

From the Archives

The Naming of Whisky Creek

by Lacey Moore, GRMW



Whisky Creek is a tributary that originates northeast of Wallowa. Its main stem reaches nearly nine miles into the hills before joining the Wallowa River.

As reported in An Illustrated History of Union and Wallowa Counties, Erasmus Hill "Raz" Tulley is the authority on how Whisky Creek arrived at its name. Tulley recounted that during the haying season of 1872, not long after settling in Wallowa, a friendly American Indian chief brought word that two men from Walla Walla had entered the valley. The chief informed Tulley that the pair had engaged in trading whisky with local American Indians. Fearing that trouble would

quickly follow such bartering, Tulley and a party of settlers rode to the men's camp, where they overtook the visitors and American Indians, quite by surprise. After putting an end to the trading, Tulley and his band broke the liquor-bearing casks and emptied them into a nearby stream. A short deliberation took place about the fate of the Walla Walla traders, and it was decided that the sooner the Walla Walla men left the area, the more fortunate they would be. For a short time, whisky from the broken kegs puddled on the ground and flowed through the little stream. After this incident, the creek came to be known as Whisky Creek.



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Grande Ronde Model Watershed

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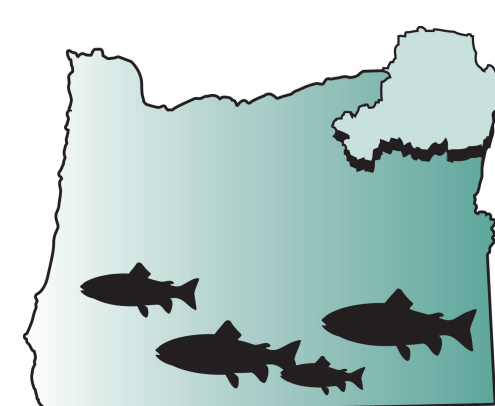
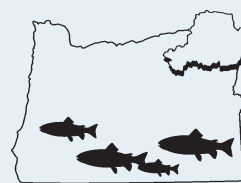
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Ripples

Summer 2013

in the Grande Ronde

RIVERS UNITING NEIGHBORS · QUARTERLY NEWS FROM THE GRANDE RONDE MODEL WATERSHED

Simulating Stream Restoration ~on the Move~

by Leigh Collins, GRMW

The Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) has added a portable stream simulator to its treasure trove of educational resources. During the past year, the GRMW has been working with Anderson-Perry and Associates to design and fabricate a stream simulation trailer with the support of grant funds from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the Bonneville Power Administration. The stream simulator was completed on May 1, 2013, and has since been used at educational events hosted by the Stella May Field Outdoor School, the La Grande Middle School Outdoor School, the Grande Ronde Academy Outdoor School, the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, the Ladd Marsh Youth Day, and the Greenwood Outdoor School.

The stream simulator is an interactive tool that highlights stream health and restoration projects in the Grande Ronde Basin. The GRMW uses stream simulators at education outreach events to demonstrate stream restoration activities and showcase aspects of current projects in the Grande Ronde Basin. The simulator also provides members of the public with a hands-on opportunity to see how different restoration actions cause different effects on stream health.

Although the GRMW has been

able to access various stream simulators during the past two years, the support of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's 319 grant program helped the GRMW build

a customized stream simulator housed in a mobile trailer, which the GRMW can transport to events all over Eastern Oregon.

The trailer runs on a battery-operated pump, which circulates water from outlets in the trailer to flow through the length of the trailer into a drain. Between the drain and the water outlets is plastic sediment, which acts as dirt or sand. Participants are able to form this pliable sediment into a stream bed and add various features like curves, rocks, and trees.

The GRMW's stream simulator has a special feature that demonstrates how aquifer recharge and recovery works within stream systems. The purpose of aquifer storage and recovery is to pump water into an aquifer when there is surplus water in the stream system and to store that water in the aquifer until water levels drop below optimal levels for fish passage. The



Above: Participants in the Ladd Marsh Youth Day engaging in stream restoration using GRMW's stream simulation trailer.

simulator is able to pump water into a tank, simulating an aquifer (recharge), and then pump the water back into the stream outlet for later use (recovery). Aquifer storage and recovery is not currently occurring in the Grande Ronde Basin, but the technique is used elsewhere in Eastern Oregon.

