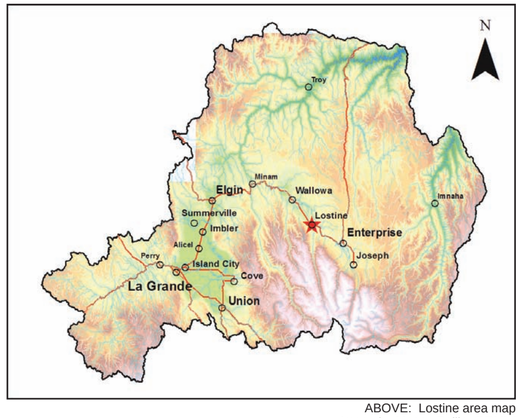
From the Archives

The Story of Lostine, Oregon

compiled by Heather Hall, GRMW



ABOVE: Lostine area map
Image by Mason Bailie, GRMW

Lostine is a small, multi-faceted community located between Wallowa and Enterprise in the Wallowa Mountain range. Lostine was established in 1878 by G.E. Laughlin. Mr. Laughlin named the town after his former hometown of Lostine, Illinois. A post office was set up in 1878, and Mrs. Laughlin acted as postmistress for many years after her husband left the area. The Joseph/Elgin Stage Line helped the town of Lostine grow. At one time, the town boasted a butcher shop, livery stable, millinery, boarding house, and three lumber mills. Lostine became incorporated in 1903.

Today, with a population of roughly 200+, many visitors stop and explore this little town on their way to Wallowa Lake. Lostine is known for its famous Lostine Flea Market, which is held the first weekend in July each year. During the flea market, more than 70 vendors from all over the U.S. line both sides of the main street and some of the side streets to sell their wares.

This newsletter is funded by the Bonneville Power Administration and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

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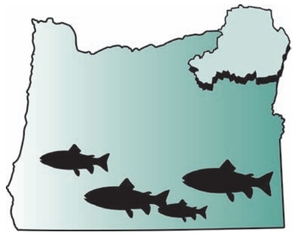


Ripples in the Grande Ronde

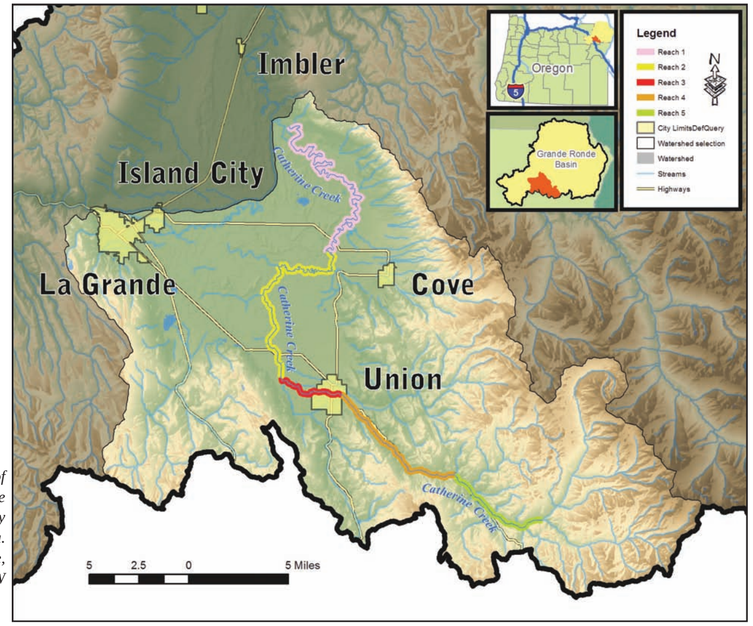
Summer/Fall 2010

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

Assessing Catherine Creek:

How does this river flow?

by Lyle Kuchenbecker
Jeff Oveson
Jesse Steele,
GRMW



RIGHT: Map of the Catherine Creek Tributary Assessment area. by Mason Bailie, GRMW

