

Spring 2018

# The Confluence

Newsletter of the Rogue River Watershed Council

## Dam Removals Give Reason to Celebrate World Fish Migration Day

by Bob Hunter

Celebration of World Fish Migration Day prompts one to reflect on the amazing journey our Rogue Basin salmon, steelhead, and lamprey make each year and the obstacles they encounter along the way. The greatest impediments for migrating fish are barriers such as dams and culverts that impede or block fish passage. Removing barriers to fish passage is one of the most effective ways to improve fish habitat and increase and protect fish runs.

In the Rogue Basin alone, hundreds of barriers have been identified that kill, injure, or delay fish during migration. The most harmful of these barriers was Savage Rapids Dam, a 39-foot-high, 464-foot-long irrigation diversion dam constructed across the Rogue River by the Grants Pass Irrigation District (GPID) in 1921. It was the first man-made



Savage Rapids Dam

Photo by Bob Hunter



All that remains after the dam's removal

Photo by Bob Hunter

barrier that fish returning from the ocean encountered. In 2001, WaterWatch forged an agreement with GPID to remove the outdated dam and replace it with modern pumps. The dam was successfully removed in 2009. Reaching agreement on the removal of Savage Rapids Dam paved the way for a number of other successful dam removals in the Rogue Basin. On the mainstem, the City of Gold Hill Diversion Dam was removed in 2008 and Gold Ray Dam was removed in 2010. On

key spawning tributaries, Elk Creek Dam was notched on Elk Creek in 2008 and Fielder and Wimer Dams were removed from Evans Creek in 2015.

The Rogue River Watershed Council (RRWC) is keeping the momentum going by making barrier removal one of its priority restoration focus areas. The Rogue's tributaries are extremely important for fish spawning and rearing yet fish are impeded or blocked from miles of spawning and cold-water rearing habitat by hundreds of barriers. Many of these are old diversion dams that have fallen into disuse or are obsolete and can be replaced by modern infrastructure. The recent removal of the Beeson-

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## The Confluence Spring 2018

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*RRWC's mission: Stewardship of the Rogue River watershed through restoration, education, and community involvement.*

*RRWC is tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and a recognized watershed council. Watershed councils were authorized by the Oregon Legislature in 1995 to promote and implement voluntary cooperative conservation actions.*

## Notes from the Executive Director's Desk

I finally broke down and bought a fishing license. While I went all of 2017 without one, I love being out on the river too much to let hectic life get in the way of that experience.

Over the seven days leading up to World Fish Migration Day (which we celebrated on April 7th in Grants Pass), I fished on the Rogue near my house (just outside of Gold Hill) for at least an hour every day. And the results demonstrate perfectly why early April is such a great time to celebrate fish migration.

Sure, it is a little late for the upstream migrating summer steelhead. And maybe a little too early for the upstream migrating spring Chinook. But I was able to coax a nice female winter steelhead to a fly on the first evening of my adventure. Awesome!

And every other morning or evening I was able to attract at least one small, silvery "soon-to-be steelhead" to the end of my line. These little guys and gals are streaming out of the Rogue and its tributaries on their way to the Pacific Ocean where they will grow big and strong so they can fight the current for as much as 200 miles upstream to their spawning areas in the Bear, Little Butte, Trail, Elk, or Big Butte watersheds.

While it is easy to stand on the banks of the Rogue or one of its tributaries and see a one-way road for water, beneath the surface is a complex two-way street that sees its fair share of local traffic. And, in the case of the Rogue, there is a never-ending stream of long distance travelers. And spring is the time of year when traffic is at its peak. Coho Salmon, Chinook Salmon, and steelhead are all on their way downstream. And in addition to the upstream movement of steelhead and spring Chinook Salmon, Cutthroat Trout, Rainbow Trout, and Klamath Smallscale Suckers are on the move to their spawning areas, too.

Read on in this issue of *The Confluence* to hear how we celebrated these incredible migrations through World Fish Migration Day!

## ...and from the Board Chair

The Watershed Council has accomplished a lot these past few months: riparian restoration and barrier removal on Wagner Creek, working with Jackson SWCD on a water quality improvement project on Neil Creek, coordinating a source water protection collaborative for area drinking water providers, completing a fish habitat project on Elk Creek, and participating in several outreach events including developing and hosting the inaugural Rogue River - World Fish Migration Day Festival & 5K Migratory Run this past month in Grants Pass. And, of course, we have plans to continue work in all of these areas! For example, we're presently serving as one of the organizers for the first Festival on the Rogue, June 9, at the Upper Rogue Regional Park in Shady Cove.

