



County Surveyor's Office

House Bill 3175 Public Land Corner Preservation Fund

Nathan A. Woodward, Columbia County Surveyor

History

History of the
Public Land
Corner
Preservation
Fund

Why

WHAT is a Public
Land Corner &
WHY do they need
to be preserved

County Surveyor

What is the
County
Surveyor's
Responsibility
in Public
Land Corner
Preservation

Fund Health

Current
Health &
Impact
HB 3175
on future
Health

History of the Public Land Corner Preservation Fund

In Columbia County, the preservation of public land corners has long been a mandated duty of the county surveyor, dating back to 1854. However, it wasn't until 1980s the critical importance of protecting these original corners became increasingly apparent. With many counties facing funding shortages, county surveyors pursued a permanent funding solution through state legislation.

In 1985, the Oregon State legislation authorized the creation of the Public Land Corner Preservation Fund. Once a county adopts the fund via ordinance, fees collected from recording certain documents with the county clerk are deposited into it dedicated account. These funds are statutory restricted to activities related to public land corner preservation.

At its core, the Oregon Public Land Corner Preservation Fund operates at the county level to support the preservation, establishment and maintenance of Public Land Survey System corners. These corners trace their origins to the federal surveys conducted by the General Land Office, which began in 1852 to aid settlement of the Oregon Territory. Over time, many original corners have been lost, damaged, or destroyed due to the development, natural erosion or neglect, necessitating ongoing preservation efforts by county surveyors.

ORS Chapter 203 - County Governing Bodies

203.148 Public Land Corner Preservation Fund; fees for recording.

(1) The county governing body may establish by ordinance a fund to be known as the Public Land Corner Preservation Fund. Moneys in the Public Land Corner Preservation Fund shall be used only to pay expenses incurred and authorized by the county surveyor in the establishment, reestablishment and maintenance of corners of government surveys under ORS 209.070 (5) and (6).

(2) After providing public notice of its intended action and holding a public hearing at which the residents of the county may appear and be heard on the issue of establishing or changing the fee, the county governing body may establish by resolution or order a fee **not to exceed \$10** for recording all instruments under ORS 205.130 (2) in addition to any other fee charged by the county clerk. All moneys collected under this subsection shall be deposited with the county treasurer at least once a month to be credited to the Public Land Corner Preservation Fund. [1985 c.582 §5; 1987 c.469 §1; 1991 c.621 §1]

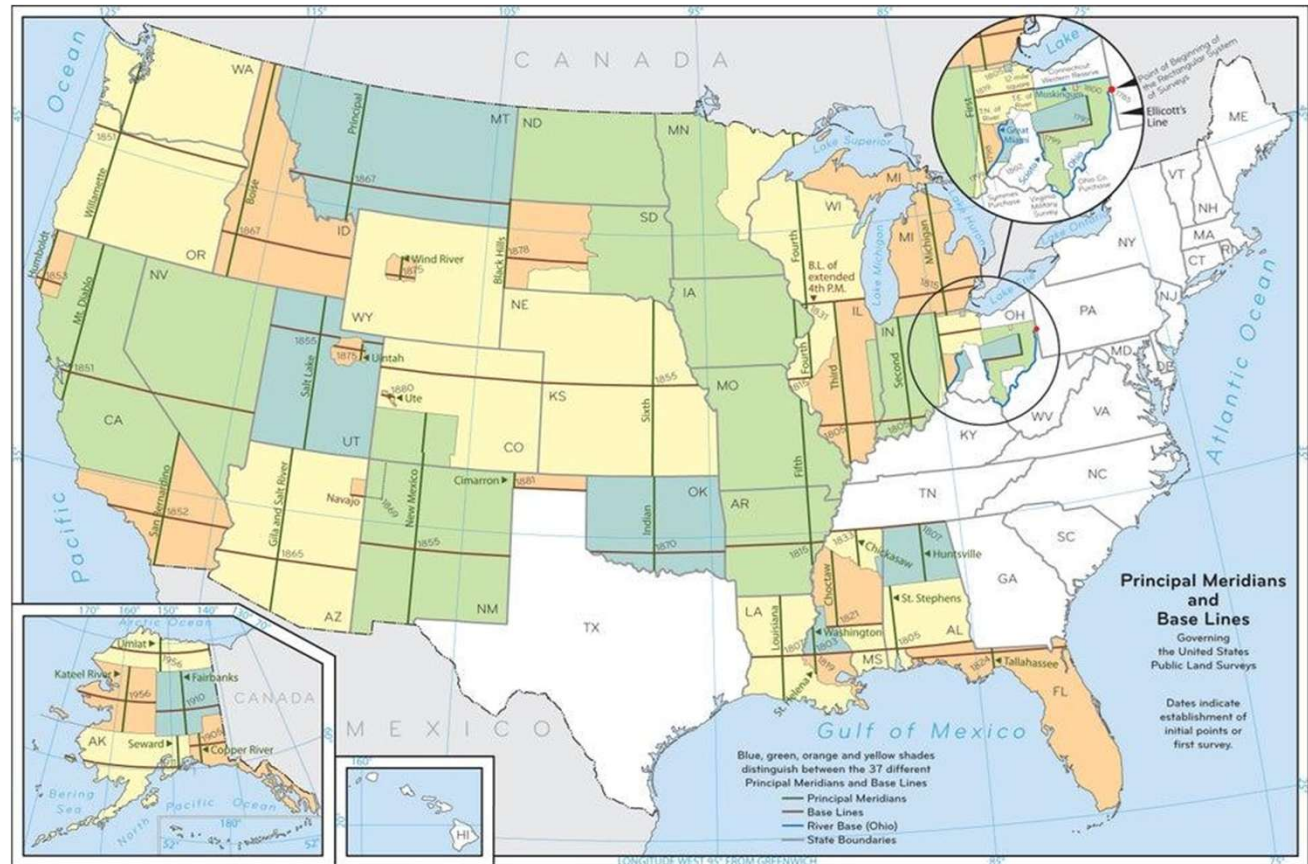
First authorized in 1985.