Introduction

The goal of the Catherine Creek Tributary Assessment (CCTA) is to evaluate the overall status of the entire Catherine Creek watershed in order to identify and prioritize potential habitat restoration projects. A project of this scope can only be accomplished through the efforts of many people from several different organizations. More importantly, the project requires the cooperation of landowners. The Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) has set out to coordinate this massive undertaking. In habitat restoration work, project proponents must strike a balance between potential benefits of specific restoration efforts and the investment of time and money they require so as to determine which projects are the highest priorities. In order to prioritize important reaches of a stream for restoration, project proponents like the GRMW and cooperators first must have a solid understanding of the stream, its complex ecosystem, and interrelated human activities. Through a comprehensive assessment, the GRMW will identify critical habitat on Catherine Creek that would be the most beneficial to endangered fish species if the habitat were to be restored. The final product of this assessment will be the implementation of many restoration projects aimed at improving fish habitat, which will be completed in coordination with landowners to meet their needs and address their concerns.

Why is the CCTA Needed?

So, why should habitat in Catherine Creek be restored anyway? The short answer is that there is a legal mandate under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to maintain populations of endangered species – which in the case of the Catherine Creek area include spring Chinook salmon, summer steelhead, and bull trout – at self-sustaining levels. The populations of these species are not large enough to sustain themselves, so the GRMW and its partners need to address the causes of reduced numbers of fish.

Continued on page 2

The causes of the decline of these species are many and date back to more than a century ago. Some of the causes stem from within the Grande Ronde Basin, and many emerge from issues downstream in the Snake and Columbia Rivers, coastal estuaries, and the ocean itself. Initially, over-harvest of Chinook salmon in the late 1800s and early 1900s in the ocean and Columbia River reduced populations to a fraction of their historic numbers. Since then, other factors, including the development of the Columbia River hydropower system, negative impacts of early hatchery programs, and habitat degradation have all contributed to the decline of these populations in Catherine Creek.

The Effects of the Hydropower System

The effects of Columbia and Snake River dams on Chinook and steelhead populations are well-documented. Fish migrating to and from the Grande Ronde Basin encounter four dams in the Columbia River and four in the Snake River. In addition to forming barriers that are obstacles to adult fish migrating upstream and hazardous to juveniles migrating downstream, the dams create conditions that are inhospitable to salmonids. Pools behind the dams are very different habitat than fish had encountered before the dams were in place. Slow-moving water is warmer and provides better habitat for non-native and native predator fish populations. The dams, particularly Bonneville Dam, concentrate fish into small areas for predators such as sea lions that prey on adults and pike minnows that prey on juveniles. The Bonneville Power Administration, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and others continue to spend significant effort and money toward the goal of improving passage conditions at the dams by upgrading fish ladders, increasing spill rates, installing screening devices, and modifying the dams to improve flow patterns through the structures.

The Effects of Early Hatchery Programs

Early hatchery programs often used fish stocks not native to the Grande Ronde Basin. The non-native hatchery fish often competed with wild fish to the detriment of the wild stocks. Most hatchery programs now use native stocks intended to supplement and restore wild fish runs.

The Effects of Habitat Degradation in Catherine Creek

The CCTA is a major step in continuing to address the habitat component of declining fish populations by evaluating how and to what degree habitat modification has affected fish populations. For several years, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Research Group has been tracking juvenile spring Chinook out-migration from headwater habitats down through the Grande Ronde Valley and all the way to the Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River. The studies have found that very high juvenile Chinook mortality rates occur between Union and Rinehart at the lower end of the valley, in the Catherine Creek area. In most years, more than 50 percent of the juveniles trapped and tagged above Union do not make it through the valley to Elgin. Knowledge of these low survival rates and the degree to which the fish's habitat has been modified should lead to the identification of habitat restoration projects that will enhance survival rates for these juvenile fish.

Many organizations and private landowners have been working to restore habitat for nearly 20 years. These groups have done many of the "easy" projects, referred to by those in the restoration business as the "low-hanging fruit." To address the more challenging habitat issues in the Grande Ronde Valley, organizations like the GRMW need to understand more precisely the factors limiting fish survival. The CCTA will help not only to assess current habitat and hydrologic conditions, but also to determine what type of actions will restore habitat while complementing agricultural production and protecting built human infrastructure.

