

History of Minto-Brown Island Park

In 1970, the City of Salem acquired the 308-acre Minto Island site located 2 1/2 miles from the City center. A Land and Water grant, Willamette Greenway funds, and a donation by the Schindler Brothers left only a small portion of the purchase price to be paid by the City. A year later, Marion County acquired a 525-acre site contiguous to Minto Island that brought the total park area to 833 acres. The site is bounded by the Willamette River on the northwest, Salem Golf Course on the south, River Road on the southeast, and Boise Cascade aeration ponds to the northeast.

In 1857, Isaac "Whiskey" Brown made his way up the Columbia and Willamette Rivers from Astoria and established his home on an island which became known as Brown's Island. Here, the colorful and untidy Brown raised livestock, farm produce and tobacco. Ten years later, John Minto purchased 247 acres on another island which was to be named after him. At that time, the island was covered with dense brush and flood debris, which he subsequently cleared, turning the land into productive farm land.

Today, the islands aren't true islands due to periodic flooding which has changed the channel of the Willamette River. The greatest flood ever recorded occurred in December, 1861. Previous to this flood, the Willamette River flowed between the two islands, so that Minto Island was on the east bank and Brown Island was on the west bank of the river.

After the flood subsided it was discovered that the river had changed its course to the present location. The 1964 flood was almost as great as the one 100 years previous, and many structures were destroyed at this time. Periodic flooding of the Minto-Brown Island area has allowed the site to survive to this day as a low density agricultural area.

Cooperation between Marion County and the City of Salem has resulted in preparation of a Master Development Plan and subsequent application for Land and Water development funds over the past few years. The city and County have recently negotiated a Land Use Permit with the Fish and Wildlife Commission which permits continued farming of the area. The agreement requires that some of the farm crops remain unharvested for waterfowl and wildlife which constitute a recreational use.

The remainder of the site consists of gravel pits, old river bed, sloughs, native timber, dense underbrush and grassy meadows that serve as a natural habitat for birds and wildlife.

There are approximately five miles of paved bikeway and two parking lots for unloading bikes in the park. The trails lead to points of interest along the sloughs with observation platforms available for bird watching. It also passes a paddle boat area and several fishing spots. The City of Salem has constructed a bicycle path along South River Road which ties into the Minto-Brown Island bike trails. Development has been kept low key to preserve this natural area.

Many people now use the site and enjoy the very natural, rural farm setting. the use of the bike trails by bikers, joggers and strollers has been very compatible with the farming interests there. Many clubs use the area extensively such as the Audubon Society, and bicycle clubs and other interests such as equestrian, archery, boating and canoeing will probably be served in the near future.

Minto-Brown Tree Restoration Project

Federal funding assistance was approved to Parks Operations Division by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The acronym for the program is CREP, which stands for Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and was created to assist with the endangered species act (ESA).

Thanks to the efforts of many volunteers, over 5,000 native plants have been planted to help create a 200' buffer along sloughs and river banks.



The purpose of this buffer is to allow a natural filtration system to prevent run off of chemicals, such as fertilizers and pesticides, from entering waterways. The buffer will also help prevent soil erosion, help habitat and help improve the water quality.



A number of groups helped out at four planting sessions by planting trees, adding plant guards and stakes in the ground and covering the plants with mulch to help ensure they thrive. School groups included Yoshika, Marion Miller, Livingstone Junior Academy, McKinley, Houck (two different groups), Sprague, Judson, North Salem, Morningside, Grant, Brush College, Candalaria, McKay and Delphian. Eagle Scouts, Cub Scouts, Shoots and Roots Club, Boys Scouts, the Environmental Club and a variety of individuals were also on hand to help out. The total number of volunteers was over 750, and 3,000 volunteer hours were tracked! Parks Operations Division would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who assisted with this important project.