LONG TOM
WATERSHED COUNCIL

FACT SHEET:
RESTORING OAK-PRAIRIE HABITATS

Oak and prairie habitats are more **open** than forest lands, but unlike most farm and residential land, they have mostly **native vegetation and wildlife,** and need to be **managed with a light touch**. They once were widespread throughout the Willamette Valley, but now are limited as they have become agriculture, rural residential and urban lands. Restoring oak and prairie habitats on private lands **can provide many benefits!** But first…

WHAT ARE THEY?

Wet prairies (or meadows) have very few (or no) trees, and often have standing water in the winter and spring. They usually are on flat bottom lands, but occasionally are on terraces or gentle slopes. Camas is shown here in flower.	
Upland prairies have few, scattered trees, and have little or no standing water. Savannas have a few more trees, and often are intermixed with prairies. They usually are on slopes, and they usually have small areas of seepy ravines or very dry spots (called balds) or even rock outcrops within them. Balsamroot is shown here in flower.	
Oak woodlands are oak trees which have been growing together close enough so that they make a forest, or a forest with some spaces. Often woodlands are on dry hillsides. In some bottomland areas, oak grows with Oregon ash to form moist riparian forests.	

WHAT GOOD ARE THEY?

These more open prairie and savanna habitats, and oak woodlands, have become very scarce, and so have the species of plants and wildlife that need them. Restoring and maintaining these habitats can provide secure homes for many types of plants and wildlife. Restoration of prairie, savanna, and oak woodlands can provide both these plant and wildlife benefits and in some cases economic or other beneficial uses. For example, light grazing of livestock at the right time can benefit these habitats, and providing native prairie wildflowers attracts native bees which are important for fruit tree and vegetable plant pollination. Increased hunting or wildlife watching opportunities may result from restoration, and managing an oak-prairie area as habitat may qualify for those seeking sustainability certification for forestry, ranching or farming. Renewable production of firewood may be encouraged in some oak areas, while larger oaks are left in other places. Oak-prairie habitats can be managed to benefit both the landowner and the habitat!

While some landowners may wish to provide wildlife habitat or economic return, others may want oak and prairie habitats to continue the legacy from their grandparent's day when the Willamette Valley landscape had more prairies and open understory oak woodlands. Stately open-grown oak trees and vibrant wildflowers beneath them can carry forward this beautiful landscape heritage. And many restored prairie, savanna and woodland habitats can provide increased fire safety as well!

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RESTORING PRAIRIE AND OAK HABITATS?

Restoring these important habitats is often not easy. If the beginning condition of an area being considered for restoration is poor, and the area is small, the benefits may not outweigh the costs. Restored oak and prairie habitats require ongoing maintenance to keep them in good condition, which may be difficult or infeasible for some landowners. For those landowners with large acreages of former prairie, oak savanna or woodland, or a group of smaller ownerships whose properties have similar conditions, technical and financial assistance for the initial restoration is often available. Areas with young conifers coming up in the understory are often prime locations for restoration, as the existing oaks and understory plant community may still be thriving.

Areas *difficult or infeasible* to restore to prairie, savanna or oak woodland	**Areas *easier* to restore to prairie, savanna or oak woodland**
Small	Large
Isolated	Connected to other habitat
Overrun or surrounded by invasive species	Not overrun or surrounded by non-invasive species
Few or no oaks or native wildflowers remaining	Many oaks and/or native wildflowers
Conifer trees encroaching	Little or no conifer encroachment
Managed intensively for grazing or forest uses	Managed with light touch

WHY DO THESE OPEN HABITATS REQUIRE MANAGEMENT?

After an area is restored, the same causes that originally changed it may remain. That is, blackberry and Scot's broom may want to continue to "invade," and fir or other trees may want to continue to encroach. Some diligence in noting and controlling these is needed regularly, so that they do not become large problems again. Large areas with small weed invasions and small levels of conifer encroachment are easier and much less expensive to deal with than large ones that have been left too long.

To achieve the best results, try to avoid these pitfalls, and follow these suggestions.

This action:	**Can lead to this unintended result:**	**Suggested ways to avoid this pitfall:**
Controlling invasive plants with no follow-up treatment or revegetation plan (for densely infested areas)	Invasive plants return	Make a plan for what you want in the area, and count on follow-up control
Disturbing soil or understory plants when restoring tree layer	Invasive plants replace native plants	Consider timing of work, and using low-impact equipment
Grazing, mowing or herbiciding too much or at wrong time	Desired native birds, plants and/or pollinators may not be able to survive	Time work when native plants are dormant (Aug. – Jan. is best)

In addition to a long term commitment to management, there are tax considerations that should be run by your tax advisor, and other topics to discuss with the Long Tom Watershed Council, and possibly other groups. We will provide suggestions so that you can make use of the best knowledge to help you!