CCTA Partners

The Catherine Creek Tributary Assessment will involve but is not limited to the work of several survey crews to gather data along Catherine Creek. The survey data will be used to fill in data gaps and update existing information to form a complete digital model of Catherine Creek. The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) is taking the lead with this assessment, while the Union Soil and Water Conservation District (USWCD) and the GRMW have coordinated the team's efforts. The BOR, the ODFW, and Anderson-Perry and Associates (AP) will provide personnel who will conduct the surveys.

About the Completed and Ongoing Surveys

Ryan Lande and Ashley Davidson of the ODFW are collecting habitat data starting from the mouth of Catherine Creek and working upstream. They started surveying in mid-July and plan to finish in September 2010. According to the ODFW Conservation and Recovery Program, information gained from these surveys can be "used to provide basic information for biologists and land managers…to direct or focus habitat restoration efforts." These surveys involve walking the stream and identifying basin, reach, and unit type characteristics.

Basin information can be gathered from a U.S. Geological Survey topographic map, whereas reach and unit characteristics are determined during an on-the-ground physical survey. A unit is a section of stream distinguished by its channel bed form and flow characteristics. Once a unit (pool, riffle, glide, etc.) has been identified, data is collected specific to each unit. Ryan and Ashley are taking measurements of active channel, flood-prone height, and terrace height along with boulder counts, large woody debris counts, and more. Riparian cross-section data and other reach data are collected occasionally. When asked about performing survey work on Catherine Creek, Ryan commented that they have seen an abundance of wildlife during their surveys, including deer, elk, owls, and herons. They recently had a close encounter with a cougar that was walking along the creek bank just upstream of them.

Rob McAffee and Don Stelma of the BOR conducted geomorphological surveys in July and August 2010. Rob and his crew collected data about geological features such as coarse-scale channel geometry, channel substrate, and bank composition. They also mapped human-made features and are working to develop a geographic information system (GIS) model for vegetation along Catherine Creek. When asked about a discovery they made on the survey, Rob described a fascinating bank sediment layer. It is a firm, erosion-resistant layer that may be referred to locally as "caliche" (kuh-lee-chee). When handled, this layer feels somewhat like silly putty or corn starch. Rob has ordered some lab analysis on the layer to determine its chemical composition. Kendra Russell and Mike Sixta are also completing geomorphological surveys for the BOR and will be mapping the channel bed elevation and the river thalweg during the month of October.

Meet the Project Partner

Shelly Schmidt

Profile by Leigh Collins, GRMW

Photo courtesy of Shelly Schmidt

Shelly Schmidt has been involved in fish habitat restoration and enhancement projects for the past 20 years while working for several state and federal agencies. Shelly is continuing to play a key role in habitat restoration efforts in Eastern Oregon as the new project manager for the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), managing its La Grande office, which is housed with the U.S. Forest Service and other federal agencies on Highway 30 east of La Grande.

An Oregon native who grew up in the small farming community of Sherwood, Shelly gained an appreciation of the wilderness and outdoor activities. After spending several years working for the Deschutes National Forest as a biologist, Shelly worked as the Region Environmental Coordinator with the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) in Central Oregon. She moved to Eastern Oregon 10 years ago to continue her work at ODOT as a Region Biologist covering all of Eastern Oregon. For the past three years prior to taking her position with the Corps, she managed the Natural Resources Department of Anderson-Perry & Associates. She currently resides in Union County with her two sons, who are 12 and 14 years old. Shelly says she was encouraged by her parents to "be or do anything I wanted, and my mom always emphasized that you spend a lot of time at your job, so it's a lot better if you like what you do." Shelly's enthusiasm for her position with the Corps is obvious from the energy she displays while talking to and interacting with others.

