

Metro Parks and Nature Field Guide

OXBOW REGIONAL PARK

STORY BY *Dan Daly*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *C. Bruce Forster and Fred Joe*

A river flows, glassy green and silent along a cliff carved by a winter flood, then slows and chatters along gravel and sand bars bright with flecks of mica. Here, in 1,000 acres of river, forest and ridge, you're sheltered from the rush of life in one of Oregon's extraordinary places, Oxbow Regional Park on the wild and scenic Sandy River.

Oxbow's human history dates back millennia, to the native people who fished and gathered here since time immemorial. Place names in the park today hearken back to early settlers, whose homesteads, bootlegging and failed attempts at building a sawmill gave way to a Multnomah County park in 1963. In 1994, recognizing the regional draw of the park, the county transferred it to Metro.

Change comes to Oxbow on nature's timetable. Follow the water upstream to the glaciers and snowfields of Mount Hood, where eruptions sent massive flows of sand and gravel into the valleys below, burying the forest beneath 60 feet of sand more than two centuries ago. Today people barbeque, camp and



ride horses on top of this buried forest, evidenced only by the ancient dead tree trunks that line the river banks.

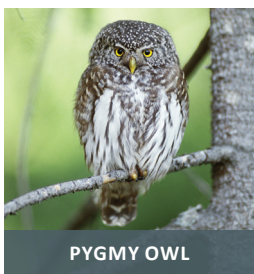
An ancient forest towers above the river, but even it changes. In 2009 a microburst threw massive living trees to the ground like match sticks, bringing sunshine to parts of the forest floor that hadn't seen the light for centuries. Change also comes by human hands. Funding from Metro's parks and natural areas levy, approved by the voters in 2013, has allowed for critical side channel habitat to be restored, giving threatened

salmon and steelhead fingerlings a place to hide and feed on their way to the ocean.

Wildlife thrives in the park, and people come from around the region to find and follow their footprints in the sand. Oxbow and protected lands around it offer an ideal home for large animals like elk, black bear and cougar. From mountain biking to riding the rapids, Oxbow has something for everyone, all year long.

To find out what's happening now, visit oregonmetro.gov/oxbow

BE ON THE LOOKOUT!



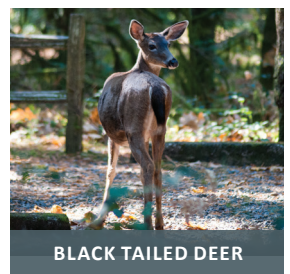
PYGMY OWL



FAIRY SLIPPER ORCHID



MAIDENHAIR FERN



BLACK TAILED DEER

OXBOW REGIONAL PARK

3010 SE OXBOW PKWY, GRESHAM

oregonmetro.gov/oxbow

DIRECTIONS

From Portland or Gresham, head east on Division Street until it branches at Oxbow Drive, near 302nd Avenue. Veer right onto Oxbow Drive, turning left on Oxbow Parkway. Head down the canyon, into the park.

KNOW WHEN YOU GO

Open sunrise to sunset. *No dogs or alcohol, please.* \$5/car, \$7/bus parking fee, free with annual pass.

AMENITIES

Bathrooms, reservable picnic areas and shelters, boat launch, camping (tent, pull-through, ADA accessible), playgrounds, pedestrian/equestrian and bike trails, nature programs and summer campfire shows. Many of the park facilities are wheel chair accessible.

RESERVATIONS

To reserve picnic shelters or group camp areas, call 503-665-4995 option 0 or email MetroPicnicReservations@oregonmetro.gov

Camping reservations are accepted up to nine months in advance. Call Reservations NW at 800-452-5687 or visit oregonmetro.gov/oxbow

METRO PARKS AND NATURE

Whether you're in the mood for a short hike or a weekend camping trip, a boat ride or a picnic, Metro has a destination for you. You'll share the landscape with salmon swimming in restored streams, birds streaking across the sky and giant, old oak trees towering overhead. Thanks to voters, you can explore 17,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas across the Portland metropolitan region.

