

“Spiritually, there’s a lot of purgatory in this forest. Lot of spirits that haven’t made a decision yet... it’s not for the faint of heart.” – Tish, Thousand Acres resident since 2019

Cold seeps into the rushing water of the Sandy River Delta where it stirs and mixes with the greater Columbia River. The cottonwood trees begin to yellow and turn, a picturesque canopy draped over labyrinthine trenches carving earthwork obstacles alongside eclectic sculptures, elaborately established dispersed campsites and makeshift barricades. Each of these projects bears testament to those who call this land home and their battle to stop a sweep organized in part by the office of Governor Tina Kotek. A sweep that now looms over the heads of every occupant of this decades old community.

Previous coverage compiled interviews with residents of the encampment and their stories, as well as documented the initial June sweep of the Thousand Acres Encampment and the details of contracts with various companies and local government entities. This included Springfield, Oregon based Northwest Hazmat which bear maced a protestor unprovoked on video– which lead to a pause on the sweep and the re-examination of contracts. Kotek’s office and the Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL) announced they would “be halting and reevaluating the project for now, citing “the safety and security of our staff, contractors, and the public, including those currently in the area.” According to the Portland Mercury, Kotek’s State Resiliency Officer, Jonna Papaefthimiou, has been tasked with “work[ing] closely with the agency (DSL) to bring together the necessary NGO, local, and state partners that can help accomplish a successful outcome.” Residents argue that the NGO groups in question, which is really just the Salvation Army, is insufficient; referencing resources which are unavailable do to demand and barriers to entry.

In the meantime, the residents of the Thousand Acres Encampment penned a **Cooperative Stewardship Proposal** which offers a peaceful path forward. This proposal would allow the residents of the encampment to remain on the land while remedying environmental concerns raised by various parties. The Proposal pushes for a self governed village, modeled after Hazelnut Grove, Dignity Village, and Right 2 Dream Too (R2D2), three other long lasting self organized houseless communities that have grown into permitted and supported endeavors within Portland. The goal of the residents is to build their community into a similar project within the 1,400 acre park at the confluence of the Sandy and Columbia rivers.

On September 4th, advocates and residents of the Thousand Acres encampment were finally able to present the Cooperative Stewardship Proposal to Papaefthimiou, as well as a DSL representative and Sara Manning, who represents Rapid Response Bio Clean (the Portland based company that stepped into the space left by Northwest Hazmat). Shortly thereafter, the DSL released an update on its website regarding the Sandy River Delta Restoration. They summarize the events of the first sweep from the State's perspective and explain that since the ill fated sweep they have, "Listened and Learned," and have "engaged with partners, advocates, and service providers to understand what went wrong," and that they want to "resume restoration work with a renewed focus on safety, dignity and environmental stewardship." An advocate who was present for the meeting paints a different picture.

Thousand Acres folks did an amazing job presenting the Cooperative Stewardship Proposal and the reasons it would be a deeply inhumane act for the state to move forward with the sweep, especially since the DSL has continued to lie about connecting people with alternative housing. Overall, Jonna's response was pretty infuriating. We kept asking 'why now', after people have lived here for decades. Jonna wouldn't give a straight answer... but she did admit that Kotek's plans to

expand housing resources aren't actually providing any solutions for where Thousand Acres folks are supposed to go within the timeline of the sweep, while in the same breath saying DSL and Kotek aren't willing to budge on that timeline." – Bantam, Thousand Acres Advocate

No specific timeline was given when pressed, nor when I reached out to Rapid Response for comment, a request which has gone unacknowledged at time of writing. But, Bantam says that they expect the sweep to be underway again in the next month or two.

The resident's argument didn't only make moral appeals, their proposal estimates that the cost of implementing a permanent solution in building a village in the Thousand Acres Dog Park would be less than \$15,000 per unit on the high end. Comparatively, according to KATU news NW Enforcement was contracted for up to \$200,000 and Northwest Hazmat for up to \$139,000 in the initial sweep, the cost of the first sweep is sunk now. The details of the new contract with Rapid Response have not come to light as of yet.

For its part, Rapid Response positions itself as a morally enlightened alternative to Northwest Hazmat. Bantam says that, "[Rapid Response] presents itself as the best case scenario for sweeps that are 'inevitably' going to happen." Part of this image is upheld by Rapid Response claiming that they actually hire impoverished and sometimes formerly unhoused people to do the work of clearing urban camps. According to the Willamette Weekly, former Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler once cited a statistic that nearly 75% of Rapid Response staff "have similar lived experience to those at the campsites." Despite these assertions of moral authority and of approaching those on the streets with a sympathetic touch, the company is in fact embroiled in controversies regarding its documented mistreatment of the people they interact with, including violations and poor training, improperly disposing of peoples

personal property on numerous occasions including when a lawyer used apple air tags to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the company was violating state and local law to improperly discard of people's property.