Columbia County Ordinance 86-2 set our fee to the maximum allowed of \$10 on February 1, 1986. This Ordinance was ammended in 1987, 1989 and later adopted in 2006 per Ordinance 2006-10.

The US Public Land Survey System (PLSS)

After the American Revolutionary War, the United States needed a quick and efficient method to survey and sell newly acquired ground. The goal was to raise money to fund the government and promote settlement West. Thomas Jefferson formulated what is known as the Public Land Survey System, or the PLSS. It was enacted into law by the Land Ordinance Act of 1785.

I like to think of the PLSS as the backbone of American property rights.



The Initial Point of Oregon

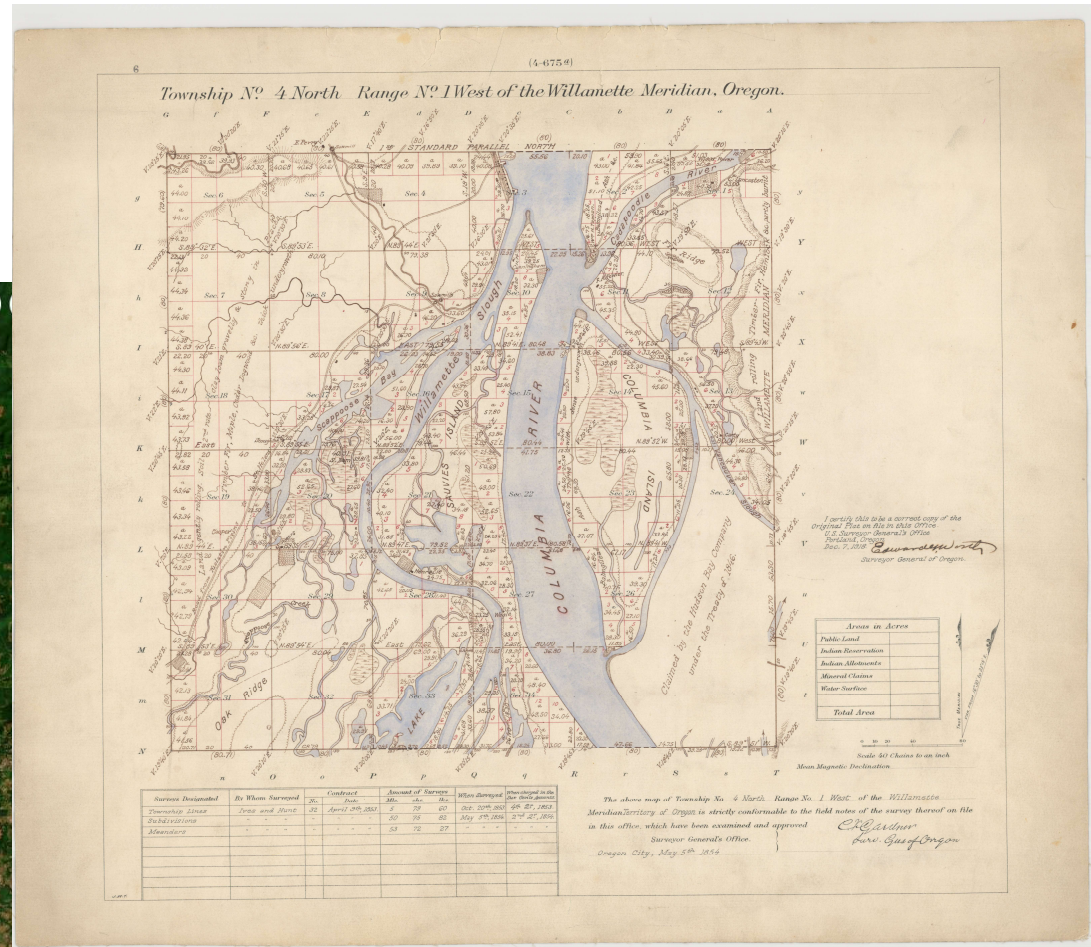
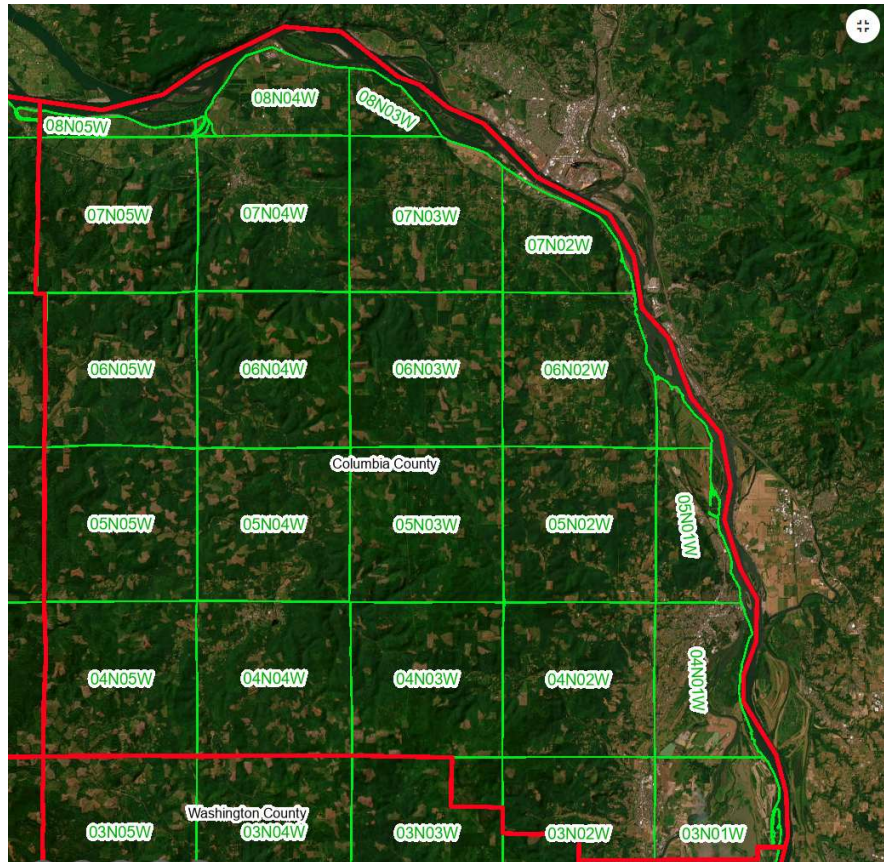
Willamette Stone, established in 1851

