

## The Register-Guard: *CityRegion: City/Region*

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### **EWEB breaks ground on operations center**

By Susan Palmer

The Register-Guard

Published: August 9, 2008 12:00AM

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Ceremonial shovels full of dirt flew Friday, but the real work actually began weeks ago for the Eugene Water and Electric Board's new operations center.

Construction and gravel crews have been grading and contouring the 52-acre site at the southeast corner of Roosevelt Boulevard and Belt Line Road, marrying the industrial needs of EWEB's water and electrical operations buildings with the environmental needs of area wetlands.

The utility is preserving 3.5 acres of wetlands currently functioning — a clump of dense green willows on the otherwise brown site — and will restore an additional 10 acres of long-degraded wetlands. The utility also will pay \$485,000 to the Eugene Wetlands Bank for mitigation work on the extensive West Eugene Wetlands that meander through the city's west side.

"A lot of what we're doing offers a good model about how you might develop an industrial site inside the urban growth boundary," said Ken Beeson, Roosevelt project manager for EWEB. Invasive species have been removed and will be replaced with the native upland prairie species once common throughout the Willamette Valley.

Mayor Kitty Piercy, who spoke at the brief ceremony, hailed EWEB for its focus on sustainability in the project design.

"It's known as a leader among public utilities across the country," she said.

The \$83.5 million project — financed by bonds — includes an operations center for engineers and work crews, a warehouse, vehicle shop, covered vehicle storage and a materials storage yard.

The building and site qualify for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, a process that awards points for a range of energy efficiency and environmentally sensitive measures.

It's not clear yet whether the Roosevelt Operations Center qualifies at the silver or gold LEED level, said project architect Eric Gunderson of Pivot Architecture.

The buildings are placed on the property in a way that allows a sweeping S-curve

of connected wetlands, with a bridge from the employee parking lot to the main operations building protecting a bioswale below.

The operations building, wetlands and employee parking are all on the north side of the property, screening the fleet parking and maintenance areas from the neighborhood just north of Roosevelt.

The narrow operations building, which runs east-west on the site, will have 75 percent of its lighting from windows and skylights, Gunderson said.

Working on EWEB's project was exciting, Gunderson said, and not just for the opportunity to incorporate green measures at the site and in the buildings.

"EWEB is an amazing bunch of people," he said. "You've got everything from the guy who buries the pipes to the guy who buys power on the international market."

The project will have repercussions for the city's downtown riverfront. While EWEB's customer service and administration employees will remain at the utility's headquarters along the Willamette River, the operations center move opens up 20 acres for development.

EWEB board commissioners and the Eugene City Council have put together an advisory team that will come up with development options for the property.

The team met for the first time in July, plans four public meetings to gather community input and will make recommendations to EWEB within the next year to 18 months.

Oregon's largest citizen-owned public utility, EWEB provides electricity and water to nearly 200,000 people and businesses in the Eugene area.

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