Restoring Rivers

STORY BY *Yuxing Zheng* / ILLUSTRATION BY *Dave Elkin*

Clean water and healthy habitats are the hallmarks of parks and nature in the Portland metro region. Look no further than nearby creeks and rivers, where residents can enjoy scenic summer floats, wildlife viewing and unrivalled winter fishing.

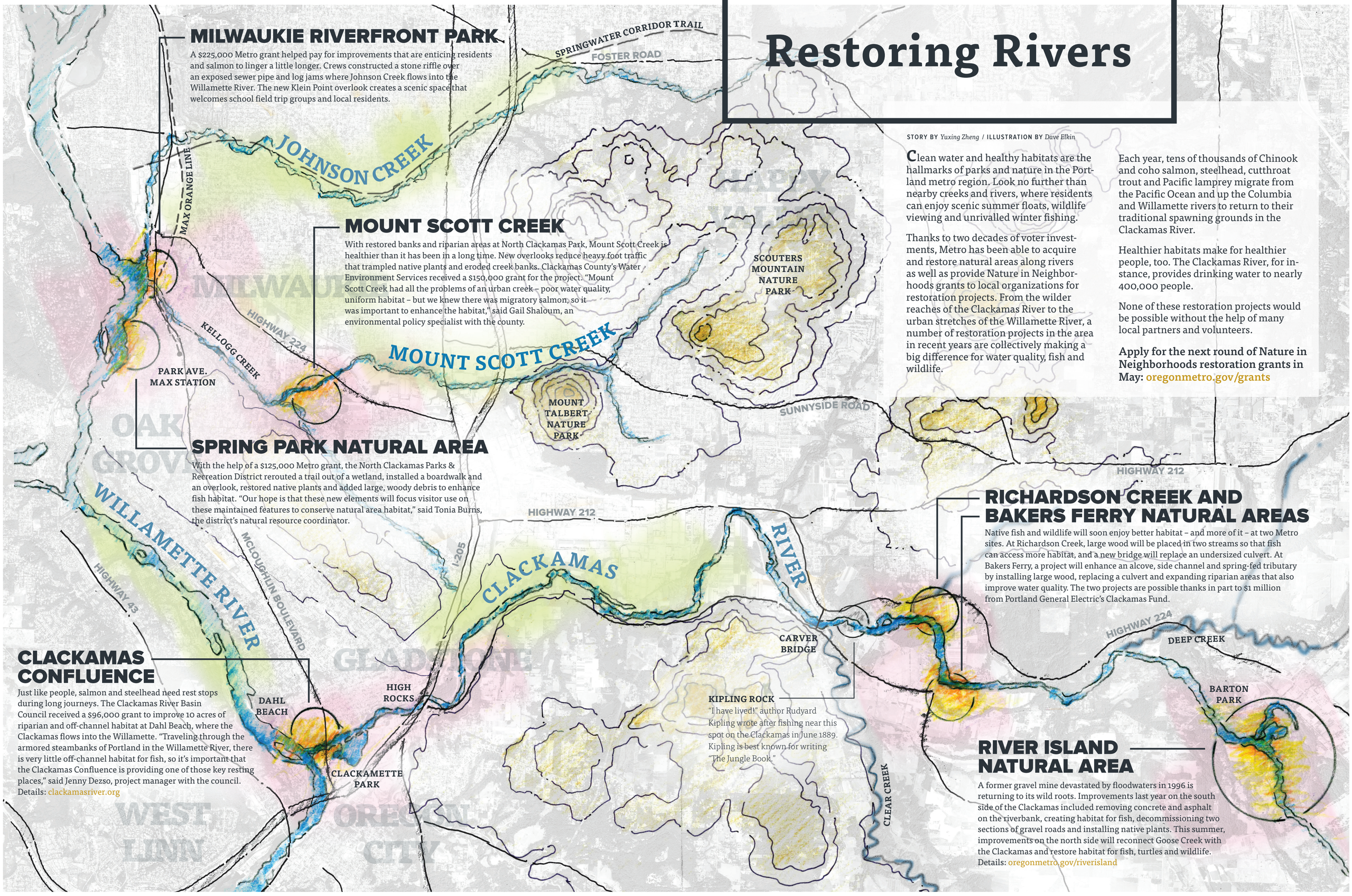
Thanks to two decades of voter investments, Metro has been able to acquire and restore natural areas along rivers as well as provide Nature in Neighborhoods grants to local organizations for restoration projects. From the wilder reaches of the Clackamas River to the urban stretches of the Willamette River, a number of restoration projects in the area in recent years are collectively making a big difference for water quality, fish and wildlife.

