

Status of the Willamette Cove Cleanup – February 2015

The DEQ is working with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Port of Portland, Metro, and others to ensure that ongoing assessment and cleanup efforts at Willamette Cove meet Oregon's standards established to protect human health and the environment.



Willamette Cove looking up river to the south.

Willamette Cove

The Willamette Cove property comprises approximately 27 acres and approximately 3000 feet of Willamette River shoreline. The low-lying river front property is on the northern bank of the Willamette River between the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Bridge and the St. Johns Bridge, north of downtown Portland. Metro purchased the property in 1996 under the 1995 Open Spaces Bond Measure as one of the first greenspaces to be protected under this measure, and plans to preserve the land as green space. Portland's Cathedral Park Neighborhood occupies the terrace above Willamette Cove.

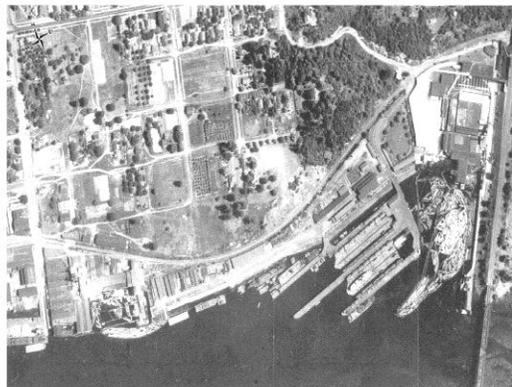
Willamette Cove's industrial uses date back to the early 1900s. Industrial activities ended by the late 1960s and the site has been vacant since. Soil, groundwater, and sediment contamination have been confirmed on-site. Metro and the Port of Portland entered into a voluntary agreement with DEQ for a remedial investigation and source control measures.

The site is currently closed to the public, but use of property for recreational purposes is known to occur. Unimproved roads and trails traverse the property and a few trails reach the Willamette River. Foundation concrete and other remnants from the site's industrial past remain at many locations. Working railroad tracks border the northern and eastern boundaries of the property.

Environmental history

This site was used from 1901 into the late 1960s as a lumber mill, plywood mill, barrel manufacturer, dry-dock and ship repair facility for a variety of small businesses. These past uses left contamination including heavy metals, diesel fuel, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and dioxins in soil in most of the Willamette Cove property. Some of these contaminants have been identified as unacceptable risks to users of the property. Some environmental cleanup has been completed, including removal of contaminated soil in the site upland and beach in 1999, 2004, and 2008. Significant environmental contamination remains in both the upland and the Willamette River adjoining the property which requires remedial action.

Wood preservative chemicals from the adjacent McCormick & Baxter site have migrated in sediment (and possibly groundwater) onto the southern portion of Willamette Cove and Willamette River. In 2002 and 2003 DEQ implemented a large remediation project to address the contaminant plume from the McCormick & Baxter site through the use of a subsurface barrier wall and engineered sediment cap.



1939 Aerial Photo

Historical photo of Willamette Cove property including lumber mill, cooperage, and dry docks.

Current risk assessment and cleanup work

Environmental work is being completed on a number of fronts. An ecological and a human health risk assessment were completed and approved by DEQ in 2014. A draft feasibility study to select a remedy for the upland site is



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currently under review by DEQ. Finally a source control assessment– to determine whether upland contaminants represent an ongoing risk to the river – has been reviewed by DEQ. Source control, to the extent necessary, will be addressed in the final site feasibility study to be completed in 2015.

Sampling and the risk assessments have identified contaminants in soil across the site presenting a risk to site users or wildlife. The most prominent risk is from dioxins present in the central portion of the Willamette Cove upland. Preliminary plans by the Port to address contamination include removal of highly-concentrated contamination (“hot spots”) and capping a large portion of the site. After a final remedy is selected by DEQ, cleanup work will likely occur in a phased manner. Some removal work is expected to occur starting in April 2015.

Contamination is also present in Willamette River sediment adjoining the property. At present, plans are for remediation of sediment (and perhaps riverbank) contamination to occur under EPA following selection of a final remedy for the Portland Harbor Superfund site.

Potential Threats at the Property

Exposure pathways of greatest concern for Willamette Cove are: 1) direct contact with or ingestion of contaminated (upland) site soils; 2) direct contact with the numerous physical and safety hazards on the East Parcel Beach, including underwater hazards, buried metal rebar and other debris; 3) consumption of “resident fish” caught by recreational anglers. Resident fish are those that live their entire lives in the

Harbor and do not migrate out to the ocean or other waters. Resident fish include bass, carp and catfish, but not salmon, steelhead or lamprey.

Signage has been posted at Willamette Cove indicating the presence of contamination. Metro has made efforts to secure the site to the extent possible. Use of the property is discouraged until cleanup activities have been completed.

For more information please contact:

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Alternative formats

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