

# Restoring Oregon's White Oaks

*Friends demonstrate oak enhancement techniques along summit trail*

by Sara Nelson Lausmann, Office Manager

The Willamette Valley has been identified as one of North America's top crisis ecoregions (**The Nature Conservancy, 2006**). This designation results from the major decline of Willamette Valley oak savanna and prairie habitat.

Years of fire suppression, development, invasive species and Douglas fir encroachment have left White Oak habitats seriously degraded, leaving many species dependent upon its structure threatened or endangered. Less than two percent of the historic White Oak savanna remains intact in the Willamette Valley.

Mt. Pisgah, including Buford Park, is home to one of the largest remnants of Oregon

White Oak habitat on public lands. The oak woodlands, savanna and upland prairies on Mt. Pisgah are an important resource that deserve to be conserved and managed with care to benefit future generations. Fortunately, Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah has enlisted several partners to implement conservation practices to maintain these high value habitats.

In partnership with **Lane County Parks, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, Bonneville Power Administration, and Forest Restoration Partnership**, Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah has implemented restoration strategies proven to enhance and protect Oregon's White Oaks – and the 189 at-risk species which rely on these habitats.

The Oregon White Oak Pilot Project is a demonstration to benefit prairie, savanna, and woodland habitat on a 60-acre site on the ridgeline near Beis-

tel's West Summit Trail #1. The project, underway since early summer, aims to conserve rare prairie and oak habitats, to improve habitat for rare species, to reduce woody fuels that could result in a destructive



ABOVE: Fir encroaching upon oaks before implementation. LEFT: "Freed" oaks after implementation.



This fall, in areas cleared of exotics, we will plant a diverse mix of native shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers – all produced from our native plant nursery.

Removing the young fir and thinning crowded, declining and spindly oaks prepares the site for future controlled burns. Fire was nature's way of maintaining the open character of oak savanna and upland prairies.

While the project's immediate benefits include improved habitat and vistas of the valley floor from this popular trail, the real benefits will develop over a lifetime when our grandchildren can walk through prairies of wildflowers and sit under legacy oak trees, listening to the flutterings of butterflies, the knockings of the acorn woodpecker, and the song of the Western Meadowlark.

wildfire, to prepare the site for beneficial historically-based prescribed burning, and to demonstrate typical oak and prairie restoration methods that could be applied to conserve oak and prairie habitats elsewhere on Buford Park or on other suitable lands.

In October, Douglas fir were cut and removed, or girdled to create snag habitat for wildlife, or placed in channels in the South Meadow to improve habitat for fish and other aquatic species. The lack of wood in rivers, a consequence of dams and younger forests, is a limiting habitat factor in our watersheds.

Select oaks have been thinned to increase vigor and acorn production (an important wildlife food). Slash has been piled to benefit small rodents, reptiles and other wildlife. Large limbs and branches have been scattered to provide structure and perch points for insects, reptiles, and birds.

## Oak Habitat Hike!

**Sunday, November 2  
10 am to Noon**

Meet in the Arboretum parking lot prepared to hike near the summit.

*Parking pass required.*

Led by Jason Blazar,  
Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah  
Stewardship Coordinator