

Conservationists descend on Meldrum Bar

Portions of the Gladstone park are being overwhelmed by invasive plants

BY ELLEN SPITALERI

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Earth Day is on the way and there are a number of opportunities for volunteers to help the environment in the county — including Community Conservation Day, a work party event to be held on April 18, at Meldrum Bar Park in Gladstone.

“This area was brought to our attention, because [the city of Gladstone] doesn’t have the resources to accomplish what needs to be done. We determine which [areas] need us the most, and this one was beckoning to us,” said Russ Hall, executive director of Wilderness International Inc., the main sponsor of the event.



Russ Hall, above, director of Wilderness International Inc., deploys a post-hole digger at Meldrum Bar Park.

“Work parties are really important, because there’s an unlimited need to do this type of work, and cities, counties and public organizations don’t have an unlimited amount of money or manpower to get the job done.

“We welcome kids as young as 5 and grandmas and grandpas — we are open to anybody and everybody who is interested in establishing a healthy habitat in the metro area,” he added.

The biggest problem in the park is the fact that invasive species, like English ivy and Himalayan blackberry, have moved in and are endangering the native species, Hall said.

Ivy will grow up the side of a tree and strangle it, while blackberry spreads and forces out native plants, he said.

The ultimate goal for the city of Gladstone is to “restore the whole park to its native habitat in cooperation with all the other organizations,” he said.

“We have two different locations in the park, and they are central to what’s going on there — they are very visible. [The volunteers] are going to come in to these areas and completely strip them of invasive plants.

“[The city] is going to provide mulch and bark chips that we can spread 7 inches thick. Studies show that mulch that thick prevents the roots from coming back up,” Hall noted.

The “first order of business” on Saturday, he said, “is to get all the trees girded” by removing English ivy in a “two-foot swathe around the tree, cutting off the root base.”

He added, “It takes about three weeks for the ivy to die. You don’t want to pull the ivy off the tree while it is still alive, as it will damage the bark. Then you come in later and [pull the ivy off] and dig out the roots with a shovel and rake.”

He and a group of volunteers came in earlier and girded about 50 trees he said, so that this Saturday’s crew can safely remove the ivy.

Fences

Hall said Gladstone Public Works Supervisor Scott Tabor provided materials for fences to be built in the two target areas; one “is a small wetland” near the restrooms in the first parking lot, and the other, drier area is “near where the Clackamas comes into the Willamette,” Hall said.

“The fences are placed strategically, and we put up signs to give people a little bit of warning that native habitat restoration is in process, and to please be careful. They are in two very visible areas, and that might help recruit more volunteers,” Hall said.

Tabor said he is “really excited” about the upcoming conservation day, as it is his intent to show people “what [the park] is going to look like when it is back to its natural vegetation.”

He added, “I have only a limited crew and it is good to see community involvement in natural areas. Once we get rid of the invasives, there will be a continuity to the park, creating a place where people are educated” about native habitat.

Once the invasives are removed, Hall said, volunteers will begin to plant the 2,000 native plant starts that Wilderness International has purchased.

Wilderness International is a non-profit organization founded in 2004, and Hall said the board of directors developed a statement to describe the group: Conservation through Active Participation.

“Our emphasis is on activity, as compared to setting policy or lobbying. We are not into that kind of thing. Our specialty is to come alongside other organizations and help them organize and recruit volunteers,” he said, noting that partners for the Meldrum Bar Park work day include SOLV, the city of Gladstone, Oregon 150, Starbucks, youth organizations and the Friends of Rinearson Creek, a neighborhood group.

Tabor wants to recruit volunteers as well, and said he hopes “the diversity of people” who use the park “will be inspired by this project to work on future projects.”

He added, “It is especially good for today’s youth [to work on these projects] so they get to see what they do today will bring awareness to the rest of the community. And it keeps them active and is a learning experience.”

Fast Facts

What: Wilderness International 2009 Community Conservation Day – work party

When: Saturday, April 18, from 9 a.m. to 4p.m.

Where: Meldrum Bar Park, just off River Road in Gladstone – meet at the end of the first parking lot by the vehicle with the Wilderness International sign.

Details: Volunteers can come out for the entire day or for a few hours. Activities will include removal of invasive plants and replanting with native species. Please bring a rake and/or a shovel and wear work gloves. Volunteers who plan to stay the entire day should bring a packed lunch.

RSVP: Wilderness International Web site www.wildernessintl.com or call 503-593-0199

Meldrum Bar

Two small, high-visibility sections of land have been identified within the park for restoration work on April 18. The invasive plants in these areas will be removed, mulch and bark chips will be spread and then volunteers will plant young native plant starts. These two sections have been chosen to serve as a showcase for what needs to be done throughout the park.

Wilderness International is working with Oregon 150 in honor of Oregon's sesquicentennial to hold this inaugural event, to serve as the beginning of many future projects. Meldrum Bar Park is an incredible natural resource for those who live in the Portland metro area.

Wilderness International is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to educating, enabling and encouraging as many people as possible to enjoy the wonder of nature. Learn more at: <http://www.wildernessintl.com>