

TOURISM

Goal: Attract visitors to Marion and Polk counties by developing and promoting the Mid-Valley's attractions.

Oregon's natural beauty is unparalleled by any state in the Union, and the Salem area, at the center of the Willamette Valley, offers innumerable tourism opportunities for both Oregonians and out of state visitors. Marion and Polk counties already have the two top visitor destinations in the entire state, Spirit Mountain and the Woodburn Company Stores. The challenge for the region will be to find ways to capitalize on these and other assets and entice people to visit other area attractions, including the Oregon Garden, the Willamette River, and local wineries. The Salem Convention and Visitor's Association's new slogan- Naturally Inspired- provides an indication of how the region can capitalize on its beautiful surroundings and market itself as an Edenic haven of wine and roses with a thriving metropolitan area at its center.

Develop a Regional Tourism Promotion Strategy. With additional tourism promotion funding available thanks to the Legislature's passage of a tourism promotion funding package, excellent opportunities exist to better market Marion and Polk counties to tourists. Developing and implementing a regional tourism strategy would help the region identify how it can effectively market its attractions and develop the region as a better draw for tourists. Mayor Taylor has established a Regional Tourism Promotion Group that will develop such a strategy. This group is working to bring elected leaders together with the lodging industry, tourist attractions, and other regional partners to better coordinate marketing and promotion activities.

Responsibility: Private Sector, City, State

Improve Connections to the Willamette River. While the Willamette River is the major geographical feature of the Salem area, most residents have very little interaction with the river. Efforts are underway to help reconnect the Valley's residents with the Willamette by improving recreational opportunities along the river. For example, the City of Salem has developed Riverfront Park in recent years, and the Willamette Queen now offers sternwheeler service in Salem. These improvements garnered Riverfront Park a full page feature in a recent issue of *Sunset Magazine*. In the long term, the City of Salem plans to connect Riverfront Park to Minto-Brown-Island Park and Wallace Marine Park with pedestrian/bicycle bridges, creating a major complex of riverside parks, and Keizer has plans to develop a major new regional park, known as Keizer Rapids, along the Willamette. Efforts are underway to promote a Willamette River "water trail," a 25-mile water route that would utilize existing public properties between the Buena Vista Ferry and the Wheatland Ferry. Cities in the region, including Corvallis and Independence, are implementing similar plans for increasing river use. If these efforts are successful and promoted and coordinated well, they could help draw tourists from around the nation and even the world to experience the beautiful Willamette.

Responsibility: City, State, Federal

- **Develop Keizer Rapids Park.** Keizer is leading a regional effort to develop Keizer Rapids Park, a 119 acre riverside park on the Willamette. When completed, this park would offer the public access to a wild stretch of the Willamette outside developed urban areas and would be a key stopping point on the Willamette Water Trail. Keizer has secured a long-term lease on an 85 acre parcel of unutilized land owned by the Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation, and the city has options on two privately owned properties. The city has received significant grant support for this acquisition but needs to identify additional funding.
Responsibility: City, State, Federal
- **Connect Salem's River Parks.** As Salem works to attract visitors and revitalize downtown, the Willamette River will be a huge asset. With three large parks along the river, Salem has the potential to provide amazing recreational opportunities for visitors and residents alike if these parks are connected. A group of local citizens is working with the City of Salem to build a pedestrian/bicycle bridge across the Willamette Slough from Riverfront Park to Minto-Brown Island Park, offering convenient access from downtown to miles of trails. In addition, the City has taken ownership of the Union Street railroad bridge and plans to refurbish it, offering greatly improved pedestrian access between West Salem's Wallace Marine Park and downtown. When both projects are complete, Salem will have a riverfront park complex that rivals any in the region, and perhaps even the nation.
Responsibility: City, State, Federal
- **Develop the Willamette River Water Trail.** For the past several years a group of local officials has been exploring the potential for improving opportunities for use of the Willamette River in the Mid-Willamette Valley. This Mid-Willamette River Connections (MWRC) group has proposed creating a water trail on the Willamette River that would facilitate the use of existing public properties for activities on the river such as canoeing. The first stage in the project will establish a 34-mile leg of the trail from the Buena Vista ferry, near Independence, to the Wheatland Ferry, north of Keizer, and provide a paddling guide to this section of the water trail. Signs along the shore will help people using the river identify public properties where they can get out. This project will significantly enhance opportunities to use the river and could help turn the Willamette into a major tourist draw.
Responsibility: City, State