Our staff does a great job developing and implementing these projects. They raise some of the funding for these projects through grants, but that isn't always enough. Donations from folks like you also play a large part. Our annual fundraising campaign will begin in June and continue until our "Celebrate the Rogue!" event in October. Please consider making a donation to ensure the continued success of our projects, and then plan on helping us celebrate these successes October 20 at Inn at the Commons. Mark your calendars now!



Photo by Justin Clifton



*Dam Removal Gives Reason to Celebrate World Fish Migration Day  
(Continued from page 1)*

Robison Dam by RRWC is a great example, where an aging diversion dam was replaced by a roughened channel and a new headgate. This created unimpeded fish passage for both adult and juvenile fish, while modernizing the irrigation



*The roughened channel created after the removal of the Beeson-Robison Dam*



*The new efficient irrigation headgate that replaced the Beeson-Robison Dam*

diversion works for the landowners. RRWC is now working with landowners on Salt Creek to remove four to seven more barriers to migrating fish. Supporting the RRWC is a great way to celebrate World Fish Migration Day and continue the great river restoration work that has been done in the Rogue Basin.

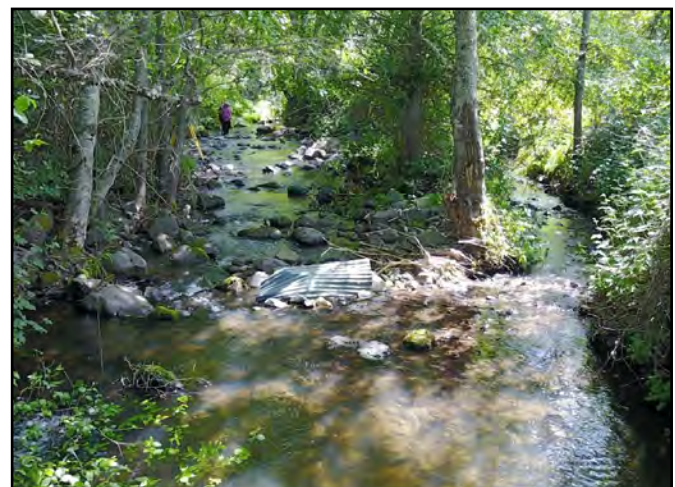
*Bob Hunter is retired staff attorney for WaterWatch and a Rogue River Watershed Council board member since last October. He has many years of dam removal experience and led the effort to remove Savage Rapids Dam.*



**RRWC PROJECT PREVIEW**

***Improving Access for Coho Salmon on Salt Creek***

Unblocked rivers and streams throughout our watershed are critical to maintaining migratory fish populations. Salt Creek is a substantial tributary to the upper reaches of the mainstem of Little Butte Creek near the community of Lake Creek. Spring fed, Salt Creek maintains cold water temperatures throughout the summer providing essential over-summering habitat for endangered Coho Salmon and steelhead. Salt Creek is also used for irrigation during the summer by multiple landowners who install seasonal push-up dams to divert flow. These push-up dams can impede passage for juvenile salmonids looking for a cool water refuge from the high summer stream temperatures in Little Butte Creek. Cool stream temperature (<64°F) is a critical environmental factor in salmonid growth and survival, so access to these tributaries is vital.



*Seasonal dam on Salt Creek*

Rogue River Watershed Council is working with multiple landowners on Salt Creek to eliminate their need for these push-up dams by installing irrigation system upgrades. Specifically, this summer we will be removing two push-up dams that are on the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife’s statewide priority list and replacing them with two new intake systems at each diversion site. We will also pipe approximately 500 feet of irrigation ditch. This project will improve access to 0.6 miles of stream and is located 1.6 miles upstream of the confluence with Little Butte Creek. This project represents a win-win situation where the landowner receives improvements to their land management system and the watershed council improves fish passage, which will improve populations of our native salmonids.



