

Fall/Winter 2019

# The Confluence

Newsletter of the Rogue River Watershed Council

## *Another Success: 2019 Celebrate the Rogue!*

What started out as a relatively small, quiet celebration of Rogue River Watershed Council’s successes in the fall of 2017 has blossomed into a much larger and louder celebration for the organization. This year’s Celebrate the Rogue!, our third such event, included a silent auction, live bluegrass music, a fantastic dinner, some well-chosen words by our executive director, Brian Barr, and founding board member, Bob Jones, and a “paddle raise” that sent not one, but two, Coho Salmon up the river to spawn!

The “paddle raise,” something we initiated at last year’s event, has morphed into a pretty well-executed process of raising funds (and bidding paddles) to further RRWC’s watershed restoration efforts. With the help of PowerPoint maestro Craig Harper, RRWC’S Medford Water Commission board liaison, bidders could watch the Coho move up the river with each succeeding pledged donation. The goal was to move the salmon from the mouth of the Rogue all the way up to Sugarpine Creek, site of some of our recent restoration work, a trip of roughly 170 miles. It was a busy night for emcee, Michael Parker (Southern Oregon University biology professor), as there were numerous paddles raised for every donation level!

A huge thank you to our 14 sponsors, 62 businesses and individuals who donated auction items, 7 SOU student volunteers, Michael Parker, and the 130-plus guests/bidders who shared in our celebration!



Great bluegrass entertainers Rainy & the Rattlesnakes



Guests visiting with Jackson Co. Commissioner Bob Strosser



Guests mingling before dinner

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## The Confluence Fall/Winter 2019

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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

There sure are a lot of “things” that need to fall into place to make tangible improvements to watershed health. The kind of improvements that grab peoples’ attention. Results that bubble up during early morning discussions among anglers at The Rogue Fly Shop in Grants Pass (“It seems like I’m seeing more steelhead in the river this year.”) or between two families at Mattie Brown Park in Eagle Point (“It sure is great that the kids can finally play in Little Butte Creek.”).



Photo by Justin Clifton

Here at Rogue River Watershed Council, we are working hard at as many “things” as possible so that in 15 years, those conversations happen. We **focus** on stretches of streams that will make the biggest differences to water quality and native fish habitat. We **engage** landowner and agency partners to turn ideas into restoration projects. And we set about designing, securing the permits, and **fundraising** so that we can **build** those projects.

Finally, we **talk about our work and our partnerships** to folks throughout the region to draw attention to the incredible resources here in our home watershed and the opportunities to improve them over the future.

In the last month we made some giant strides on landowner engagement, fundraising, and talking about our work that I am very proud to share with you. Some of this progress is well-reflected in this newsletter (see our cover story about our Celebrate the Rogue!). Progress on landowner engagement is difficult to update in a newsletter but the staff here have done a wonderful job and I want to highlight that here.

Donna, John, Lance, and Randy White (Jackson SWCD) recently organized and participated in workshops that turned out 20 people, representing 14 properties in the South Fork Little Butte and Elk Creek watersheds. Numerous, contiguous creekside landowners expressed interest in working with us to develop streamside or instream habitat restoration projects that will lead to water temperature and habitat complexity improvements. This sort of landowner engagement is essential to our project development.

Keep your ears peeled for similar engagement if you happen to live along a creek in the Elk, Little Butte, upper Bear, or upper Grave Creek watersheds. We’d love to discuss opportunities to improve water quality and instream habitat with you!

## ...and from the Board Chair

Greetings from the RRWC board chair! I hope everyone enjoyed fall across the watershed as much as I did. In addition to giving us beautiful tree colors and incredible daytime temps, fall is the season when we host our annual Celebrate the Rogue! fundraising dinner to showcase the various projects and activities that the RRWC staff have been working on during the year. I’m always impressed by the variety of guests attending this event, including local lawmakers as well as industry partners who have provided expertise, materials, and equipment to enable us to plan and complete our various projects. It’s always gratifying to see the many items that so many businesses and private parties have graciously contributed to make the silent auction so appealing to guests of many different interests. So, thank you to our Celebrate the Rogue! guests and donors, and to the many others who have donated time and/or money to help support our organization and the restoration efforts we undertake each year!



## Thank you to our 2019 Celebrate the Rogue! event sponsors



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## Finding the Elusive Off-channel Habitat

By Tim Elder

On a beautiful fall day in late September, I found myself crawling on hands and knees following bear trails through blackberry brambles and wading through shallow pools that have been disconnected from the mainstem of Elk Creek since spring. I was on a mission to locate and map side-channel habitats that may be good candidates for future restoration sites.

