Summer 2010

The Landscape: Sherwood

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Located near the edge of the urban growth boundary at the northern end of the Willamette Valley’s rich wine country, Sherwood is a small town with a deep commitment to nature. Although Sherwood has experienced rapid growth in both population and building structures during the past twenty years, the community’s preservation and enhancement of its natural surroundings are evident in the tree lined streets and attention to wildlife safety and habitat restoration. The commitment is perhaps most evident in the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge, a large swath of restored wetland that enables the human residents of Sherwood to share their town with nearly 275 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians and a wide variety of insects, fish and plants.

During the past ten years, the population of Sherwood has increased by nearly 45 percent from just over 11,000 in 2000 to more than 17,000 today. The growth occurs in residential subdivisions, newly updated and expanded civic buildings, and maturing commercial and manufacturing districts. Although Sherwood was incorporated nearly 120 years ago, 76% of the town’s buildings have been built since 1970, with 52% built between 1995 and 1998. Sherwood’s tree canopy is also growing. In 2004, the Arbor Day Foundation designated it as a Tree City USA. The program, which is co-sponsored by the USDA Forest Service and Community Forestry Program, supports communities that are committed to maintaining and expanding healthy urban forests.

Balancing new residents and the local wildlife is not always easy. Signs warning drivers to watch for deer line the roads not only in the hills surrounding the city but also in the dense residential neighborhoods in the valley. While deer may feel threatened, wildcats are being sent to Sherwood to find safety. Wildcat Haven is one of the few sanctuaries in the country focused exclusively on small, lesser known wildcats. Located on eight acres, Wildcat Haven is dedicated to rescuing and nurturing animals while educating the public about the different varieties of wildcats and their habitat needs.

Wildlife and people have to share space in much of the town, but in the Tualatin River Wildlife Refuge it is clear that wildlife takes precedence. First proposed by a local citizen in 1990, the Refuge was officially designated in 1992. Over the next eleven years, land was bought and donated, native habitat was restored, and, by 2003, the Refuge had grown to 1,268 acres. A Wildlife Center opened in 2008, providing visitors with enhanced educational and recreational opportunities. Although the Wildlife Refuge covers less than one percent of the Tualatin River’s Watershed, it is home to abundant and varied local wildlife.

Sherwood residents may soon have even greater access to natural areas. Currently in the early planning stages, the Tonquin Trail will start at the Tualatin River Natural Wildlife Refuge leading pedestrians and cyclists through Sherwood along the banks of Cedar Creek to the Grahams Oak Nature area along the Willamette River in Wilsonville. Commuters will also be able to use the trail to access the Westside Express Service (WES) stations in Wilsonville and Tualatin via additional trail spurs.
Clockwise from upper left: a new mixed-use development in Sherwood’s historic downtown; Smockville Station Antiques in the historic downtown; overlooking Sherwood from the south; Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Office and Wildlife Center; and a view of the Refuge.