RRWC PROJECT PROFILE

# Rogue - World Fish Migration Festival & 5K Migratory Run

On April 7, Rogue River Watershed Council hosted the first-ever local celebration of World Fish Migration Day, a global event intended to create awareness of the importance of freshwater migratory fish and open rivers. Over 550 events in over 60 countries were held as part of the celebration this year; our inaugural event included an outreach fair, a 5K migratory run, and an evening presentation on Pacific Lamprey. Over twenty area agencies and organizations attended to staff booths and offer activities ranging from tying fishing flies to creating ceramic fish. Kids and adults had the opportunity to learn about climate change, habitat restoration, stream processes, the life cycle of salmon, fishing, and much more! And if education or hands-on learning wasn't enough to interest folks, we offered them a chance to partake in their own migratory run – downstream and upstream along Gilbert Creek, an important urban stream that RRWC had partnered with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Grants Pass School District to help restore.

The weather was wet and blustery (in early April ANYTHING is possible!), but we all had a great time . . . good enough, in fact, that we'll be offering our SECOND annual World Fish Migration Day next year!



Thank you to our 2018 Event Sponsors



- Compassionate Dentistry
- Dutch Bros
- Grants Pass Water Lab
- McMichael & Toledo, CPAs
- River Design Group
- Roe Motors
- Rogue Basin Partnership
- Rogue Valley Council of Governments
- Trout Unlimited

# Rogue and Umpqua Water Report

By Jonas Parker

A good number of the state's snow measurement sites don't have any snow left, which although it's getting closer to summer, is still unseasonably early. Fortunately, temperatures haven't been off the charts yet, which has helped slow the loss of what little snowpack we have left.

Forecasters are predicting more warm and more dry weather. Streamflows are predicted to be in bad shape come summer, especially in southern and eastern Oregon. Klamath and Baker counties have already been declared drought emergencies. If there is one glimmer of good news, reservoir storage is in a good spot owing to snowpack and controlled releases of water from the reservoirs. Northern Oregon outperforms the rest of the state in snowpack (Hood, Sandy, and the Lower Deschutes Basins are at 95 percent) while eastern Oregon lags last (the Owyhee Basin is at 5 percent).

All of Jackson, half of Douglas, and about a quarter of Josephine County remain in the first stage of drought, classified as "Abnormally Dry." Much of central Oregon remains in the next level, "Moderate Drought."

Now the specifics:

Snowpack for the Rogue and Umpqua dropped just a smidge to 53 percent of normal. The Middle Rogue (Grants Pass upstream to Ashland) is now doing the worst as far as snowpack is concerned at only 26% of average while the North Umpqua is doing the best at 84% of average.

Precipitation in April for the Rogue and Umpqua was 116 percent of average (yay!), bumping the average for the water year up to 79 percent of normal.

Reservoir storage capacity varies in our region, but on average is at 82 percent of normal. Hyatt Prairie Reservoir is currently the least full at 54% of average, while Fish Lake continues to do great at 109% of average.

Summer streamflow forecasts trend down and are now predicted to be at 63 percent of average. Water users and managers in the Applegate are being told to expect significantly reduced water supplies this summer.

As always, if you have any questions, go find a hydrologist!

*Jonas Parker is the district hydrologist for the US Bureau of Land Management based out of Medford.*

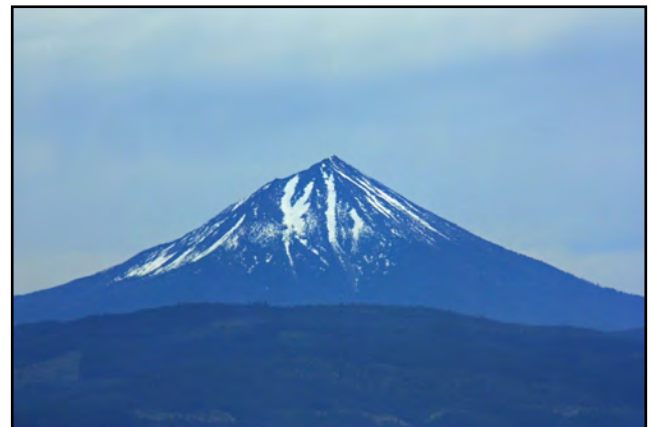


Photo credit: pnsdaddy.com

*The so-called "angel wings" or "diving eagle" appear on the west side of Mt. McLoughlin as the snow melts*

## OFF THE RESOURCE SHELF

### World Fish Migration Day

World Fish Migration Day has been celebrated globally every two years since 2014. To get a better idea of what it's all about, check out the following videos. You'll be enlightened, inspired, and entertained!