Each year, tens of thousands of Chinook and coho salmon, steelhead, cutthroat trout and Pacific lamprey migrate from the Pacific Ocean and up the Columbia and Willamette rivers to return to their traditional spawning grounds in the Clackamas River.

Healthier habitats make for healthier people, too. The Clackamas River, for instance, provides drinking water to nearly 400,000 people.

None of these restoration projects would be possible without the help of many local partners and volunteers.

Apply for the next round of Nature in Neighborhoods restoration grants in May: oregonmetro.gov/grants



MILWAUKIE RIVERFRONT PARK

A $225,000 Metro grant helped pay for improvements that are enticing residents and salmon to linger a little longer. Crews constructed a stone riffle over an exposed sewer pipe and log jams where Johnson Creek flows into the Willamette River. The new Klein Point overlook creates a scenic space that welcomes school field trip groups and local residents.

MOUNT SCOTT CREEK

With restored banks and riparian areas at North Clackamas Park, Mount Scott Creek is healthier than it has been in a long time. New overlooks reduce heavy foot traffic that trampled native plants and eroded creek banks. Clackamas County's Water Environment Services received a $150,000 grant for the project. "Mount Scott Creek had all the problems of an urban creek – poor water quality, uniform habitat – but we knew there was migratory salmon, so it was important to enhance the habitat," said Gail Shaloum, an environmental policy specialist with the county.

SPRING PARK NATURAL AREA

With the help of a $125,000 Metro grant, the North Clackamas Parks & Recreation District rerouted a trail out of a wetland, installed a boardwalk and an overlook, restored native plants and added large, woody debris to enhance fish habitat. "Our hope is that these new elements will focus visitor use on these maintained features to conserve natural area habitat," said Tonia Burns, the district's natural resource coordinator.

CLACKAMAS CONFLUENCE

Just like people, salmon and steelhead need rest stops during long journeys. The Clackamas River Basin Council received a $96,000 grant to improve 10 acres of riparian and off-channel habitat at Dahl Beach, where the Clackamas flows into the Willamette. "Traveling through the armored steambanks of Portland in the Willamette River, there is very little off-channel habitat for fish, so it's important that the Clackamas Confluence is providing one of those key resting places," said Jenny Dezso, project manager with the council. Details: clackamasriver.org

KIPLING ROCK

"I have lived!" author Rudyard Kipling wrote after fishing near this spot on the Clackamas in June 1889. Kipling is best known for writing "The Jungle Book."

RICHARDSON CREEK AND BAKERS FERRY NATURAL AREAS

Native fish and wildlife will soon enjoy better habitat – and more of it – at two Metro sites. At Richardson Creek, large wood will be placed in two streams so that fish can access more habitat, and a new bridge will replace an undersized culvert. At Bakers Ferry, a project will enhance an alcove, side channel and spring-fed tributary by installing large wood, replacing a culvert and expanding riparian areas that also improve water quality. The two projects are possible thanks in part to $1 million from Portland General Electric's Clackamas Fund.

RIVER ISLAND NATURAL AREA

A former gravel mine devastated by floodwaters in 1996 is returning to its wild roots. Improvements last year on the south side of the Clackamas included removing concrete and asphalt on the riverbank, creating habitat for fish, decommissioning two sections of gravel roads and installing native plants. This summer, improvements on the north side will reconnect Goose Creek with the Clackamas and restore habitat for fish, turtles and wildlife. Details: oregonmetro.gov/riverisland