

Field guide

OXBOW REGIONAL PARK



Turn to page 12 for details about Salmon Homecoming Oct. 13 to 14.

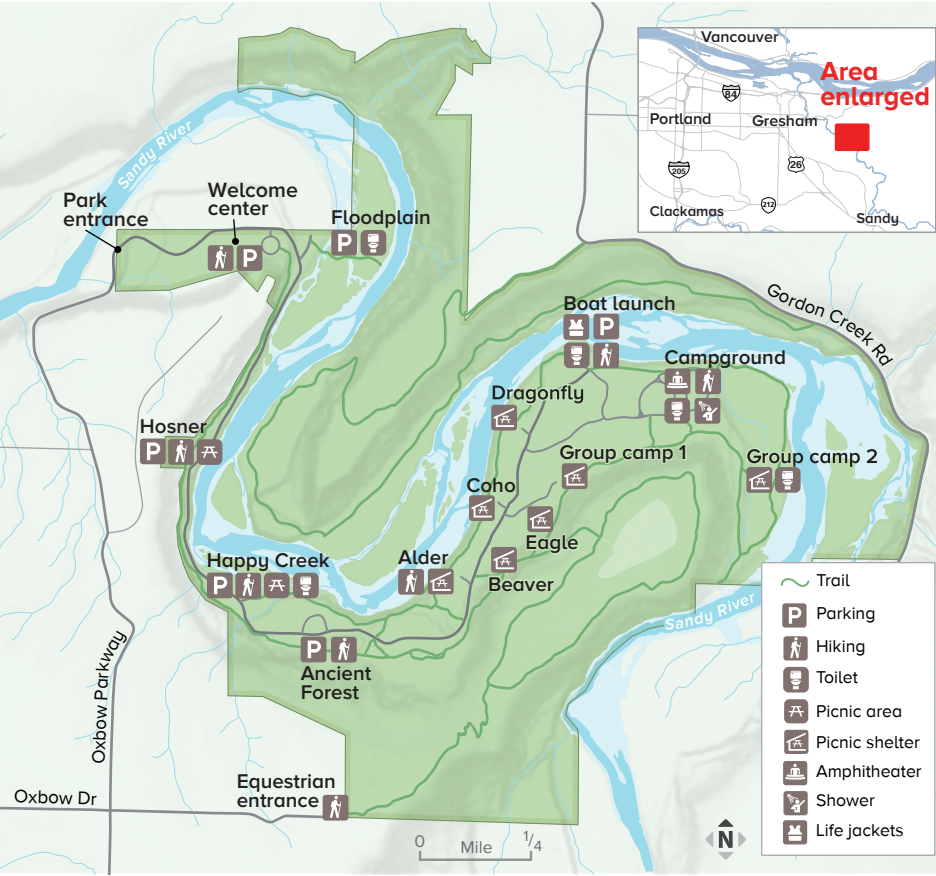
Story by Dan Daly
Photography by C. Bruce Forster and Fred Joe

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 since time immemorial to the indigenous peoples who continue to hold deep relationships with the land and water here, fishing, gathering, celebrating and caring for the land. Place names in the park today hearken back to early European 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.

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.



Oxbow Regional Park

3010 SE OXBOW PARKWAY, GRESHAM

DRIVING

From Portland 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 pets, please.

AMENITIES

Bathrooms, picnic areas and shelters, boat launch, camping (tent, pull-through, ADA accessible), playgrounds, pedestrian/equestrian and bike trails, nature programs, summer campfire shows.

oregonmetro.gov/oxbow

In the neighborhood Historic Troutdale offers art galleries, restaurants, a farmers market and seasonal fairs. U-pick blueberry and Christmas tree farms are woven into the countryside. With lodging, a theater, winery, brewery, concert venue and spa, McMenamins Edgefield can turn a walk in the park into a mini vacation.

Change also comes by human hands. Voter-approved parks and natural areas levies allow for the restoration of vital side channel habitat, 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 can 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.

Be on the lookout!



PYGMY OWL



FAIRY SLIPPER ORCHID



MAIDENHAIR FERN



BLACK-TAILED DEER

Season-by-season highlights

FALL: As fresh rains recharge the rivers, Chinook salmon return to begin their ancient spawning ritual. Attend Salmon Homecoming, where participants can see these fish. Salmon draw in bald eagles and raccoons, and some leave tracks in the wet sand as they search for the carcasses of fish that have spawned. Mushrooms are popping out of the ground all over the park.

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 more than 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 sometimes seen at dusk on the floodplain.

SPRING: The ancient forest buds out and reaches for the sun. Osprey return to repair their nests, raise their young and share their fish catch with bald eagles. Ferns unfurl. Rufus hummingbirds flit from bloom to bloom, and hikers join the Swainson's thrush in a springtime banquet of salmonberries and huckleberries. Seek the wildflowers of the forest floor, like wild ginger, Menzies' larkspur, starflower 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, hit the trail and leave the masses at river's edge. 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.