Perhaps most damning of all, in 2022 Rapid Response Bio Clean lost a wrongful death lawsuit after the theft and disposal of an unhoused woman's medication led directly to her death only a week later. A default judgement issue was ordered after the company failed to attend the court date. The president of Rapid Response, Lance Hamel failed to pay any of the ordered amount to the woman's family. In 2024 Hamel and Rapid Response pushed for a redo on the case, first arguing that they had not been notified. When the contrary was proven, they amended their statement to claim that they had simply 'forgot'. This is according to court documents and testimony procured by Portland Street Roots.

In the wake of the seemingly fruitless meeting with Papaefthimiou and representatives of other parties in the conflict, the community at Thousand Acres was left to figure out next steps alongside advocates who have helped them along this journey.

"A lot of people were angry and frustrated with the lack of response that we got.... There's this sense that the state is underestimating us, and that's an advantage in a way. There's a lot of beauty and power and strength in being a group that has a lot of care for each other. People are intent on not having the community split up and continuing to care for each other- no matter what." – Bantam

Looking ahead to what's to come, Bantam described other routes that may begin to take shape- whether it be raising money to buy land elsewhere or building a "digital action toolkit where supporters can make calls and apply pressure to Kotek's office and DSL," they added that, "there will be opportunities for

people to be showing up in person more, and laying out a process for how people can contact us and support us and get involved.” They concluded, “when the state is after every aspect of your being, people get creative.”

The Digital Action Toolkit was released shortly after the interview, and can be found here: bit.ly/defend1000acres

Readers can also get involved, by going to @thousandacresdefense on venmo and can follow the Instagram account with the same name to stay up to date and find resources as the encampment’s struggle continues to unfold.

Interview with an advocate who wished to go by Bantam

Written by: Azria Raventhorn

Sources:

Previous Dissonant Times Coverage of the Thousand Acres:
<https://dissonanttimes.org/thousand-acres-stops-the-sweeps-for-now/>

Katu article of coverage including details of previous contracts:

<https://katu.com/news/local/documents-jurisdictional-kerfuffle-cleanup-pause-troutdale-sandy-river-delta>

What is Northwest Hazmat?: <https://nwhazmat.com/>

Katu article covering the incident with protestors, including video:

<https://katu.com/news/city-in-crisis/departments-state-lands-begins-clearing-sandy-river-delta-camps-as-part-of-restoration-efforts-oregon-troutdale-thousand-acres-homeless>

Portland Mercury coverage of the pause on the sweep:
<https://www.portlandmercury.com/news/2025/06/06/47823764/updat>

e-we-do-not-consent-sweep-at-thousand-acres-removes-longtime-unhoused-community

Cooperative Stewardship Proposal written by residents of the Acres:

<https://wraphome.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/1000-acres-cooperative-stewardship-proposal-1.pdf>

About Hazelnut Grove:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazelnut_Grove

About Dignity Village: <https://dignityvillage.org/>

About Right 2 Dream Too:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_2_Dream_Too

DSL on resuming operations in the Delta:
<https://www.oregon.gov/dsl/waterways/Pages/sandy-river-delta.aspx>

Willamette Weekly on property damage of Rapid Response offices, percentages of impoverished employees:
<https://www.wweek.com/news/2021/04/12/activists-again-vandalize-office-of-city-contractor-aiding-in-tent-sweeps/>

Street Roots documenting legal violations from Rapid Response:
<https://www.streetroots.org/news/2024/05/15/rapid-response-bio-clean-complaints-lawsuits>

Portland Mercury on Rapid Response settling a lawsuit regarding destruction of personal property:
<https://www.portlandmercury.com/news/2023/06/20/46568325/city-contractor-ordered-to-pay-for-personal-items-confiscated-during-2020-homeless-camp-sweep>

Koin 6 on use of apple airtags to prove legal violations:
<https://www.koin.com/news/lawyer-laurelhurst-homeless-belongings-unlawfully-trashed/>

Street Roots on Rapid Response wrongful death debacle:

<https://www.streetroots.org/news/2024/05/22/rapid-response-bio-clean-wrongful-death-lawsuit-ruling>