In addition to teaching environmental and biological lessons, the simulator illustrates engineering and physics concepts, providing for a more diverse range of topics that can be covered during outreach events and presentations. Using a hands-on demonstration approach to educational outreach activities allows learners to quickly grasp some of the more complex concepts on which stream health and restoration activities are premised.

If you would like to learn more about outreach activities organized by the GRMW, please visit our website.

BPA Partnership with GRMW Benefits Fish & Communities

by Michael Milstein, BPA

Many residents of the Columbia River Basin know the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) as an agency of the Department of Energy that markets and distributes affordable hydroelectric power generated by federal dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. But the BPA also actively partners with community watershed groups such as the Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) to rehabilitate hundreds of miles of salmon and steelhead habitat in ways that benefit both fish and local communities.

The results of these partnerships have included fish returning to stretches of rivers and streams where they had long been absent, increased fishing opportunities, and economic benefits resulting from habitat improvement dollars spent on goods and services from contractors and other local businesses. A progress report called a Comprehensive Evaluation that thoroughly documents these results is due to be released in July 2013.

The partnership between the BPA and the GRMW is important locally, regionally, and even nationally. The BPA looks to the local relationships and expertise of groups such as the GRMW to accomplish ambitious and often complex habitat improvement projects, which in turn help advance regional priorities for salmon populations. The hundreds of similar projects that the BPA funds across the Columbia River Basin represent one of the largest species restoration programs in the nation and the world.

So, why is a power agency so involved in improving salmon habitat? The BPA supports these efforts to help offset the impacts of the federal dam system on salmon and steelhead through a practice known as mitigation. Because they take

place at locations away from the dams, habitat improvement projects are described as constituting “off-site mitigation.” Federal agencies such as the BPA are required to evaluate the impacts of their actions on species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act and to mitigate those impacts. Beginning in the early 1990s, 13 stocks of salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River Basin were listed as threatened or endangered as numbers declined due to a variety of impacts, including those of the dams.

Although the federal dams are owned and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation, the BPA shares mitigation responsibility because it markets the power the dams produce and dedicates a substantial share of this revenue to protecting salmon and steelhead. This responsibility is outlined in a document called a biological opinion (often called the BiOp) issued by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

(NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service, the federal agency with jurisdiction over salmon and steelhead. It outlines numerous actions that make the dams safer for juvenile and adult fish to migrate past them. But it also places a high priority on improving the rivers and streams that provide important habitat for adult fish to spawn and young fish to grow before they depart for what may be a few years in the ocean.

Like many issues involving endangered species, the BiOp is controversial and is the subject of long-running litigation regarding what kinds of actions are most effective in protecting salmon. NOAA is currently developing an updated BiOp in response to recent court decisions.

The BiOp reflects what federal agencies call a life-cycle or “All-H” approach because it addresses impacts throughout the salmon life cycle, including those involving the hydropower system, habitat, hatcheries, harvest, and predation.



Right: Picture Taken by Mary Edwards at the Wallowa River 6 Ranch Project site of a steelhead using a newly placed rootwad for cover.

Meet the Board Member Katie Frenyea

by Jeff Oveson

If you grow up with dairy cows and draft horses in Plattsburgh, New York, then how do you end up working on fish habitat projects in northeastern Oregon? In the case of Katie Frenyea, the explanation is really fairly simple and all part of a natural progression. It's natural, then, coming from a family of four daughters and a father whose passion in life was his draft horses, that Katie would leave the pastoral landscape near Lake Champlain to attend an agricultural college. Katie earned an Associate's Degree at State University of New York (SUNY) Morrisville, a small college that is one of the SUNY system's 64 campuses. Then how does this natural progression in turn lead to Auburn University in Alabama? Easy answer: Katie wanted to attend Oregon State University, but her family really didn't want her to move that far away from home. Geographically, Oregon is farther from upstate New York than Alabama, but something was still leading Katie to go farther west. While at Auburn pursuing her Bachelor of Science degree in Fisheries Management, Katie also was working in an aquatic animal health laboratory with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to study fish immunology (she was trying to find out what keeps Catfish and Tilapia from dying). Katie got the chance to move from farm fish to river fish when she began working for Pat Keniry at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) research group housed at Eastern Oregon University. She spent more than two years with the ODFW before moving on to work with the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) Department of Fisheries Resources Management, both in Joseph and in Idaho. When she was working with the NPT Watershed Division, she briefly served as an alternate Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) Board Member for Ira Jones, her then-supervisor.