All land descriptions in Oregon
can be traced back to this point.

The screenshot shows the Oregon State Parks website interface. At the top left is the Oregon State Parks logo. To its right are navigation icons for 'visit', 'things to do', 'get involved', 'about us', and 'shop'. A search bar and a 'Share' button are in the top right corner. The main heading is 'Willamette Stone State Heritage Site' with a 'Like' button. Below the heading is a sidebar menu with options: 'Day Use: Year Round', 'Park Info', 'Rates', 'History/FAQ', 'Events', 'Brochures/Pix/Video', 'Feedback', and 'Driving Directions'. The main content area features a photograph of the Willamette Stone monument, a rectangular metal plaque set in a concrete base. The base is marked with 'WILLAMETTE MERIDIAN' and 'R I E'. The plaque contains text and a small map. A 'Share' icon is visible in the bottom right corner of the photo.

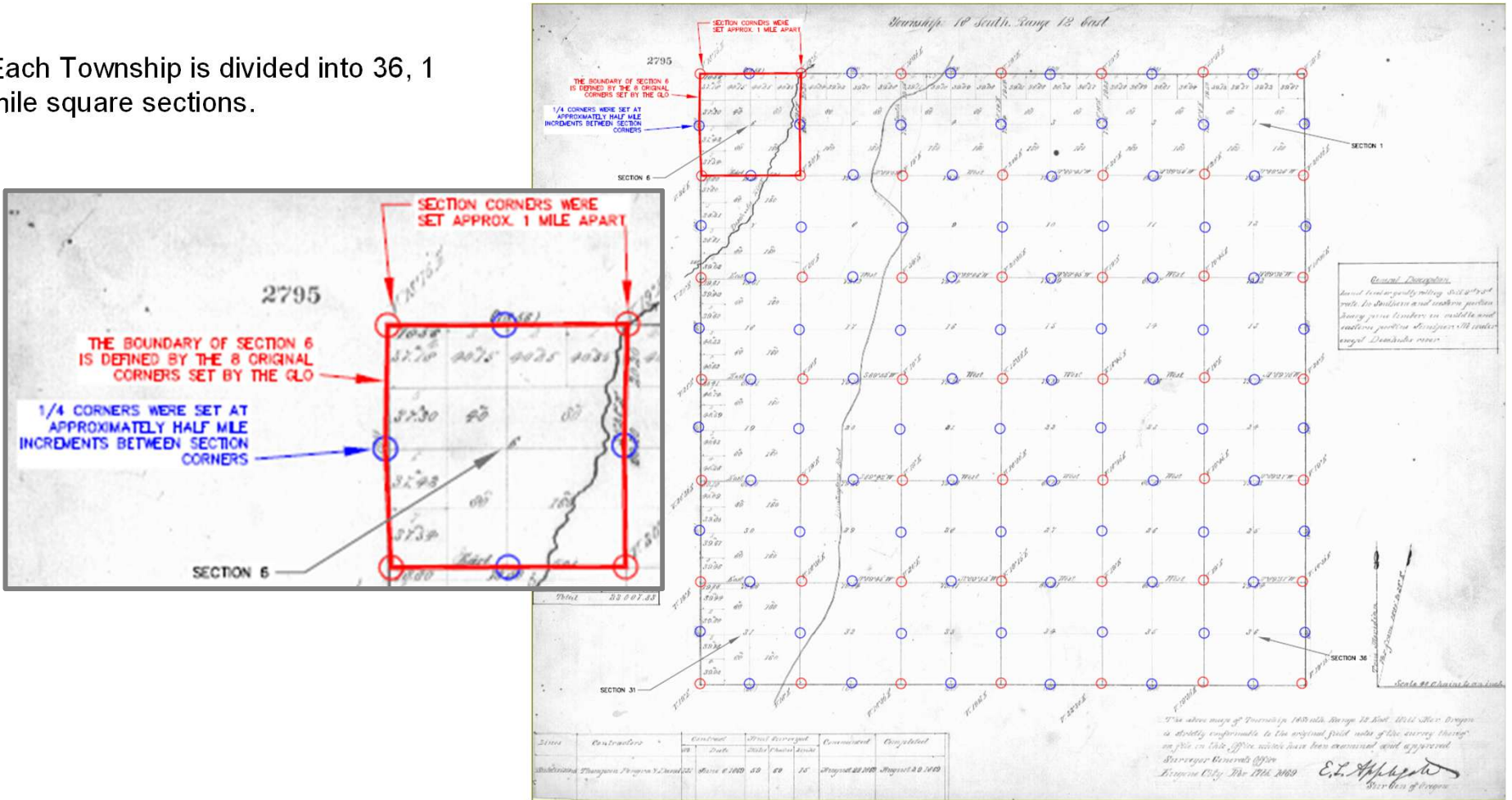
Oregon PLSS Townships

PLSS States are divided into 6 mile square Townships

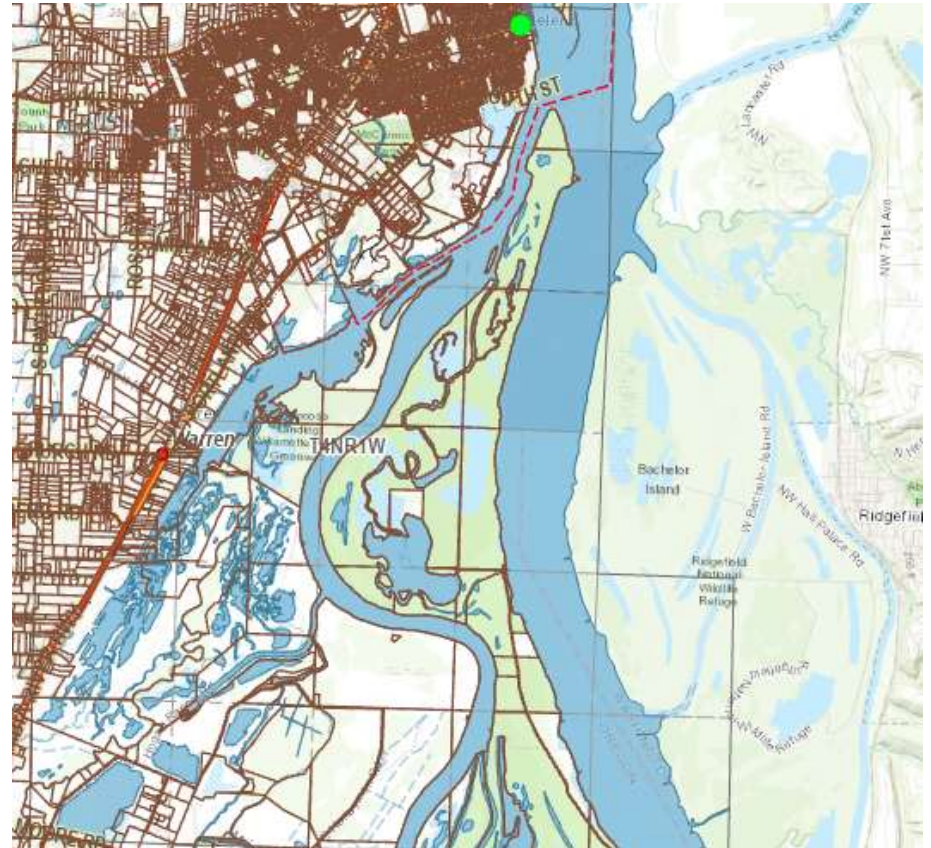
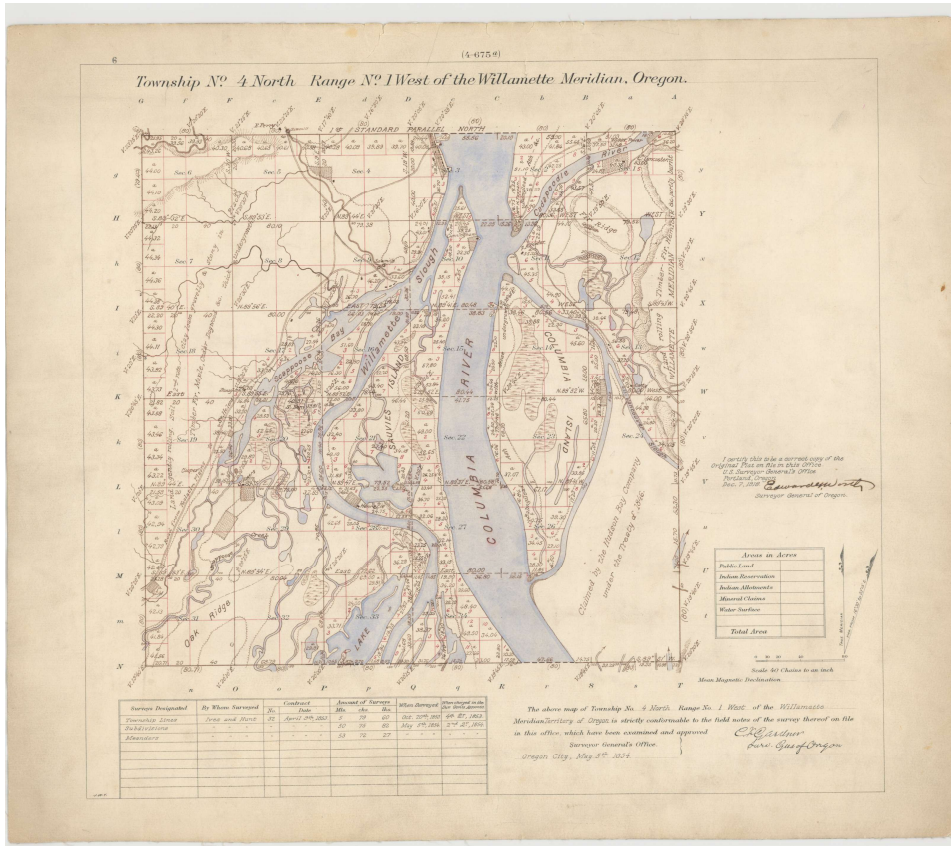


