

Partnering for water quality

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Clackamas River Basin Council uses community ties for restoration work



by: ISABEL GAUTSCHI - Morgan Parks of the Clackamas River Basin Council enjoys a visit to a restoration project.

Morgan Parks is one of the most visible people in the Estacada area.

She's a member of the Ford Institute's Leadership Program in Estacada, she attends various community meetings such as the Timberlake Job Corps community outreach meetings, and is an after-school instructor for Eagle Creek Elementary's STEAM program to name a few places one is likely to run into her.

Parks is the environmental outreach and engagement coordinator for the Clackamas River Basin Council.

The nonprofit council's mission is to "foster partnerships for clean water

and to improve fish and wildlife habitat and the quality of life for those who live, work and recreate in the watershed."

Parks explained that community involvement is integral to the council's restoration work.

"We really engage citizens in caring for the Clackamas River basin," Parks said.

But what, exactly, does the Clackamas River Basin Council do?

by: ISABEL GAUTSCHI - Cheryl McGinnis is the executive director of the Clackamas River Basin Council.

To answer that question, Parks and CRBC Executive Director Cheryl McGinnis took the Estacada News on a tour of three restoration projects in the Estacada area.

"I just think the Clackamas River is Estacada's backyard," Parks said. "It's so important to realize that everyone's individual actions impact water quality."

The first stop was a property on Goose Creek near Eagle Creek Elementary.

The property owner had participated in CRBC's Shade Our Streams Program, a community tree planting and invasive species removal project designed to improve water quality in the Clackamas River basin at no cost to landowners.



CRBC aims to plant more than 300,000 native trees along 30 stream miles in an effort to restore streamside habitat.

The program prioritizes streamside properties along Clear Creek, Deep Creek and Eagle Creek.



by: ISABEL GAUTSCHI - Parks adjusts a stake marking a young, native tree planted on property along Goose Creek. The property is enrolled in the Clackamas River Basin Council's Shade Our Streams Program.

Interested property owners may get in touch with CRBC to arrange a site visit to discuss potential restoration efforts.

CRBC will perform invasive species removal in late summer or fall for properties enrolled in the program.

In the winter, CRBC plants a buffer of native species along the stream.

For an additional two years following the planting, CRBC will perform site-maintenance.

Parks and McGinnis emphasized that the restoration efforts as part of the Shade Our Streams Program do not cost the property owner anything.

They explained that the restoration efforts hold additional benefits for property owners.

For example, the roots of trees

help hold soil in place, prevent erosion and reduce flood damage.

At the Goose Creek site near Eagle Creek Elementary, Parks and McGinnis point to numerous stakes marking young, native trees.

Last year, Parks explained, CRBC removed numerous invasive species from the site such as Himalayan blackberry, Scotch broom, teasel and reed canary grass.

“They can totally take over a streamside area,” Parks said.

She explained that these species are aggressive and hard to get rid of, but CRBC removes invasive species for free for properties enrolled in the Shade Our Streams Program.

Parks said that blackberry, Japanese knotweed, English ivy and reed canary grass are some of the worst invasive species in the area.

Streamside properties overrun with these plants could benefit from the Shade Our Streams Program, Parks said.

Other tell-tale signs that a streamside area could benefit from restoration efforts include: a lack of diverse plant species, lack of shade and erosion.

Once the invasive species are removed, CRBC plants low-maintenance native species along the stream in the winter.

The native plants help provide wildlife habitat and shelter and, when large enough to provide shade, lower water temperatures.

McGinnis said that high water temperature is one of the biggest obstacles for endangered fish survival in the Clackamas River basin.

Other obstacles include barriers and lack of “stream complexity.”

A healthy stream, McGinnis explained, does not run in a straight line. Rather, it meanders, has turns and flows into side channels.

A meandering stream slows water velocity and lowers the risk of flood damage and erosion.

It also provides a more suitable habitat for fish (think hiding places, shelter, etc.).

McGinnis said that the planting of native trees and plants along streams is a “simple restoration activity” that can help alleviate these obstacles.

Dying trees and plants may fall in the stream, enriching its nutrients and creating new meandering water pathways.

“We planted a really high density to allow some trees to die,” Parks said of the Goose Creek site. “They’re not all going to survive and that’s fine.”

Looking around at the young trees along the stream, Parks said, “It’s a really good looking project.”

Parks said the CRBC hopes to get chains of neighboring stream-side properties to participate in the Shade Our Streams program.

“We really love those connecting corridors,” she said.

The next stop was Eagle Creek Elementary.

Parks has taught three after-school classes as part of the school’s Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math (STEAM) program. She will teach another class in May.

Through STEAM, the students participate in CRBC’s Shade Our Streams Program.

They spread mulch on a school trail leading down to Goose Creek where they then planted native trees such as cottonwood, Douglas fir and big leaf maple near the banks.

For the third project on the tour, everyone piles into Dan Fink’s truck.

Fink is the Clackamas Tree Farm Manager of Weyerhaeuser Columbia Timberlands (formerly Longview Timber).

The truck enters private timber lands and winds its way down narrow logging roads.



by: ISABEL GAUTSCHI - This is one of four log structures that were placed along a nearly half-mile stretch of Eagle Creek in the Weyerhaeuser Columbia Timberlands in 2012 to improve stream health.

by: ISABEL GAUTSCHI - Dan Fink points out several pools and side channels that have formed as a result of the placement of wood structures along a stretch of Eagle Creek in the Weyerhaeuser Columbia Timberlands. This is the result that was hoped for. Fink is the Clackamas Tree Farm Manager of Weyerhaeuser Columbia Timberlands (formerly Longview Timber).

Everyone dons a hard hat and orange vest before setting off to view a restoration project on a difficult to access part of Eagle Creek.

The Clackamas River Basin Action Plan of 2005 had identified Eagle Creek as an area of the watershed that would benefit from the placement of wood structures in the stream as a way to provide water complexity and improve wildlife habitat.

McGinnis explained that in partnership with Weyerhaeuser Columbia Timberlands and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the three entities decided to coordinate the restoration with a planned logging project.

“The scheduled timber harvest presented an opportunity to improve instream habitat in a cost-effective manner by utilizing available contract labor already onsite,” CRBC stated in a press release.

In the summer of 2012, 20 logs donated by the Weyerhaeuser Columbia Timberlands were used to construct four structures which were placed along nearly a half-mile stretch of the creek.

Looking at the one of the structures, Fink points out new pools and side channels that have formed in the creek since the placement of the wood structures—exactly as the project had intended.

Resident fish, including cutthroat trout and lamprey, now have a healthier creek for a habitat.

Driving back into town, McGinnis and Parks list numerous events



CRBC holds each year.

There's the Tour de Clack bike ride, the Down the River Cleanup, salmon carcass tossing, work parties and more.

For more information about the Shade Our Stream Program and other Clackamas River Basin Council restoration efforts and educational programs, visit clackamasriver.org or call Parks at 503-303-4372 ext. 101.

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