

US Army Corps of Engineers- Portland Division: *Willamette River Basin, Oregon Floodplain Restoration Project*. 1999. (Reviewed by Kate Koehler)

The US Army Corps of Engineers-Portland Division's, report entitled *Willamette River Basin, Oregon Floodplain Restoration Project*, published in April 1999, outlines a plan for how to improve the Willamette River watershed. The purpose of the study is “to evaluate Federal interest in pursuing feasibility studies of opportunities to modify existing floodplain features in the Willamette River Basin to reduce flood damages while restoring natural wetlands and promoting ecosystem restoration.” The 43-page report highlights the importance of an all-encompassing, basin-wide framework for reaching its objectives.

This publication begins with an introduction of the basin, as well as the various stakeholders in the area. It explains past projects the Army Corps has been a part of; the Corps has “the authority to regulate work in the waters of the United States, including the Willamette River and its tributaries, under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) and Section 10 of the River and Harbor Act of 1899.” These projects include dams, levees, floodplain information reports, creation of waterways, and riverbank protection to reduce erosion.

The report also talks about the importance of restoration, as well as looking at the damage already done. This damage includes channeling of the Willamette that increased erosion, flood damage, loss of wildlife, questionable water quality, and the lack of an integrated restoration policy. The report goes further, looking at the potential future problems as well.

After examining the problems present, this document outlines a plan that includes their objectives, a basin-wide framework that works with the various stakeholders to improve the watershed conditions, an intention to collect data concerning the watershed, identification of potential areas to begin restoration, and the establishment of a cooperative long-term restoration plan. It ends with a recommendation to begin the feasibility study as soon as Federal funds are collected.

Critique

Overall, I found this document environmentally focused, especially in comparison to many other government documents. I like that it recognized the importance of examining historical data and trends when looking at how to improve the watershed in the future. It also plans to examine the existing conditions, contrasting those with the desired conditions. The fact that it strives for an integrated restoration strategy and realizes the value in involving all the stakeholders also shows a thoughtful and intelligent approach to dealing with the problems in the Willamette watershed.

However, at the same time, this report seemed to downplay any harm the Corps may have done to the watershed. For example, the Corps is also in charge of constructing dams and levees. These could also harm the watershed. In addition, although this document is environmentally based, these environmental

issues seem to only be important as they relate to humans. For example, it speaks of the need to reduce erosion, in order to “reduce the impacts of bank erosion on agricultural lands as well as urban and suburban. Erosion results in the loss of farmlands and threatens roads, bridges, utility lines and other improvements.”

Overall, this report is a good plan for action in the Willamette River watershed, especially because it focuses on environmental improvements and the need for a collaborative group to fulfill these objectives. It is a strong first step in improving the conditions of our basin, and now needs implementation.

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