Original GLO Plat

Each Township is divided into 36, 1 mile square sections.



1854 GLO Plat of T4N, R1W, W.M. (St. Helens)

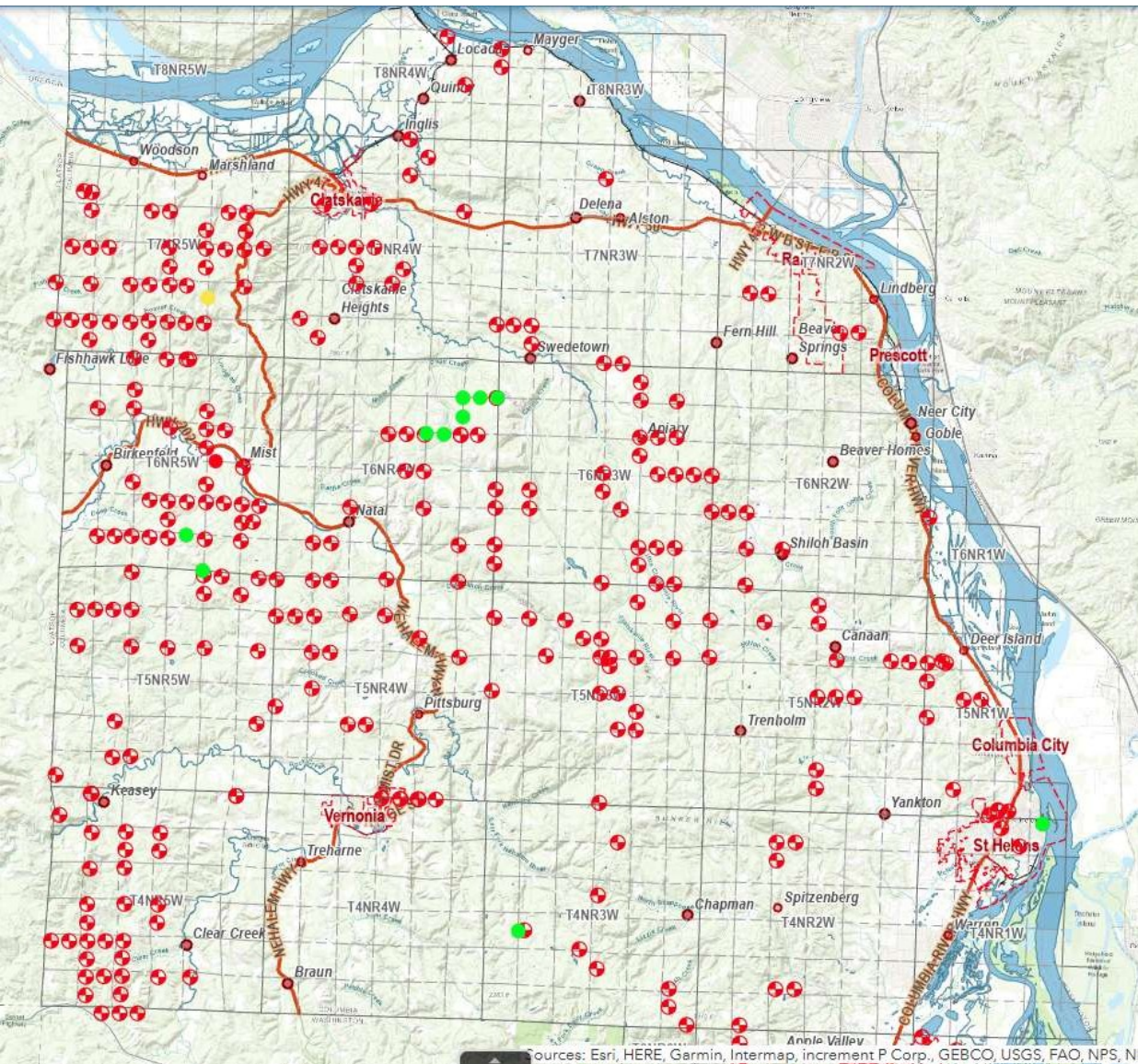


Today, the original PLSS corners control hundreds of tracts of land.

