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Restoration taking place near Bird Track Springs

Sabrina Thompson Sep 13, 2019

The two-mile stretch of the Grande Ronde River by Bird Track Springs Campground is currently under restoration to repair and enhance the land on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest and Jordan Creek Ranch. This project will help with flooding, fish and bird habitats in the area.

The project began in August 2016, using the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation River Vision, which provides a process-based framework to evaluate, develop and implement river and floodplain management and restoration from a holistic process and function perspective. The framework encompasses physical, biological and cultural aspects of natural resource management, according to project lead Allen Childs.

The project is expected to be completed by November of this year. The work being done includes creating 17 large main channel pools and 47 medium channel pools, restoring 101 acres of floodplains, creating at least 300 large wood structures and working on 3,700 feet of streambank bioengineering that will help support the currently endangered salmon and steelhead populations.

“Fish habitat along the Grande Ronde River in the Bird Track Springs area has been severely degraded by historic splash dam logging, railroad and road construction, channelization and removal of riparian forests and wetlands,” Childs said. “The

current river is over-widened, disconnected from its historic floodplain, gets very warm in the summer, can completely freeze in the winter and lacks large pool habitat and side channels.”

The project costs \$3 million, with construction being completed by local contractor Steve Lindley Construction and Lee Ricker serving as project superintendent. Funding is provided by Bonneville Power Administration, which includes funds administered by Grande Ronde Model Watershed, through the CTUIR/BPA Fish Accord and Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.

Additionally, BPA ratepayers support projects like this as mitigation for the construction and operation of hydroelectric projects on the Columbia and Snake rivers, according to BPA’s communications coordinator, David Wilson. These funds come from BPA customers’ power bills.

The goal of the restoration is to restore natural floodplain processes and functions, and to develop and maintain resilient and high-quality fish habitat. The project has been developed to increase water storage, buffer water temperatures and increase cold water refuge during summer and provide warmer water during winter that fish can survive in.

Project partners include Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, La Grande Ranger District, Jordan Creek Ranch and Bureau of Reclamation.

There have not been any major issues during the project. Minor hurdles have been navigating the complexity of the large project and working with a neighboring landowner to ensure concerns were addressed.