Having a strong background in this community and knowing so many vital individuals is helping Shelly to make a smooth transition to her new job with the Corps. Shelly said the biggest lesson she has learned throughout her career is that "when doing restoration projects anywhere, it is about relationships. You have to establish trust and a working relationship, whether it is with a private landowner, client, or another regulatory agency, and that's what keeps your project afloat and successful." Shelly also keeps in close contact and has positive support from the Corps' Portland office. Her counterparts from the Portland area have visited Eastern Oregon to meet with several agencies and landowners, and Shelly has helped them gain a better understanding of the local culture and values that might not be well understood in Western Oregon. Shelly is creating vital linkages between the western and eastern sides of Oregon and will continue to do so in the years to come.

As a project manager for Eastern Oregon, Shelly now has the opportunity to be involved in projects beyond Union and Wallowa Counties, also serving Baker, Grant, Gilliam, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, and Wheeler Counties. Shelly's position involves reviewing permit applications from both public and private organizations and individuals who want to do work in navigable waterways, wetlands, and rivers, which are covered by Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act and Section 404 of the federal Clean Water Act. She also helps the general public learn more about the Clean Water Act.

The mission of the Corps is to protect and enhance aquatic ecosystems and sustain habitat. Even before joining the Corps in July, Shelly had been a part of many of the restoration and enhancement projects that have occurred within the Grande Ronde Basin since relocating here 10 years ago, including working side-by-side with federal and state agencies, public interest groups, and the Grande Ronde Model Watershed to plan major restoration efforts. During one of the many projects she was involved with in Union County, a project to rebuild the Lower Perry Bridge, she recalls the "battle between restoration and deer" in which deer came in and ate the newly planted trees and shrubs in the project's riparian area.

One of the things Shelly would like the public to know is that she is available as a resource and is always willing to assist anyone who needs help obtaining a permit from the Corps. Shelly's office is open to anyone who would like to stop by, and if you have any questions, you can reach her by telephone at 541-962-0401 or by email at michelle.r.schmidt@usace.army.mil.

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 and Planning Session

The public is welcome to attend

- Board Meeting
  Tuesday, September 28: 6:30 p.m.
  Wallowa Community Center
  204 East Second Street
  Wallowa, Oregon

- Annual Planning Session
  Tuesday, December 7
  9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
  Ascension School
  1006 Church Street
  Cove, Oregon

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

We Are Family!

ABOVE: Leigh with her husband, Clayton, who is the brother of Jesse Steele's wife, Summer. Photo by GRMW staff.

Welcome to Leigh Collins, the GRMW's New Public Involvement/ Education Coordinator!

By Jeff Oveson, GRMW

What kind of woman takes herself up the side of steep mountains, rafts whitewater rivers, and teams up with family and friends to run a 200-mile relay from Utah to Wyoming? She's the kind of woman who skis downhill and cross-country, bikes, runs and, more noticeably and importantly, she's the kind of woman who cares. She cares about the people in her community and in her family, she cares about the land she lives in, and she cares about the natural resources that are the life-blood of northeastern Oregon.

"She" is Leigh Collins, recently hired to join the Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) team as the Public Involvement/Education Coordinator. The position is a new one at the GRMW, which means Leigh essentially will be charged with building two programs (public involvement and education) without the benefit of an existing foundation or framework. Since accepting the position in July, Leigh has already hit the ground running with her role as Public Involvement Coordinator. A large segment of Leigh's work will involve supporting the ongoing Catherine Creek Tributary Assessment, a partnership effort with the Bureau of Reclamation, the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, the Union Soil and Water Conservation District, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and other organizations. Leigh will be responsible for coordinating the outreach effort to share information gained as a part of the assessment process with landowners. This outreach work will include opening and maintaining clear channels of communication to make certain that landowners and managers know what is going on with the Catherine Creek Tributary Assessment, what the information gathered means to them, and how they can be part of both the assessment and future habitat restoration projects.