ORS Chapter 209 - County Surveyors

209.070 Duties

- (4)** Make all surveys of legal subdivisions with reference to the current United States Manual of Surveying Instructions.
- (5)** Establish or reestablish and maintain all public land survey corners, where evidence of the corners can be found and the corners can be positively located, and keep a separate record of the corners, giving the dates and names of persons present. When so established or reestablished such corner monuments shall be recognized as the legal and permanent corners.
- (6)** Establish or reestablish, upon order of the county court or board of county commissioners, all public land survey corners where all physical evidence is destroyed or cannot be found but where the official government notes are available, the corners to be reestablished in the manner provided in [ORS 209.130 \(Establishment of corners\)](#) for establishing corners, and keep a separate record of the same, giving the date and names of persons present, and turn such record over to the surveyor's successor. When so established or reestablished such corner monuments shall be recognized as the legal and permanent corners.



Columbia County currently has over 2,200 PLSS corners it is responsible for.

Many corners still require maintenance or modernization.

Much like our county roads, this maintenance is ongoing, and necessary to protect our public and private lands.

Recovery of Existing Evidence

Research old GLO and CS records.

Recover original monuments and/or references.

Additional evidence such as bearing trees.



80.00 set @ post for this corner to sections 5, 6, 7 and 8.
From which
A Cedar 56 in. dia, bears S. 65° W. 29 links dist
A Cedar 40 in. dia, bears S. 75° E. 32 links distant
A Cedar 30 in. dia, bears S. 55° E. 21 links distant
The fire has left no other trees living convenient
to this corner.



Remonumentation

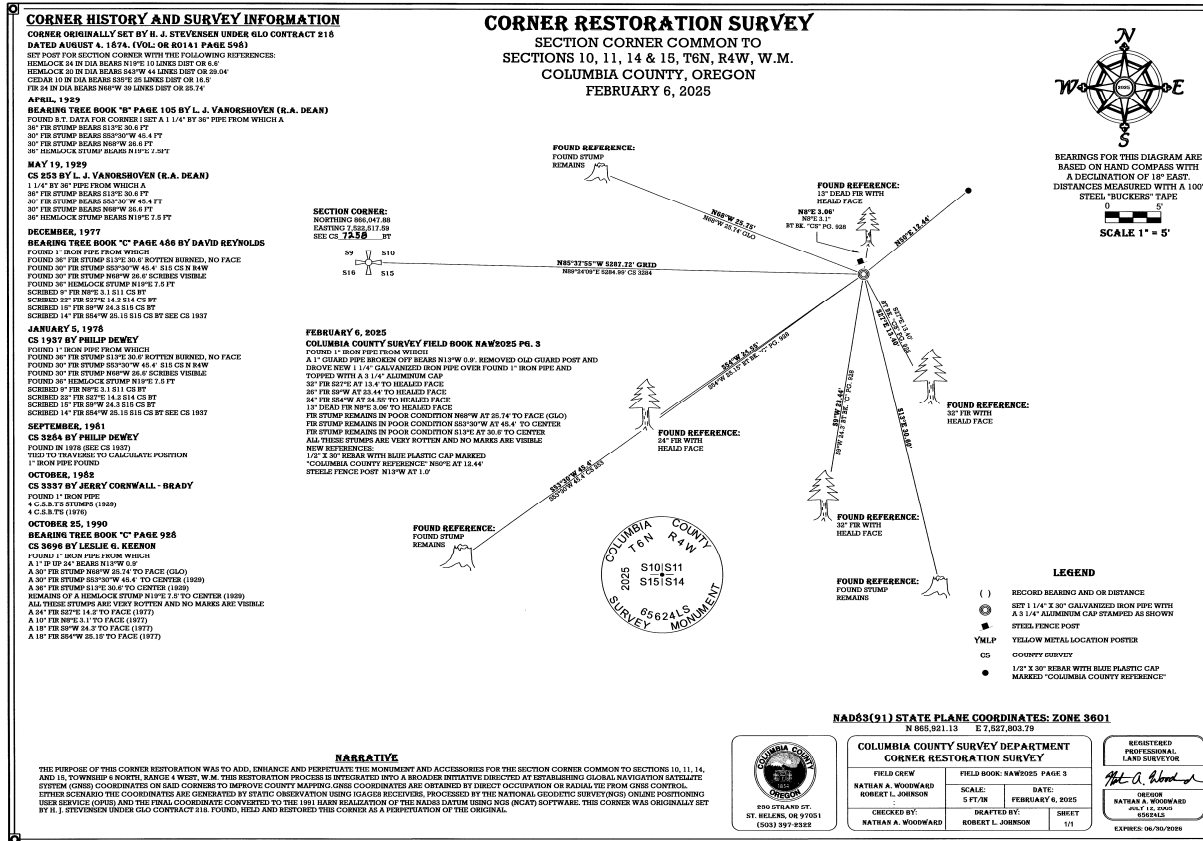
Once the original monument or location is determined a modern durable monument is set in its place.



Record and Document

The position of the new monument and references are recorded and a new corner restoration record is prepared and filed with my office.

