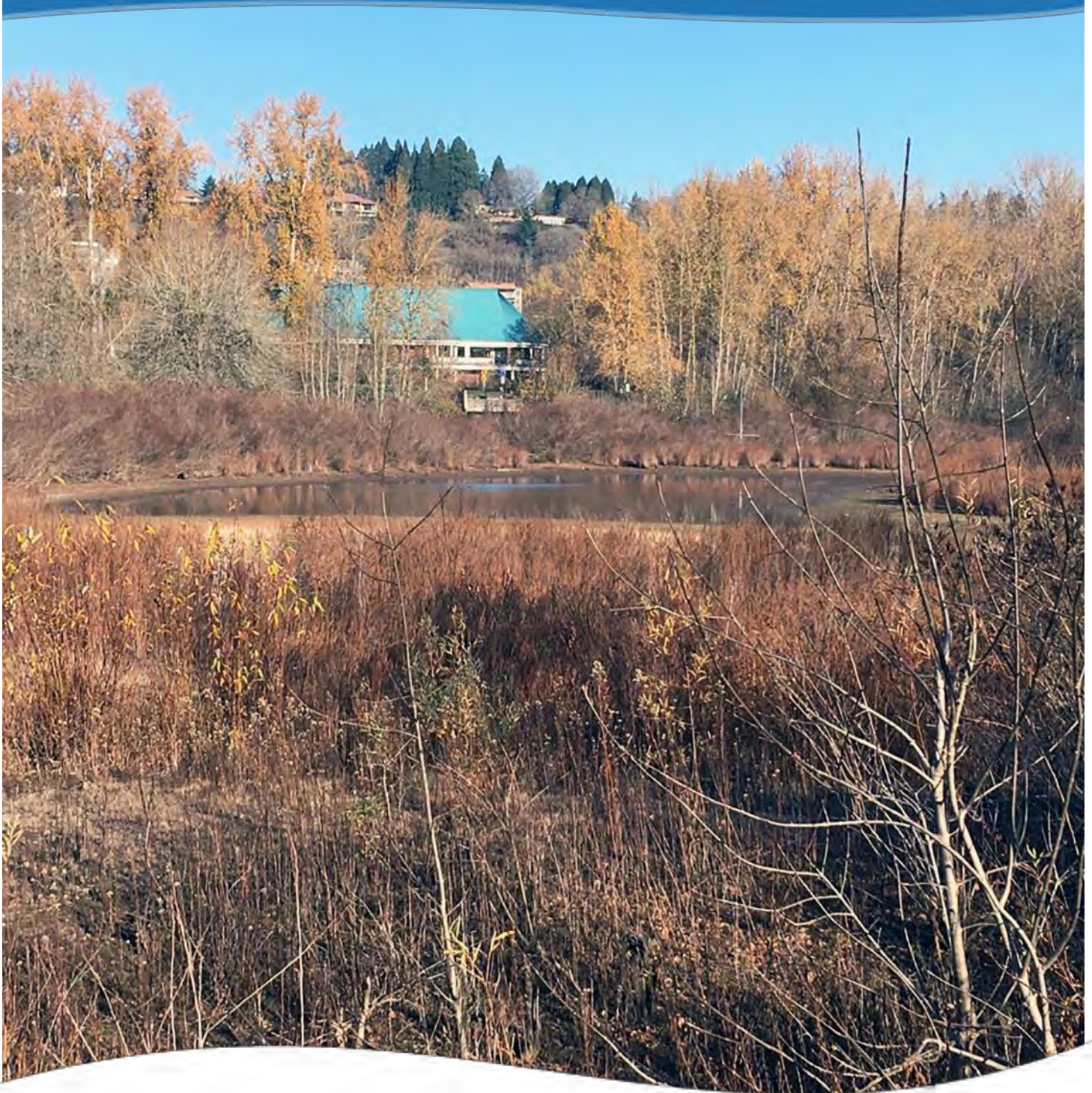


# Water Resources Education Center

2022 Annual Report



Water Resources Education Center

Department of Public Works

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Councilmember Erik Paulsen

Councilmember Sarah J. Fox

Councilmember Diana H. Perez

Councilmember Kim D. Harless

**Vancouver City Council 2022**

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Deputy City Manager Lisa Brandl