In the second part of her position as GRMW's new Education Coordinator, Leigh's classroom experience as a student teacher will be invaluable in developing useful curricula in coordination with teachers from schools in both Union and Wallowa Counties. Leigh has also coached youth soccer, taught Sunday School, and served as a volunteer aide with the Talented and Gifted program at La Grande Middle School. She is tasked with developing an education package ready to be delivered to schools for the start of the 2011-2012 school year. She is already acquainted with a number of teachers around the area and hopes to befriend many more soon toward the GRMW's goal of serving as a reliable partner in natural resources education.

A graduate of La Grande High School with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and a Masters of Arts in Teaching obtained at Eastern Oregon University (EOU), Leigh is a lifelong La Grande resident and the daughter of Anna and David Baum. Her siblings include sister Regan and brothers Aleck and Karl.

Leigh's partner in her life's adventures and passion for the great outdoors is her husband, Clayton, who was raised in Summerville and is also an EOU Alumnus who earned his Bachelor degree from the Oregon State University Range Sciences Program at EOU. Clayton is a Biology Technician for the U.S. Forest Service in La Grande. Clayton has built a relationship with GRMW not only because his wife is an employee, but also because his sister, Summer, is the wife of Jesse Steele, the other recent addition to the staff at GRMW.

GRANDE RONDE MODEL WATERSHED

ABOVE: Jesse with his son, Fenley, and his wife, Summer, who is the sister of Leigh's husband, Clayton. Photo by GRMW staff.

Welcome to Jesse Steele, the GRMW's New Field Biologist!

By Jeff Oveson, GRMW

It should come as no surprise that the GRMW's new Field Biologist enjoys fishing, loves bird hunting, and owns a couple of yellow labradors named Jed and Max. Nor should it come as a surprise that he doesn't get out to hunt and fish as much as he would like because there are things in his life that are much more important; Summer, his wife of almost 10 years, and Fenley, their 16-month-old son, are the real centers of Jesse's life. Summer was home-schooled in Summerville (no, she wasn't born there and named after the town) and was a fellow student at Eastern Oregon University (EOU) where she and Jesse met. While they were still students, they married and bought the house they live in today. Summer and Jesse are very involved in the Calvary Chapel in La Grande, where Summer's father is Pastor and Jesse serves as a youth leader. Jesse was raised with siblings Jenny and Joel, both of whom now reside out of state. Joel's father, Doug, taught and coached at Wallowa High School and now lives in Walla Walla, Washington. LeArla, his mother, resides in Depoe Bay on the Oregon coast.

Jesse comes to GRMW with an excellent background in fish biology. After graduating from Wallowa High School, he attained a Liberal Studies degree from EOU with minors in Biology and Geology. Beginning soon after graduation, Jesse acquired six years of invaluable experience with the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife's (ODFW) Northeast Fish Research program stationed in Badgley Hall at EOU. His work there mostly involved research on salmonids such as Spring Chinook and summer steelhead, which are both populations that are on the federal Endangered Species Act list and native to the Grande Ronde sub-basin.

The aforementioned Spring Chinook native to Catherine Creek and the Upper Grande Ronde River areas are two of the highest priority populations to be addressed by the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) Biological Opinion (BiOp). The BiOp mandates that the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) must take action to mitigate for the effect of operating the Snake and Columbia River hydropower system on fish populations. GRMW is the local stakeholder group through which much of the funding for restoration projects is allocated, and Jesse will be instrumental in working with partners to identify, design, and implement BiOp-related projects, with special emphasis on projects located in the Catherine Creek and the Upper Grande Ronde River areas. His appreciation of private landowners and their priorities as well as his passion for habitat restoration work make him a natural fit for the GRMW's new field biologist position.

Although in the past the GRMW has partnered with a large group of biologists from a multitude of organizations, Jesse is the first full-time biologist to serve on the staff and will be assuming a variety of responsibilities, not the least of which is establishing and maintaining relationships with private landowners. Jesse's work with the ODFW afforded him the opportunity to work with a number of private landowners, and his position with the GRMW will allow him to increase the number of landowners he knows and works with across both Union and Wallowa Counties.

