



SWITCHBOARD
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Kaid Benfield's Blog

Live. Eat. Shop. Spawn. Portland's salmon-safe urban neighborhood

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Posted by [Kaid Benfield](#) in [Green Enterprise](#) , [Living Sustainably](#) , [Saving Wildlife and Wild Places](#)

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One of the largest urban redevelopment projects in the country, [Portland's South Waterfront](#) ("SoWa") has been certified as "salmon-safe" by a nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring watersheds so that salmon can spawn and thrive. According to the [press release](#) from [Salmon-Safe](#):

"From a salmon's perspective, the water flowing into the river from South Waterfront is as clean as if development had not occurred, a huge improvement from the area's recent industrial past."



A New Urban District Meets a Renaturalized Riverbank

What I find especially heartening is that SoWa, partially completed but still under construction, is such a large, intensely developed project, comprising 130 acres altogether. Its 17-block Central District is the first to be certified. Roles and responsibilities for construction within the district are guided by a development agreement signed by various City bureaus, River Campus Investors, North Macadam Investors and Oregon Health and Science University, the major developers in South Waterfront.

This proves that sustainable waterfront restoration need not be incompatible with intense urban development. More from the [press release](#):



"Residents and visitors can readily see many of the features responsible for that change such as the extensive use of bioswales and other innovative stormwater management techniques that have been incorporated into landscaping . . .

"Certification is awarded only after comprehensive on-site assessments by an independent team of environmental science and water quality experts based on Salmon-Safe's rigorous standards. Those standards assure that landowners go above and beyond state and federal regulations in ecologically sustainable design and that they adopt significant and specific measures to restore wildlife habitat, conserve water, protect streamside habitat and wetlands on site, reduce erosion and sedimentation, and

reduce or eliminate the use of chemical pesticides through integrated pest management."



Salmon-Safe will conduct annual inspections for at least five years to ensure that the standards are being maintained.

Salmon-Safe is described on [the organization's website](#):

"Salmon-Safe has become one of the nation's leading regional eco labels with more than 50,000 acres of farm and urban lands certified. The Salmon-Safe retail campaign has been featured in 200 supermarkets and natural food stores."

SoWa has also received an [award of excellence from the Oregon chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects](#). One of the jurors commented that "This is a project that will turn heads far beyond the Northwest and represents a new era of thinking about how dense, urban enclaves integrate with their riverbanks."

For more about SoWa, see the website of the [Portland Development Commission](#).

Thanks to D.K. Preston's [Jetson Green blog](#) on green design and technology for pointing me to SoWa's award. I was pleased to see that NRDC alum [Diane Dulken](#) was involved on behalf of Salmon-Safe with the announcement.