Deputy City Manager Lon Pluckhahn

Director of Public Works Vacant



Vision, Mission, Goals .....	4-5
Program Information .....	6
Funding & Facility .....	7-8
Accomplishments .....	9-13
Contact Information and Key Program Partners .....	14
Water Center Results .....	15



## Introduction

The Water Resources Education Center (Water Center) opened in February of 1996 and operates within the Environmental Resources Division of the City of Vancouver's Public Works Department. The Water Center is funded with primary support from the City's Water Fund. Integration of the City's water and other utility functions within the context of our local watersheds is what we define and value as a "healthy water system." It is our objective to fulfill our mission through communicating and connecting the community with this theme.

### Vision

The Water Resources Education Center is a vibrant and welcoming space where everyone is included in place-based nature discovery, environmental observation and positive change to benefit the waters that sustain us. Our programs and exhibits inspire curiosity and foster connections between people and the watersheds we call home, while our building and outdoor spaces are a model of environmental responsibility. We aim to create a regenerative culture where we work with the natural world to improve the ability of the land, water, soil and air to support people and wildlife in a beneficial way.

### Mission

To inspire connections between healthy water and people through education, exploration and stewardship of the natural world.

### Values

**Innovation:** We value creativity and continual improvement in our processes, programming and public offerings.

**Collaboration:** We recognize that partnerships expand our capacity, build connections and support the public we serve.

**Communication:** We aim to be honest, transparent and inclusive in all our services.

**Connection:** We aim to offer meaningful, hands-on experiences that inspire curiosity of the natural world and foster lifelong learning about healthy water systems.

**Inclusion:** We embrace all individuals and value the unique characteristics that each embodies, knowing that together we are stronger.

### Goals

#### • Exhibit Master Plan

The exhibit hall is one of the main attractions for Water Center walk-in visitors. Since the Center opened in 1996, new exhibits have been added piecemeal, when time and budget allowed for upgrades. After being in operation for 25 years, the Water Center exhibits need a significant upgrade. Many exhibits are outdated, some do not work, and others simply take up space and do not fill a role in our desired messaging to the public. This is a long-term goal that began in 2022. Exhibit hall planning and updating should be a significant undertaking for the next 5 years.

#### • Visitor Experience

The Water Center is a public education center with free entry to all. As such, we aspire to make the visitors experience one that is welcoming, enjoyable and diverse. as well.



# VISION, MISSION, VALUES, GOALS

- **Visitor Experience** (continued)

We want visitors to be inspired by the content and the staff they engage with during their visit. Our goal is to have a thriving education center where people share what they learned with their friends and family and are excited to return. The Water Center website and Public Works social media platforms provide great opportunities for connecting with our target audience and we value this connection as well.

- **Education Programs**

The Water Center currently engages the public by offering educational opportunities via onsite school field trips, community programming, volunteer stewardship opportunities and offsite/in classroom field trips via the Student Watershed Monitoring Network. The Center offers mentorship and learning opportunities via part time employment to student education Interns which is currently paused and AmeriCorps members. Mentorships are also available through partnerships with community organizations and area high schools.

- **Environmentally Safe and Innovative Facility**

The Water Center was built in 1996. As a public facility that welcomes visitors to learn about water resources, we aim to make improvements that will convey educational messaging around water, conservation and climate change issues.



### Water Resources Education Center

The Water Resources Education Center operates within the Environmental Resources Division of the City of Vancouver's Public Works Department. This division also includes the City's Urban Forestry Program and Solid Waste Program, both of which rely on separate funding sources than the Water Center. All of these programs share an educational mission related to communications on environmentally focused outcomes.

The Water Center's mission also connects with the selected other Public Works programs and services that are housed in other Public Works divisions. The following chart provides an overview of key Public Works Services. The Water Center's educational mission supports many of these community infrastructure areas.