When Jesse applied for his new position, he said that he wanted the opportunity to become more directly involved with habitat restoration projects and to work with private landowners. When asked about his work with local farmers and ranchers, Jesse expressed that he was pleased that so many of them not only were willing to allow him on their properties, but also were curious about the status of local fish populations. Jesse believes that fish and farming are compatible, and he will be instrumental in the GRMW's work to prove it.

Public or Private?

A Special Commentary by Jeff Oveson, GRMW Executive Director

Earlier this year, the Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) hosted screenings of the video "The Best Country: People Restoring Rivers." Produced by Green Fire Productions of La Grande, the video featured two families on whose private property very significant river restoration projects had been implemented. Both of these private properties were sites of channel relocation projects, in which stretches of the mainstem Wallowa River that had been straightened and channelized years ago were transformed into a more natural, meandering river. The restored river channel now provides homes to a multitude of fish and wildlife species.

Primarily funded by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, these projects that allow the river to function much like it did a century ago are the result of untold hours of planning, design, and construction efforts by public and private organizations. Many groups of volunteers have worked on them, hundreds of people have toured them both during and following construction, and the two families that own the properties upon which the projects were completed were as pleased with the final product as proud new parents.

About 170 people attended screenings of "The Best Country" in Elgin, La Grande, and Enterprise during April 2010. Following each of these video presentations, viewers were offered the opportunity to ask questions of a panel consisting of private landowners, engineers, fish biologists, and Tribal representatives who had been involved with either or both projects.

ABOVE: A happy marriage of public and private interests made the Wallowa River restoration projects possible. From left to right: Bill Maslen, Director of BPA's Fish and Wildlife Program; Timmie Mandish, Contracting Officer for BPA; Liza Jane Nichols, Landowner. Photo by GRMW staff.

The questions asked by viewers could be categorized into some recurring themes. But one particular query was memorable because it is a question that follows a reasonable line of logic yet received responses that amounted to a "Well, because that's not how it's done" answer that has never served to mollify children, let alone inquisitive adults. At all three screenings, questions surrounding the following idea were raised by viewers: "Because these projects were paid for with public funds, shouldn't the public be allowed access?" In and of itself, the question represents a fairly simple equation, but the answer is a little more complex than "Well, because that's not how it's done."

The reason why these landowners are able to control access to their land goes beyond the "that's how it's done" mantra. Public funds are often allocated to pay for facilities to which uncontrolled public access is not allowed, such as school buildings or government offices. Companies that have received any kind of public largesse through economic development or energy conservation incentives still have control over the businesses they own and operate. Farmers who receive Farm Program funding through subsidies or conservation payments might be required to meet certain standards of management and operation but are not required to allow public access to their private properties.

All of the landowners who have participated in restoration projects have opened their land to access by a host of organizations and agencies. They have allowed the GRMW, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Tribes, and other organizations to take their property as they know it and turn it into land that represents a shared vision of sustainable restoration and production agriculture. They have allowed actions that enhance habitat for numerous populations of fish and wildlife. These landowners have given a written guarantee to maintain and care for the enhancements on their private property and, in some cases, have voluntarily sacrificed some of the economic production of their land.

Restoration on private land is critical work. Part of the work is protecting the landowner's rights to control access to their properties.

BOR hydrologist Kayti Didricksen conducted groundwater surveys along most of Catherine Creek in July 2010. Her survey involved dragging a probe near the streambed behind an inflatable kayak. The probe collected both depth and temperature readings at three-second intervals. The probe simultaneously took GPS location points. When these data points are laid on top of one another, the model will show the locations of cold water influences, most of which are the result of subterranean inflow (springs). These cold water refuges are vital for fish during warm summer months.

