

Shady Cove open forum for river stewardship

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The topic of the Nov. 12 Shady Cove open forum was “Stewardship of the River.” As noted by Rogue River Watershed Council Executive Director Brian Barr, if you live along the Rogue, stewardship of the river becomes part of your life.

What is “stewardship?” It is “the job of supervising or taking care of something, such as an organization or property.” Those who live in Shady Cove know the Rogue River is the proverbial crown jewel of the city.

Oregon Department of State Lands mitigation policy specialist Melody Rudenko, illustrated this with her opening query: “How are you connected to the river?” Whether participants lived on the river, worked on or by it, fished, swam, rafted, nature watched, etc., every one of the 32 people in attendance had some personal connection to the Rogue.

Rudenko then went on to discuss the importance of the river to everyone. Rivers provide habitat for wildlife and move water through landscape, surface and subsurface. They also provide resources for agriculture, commerce routes, recreation and electricity.

She then illustrated that for a river to function at its best and provide those resources, a healthy riparian area is key. A healthy riparian area shades and cools water, provides food and habitat for wildlife, prevents bank erosion and filters pollutants from surface and upland areas.

Next to speak was Barr who noted that it can be easy to take the Rogue for granted, but reminded everyone that it’s a river known throughout the United States for its great and unique fishing.

The salmonids in the Rogue are different from those in all other Oregon rivers as they go south when they go out to the ocean versus north. The Rogue is also known for “half-pounder” steelhead, also unique in Oregon.

A half-pounder is an immature steelhead that returns to freshwater within about four months of entering the ocean. The steelhead that make this migration spend the winter in freshwater and actively feed during the winter. Most other steelhead will spend one or two years in the ocean before returning.

All the salmonids in the Rogue need clean, cool water and a healthy riparian area is important. While salmonids spend time throughout the Rogue and out into the ocean, many of them start their lives in the Upper Rogue and the tiny fry need lots of nutrients and protection when they are at their most vulnerable so they can grow and make the trip out to sea and back.

The final speaker was Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Rogue District fish biologist Daniel Van Dyke. He discussed ways to create a healthy riparian area. “If you’re interested in making things better, minimize that lawn,” Van Dyke suggested.

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Melody Rudenko

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Good riparian habitat includes diversity of native plant species and vertical layers; overstory canopy and understory of diverse native plants and an effective buffer to keep pollutants out of the water and minimize the disturbance to fish.

Van Dyke discussed several types of native plants and trees that are low maintenance and great for riparian planting. The list included blue elderberry, Pacific ninebark, snowberry, Ponderosa pine and California black oak. The best "bang for your habitat buck" is the big leaf maple which provides lots of shade, lovely early spring flowers for pollinators and tons of seeds in summer

and fall for all types of critters to eat.

Both Shooting Star Nursery in Medford and Plant Oregon Nursery in Talent specialize in selling native plants and trees.

If you have questions for any of the presenters you can contact Shady Cove City Hall at 541-878-2225 and they can give you their contact information.