\*General Fund-supported or partially General Fund-supported programs

<sup>1</sup> Utility Services handles billing & customer account for all City Utilities, with the exception of garbage & recycling

<sup>2</sup> Construction Services provides inspection, engineering, surveying & contract management for all capital projects including Utilities



- **Location:** The Water Center, at 4600 S.E. Columbia Way, is a part of the Marine Park Natural Resource Area. The Water Center's site includes a 50-acre protected wetland natural area, one of the few remaining metropolitan area riparian/off-channel rearing and nesting habitats along this reach of the Columbia River for more than 120 species of fish and wildlife. The Water Center is located within the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site.
- **Capital Cost:** \$3.5 million, included in \$40 million bond package for the Marine Park wastewater treatment plant.
- **Indoors:** 16,000 square feet of floor area that includes the Bruce E. Hagensen Community Room, with catering kitchen, seating for 180 and view balconies; River and Garden Classrooms; Exhibit Hall; laboratory; aquaria; and offices.
- **Outdoors:** Certified Backyard Habitat Garden demonstrates effective native and climate-friendly landscaping practices and a 3,000 square-foot observation platform overlooking the wetlands and Columbia River. Also an

outdoor Classroom to the east of the building developed through a grant from the Washington Department of Natural Resources with participation of the Arbor Day Foundation, the City's Greenway Sensitive Lands Team, Urban Forestry Program and others.

- **Adjacent Facilities:** The Marine Park Water Reclamation Facility to the north and west, and the City's Public Works Marine Park Engineering Building to the west. The Water Reclamation Facility provides opportunities for student and community group tours and learning through a partnership with Jacobs, the contracted operator.
- **Nearby:** The Columbia River Renaissance Trail and Marine Park (both managed by Vancouver Parks & Recreation) reflect the City's ongoing efforts to establish an attractive, vital and safe urban waterfront, restore access to the Columbia River and enhance historical and natural resources.
- **Hours and Admission:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Closed most holidays. Admission is free.



### Water Center: Facility/Funding

Vancouver's Water Resources Education Center receives funding within the City's biennial budget and relies primarily upon the City's Water Utility fund to cover operating expenses. Water Center's budget for 2022 was \$1,826,342. Actual Water Center expenditures for the year totaled \$1,202,516 about 66 percent of the approved budget. Key partnerships for the Water Center include Columbia Springs and the Watershed Alliance of Southwest Washington. Through annual grants, as well as some Solid Waste funding, these organizations contribute to the City's goals of providing effective public education and outreach. Separate annual reports for these non-profits detail progress and outcomes that resulted in 2022 from these partnership efforts.



Current staff costs include salaries and benefits for the following budgeted positions:

- 3 Water Educators
- 1 Facility/Program Coordinator
- 0.5 Communications Specialist
- 1 AmeriCorps member



The Water Center also is proud to be supported by a great group of committed volunteers. In 2022, volunteers invested 184 hours in the Water Center at an estimated value of \$5,510.

Other support for Water Center outreach is provided by our many partners whose roles are described in the report sections which follow.



## Public Education and Outreach

Public education and outreach supportive of drinking water, surface water, stormwater management and related goals has long been a vital component of the City of Vancouver's ongoing efforts to protect and enhance water resources and our aquatic and wetland habitats. The Water Resources Education Center and its programs have been central to meeting this community objective for more than 25 years.

Other City departments and divisions of Public Works (see page 6) support this charge to actively engage the community through a variety of communication channels including local media advertisements, newspaper articles, social media and websites.

In addition, the City is an active partner with many other agencies and non-profits in offering ongoing education and outreach programs for the community, including Vancouver's Urban Forestry Program and Urban Forestry Commission, Watershed Alliance of Southwest Washington and Columbia Springs.



This Accomplishments section of the report provides a discussion of the Water Resources Education Center's normal 2022 programs and activities, as well as those of our partners, which help to build general awareness among target audiences and help change behaviors that address stormwater-related impacts and challenges.

These shared efforts help Vancouver meet Public Education and Outreach and Public Involvement and Participation requirements (under sections S5 C2 and S5 C3) outlined in the City's [2022 Stormwater Management Program](#) for responsibilities under the MS4 (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System) program also known as the NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) Phase II Municipal Stormwater Permit for Western Washington.



We also summarize stewardship activities undertaken with the goal of encouraging residents to participate in activities related to stream teams, storm drain marking, volunteer monitoring, riparian plantings and related education activities. Vancouver Urban Forestry, the Watershed Alliance, and Columbia Springs have prepared separate documents which detail their efforts in 2022.

## Water Center On-site Opportunities & Activities

### School Group Visits (K-12 Classrooms)

During the 2021-2022 school year, the Water Center hosted 42 field trips for a total of 684 students plus teachers and chaperones.