The GRMW recently has welcomed Katie as a Member of the Board representing the Union Soil and Water Conservation District (USWCD). Nearing the completion of her second year with the USWCD, Katie was selected to serve as the USWCD's representative to the GRMW Board following an interval during which the USWCD was unrepresented on the



ABOVE: Katie Frenyea instructing students at La Grande Middle School outdoor day.

Board.

Katie feels that she's a good fit for the GRMW Board "because both organizations believe that watershed restoration and fish population recovery are complementary to ongoing activities such as irrigated agriculture, cattle ranching, and timber management." Katie said she believes that what were once isolated islands of authority and responsibility scattered among numerous organizations, agencies, and Tribes have become integrated into a more purposeful working unit with an enhanced capacity for assessing opportunities and completing work with private landowners and on public land. She reflects on a time not too far past when the spring Chinook populations in Catherine Creek and the Upper Grande Ronde were essentially written off as hopeless. The prioritization of these populations in restoration and recovery efforts by all of the partners in the basin, including hatchery efforts to maintain some genetic integrity, has "reinvigorated both populations ...not to the point they're secure, but at least to the point they appear to be recoverable."

On the job, Katie enjoys interactions with landowners, noting that after several years in the field with different employers, she's discovered that most landowners prefer a "look-me-in-the-eye" handshake to a postcard or voicemail seeking permission to access private property. "Postcards, letters, and phone calls will always be part of the deal," said Katie, "but nothing replaces personal contact."

Fish Online!

www.grmw.org

- Adult salmon counts at the dams
- Snake River Basin stream flows
- Snow and precipitation reports
- Habitat enhancement projects
- Meetings, activities, and events
- Past issues of *Ripples* and more!

Grande Ronde Model Watershed

Upcoming Board Meetings

The public is welcome to attend

- Tuesday, August 27: 5:00 p.m.
Location TBA
- Tuesday, October 22: 5:00 p.m.
Elgin Community Center
260 N. 10th Street
Elgin, Oregon

*Meeting dates are subject to change.
Please call 541-663-0570 to confirm.
Thank you!*

Projects in the Hopper for 2013

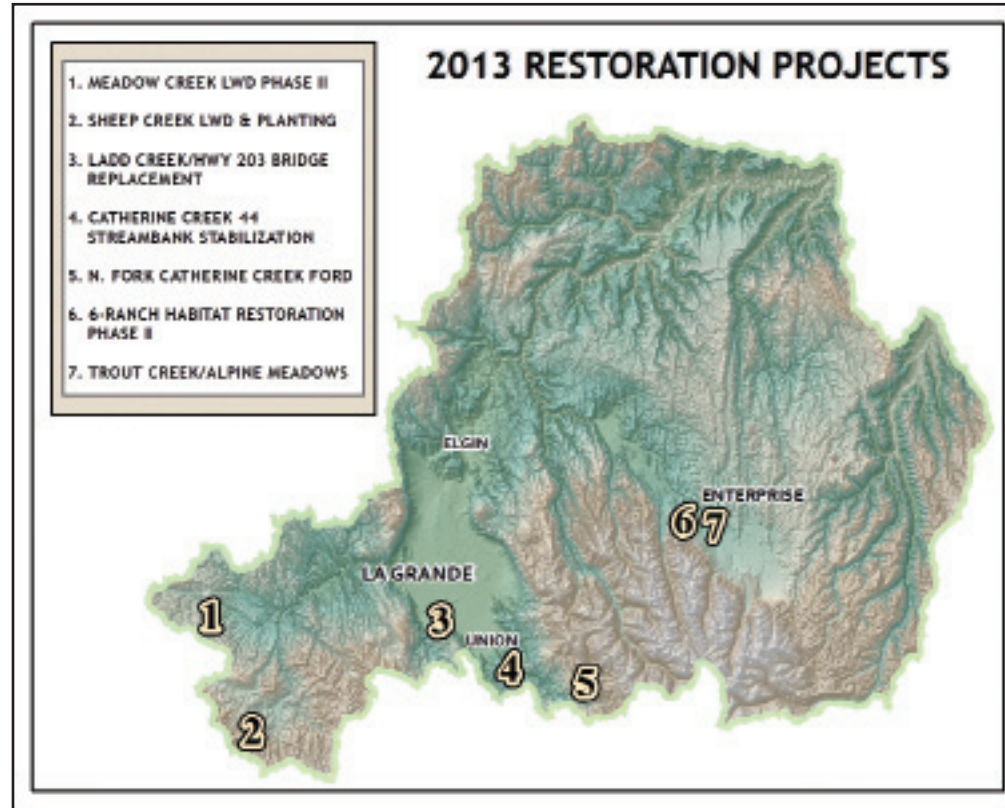
by Coby Menton and Lyle Kuchenbecker, GRMW

The Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) coordinates and oversees the implementation of watershed restoration activities in the Grande Ronde Basin that are funded through the Bonneville Power Administration's Fish and Wildlife Program. Projects are sponsored and implemented by a variety of entities, including the GRMW, the U.S. Forest Service, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), the Union Soil and Water Conservation District (USWCD), and others.

The following restoration projects are scheduled for implementation during 2013.

Catherine Creek 44 Stream and Fish Habitat Restoration Phase I

Sponsored by the USWCD, this project is located on Catherine Creek about four miles above Union. Phase I is the initial step in a large-scale effort by a local partnership comprising eight private landowners and the USWCD, the Bureau of Reclamation, the CTUIR, and the ODFW. The overall project goal is to restore natural channel function and processes that provide for enhanced capacity to spawn and rear Endangered Species Act-listed salmon and steelhead while protecting the utility and economic viability of working ranches. The goal of Phase I is to address the landowners' immediate concerns about streambank erosion, loss of fencing, occasional livestock loss, and potential outbuilding flooding as wider-scale planning and design for Phase II is completed. Large log structures will



Left: A map of the projects occurring in the Grande Ronde Basin during 2013. Below: An eroding bank located on the project site of the Catherine Creek 44 Stream and Fish Habitat Restoration Phase I project.



be constructed at five sites to increase habitat diversity, provide side-channel habitat, and reduce streambank erosion. In future years, historic channels will be re-activated, side channels will be constructed, levees will be removed, irrigation diversions will be consolidated, riparian easement fencing will be installed, and additional water conservation measures will be taken. The project is funded primarily by the Bonneville Power Administration, with project design services provided by the Bureau of Reclamation.

The Ladd Creek-Highway 203 Bridge Replacement

The project is located approximately four miles southwest of La Grande where Ladd Creek crosses Highway 203. The project is sponsored by the CTUIR in cooperation with the ODFW and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). The project will replace an undersized concrete box culvert with a full channel-spanning bridge, representing the final phase of the Ladd Creek Channel Relocation and Wetland Project completed in 2009-2010. The initial project completed in the Ladd

Marsh Wildlife Management Area included the reconstruction of 5.4 miles of sinuous channels to replace about two miles of channelized ditches; the addition of wood structures, riparian planting, and seeding; and the replacement of an undersized culvert on Pierce Road. The project is funded primarily by the Bonneville Power Administration and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. ODOT designed the new bridge and will oversee construction activities.

Alpine Meadows Golf Course

In January 2013, construction began at the Alpine Meadows Golf Course

(AMGC) in Enterprise to convert the irrigation source from surface water from Trout Creek to treated wastewater from the City of Enterprise. This conversion is being accomplished through the construction of a new storage pond, water transport pipeline, and pump station as well as the modification of the existing irrigation system. Scheduled to be completed in September 2013, all construction is taking place on grounds managed by the AMGC. The benefits of the project include improved water quantity and quality in Trout Creek, which is a steelhead spawning and rearing stream. Surpassing all wastewater treatment criteria, the treated wastewater released from the treatment facility in Enterprise is of exceptional quality and is suitable to be used for irrigation on a public use facility like the AMGC. During Spring 2013, 21 steelhead redds were counted and nine live steelhead were observed in the reach of Trout Creek that runs through the golf course.

