



CITY OF PORTLAND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES



1120 SW Fifth Avenue, Room 1000, Portland, Oregon 97204 ■ Charlie Hales, Mayor ■ Dean Marriott, Director

April 2013

Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services successfully met a state-mandated December 1, 2011 deadline to control combined sewer overflows (CSOs). The video "Portland's CSO Program 1991-2011" at www.portlandoregon.gov/bes/csovideo recaps the entire 20-year effort.

That success means the city no longer uses the Willamette River as a default sewer. Completing the CSO Program is dramatically altering the way Portlanders see their river and interact with it. We need only to look to the Columbia Slough to see how water quality, habitat and recreational use all benefit when we stop sewage from overflowing to a waterway, as we did on the slough in 2000.

The city's agreement with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) does allow for four overflows each winter and one every third summer, but it takes a lot of rain to make that happen; nearly 1.2 inches in 24 hours for the river and 2.5 inches in 24 hours for the slough. Before we completed the CSO program, one-tenth of an inch of rain in 24 hours was enough to cause a CSO.

City staff collects monthly water samples year-round at three locations and weekly samples at five Willamette River public access points from May until October. The water quality information they gather is available online at www.portlandoregon.gov/bes/WillametteRiverRecreationIndex. The webpage displays information for *E. coli* count and water temperature for each location.

Completing the CSO program has made CSOs to the Willamette a rarity. The river is cleaner than it's been in decades and bacteria levels are consistently low. But many people still think of the Willamette as badly polluted even though that's not the case anymore.

Our challenge now is to change public perceptions about the river, and when they do change people will want more river access. Just imagine a warm summer day not long from now when there will be several places along the Willamette River in downtown Portland where people of all ages will be taking a swim. It's a pretty exciting prospect.

Dean Marriott, Director