### School and Group Visit Options

Available programming for classrooms and groups, normally provided by Water Center staff and interns, is summarized on our [website](#) and includes the following:

- Exhibit Hall Tour/Exploration
- Classroom Programs/Hands-On Activities
- Marine Park Water Treatment Plant Tour (grades 4 to 12)
- Water Science Laboratory/Water Quality Activities (Grades 5-12)
- Nature/Wetlands Tour/Walk
- Beach Cleanup/Scout Badges

### Other Group Visits

Preschools, play groups, day cares, retirement facilities and community organizations including scout troops, service clubs, garden clubs and others frequently arrange for visits to the site and may request educational activities or tours, sometimes associated with a service learning experience, a tour of the treatment plant, the wetlands, or the facility tailored to their particular interests and needs.



### Water Center Programs

The Water Center held Public Nature Programming in 2022. Staff held 21 nature programs centered around the Water Center, Columbia River, Burnt Bridge Creek and other locations. 184 people attended and were able to participate in walks, learn about bats, tree pruning and animal tracking.

### Reading in the Wild

Reading in the Wild, a morning reading series for preschoolers and their parents that offers them an opportunity to listen to a fun story and to explore nature in the “wild” areas of our site, returned in summer 2022 after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic. We were able to offer a successful four weeks of programming in July with very limited staffing. The four Thursday's attendance saw 69 adults and 111 kids (range infant to 6 years, most preK).





## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**Walk-in and Community Room Visitors**

Families, individuals, out-of-town visitors as well as small or large groups make frequent visits. Many of these guests arrive with plans to view educational displays, interactive exhibits, aquaria and other features on the exhibit floor areas or to spend time on our grounds or meet up with others after walking the trail.

The Water Center welcomed 2,362 walk-in visitors. 61 events were held in the Bruce E. Hagensen Community Room in 2022.

**Student Watershed Monitoring Network**

During the 2021-22 school year, the Water Center's countywide [Student Watershed Monitoring Network](#) program (SWMN), now in its 25th year, served a total of 6892 students from 25 schools and was supported by 32 teachers. Grades 3 through 12 were represented and are in schools located in Clark County areas (including in other cities) outside of Vancouver's City limits. The program functions in these areas through a \$60,000 annual grant provided by Clark County's [Clean Water](#) program.





## Critical Support for Water Center Programs

### Water Center Volunteer, Service Learning and Internships

Typically there are a number of ways the public and area students participate in helping the Water Center to deliver our programs while gaining valuable experience and pursuing areas of personal interest in learning about the environment. These are summarized below.

Volunteer roles typically include:

- **Garden and Wetlands Volunteers**  
Volunteers help with the wildlife habitat demonstration garden and outdoor classroom and/or help in wetland areas to collect litter, remove blackberries, ivy and other invasive plants, and to replant with native species or perform other hands-on projects. They also help with beach cleanups at Wintler and Marine Parks.

- **Special Project Volunteers**

Volunteers work with staff on specific projects.

- **Water Center Interns & AmeriCorps Members**

The Water Center offers both paid and non-paid internships for those enrolled in college or high school course work in areas of science and environmental education aligned with their academic and career goals. Interns are classified as temporary city employees and currently the program is on pause. Our current AmeriCorps member working at the Water Center started in early October and is able to support our programs through the end of her term in August 2023.





## Partnerships

### Columbia Springs Environmental Education and Outreach Program

The City of Vancouver is one of a half dozen partners in the region that support the work of the [Columbia Springs](#) Environmental Education Center, which provides educational, volunteer stewardship and related programs to school children, teachers and adults throughout Clark County. A full explanation of their efforts is available on their website.

The City has provided a 5 year grant agreement with the non-profit in order to support ongoing efforts. The City's total support for Columbia Springs in 2022 was \$60,000.

### Watershed Alliance of Southwest Washington

This local 501(c)(3) non-profit organization works to educate and engage community members to be active stewards of Southwest Washington's natural legacy with a focus on creeks, lakes and other water bodies. They educate children and adults, while giving them hands on opportunities to participate in the restoration and protection of waterways.

