OR Gov celebrates completion of Willamette River Water Trail

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Trail offers recreational opportunities along the river, while contributing to a healthy, sustainable Willamette River Basin

Governor Ted Kulongoski was joined by federal, state and local leaders on Saturday to celebrate the completion of the Willamette River Water Trail with a ribbon-cutting dedication at Willamette Park. This marked the third and final section of the trail, creating a seamless recreational stretch of the Willamette from Eugene to the Columbia River for canoers and kayakers. â€œThe trail we are dedicating will create economic and tourist opportunities for communities along the Willamette, while also improving our quality of life,â€• said the Governor. â€œIt is another important step to cleaning up the crown jewel of Oregonâ€™s river systems and ensuring that we can pass this legacy on to future generations.â€• The completed water trail is a major component of the Governorâ€™s Willamette River Legacy Program. Under the program, Governor Kulongoski has identified the priority areas of repair, restoration and recreation as central to creating a healthy, sustainable Willamette River Basin that will serve the people of Oregon for years to come. â€œThis trail offers Oregonians an opportunity to experience the Willamette from a new perspective,â€• said the Governor. â€œAs a canoeing enthusiast, I know my fellow paddlers are looking forward to being able to enjoy the natural beauty of the river. I appreciate the hard work of the public and private parties that came together to make this trail a reality.â€• A water trail is a stretch of the river that has been mapped out to create an educational, scenic, and enjoyable experience for canoers and kayakers. The Willamette River Trail, created by connecting existing federal, state, county and city properties, provides paddlers with convenient, well-marked places to enter and leave the river, making the trail more accessible while protecting private property. In dedicating the trail, the Governor was joined by Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior Lynn Scarlett, Congressman David Wu, and many other state and local leaders from communities along the Willamette River. In addition, members of the public received free copies of the latest waterproof Willamette River Water Trail guide and were offered educational opportunities including boat demonstrations, displays and the chance to get out on the water. â€œOn National Trails Day, the U.S. Department of the Interior congratulates the citizens of Oregon on this newest asset to your beautiful State,â€• said Scarlett. â€œThe water trail is a great example of cooperative conservation, with support from the community-based Willamette American Heritage River Initiative, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service's Rivers & Trails Program. Working in a public-private partnership, local communities, state agencies, and private organizations have realized a shared vision that reconnects locals and visitors to the river.â€• The celebration is the culmination of a five year local partnership effort to reconnect river communities with the Willamette. Through a series of open houses hosted by the Mid-Willamette River Connections group, the public overwhelmingly endorsed increasing water recreation opportunities and improving access to the river â€“ identifying the water trail as an opportunity to promote the river. The completion of the water trail was realized through a cooperative partnership involving the communities and counties along the route, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD), Oregon State Marine Board, Oregon Tourism Commission, U.S. Bureau of Land Managementâ€™s American Heritage Rivers Initiative, the National Park Serviceâ€™s Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, and the Willamette Riverkeeper. Private funding and support has been provided through REI and fundraising campaign by the Oregon State Parks Trust involving GI Joeâ€™s and Columbia Sportswear Company. â€œThe Willamette River Water Trail demonstrates what can be achieved by working together,â€• said Keizer City Council President Richard Walsh. â€œIt is wonderful to see our dream become a reality that all Oregonians can enjoy.â€•