There are 52 bridges, culverts, and diversions along Catherine Creek and the Grande Ronde River above Rinehart. It is important to gather data about all of these structures because each of them could potentially influence the behavior of the river, especially during high-flow stages. The survey to gather this data will be conducted by Mike Posada, P.L.S., of AP. Mike will establish a survey control network, which will involve placing four survey subsurface stakes at each structure. Mike will also conduct a survey of each feature plus four cross-sections adjacent to the river with the goal of developing a hydrologic model of each feature. This data will be entered into a HEC/RAS, or river analysis, model so that engineers can evaluate the hydraulic opening of each structure. Once a model of how the river flows through each bridge, culvert, and diversion is in place, the project team can begin to answer questions concerning flooding, erosion, and fish passage issues.

What's in it for Landowners?

So, what good is all this knowledge, and how will it benefit landowners? Let's go back in time to far different circumstances, when the Catherine Creek was once an untamed river that did as it pleased, including inundating thousands of acres of land every time there was too much rain or rain on snow or a sudden late spring snow melt that accompanied the first hot weather of the year. The Catherine Creek's flow ran both into and out of historic Tule Lake, which varied in size from 10,000 to 20,000 acres depending on the year.

Things have changed. As American demand for food grew and settlers looked for more places to build homes, grow crops, and raise families, Catherine Creek was straightened, deepened, diked, and slowly brought under the (almost) absolute control of humans. After more than 150 years of intervention by European settlers and their descendents and after millions of dollars spent diking the stream as well as leveling and draining lands, Catherine Creek still flexes its muscle every year or two by washing out some roads, flooding crops, and otherwise laying waste to the human-built infrastructure. In the last century, some thought was given to building dams on Catherine Creek and many of the other creeks and rivers that come into the Grande Ronde Valley. The reasons for building the dams cited then were the same as they are now: to save some water and to save some private land. Although they are somewhat more complicated today, the reasons for not building the dams were the same then as they are now: dams are cost-prohibitive to build and operate, they would flood spawning grounds, and they would flood private land, displace highways, and drown forests.

A Healthier River

In its present condition, Catherine Creek is not ideal for farmers, towns, or the fish populations that are native to its waters. Catherine Creek still kills crops and fish alike, floods neighborhoods, and dares human communities to fight back. The challenge to people in the Grande Ronde Valley might be to resist the temptation to fight back and instead give the river the space it needs to behave like a river naturally behaves. There is an old saying that there are two kinds of levies: those that have failed and those that will. This saying is based on the assumption that levies are built in locations or to specifications that cannot possibly resist the buffeting of the adjacent river year after year without failing. This saying is also based on the assumption that levies are built in a way that denies rivers their normal behavior.

A less-restricted river is a healthier river. A river that has room to "bounce around" inside its own channel will diffuse much of its own kinetic energy and inertia instead of eroding banks, dikes, and farmland. A river channel that includes wood and riparian vegetation is an invitation to fish, macroinvertebrates (favorite fish food), waterfowl, beavers, muskrats, mink, and raptors and songbirds. Some birds and small wildlife will eat some fish, but they will also help control voles, mice, gophers, squirrels, and mosquitoes. A less-restricted river would not require ongoing maintenance and repairs such as topping dikes, dredging, or removing vegetation from banks and floodplains.

The CCTA will help landowners, biologists, and engineers understand what the river is right now. It will predict what the Catherine Creek wants to be, how it wants to act, and what can be done to allow the river some latitude to express itself without wreaking havoc among the landowners and the infrastructure that sits within its normal floodplain. When the assessment is completed, the reports are written, and the hydrologic modeling is finished, the GRMW team will have a much better understanding of the river and what it needs to function without breaching banks and dikes, washing across fields and roads, and seeping into houses.

This is not 1860, when Catherine Creek wandered where it pleased, without really causing much damage. Nor is this 1960, when the idea that humans could and should subdue all rivers within a narrow channel was a widely held belief. Time has shown that no river can be completely contained and controlled, no matter how much money and effort are expended. Farms and fish can thrive side-by-side. This assessment of Catherine Creek will help the Grande Ronde Valley community understand how.

For more information about the CCTA, please contact Leigh Collins, the GRMW's public involvement coordinator, via phone at 541-663-0570 or email at leigh@grmw.org.

ABOVE: Chinook salmon smolt. Photo courtesy BPA.