

<https://www.camaspstrecord.com/news/2024/mar/14/washougal-stormwater-projects-ripple-out/>

Washougal stormwater projects ripple out

Campen Creek, Mable Kerr Park and Washougal High School parking lot to benefit from City's plans

By Doug Flanagan

March 14, 2024 1:47 pm

Environment



PreviousNext

The city of Washougal has kicked off a series of projects to improve water quality and fish habitat at Campen Creek.

The City, as part of its Stormwater Management Action Plan (SMAP), has proposed strengthening its stormwater infrastructure near Washougal High School, retrofitting an underutilized water infiltration pond and restoring Mable Kerr Park.

“The first step in the SMAP process was to assess and prioritize our various water bodies inside the city of Washougal,” Sean Mulderig, the City’s stormwater program coordinator, told Washougal City Council members during their Feb. 26 workshop. “Based on rounds of public feedback and analysis, we ultimately selected the Campen Creek watershed as our area of focus. From there, we developed an SMAP with an associated capital improvement plan for water quality (and) fish habitat improvement projects, and the next thing in line is to use the SMAP as a tool to apply for Washington State Department of Ecology grant funding.”

Campen Creek, a tributary of Gibbons Creek, was selected because of “water quality impairments and inadequate flow controls,” according to the City.

In its SMAP, the City said “addressing these issues will require a combination of approaches,” including structural retrofits, policy changes and public outreach to help change behaviors that can harm the watershed.

Gibbon Creek and Campen Creek are listed on Ecology’s Washington State Water Quality Assessment as impaired for temperature and fecal coliform bacteria.

“High water temperatures prevent the creeks from attaining their designated uses for aquatic life, affecting salmonid spawning, rearing and migration,” the SMAP states. “High levels of fecal coliform bacteria prevent the creeks from attaining their designated uses for recreation. Gibbons Creek and its tributaries have a total maximum daily load for fecal coliform bacteria to address the impairment and attain water quality standards. Improving water quality in the (area) would also benefit Gibbon Creek.”

The plan states that the City will identify illegal discharges, failing septic systems and contributions from residential pet waste to decrease the amount of fecal coliform bacteria in its creeks.

The City said Campen Creek and its tributaries are “flashy,” meaning their stream levels rise very quickly following a rainstorm.

“Many residential subdivisions in the (watershed) were developed under Clark County regulations in the 1990s and 2000s, which means most of them have older flow control and older water quality facilities, and many of these subdivisions have wider county road widths,” according to the City.

During a site visit to the Gibbons Creek Basin, City staff members and consultants identified several stormwater retrofit opportunities and stormwater management needs, including poorly

functioning, older water quality and flow control facilities; potential high-risk drywells; residences on septic systems; and erosion at 39th Street.

“The Campen Creek catchment was selected for SMAP because of the ease of coordination for placing facilities in the right-of-way in underserved residential areas, the number of existing older publicly owned flow control facilities that are eligible for retrofit, the presence of a known erosion problem in the tributary at 39th Street, and the focus on this catchment demonstrated through public feedback and the efforts by the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership,” according to the City.

Washougal High water quality, flow-control project in the works

The Washougal High project will provide water quality and flow-control treatment for a 9-acre area capped with impervious surfaces.

The City received \$390,502 from Ecology for the project and assistance from the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership, a Portland-based environmental protection nonprofit coalition that provided a funding match of \$20,552 and recently hired firms for design services and landscape architecture.

The City plans to complete its design work on the water quality project by the summer of 2025, and will likely apply for construction funding in 2026, according to Mulderig.

Subscribe to the Post-Record today to support local journalism and help us to build a stronger community.

[Subscribe Today](#)

“(There are) sections of ‘J’ Street, ‘I’ street and 36th Street that really don’t have any sort of stormwater infrastructure whatsoever,” Mulderig said. “Every single time it rains, (we) get big pools of water forming on ‘J’ Street, and it goes into Canyon Creek, clearly untreated. And these are some pretty highly trafficked streets, so you get a lot of pollution that’s being generated on these impervious surfaces.”

The water infiltration pond project will redirect approximately 22 acres of untreated and flow-controlled drainage to an infiltration pond on “Q” Street. The City is on the DOE’s 2025 Draft Water Quality Funding Offer List and Intended Use Plan to receive \$236,4110 for the project.

“(In a) natural creek system, you don’t want super high peaks and low valleys in terms of the hydrograph. You want to see sustained flows, you want to see a steady incline in that hydrograph and then come down slowly,” Mulderig said. “But with a large amount of impervious surface, you see super high peaks, and then it drops down super low. It makes it really difficult for fish and other aquatic life to survive in those kinds of urban environments. The intent here is to redirect water (to the pond), let it infiltrate, increase base flows that are going to Campen Creek, and reduce some of those peak flows.”

Mable Kerr Park restoration project planned

The Mable Kerr Park restoration project will remove dead, dying and invasive trees; regrade the entire site; install habitat features; realign and improve paths; and plant site-appropriate native species.

The City is on Ecology's 2025 list of funding projects and could receive \$489,445 for the Mable Kerr project. Mulderig said the state funding would pay for 100% of the construction costs, and that the project is already at 60% design and scheduled to start construction in the summer of 2025.

“(This project) takes on some of the same themes that you saw at the Steigerwald (project) at a smaller scale, reconnecting the Campen Creek floodplain,” Mulderig explained. “Right now, you see incise channels, and they are a clear indicator of an urbanized stream in a degraded system. You see steep cut-offs. You have really flashy storm events. This is not really that conducive to providing healthy habitats for salmonids and other species. They don't like to have water that's moving really fast all the time, then gets really low during the summertime — almost a trickle. The intent here is to kind of spread that out, make multiple little channels have pools of water, where baby salmon can survive and get refuge.”

Mulderig credited the Lower Columbia River Estuary's Steigerwald Reconnection Project, which removed 2.2 miles of an existing flood-control levee, built two new levees to protect adjacent properties from flooding and reconnected 965 acres of floodplain habitat to the Columbia River, and expanded the size of the Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge east of Washougal, for “increased migration of salmon upstream into some of the tributaries that maybe they didn't have the ability to reach previously.”

“We've done a lot in the city's stormwater program to improve water quality, too,” Mulderig said. “That (work), paired with the Steigerwald project, has probably created a positive change. It's an encouraging sign, and we'll probably only get better numbers from here on out.”

Mulderig said he recently heard from a Washougal resident who spotted a coho salmon in a portion of the creek in December 2023 — something that hadn't happened for at least a decade.

“This is just a very encouraging sign and a very exciting milestone,” Mulderig said of the salmon spotting. “(It shows) that some of the stormwater management and watershed management work that we're doing in Washougal — not only by us, but some of the partnerships that we're working with — is creating positive (change) our riparian habitats.”