portland released a plan in 2017 to redevelop the east bank of the Willamette River between the Marquam and Hawthorne Bridges.

The new parks are a valuable part of the infrastructure that allows individuals and communities to reconnect to the rivers. When the region’s economy was closely tied to the extraction, processing, and shipment of natural resources, the rivers were important sites of commerce. As we’ve shifted away from a natural resource economy, local governments are able to redevelop the river – banks as public parks.