<https://bit.ly/2rBgOIJ>

<https://bit.ly/2Kgfn4y>

<https://bit.ly/2IfecjM>

And if you really want to get in the spirit of celebrating World Fish Migration Day all year round, grab one of our 2018 event t-shirts! These 4.3-ounce, 50/50 ring-spun combed cotton/poly shirts sport a Chinook Salmon exhorting, "Water You Waiting For!" Fun, bright, and comfortable, you'll be supporting RRWC and helping spread the word about the importance of our area's migratory fish every time you wear it! We have a few of the following sizes available for purchase for \$12 each: Youth small, medium, large; ladies' medium, large, x-large; men's large, x-large. Call Anna at 541-423-6158 to place your order!



## *OWEB Awards Three Grants to Rogue River Watershed Council*

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) recently announced grant awards for proposals submitted during their fall 2017 round of applications. In the southwest region, of which Rogue River Watershed Council is part, 12 organizations received over two million dollars to engage in restoration, monitoring, technical assistance, stakeholder engagement, and water acquisition projects. OWEB grants are highly competitive; all three projects submitted by Rogue River Watershed Council were funded for a total of over \$239,500 – two for on-the-ground restoration projects and one for technical assistance.

One of RRWC's funded restoration projects, the Salt Creek fish passage improvement project (see project preview on page three), will begin to restore access to seven miles of critical cold water refugia for Coho Salmon and other native fish. Salt Creek is seen as an important stream in our watershed as it is one of just a few major producers of Endangered Species Act-listed Coho Salmon in the Rogue Basin.

The other RRWC restoration project to receive funding in this go-round was the Little Butte Creek floodplain connectivity and side channel restoration project (previewed in the winter issue of *The Confluence*). This project seeks to improve water quality and enhance the quality and quantity of winter rearing habitat for juvenile salmonids by addressing four site-specific problems: 1) chronically eroding banks; 2) lack of floodplain and side channel connectivity; 3) channel simplification; and 4) degraded riparian forest conditions.

The technical assistance award is for a fish passage project on Ashland Creek. Funding will be used to help pay for design, engineering, and permitting work for removal of the Smith Meyer Roper diversion dam. This channel-spanning concrete dam is approximately 2.5 feet in height and impairs access to approximately two miles of valuable Coho Salmon and steelhead spawning and rearing habitat. The dam is also considered a near complete barrier to upstream migrating juveniles seeking cold water refuge in summer and high flow refuge in winter.

Funds for these grants come from the Oregon Lottery Fund, salmon license plate registration surcharges, and the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund.



### UNDER THE SURFACE

## *The Secret Wish of Dante DiVincenzo*

by Jay Doino

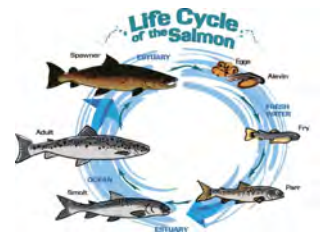
My grandfather used to say, “For every winner there’s a loser.” Though he wasn’t very nice, I suppose that’s still true. Take NCAA men’s basketball, for example. Villanova was 2018’s (decisive) winner. The rest were not. And this is not dissimilar to aquatic communities, (wait for it . . .) where winners are made every day, and thus, by my grandfather’s definition, so are losers.

To demonstrate, let’s examine Villanova sixth man (seriously?) guard Dante DiVincenzo. Kid can run the floor, shoot the lights out, clear boards and more. He’s so good in fact, he’s considering an early run at the NBA.

Now pretend Dante is a juvenile steelhead. I know he wants to be one. We’ll call him Slimy Dante. To win, Slimy Dante must find space (like creating a shot), find food (like rebounding), and avoid predators (like breaking a press). For every resource Slimy Dante consumes, he leaves less for others – like slimy, hungry, and displaced versions of the Kansas Jayhawks and Michigan Wolverines, for example.

Human Dante’s also really good at knowing when to move – when to break, cut, rotate. Human Dante also knows when to stay put and take a charge. Similarly, Slimy Dante must know when to migrate – be it short seasonal migrations for food, space, and suitable habitat or major migrations like heading to sea. If Slimy Dante waits too long he could be left stranded and starving. If he goes too soon, he could become quarry for bigger fish. Like those of the NBA.