If you picnic at Blue Lake or take your kids to the Oregon Zoo, enjoy symphonies at the Schnitz or auto shows at the convention center, put out your trash or drive your car – we've already crossed paths. *So, hello. We're Metro – nice to meet you.*

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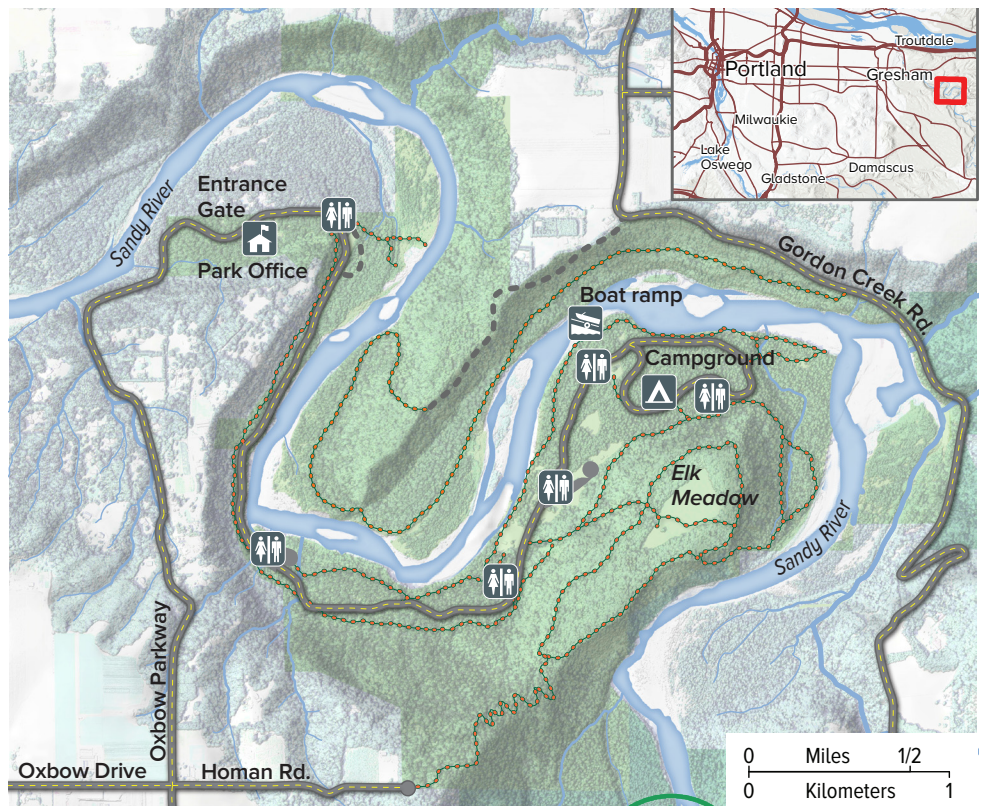
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Metro

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IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Coming from Portland, historic Troutdale offers small town charm with art galleries, restaurants, a farmers market and seasonal fairs. On the way to Oxbow, u-pick blueberry and Christmas tree farms are woven into the countryside. McMenamins Edgefield is a great stop for lunch or to make a night of it. With lodging, a movie theater, winery, brewery, concert venue and spa, Edgefield can turn a walk in the park into a mini vacation.

SEASON BY SEASON

SPRING: The ancient forest comes alive. Osprey return to repair their nests, and do battle with the bald eagles that work to steal their every catch. Ferns of all shapes and sizes unfurl their glowing green fronds. Rufus hummingbirds flit from bloom to bloom, and hikers join the Swainson's thrush in a springtime banquet of salmon and huckleberries. Seek the wildflowers of the forest floor, like wild ginger, Menzies' larkspur, star-flower and fairy slipper orchid.

SUMMER: Reserve a campsite and catch a campfire show in the evening. Come out for a day of hiking and river play. To escape the weekend crowds, simply hit the trail and leave the masses at river's edge. Float in an inner tube or launch a boat. Reserve a group picnic shelter for a work meeting, family reunion or wedding. Ride on horseback down Alder Ridge by parking at the equestrian trailhead. Listen for the metronome-like toots of the pygmy owl, which are active in the daytime. Deer abound.

FALL: As fresh rains recharge the rivers flow, Chinook salmon return to their natal river to begin their ancient spawning ritual. Attend the Salmon Homecoming event where naturalists lead participants to the fish. You won't be alone. Salmon draw in bald eagles, black bears and mink that leave clear tracks in the wet sand as they search for the carcasses of fish that have spawned. Fishermen do well with the Coho headed upstream and mushrooms are popping out of the ground.

WINTER: When winter rains swell the Sandy, the river is at full strength. Climb from the river bottom to the park's highest point (Equestrian Trailhead), and you will traverse over 13 million years of Oregon's finest geological strata, best seen when the summer foliage is down. Winter steelhead brave the currents, and lucky fishermen are rewarded with more than cold fingers and stellar scenery. Roosevelt elk are some-times seen at dusk on the floodplain across from Trail Marker B.