COLUMBIA COUNTY SURVEYOR
RECEIVED: 03-10-2025
FILED: 04-02-2025
CS# 7260 BT



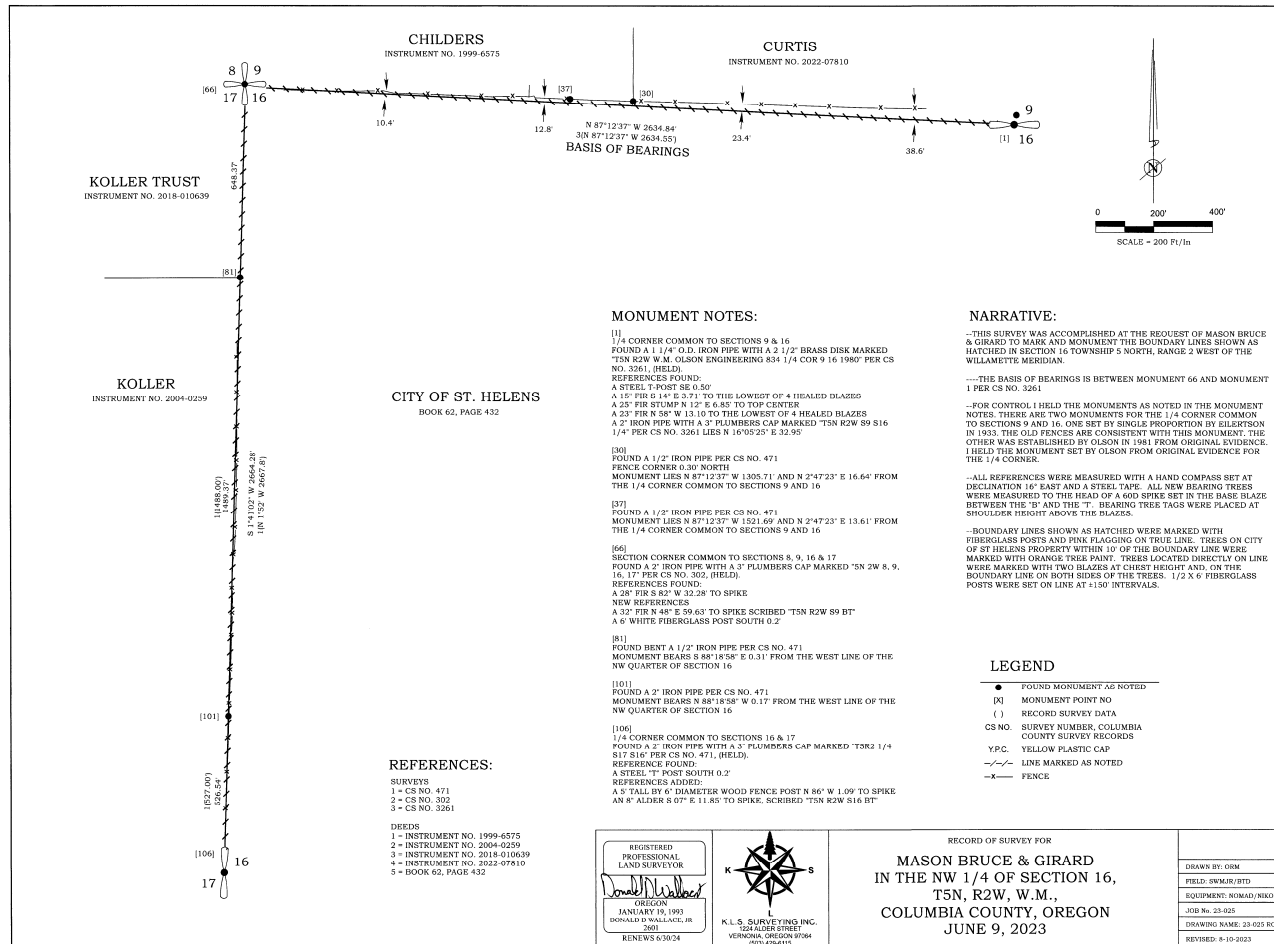
What happens if we don't maintain corners?

- Monuments disappear
- boundary uncertainty
- Litigation \$\$
- Increase survey cost
- Increases development cost