The Meadow Creek Large Woody Debris Phase I & II

The project is located on Meadow Creek, a tributary of the Grande Ronde River within the Starkey Experimental Forest. The project is sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service La Grande Ranger District in cooperation with the Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center and the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station. The objective is to improve spring/summer chinook and summer steelhead habitat by increasing the quality and quantity of pools, improving stream shading, enhancing floodplain and riparian area function, and increasing in-stream habitat complexity. Phase I of the project began in 2012 and will continue into 2013. Phase II will begin in 2013 and continue into 2014. Project activities will include adding large wood structures to 7.25 stream miles, planting vegetation on five stream miles, and constructing or reconstructing riparian pasture and enclosure fencing. A new cattle grazing system will be implemented by the project partners on this reach of Meadow Creek to monitor and assess impacts of

all ungulates (livestock, elk, deer) on the proposed restoration activities. The project is funded by the Bonneville Power Administration and the U.S. Forest Service.



This photo of Meadow Creek shows the lack of in-channel habitat diversity that is common in the project area.

Sheep Creek Large Woody Debris and Planting

The project is located on Sheep Creek upstream from Vey Meadows on Wallowa-Whitman National Forest lands. The project is sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service La Grande Ranger District. The overall project objective is to improve spring/summer chinook and summer steelhead habitat by increasing the quantity and quality of pools, enhancing floodplain function, and improving riparian vegetation diversity and vigor. Large woody debris structure construction and planting will take place on three stream miles. Existing shrubs with heavy damage caused by wild ungulates browsing through the forest will be protected by small exclusion fences. The project is funded by the Bonneville Power Administration and the U.S. Forest Service.

North Fork Catherine Creek Ford/Bridge Replacement

This project is located on the North Fork of Catherine Creek just above the confluence of the Middle Fork and the North Fork of Catherine Creek. The project is sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service La Grande Ranger District. The objective of the project is to restore fish passage for

Chinook, steelhead, and bull trout to access several miles of habitat above the ford. The project will replace the deteriorating ford with a full channel-spanning bridge. The project is funded by the U.S. Forest Service, with funding assistance provided by the Bonneville Power Administration.

Wallowa River/6-Ranch Habitat Restoration Project 2

Currently in the planning stages, the Wallowa River/6-Ranch Habitat Restoration Project 2 near Enterprise continues downstream of Project 1, which was completed in 2009. A diverse team is helping plan implementation of this project in 2013 and 2014. Team members represent livestock, riparian, fisheries, and engineering disciplines, and planning and design is scheduled for completion during late Summer 2013. The resulting project will improve fish habitat by constructing complex habitat conditions, including channel re-meandering, side channel construction, constructed riffles, and large woody debris features. The 2,000-foot stream reach covered by the project will reconnect the river to its flood plain, restore riparian vegetation, and improve water quality.



This photo shows where the 6-Ranch Habitat Project will take place. Currently, the river is channelized against the hill slope in the back ground. This project will re-meander the river through the pasture in the foreground and enhance parts of the channel in its current course.

Looking Behind the Ledger Sheets:

A Salute to Mary

by Jeff Oveson, GRMW



RIGHT:
*Mary Estes
Fiscal
Manager at
the GRMW*

The Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) undergoes an A-133 audit every year, which is a requirement of any 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that receives more than \$500,000 annually in federal funds. The GRMW falls into this category because the Bonneville Power Administration, a federal agency, is the GRMW's primary funding source. In essence, the audit is a measure required by the government to safeguard taxpayer funds, but the audit process also protects the GRMW Board of Directors from liability for any fiscal malfeasance. Conducted by Certified Public Accountants (CPAs), the audit process involves accounting for every dime that flows through non-profit organizations like the GRMW.

By now, you are either bored to tears and have turned the page, or you are scared to death because federal regulations just have that effect on you. Maybe you are interested because you happen to have an aptitude for things like financial management rules and regulations, in which

case you might be a CPA yourself. I know several CPAs; by all outside appearances, they seem to be normal people. However, CPAs view "normal" a little bit differently than the rest of us do. They find it perfectly acceptable to sort through columns and rows of endless numbers in an attempt to "reconcile" things. Believe me when I say that when you are paying a CPA to audit your books and records, you want everything to reconcile.

This year's audit was led by Yvonne Roberts, CPA, with support from Chelsea Herron and Amy Breshears of Seydel, Lewis, Poe, Moeller & Gunderson, LLC. Roberts commented that Mary Estes, the GRMW Office and Fiscal Manager whose work is the focus of an audit, has "excellent organizational skills." According to Roberts, "Mary has a very good handle on where things are and what they're for, and she's very dedicated to her work."