So Dante, don’t go too soon.



From *Field Guide to the Pacific Salmon*,  
by Adopt-a-Stream



## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

## The Water Ouzel

By Karelia Ver Eecke

Out of the corner of my eye, I catch the flit of a dark, buzzing bird flying low over the water of Ashland Creek. I've caught the melodic babbling-brook song over the breeze. I pause, and search the riffles and tops of boulders for my favorite denizen of the water, the Water Ouzel.

The Water Ouzel (*Cinclus mexicanus*), also known as the American Dipper, is a small dark bird that lives a relatively secretive life in the western United States' clear fast-flowing mountain waters. Being closely related to the wren family, the ouzel is most easily recognized by its slender insect-picking beak, upright-angled tail, and erratic flitting and foraging behaviors.



Photo credit: National Park Service

The ouzel spends much of its time with its head underwater looking for its next meal. They feed primarily on aquatic insects, such as stonefly, mayfly, and caddisfly larvae. This unique ability is facilitated by the ouzel's transparent nictitating membrane – a protective longitudinally moving extra eyelid; an insect-eating wren-like beak; strong legs; long grasping toenails; and short powerful wings. While snorkeling for food, the ouzel creeps over cobble and gravel, searching for tasty morsels. When satisfied with its gleaning in an area, the ouzel flits upstream or downstream, landing on the occasional mid-stream boulder to sing and call. When just the right riffle has been found, the ouzel returns to foraging for food.

Similar to its invertebrate meals and scaled neighbor, the salmon, the ouzel's presence in a riverine corridor hints at water quality healthy enough to support a diverse ecosystem. As we often see in nature, no variable exists alone – the waters' health is the macroinvertebrates' health, the salmon's health, the birds' health, and our health.

*Karelia Ver Eecke is Education and Outreach Coordinator for the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District.*

## Looking Forward

**Editor's note:** *We have decided to move to a twice-yearly publishing schedule for The Confluence. As such, this is the last newsletter until our fall issue, which will be published in early November. RRWC Friends will continue to receive their monthly updates, and we will continue to post important news on our Facebook page and website. In the meantime, here is a rundown of some events happening over the next few months, in which you may be interested.*

### **Rogue River Watershed Council Board of Directors' Annual Fundraising Campaign** June - October

Help the board meet their goal by donating today! Donations can be made through the mail (89 Alder St., Central Point, OR 97502) or on our website at <http://www.rogueriverwc.org/get-involved/donate/>

### **Festival on the Rogue** June 9; Upper Rogue Regional Park, Shady Cove

Co-organized by Rogue River Watershed Council and Shady Cove community volunteers

A day-long event focused on the Upper Rogue's natural wonders and recreational opportunities

### **Jackson Soil & Water Conservation District's Annual Forest & Range Day Camp** July 16 - 20

Volunteers needed to help plan, organize, and implement! Teens needed to serve as youth counselors! Contact Karelia at 541.423.6182 or Donna at 541.423.6185

### **Bear Creek Fall Fest** September 22; Bear Creek Park, Medford; Co-organized and sponsored by RRWC

Formerly known as Kids & Creeks, this event aims to connect community members through hands-on activities and exhibits to local water resources and their stewardship

### **Celebrate the Rogue!** October 20; Inn at the Commons, Medford

Rogue River Watershed Council's second annual celebration gala!

An evening of good food, entertainment, and fun-, friend-, and fund-raising!

## Support Our Work!

### Make a Donation

All donations are greatly appreciated, put to good use, and are tax-deductible. Donate online at <http://www.rogue riverwc.org/get-involved/donate/>.

### Bottle Drop Redemption

Open a Bottle Drop account at an Oregon Redemption Center, drop off your cans and bottles, then transfer your donation to RRWC [online](#).

### Fred Meyers Rewards

Help RRWC earn donations by shopping with your Fred Meyer Rewards Card. Link your card to us at <https://www.fredmeyer.com/topic/community-rewards-4>. Search for us by name.

### AmazonSmile

Online shoppers can go to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com), click on your account and select RRWC as your charity of choice at no cost to you.

## More Photos from RRWC's World Fish Migration Day