Historically, streams and rivers are wily, dynamic systems that evolve and change through time. The meanderings of streams leave side channels that either conveyed water downstream long ago or that are only active when flows rise in the winter and spring. While these dry creek beds might not seem very impressive in August, when winter arrives these side-channel areas are essential for aquatic organisms, and salmon in particular. During the high-water flows of winter, water velocities can often overwhelm a juvenile fish's ability to swim and hold position in a stream. Fish that are overpowered by flows get "washed out" and are prematurely sent downstream. Side-channel habitats provide a vital refuge from high-water velocities in the main channel, enabling juvenile fish to maintain their position high in the watershed. Restoration activities that help to maintain and activate these side-channel areas during high flows increase the amount of winter rearing habitat that salmon (and other aquatic organisms) can use.



No water in this side channel during summer

Scrambling among the blackberries of Elk Creek confirmed modeling work that the Wild Salmon Center and Rogue River Watershed Council have been using to plan restoration activities for Coho Salmon in the Upper Rogue. With the locations of these habitats now mapped, we'll return this winter to examine the flow volumes needed to activate these areas and refine future restoration project development in Elk Creek.

*Tim Elder is a Southern Oregon native, now working as the Southwest Oregon Program Manager with the Wild Salmon Center.*

**RRWC PROJECT PREVIEW**

## ***Kitchen Creek Water Quality Improvement Project***

Rogue River Watershed Council is ready to begin the implementation phase of a riparian restoration project across three acres along Kitchen Creek in Ashland. RRWC received funding for the project from Blue Sky Habitat Fund, Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Mountain Meadows Association. We are working with Lomakatsi Restoration Project to implement the project.

Kitchen Creek enters Bear Creek near Mountain Meadows Community, a retirement community in Ashland that is dedicated to the pursuit of active retirement living. Recreation opportunities provided at the restoration site and adjoining private property include a trail system that weaves through natural and open space and a community garden.

Small tributary streams like Kitchen Creek are vital to wild steelhead and salmon recovery in the Rogue Basin as they provide cool water and important spawning and rearing habitat. This project represents a strong and unique collaboration between the retirement community, neighbors, and non-profit organizations working toward mutual goals—improving riparian habitat and water quality, as well as providing community involvement and volunteer opportunities during project planting and maintenance.



**RRWC PROJECT PROFILE**

## ***Aunt Caroline’s Park Riparian Restoration Project***

Two years ago, the City of Shady Cove contacted RRWC to help them restore the riparian vegetation along the south bank of Indian Creek in Aunt Caroline’s Park, a popular and beloved local gathering spot. Having requested and received funding from Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board’s Small Grant Program, RRWC began implementing the project this past August.

Actively eroding streambanks were addressed by mechanically reshaping them to a gentler slope, which will mitigate against the erosive power of high stream flows. Work continued in October, when over 30 fifth graders from the Shady Cove School partnered with three volunteers from Southern Oregon Fly Fishers and Shady Cove and RRWC staff to plant 60 riparian shrubs and 40 willow stakes at the park. The students worked in groups to plant the shrubs, backfill the holes, and place mulch around each plant. This turned out to be a great experience for the students, as they had a good time while learning and performing community service. Educational efforts will continue in the spring as the students will be doing some additional monitoring of the project.

A final component of the project will be an interpretive sign, which will be installed this winter. This sign will explain the benefits of a healthy riparian area, as well as describe the history of the park. The City hopes that in addition to restoring ecological health to the riparian corridor, the project will provide an opportunity to educate the community about the importance of riparian zones and the City’s new riparian ordinance.



Reshaping the slope to a gentler grade

Happy planters





RRWC PROJECT UPDATE

## *Smith-Myer-Roper Diversion Dam Removal*

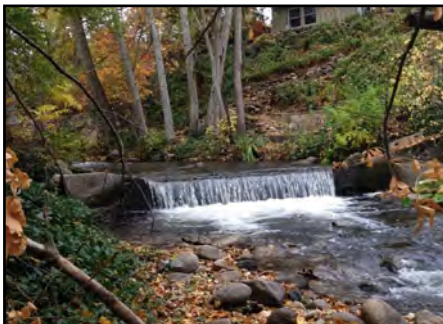
One of our best days in September had to be the removal of the Smith-Myer-Roper diversion dam. The dam, located on Ashland Creek, was a high-priority fish passage barrier that limited access to nearly two miles of spawning and rearing habitat for adult and juvenile migrating salmonids. Ashland Creek is fed by snowmelt from Mount Ashland, making it one of a few perennial tributaries to Bear Creek maintaining suitable water temperatures for year-round salmonid rearing. The diversion dam was developed to feed an irrigation ditch, which is still used by a few active water rights certificate holders.

