

# Brownfields

## Success Story

### Navigating a New River Launch Hillsboro, Oregon

The Tualatin River and the surrounding valley have long provided for the residents of greater Portland, Oregon. In the 1850s, produce and grains grown in the valley were shipped downstream to the city and distributed through its ports. Today, Oregonians enjoy visiting the river to kayak and canoe. The Tualatin River also provides drinking water to 360,000 homes and businesses.

The Tualatin River Water Trail calls for river access points every 5 river miles, but, until recently, a popular 10-mile section of the river lacked safe access for paddlers. In 2014, Metro—the regional government of greater Portland—purchased a 1.6-acre parcel ideally situated halfway between the two nearest launch sites. Metro works to protect clean water, restore fish and wildlife habitat and provide opportunities for people to enjoy nature close to home across 17,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas. After purchasing the property, staff moved to identify and remediate contamination on the property to prepare it for safe public use.

#### The Site Assessments

The property had been used for many purposes over the years, including for agriculture in the 1930s and as an assembly and packaging site in the 1970s. It later housed a leather and saddle production business, as well as trailer and clock repair facilities.

Prior to purchasing the property, Metro obtained liability protection as a bona fide prospective purchaser through a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment completed to ASTM International Standard and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Standard for All Appropriate Inquiries.

When Metro bought the property, it had a 5,400-square-foot, one-story combined home and machine shop that housed a clock repair business, a 500-gallon above-ground heating oil tank and a barn. Metro also discovered discarded concrete rubble, scrap metal and shopping carts built into an embankment and containers of hazardous substances. In addition, Phase I and II Environmental Site Assessments revealed significant soil contamination on the property.



#### EPA Grant Recipient:

Metro — the Regional Government of Greater Portland

#### EPA Grant Type:

Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund

#### Former Uses:

Agricultural, Industrial, Residential

#### Current Use:

Non-Motorized Boat Launch and Public Park



The property had been used not only as a farm (with a barn, shown here) but also for a saddle company, a clock repair business and a trailer repair facility.



Workers removed concrete rubble and hazardous containers from the property and remediated groundwater contamination.



A row of canoes awaited the grand opening of Farmington Paddle Launch.

**“With the help of an EPA Brownfields grant and voter investments, we transformed an environmental liability into a community asset.”**

*Suzanne Piluso,  
Senior Analyst,  
Parks and Nature, Metro*

### **For more information:**

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at [www.epa.gov/brownfields](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields) or contact Susan Morales at 202-553-7299 or [Morales.Susan@epa.gov](mailto:Morales.Susan@epa.gov).

Officials were surprised by the extent of the contamination uncovered during the environmental site assessments. “Metro was committed to acquiring the land and cleaning up the site because public access to the Tualatin River had long been of interest to the community,” said Suzanne Piluso, a parks and nature senior analyst at Metro. “But it was impossible to know the full extent of the contamination before we started the work.”

## **The Cleanup**

After razing the structures, cleaning the embankment and properly disposing of the above-ground drums, workers began digging. That’s when they discovered that heating oil from the above-ground tank had leaked into the soil and groundwater, which required additional testing and remediation. In cleaning up the site, Metro coordinated with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) before hauling away many tons of contaminated soil and capping the area with clean fill.

The total cleanup cost about \$374,000. An EPA Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund from the Oregon Business Development Department (Business Oregon) provided \$176,000, which was combined with \$198,000 from the Metro natural area bond measure that voters approved in 2006.

Metro also received a \$287,500 grant from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) to fund new structures on the site, with additional costs funded through Metro voter investments. Clean Water Services, a local utility devoted to protecting the Tualatin River, partnered with Metro to assist with design and planting of stormwater treatment swales to enhance Tualatin River water quality.

The strong partnerships between Metro, Business Oregon, DEQ, OPRD and Clean Water Services helped make the cleanup and construction a success. On May 2, 2017, DEQ issued Metro a certification stating the property poses no unacceptable risks to human health or the environment and protecting the owners from liability.

## **The Benefits**

The project took 4 years for assessment, design, permitting and cleanup. Construction of the boat launch and park took an additional year. Amid much excitement, the Farmington Paddle Launch grand opening took place on June 24, 2017.

The launch is now a safe and convenient place for people to access the river with kayaks, canoes and paddleboards. It features restrooms, bike racks, picnic tables, trash cans, benches and parking. It’s also a popular spot for bicyclists to park as they begin their journeys through the scenic countryside. Thousands of native plants were reintroduced to the area and new trees were planted after invasive species were removed. Plus, the project completes an important part of the Tualatin River Water Trail.

“The water trail gives people greater access to the outdoors,” said Karen Homolac, a brownfields program policy specialist with Business Oregon. “Most importantly, the launch provides families with safe and environmentally clean access to the river.”