Mary began her career with the GRMW on December 14, 1994, and she has been integrally involved with managing

the evolving legal and financial status of the GRMW throughout her almost 20-year tenure. With her educational background from the former La Grande College of Business, Mary developed an accounting system ideally suited to the nuances of a non-profit organization that is sponsored by multiple funding sources and works with a variety of vendors. In March 2003, the GRMW was granted 501(c)(3) status as a non-profit corporation. The change in status meant, among other things, that the GRMW could pursue different funding sources and would not have to pay high administrative costs for other entities to handle simple day-to-day operations like paying office rent, acquiring and maintaining phone and internet services, renting company vehicles, paying per diem, etc. With 501(c)(3) status, these types of tasks could be undertaken in-house, in addition to contracting for project activities, invoicing and paying bills associated with contracts, and occasionally assuming mitigation fees paid for regulatory violations elsewhere in the state.

Anyone who has spent much time with Mary already knows how dedicated she is, how thoroughly she tracks every dime, and how unlikely it is that she would paint beyond the lines, even if the lines might be blurred. Mary's determination to the rock-solid organization, planning, and execution of her duties makes her the indispensable Office and Fiscal Manager that she is. Those of us who have the pleasure of working with Mary also know her to be one of the most compassionate people you'll ever meet. She is always willing to help out and is always the one who shows concern about everyone else.

Mary and her husband, Don, were married 32 years ago and have lived in La Grande throughout their married life. Don works for Union Pacific Railroad in the Hinkle car shop as the safety facilitator. Mary and Don have a daughter, Stephanie, who lives in Eugene, as well as two sons, Chris and Michael, and a granddaughter, Jessica, all of whom live in La Grande.

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council also helps guide habitat improvements through the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Program, which includes subbasin plans that outline needs and priorities in areas such as the Grande Ronde Basin.

Significant amounts of fish habitat have been damaged or degraded during the past century as rivers and streams were straightened, diverted, or otherwise affected by development that sometimes included mining and road construction. For instance, irrigation diversions and undersized or misplaced drainage culverts may cut off fish from important historic spawning areas or water sources.

The BPA works with the GRMW and similar groups as well as with states and tribes to identify opportunities to remedy this habitat damage through various projects and activities that may include replacing outdated culverts, leasing water to restore stream flow, and reworking or replacing water diversions to make it easier for fish to move past them. The BPA typically does not purchase land or undertake habitat improvements on its own but instead funds and cooperates with local organizations such as the GRMW that are more finely attuned to local habitat conditions and community priorities. Panels of local scientists and other experts review proposed projects to assess their benefits to fish prior to implementation.

The outcomes of BiOp actions have been positive. More juvenile fish are passing more safely through the federal dams on their downstream migrations to the ocean. An important contributor to this improvement in fish passage has been surface passage systems installed at the dams during the last decade that allow juvenile fish to cross dam spillways at the surface of the river, where they naturally travel. Although many factors, including climate and ocean conditions, affect the number of salmon that return to spawning areas as adults, the BiOp includes performance standards to assure that at least



This photo was taken during construction of the Willow Creek Restoration and Enhancement Project. The image shows the re-contouring of the stream bank, which was extremely eroded and vertical in some areas. Large wood structures also were placed in this area of the project.

96 percent of juveniles (93 percent for those that migrate as sub-yearlings) safely pass each dam on their way to the ocean.

Meanwhile, habitat improvements have reopened or improved access to reaches of rivers and streams that total nearly twice the length of the Columbia River. Many of these streams also have been improved through the addition of woody material and other steps that provide refuge and shelter for young fish.

One example is the Willow Creek Restoration and Enhancement Project near Summerville, located in the northwest corner of the Grande Ronde Valley. Supported by BPA funding, the GRMW managed a project with partners including the Oregon Agricultural Foundation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Oregon Department of Fish and

Wildlife to reconnect historic channel meanders and add large wood to improve rearing conditions for juvenile fish. They also replaced undersized culverts, which opened valuable cool water refuge habitat. A conservation easement protects the area, and farming activities still occur outside the riparian zone. The project partners' vision of a working farm with healthy and more abundant fish, wildlife, and plants for future generations was achieved.

The BiOp runs through 2018 and is backed up by funding commitments made by the BPA to states and tribes under the Columbia Basin Fish Accords. But the benefits of the habitat improvements supported by the BPA's partnership with the GRMW should last for generations to come.