



# Wild Iris Ridge Oak Savanna & Upland Prairie Enhancement

## Project Background

Wild Iris Ridge, a 250-acre site located along the South Hills ridgeline, was purchased by the City of Eugene for habitat preservation and community open space. Wild Iris Ridge is a mosaic of oak woodlands, oak savanna, and upland prairie habitat that was common throughout much of the Willamette Valley prior to Euro-American settlement. Today, less than 2% of oak savanna and 1% of upland prairie—essential habitat for as many as 200 species—remains in the valley.

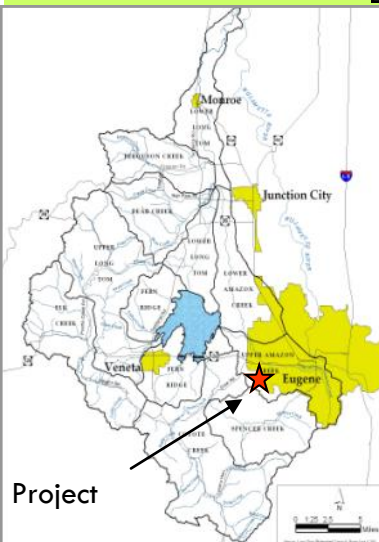
Conversion to timber production and encroachment of conifers and other trees due to fire suppression contributed to the sites' transition from a predominately open prairie-savanna landscape to more closed canopy forest. Soil disturbance caused by periodic logging and grazing also contributed to invasive plants becoming well established over the site.



**Before the project:** Dense, closed-canopy forest crowded oaks, reducing crown spread and decreasing habitat quality.



**After the project:** Conifers and other woody vegetation was thinned from around oaks.



The Council and City of Eugene worked together to restore this site between 2006 and 2012. Our work has focused on restoring oak savanna and woodland structure by removing and controlling woody invasive species and thinning stands of former oak savanna. Some of this thinning included the removal of young Ponderosa pine that had been planted at high densities after the site was logged in the late 90's. Although this is a native tree, the density would have converted the site to a pine plantation within another decade. Another result of the logging operation was numerous slash piles. These were removed to reduce fire hazard and improve our ability to control invasive plants.



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## Restoration Methods

- ◆ Mapped invasive species across the site.
- ◆ Re-graded road ditches and decommissioned one section of road to reduce erosion.
- ◆ Removed blackberry and other small woody vegetation (e.g., overstocked Ponderosa pine), using a skid steer with a masticating head.
- ◆ Spot sprayed Scotch broom, blackberry, thistle, & false brome multiple times across 143 acres.
- ◆ Removed 145 slash piles by burning or grinding wood and hauling off-site.
- ◆ Seeded bare ground resulting from restoration actions with native grasses and forbs.
- ◆ Thinned trees on 13 acres of former oak savanna using a harvester and forwarder.
- ◆ Removed 1,000 feet of barbed wire fence
- ◆ Restored upland prairie grass and forb community at several locations across the site.



**Before the project:** Scot's broom and young Ponderosa pine were taking over this hillside.



**After the project:** A skid steer removed the pine and invasive species. Now the area has a tree density comparable to oak savanna.

## Environmental & Economic Benefits

- ◆ Removal of invasive non-native plants will increase the biodiversity and cover of native prairie grasses and forbs.
- ◆ Thinning allows mature oaks to expand their crowns and produce more acorns, which provide food for wildlife. More cavities are formed in oaks with larger crowns. Many wildlife species, such as Western bluebirds, nest in the cavities present in large oak trees.
- ◆ Thinning the savanna increases light to the forest floor, increasing growth of native flowering plants and benefitting pollinators.
- ◆ Contractors were used from the surrounding area, which contributes to the local economy.

## Project Funding & Partners

**Total Project Cost: \$ 277,200**

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|----------------------------|------------|
| OWEB:                      | \$ 147,200 |
| Bureau of Land Management: | \$ 47,000  |
| City of Eugene:            | \$ 83,000  |



The Long Tom Watershed Council thanks our partners and funders!