



Graham Oaks

FIELD GUIDE

Rising above an expanse of prairie, a lone tree's gnarled branches reach in every direction. This heritage oak has been a witness to the history of this land, one filled with the complex relationship between people and place.

Nestled in the suburban landscape of Clackamas County, Graham Oaks Nature Park offers a glimpse into oak prairie habitats once common across the Willamette Valley. Now, they cover only about 7 percent of their original range.

Oak prairies reflect the communities they support. The Kalapuya and other Indigenous peoples have cared for this land for thousands of years. Before settlers arrived, they regularly used seasonal fires to maintain vast open spaces for hunting and gathering practices. The fires also supported a rich diversity of native wildflowers that continue to draw unique pollinators from across the region.

Along the southwest edge of the park, pockets of towering old-growth Douglas fir trees invite visitors into a shaded world of steep canyons blanketed in dense ferns and native shrubs. Woodpeckers can often be heard in the dappled sunshine canopy.

On the eastern flank of the park, songbirds flock to a wetland oasis filled with insects and flowers. Springtime brings the omnipresent sound of young frogs. Restoration work has increased the amount of water flowing to Arrowhead Creek, creating new habitat for sensitive species, such as northern red-legged frogs.

Returning to the prairie, birds flit about the sentinel oak tree. They come for shelter when winter storms blow through, and they find insects for food in the crooks and crannies of the bark. Like the gnarled branches of this heritage oak, Graham Oaks Nature Park knits together a mosaic of habitats for local wildlife and people.

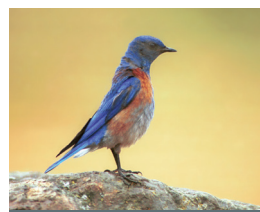
Be on the lookout!



rubber boa



western grey squirrel



western bluebird



white-breasted nuthatch



Season-by-season highlights

Spring: Listen for the sounds of frogs during breeding season along the Arrowhead Creek trail. These peeps belong to Pacific chorus frogs. Formerly known as tree frogs, these tiny creatures range from bright green to dusky brown, but all share dark masks across their eyes.

Summer: Take the family for a bike ride along the first five miles of the Ice Age Tonquin Trail. Along the way, discover the scablands, rich wetlands and ponds left by the Ice Age Missoula floods. In Graham Oaks, enjoy a leisurely ride through the restored prairie on a wide, paved trail.

Fall: Stroll along the Legacy Creek trail and enjoy the brilliant reds of vine maple leaves in the changing forest. As the trail rejoins the prairie, search for the hidden wonders of oak galls. These large, round and vaguely apple-like structures are caused by chemicals injected by larva of certain gall wasps. Once a main source of ink, oak galls continue to fascinate botanists and artists.

Winter: Watch northern harriers glide across the landscape on a crisp, clear morning. These unique raptors have disc-shaped faces similar to owls that allow them to use hearing as well as sight when hunting. Identify them by their low flight above open lands and distinct white rump patch that's obvious in flight.

Graham Oaks Nature Park

11825 SW Wilsonville Rd., Wilsonville

Getting there

From Interstate 5, take exit 283 and head west onto Southwest Wilsonville Road. After a mile and a half, turn right into the park. Park at the entrance; parking is not allowed at nearby schools. Wilsonville SMART bus line 4 serves the park's main entrance.

Know when you go

Park open 6:30 a.m. to sunset. Bicycles and on-leash pets are allowed on the Ice Age Tonquin Trail but not the rest of the park.

Amenities

Restrooms, picnic shelter, parking for six bicycles at park entrance. Much of the park is wheelchair accessible, although some trails are more challenging.

Pets policy

To protect plants, wildlife and people, Metro does not allow pets at most regional parks and natural areas. Pets can damage sensitive habitat and threaten wildlife the region has worked to protect. In natural areas where pets are not allowed, people see more wildlife and get closer to it. Seeing-eye dogs or other service animals are allowed. Please bring cleanup materials.

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