In 2022, the City of Vancouver contributed \$140,147 through an ongoing grant



agreement directed at two general areas: Private Property Programs (Project Restore, Backyard Habitat Certification, Other - including multi-family and

commercial sites), and Public Programs (Stewardship, Outreach and Education, Neighborhood Grants, Don't Drip and Drive).

The Watershed Alliance of Southwest Washington's [website](#) provides a helpful overview of their overall efforts on behalf of the community.

### Solid and Hazardous Waste Outreach and Education

The City of Vancouver, with Solid Waste Services as the lead, participates as a partner in offering the regional [Household Hazardous Waste](#) program, that is detailed within the Clark County Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan, both in the [Moderate Risk Waste Plan Chapter \(11\)](#) and the [Education & Outreach Chapter \(5\)](#). Clark County Public Health is the designated Local Solid Waste Financial Assistance grant (LSWFA) recipient for our region and takes the lead in directing this Department of Ecology funding support to implement quality programs related to toxics reduction, alternatives to pesticides, outreach for properly managing household hazardous waste (HHW) and conditionally exempt small quantity generator (CESQG) waste programs, implementing the [Green Neighbors](#), [Green Business](#), and [Green Schools](#) Programs as well as the [Master Composter/Recycler](#) program.

All of these efforts address awareness and encourage behavior changes for the targeted audiences. Besides helping to reduce and divert these waste streams, the outreach efforts are critical for informing the general public, homeowners and businesses about how their behaviors and practices can benefit our local water quality and ecology.

## Water Center Contact Information

### Water Center Contact Information (Jan. 2021)

PO Box 1995  
Vancouver, WA 98668  
4600 SE Columbia Way  
360-487-7111 | Fax: 360-693-8878  
[vanwrec@cityofvancouver.us](mailto:vanwrec@cityofvancouver.us)  
[www.cityofvancouver.us/watercenter](http://www.cityofvancouver.us/watercenter)

Environmental Resources Manager - VACANT

Rita Davidson, Facility/Program Coordinator  
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360-487-7120

Support Specialist - VACANT

Facilities Assistant - VACANT

Ashley Conley, Water Educator  
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Rainy Rau, Water Educator  
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360-487-7121

Brooke Porter, Communications Specialist  
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360-487-7116

## Key Program Partners

### Key Partner Programs

- **Columbia Springs:** Ongoing support is provided through our budget for this non-profit providing environmental education and youth/teacher outreach including the annual Columbia River Watershed Festival offered each fall for area fourth graders.
- **Clark County Public Works & Public Health:** Provides grants and in-kind support for the Water Center's Student Watershed monitoring network (including FieldScope grant), and manages regional sustainability, solid waste and hazardous waste outreach and education programs.

- **Watershed Alliance of Southwest**

**Washington:** This non-profit organization provides support in outreach and education as well as through selected stewardship projects and through developing watershed restoration efforts in coordination with private property owners and offering sustainability micro-grants to city neighborhood associations.

- **Fort Vancouver National Historic Site:** The Water Center is a partner in coordinating our outreach and education efforts with those of the Trust, the National Park Service and Pearson Air Museum.



## Water Center Results - Measures

Outcomes & Measures	2020	2021	2022
<b>Outcome: We meet the community's demand for services and programs</b>			
Walk in visitors - over 12 months ( <i>closed 8 months</i> )	1,205	393	2362
K-12 School visits <u>academic</u> * year (students/classes)	505	31	684
	22	3	42
Second Saturday participation over 12 months	345	NA	NA
Community room: participants - over 12 months	2,316		2,431
Scheduled events	35	NA	61
<b>Outcome: We offer special events of interest to the community (participation/attendance)</b>			
Reading in the Wild	NA	NA	69 adults 111 kids
<b>Outcome: Supporting remotely and on-site learning at county-wide schools: Student Watershed Monitoring Network</b>			
Students served ( <u>academic</u> year*)	3,226	2,969	6,892
Schools/Teachers served	30/ 66	100	25/32
Watershed Congress attendees (students/facilitators)	NA	NA	NA
<b>Outcome: We operate a cost-effective program</b>			
Budgeted expenditures	\$1,526,458	\$1,499,083	\$1,826,342
Actual expenditures	\$1,234,423	\$1,001,172	1,202,516
	81%	67%	66%

NA - Not Available for indicated year

\* - Academic year is Sept 2021-June 2022