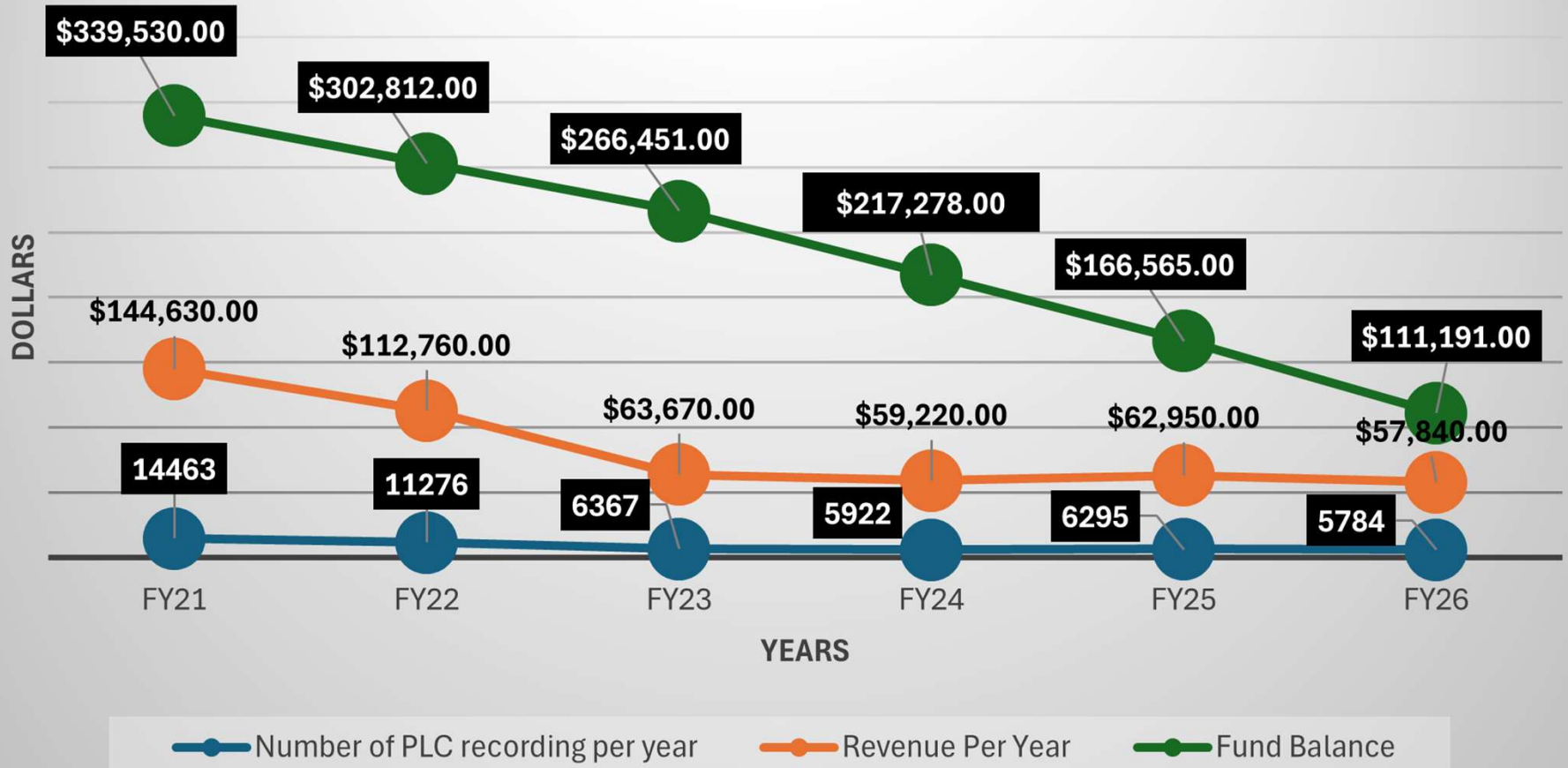
What happens if corners disappear?

COLUMBIA COUNTY SURVEYOR
 RECEIVED: 07-24-2023
 FILED: 09-27-2023
CS# 7062



Columbia County Deed Recordings FY21 - FY26

PLC Fund



HB3175 (2025) – Removes \$10 fee Cap

83rd OREGON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY--2025 Regular Session

House Bill 3175

Sponsored by Representatives MARSH, GOMBERG (Pre-session filed.)

SUMMARY

The following summary is not prepared by the sponsors of the measure and is not a part of the body thereof subject to consideration by the Legislative Assembly. It is an editor's brief statement of the essential features of the measure as introduced. The statement includes a measure digest written in compliance with applicable readability standards.

Digest: The Act would lift the cap on fees that are used to fund county activities related to public land survey corners. (Flesch Readability Score: 64.6).

Removes the cap on fees a county may charge to fund the county's activities related to public land survey corners.

A BILL FOR AN ACT

1
2 Relating to county recording fees; amending ORS 203.148.

3 **Be It Enacted by the People of the State of Oregon:**

4 **SECTION 1.** ORS 203.148 is amended to read:

5 203.148. (1) The county governing body may establish by ordinance a fund to be known as the
6 Public Land Corner Preservation Fund. Moneys in the Public Land Corner Preservation Fund shall
7 be used only to pay expenses incurred and authorized by the county surveyor in the establishment,
8 reestablishment and maintenance of corners of government surveys under ORS 209.070 (5) and (6).

9 (2) After providing public notice of its intended action and holding a public hearing at which the
10 residents of the county may appear and be heard on the issue of establishing or changing the fee,
11 the county governing body may establish by resolution or order a fee [not to exceed \$10] for re-
12 cording all instruments under ORS 205.130 (2) in addition to any other fee charged by the county
13 clerk.

14 (3) All moneys collected under this [subsection] section shall be deposited with the county
15 treasurer at least once a month to be credited to the Public Land Corner Preservation Fund.

16

Passes in the House March 6, 2025
Ayes, 47; Nays, 9

Passes in the Senate May 8, 2025
Ayes, 24; Nays, 2

Governor signed May 19, 2025

Becomes effective January 1, 2026

Proposed Fee Increase

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator shows \$10 in January of 1986, being equivalent to \$29.57 in December of 2025.

I propose we increase the current fee from \$10 to \$20.

As per ORS 203.148(2), a public hearing is required to be scheduled to change the fee, amending County Ordinance 2006-10.

Thank you!