The process of removing this barrier was a dramatically different operation from that of the 2017 Beeson-Robison dam removal procedure. The Smith-Myer-Roper dam was removed in a matter of minutes, with contractor Todd Marthoski of M&M Services artfully plucking the dam out of the creek with an excavator bucket all in one complete piece. The Beeson-Robison dam removal procedure took several hours, the excavator, and a jackhammer.

As in the Beeson project, we replaced the dam with an “engineered” stream channel and new irrigation intake structure. This new stream channel—technically referred to as a roughened channel—was built by partially burying large boulders with smaller boulders and streambed material (a mix of large and small cobbles, gravels, and fine materials), creating “veins” for water passage. The resulting channel is 95 feet long, has eight rock veins, and runs at a stream grade of six percent allowing for easy fish passage.

At the top of the new channel, boulders were strategically placed to encourage flows into a new concrete irrigation intake structure, allowing water users to continue to use their water rights. As you can see from the photo on the right below, this section of Ashland Creek now looks like a naturally occurring stream, which provides services for irrigators while also improving fish passage.

Between the Beeson-Robison and Smith-Myer-Roper projects, we’ve made over four miles of spawning and rearing habitat more accessible for salmon and steelhead.



Top left: Smith-Myer-Roper dam before removal; Bottom left: juvenile trout rescued during fish salvage prior to instream work; Right: engineered roughened channel created after dam removal



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

# Klamath Signal Crayfish

By Stewart Reid, PhD

Our native crayfish, or crawdad, is the Klamath signal crayfish. Adults are generally recognizable by their brick-red color and black cross bar just in front of the tail. They can live as long as nine years and grow to almost three inches—that’s just the carapace (body) and doesn’t include the claws or tail, both of which are good eating. In fact, crayfish are a favorite food of many animals. If you see scat full of crayfish parts by a stream it’s likely an otter.

Crayfish mate in the fall, and the female carries the eggs under her tail, protecting them all winter until they hatch in spring. Our crayfish do not dig burrows, unlike some non-native species. Instead, they hide out under rocks, roots, wood, and other debris in the stream, including old tires! They can even crawl out on land to go from one pool to the next. Often you’ll note their homes on the stream bottom where they’ve excavated the sand out from under a preferred rock to make a den. You may also see them out in the daytime searching for food, though they are more active at night. Crayfish will eat about anything they can grab with their claws, including algae, aquatic plants, insects, worms, fish eggs, and even small fish. They are also important scavengers, helping to clean the stream bottom.

Unfortunately, people sometimes carry crayfish around for fish bait. When they’re done with them, the crayfish usually get dumped in the nearest stream, often somewhere they don’t naturally occur. In fact, there is another signal crayfish from the Columbia Basin that has been widely introduced on the west coast and is invasive, having had negative impacts to local stream communities. However, our native brick-red Klamath species belongs right here—just don’t spread it around!

*Dr. Stewart Reid is an independent conservation biologist who lives on Bear Creek and works on fishes throughout the West and into Mexico. He is best known for his work on lampreys.*



Photo by Jason Jacks

OFF THE RESOURCE SHELF

## Article Review

Want a synopsis of this issue of *The Confluence* without reading it all? Here it is . . . the important words are all here, you just have to find them!

- |               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| allochthonous | invasive     |
| auction       | Kitchen      |
| celebrate     | Klamath      |
| channel       | landowners   |
| coho          | miles        |
| collaboration | park         |
| crawdad       | partnerships |
| crayfish      | removal      |
| donors        | reshaping    |
| dam           | riparian     |
| engagement    | roughened    |
| fundraising   | signal       |
| habitat       | volunteers   |
| introduced    | willows      |

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 A KAWURVWNDZIRI PARI AN  
 HLCDRSOOGMFFVP ZGDL FE  
 CAKEPNEPPNLLCJEHL GM  
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 VTUHDJXF TMNZLDCS USNA  
 OHYGAGVRYNHPDA ONAI EG  
 VXKUMLOVEPARSDLWSV NN  
 WNLOPDLL ORBPOWLI NF NE  
 FSARUAUOKBIYFAAAOEJI  
 APICGONLCHTUSRBGISRD  
 BIEVPETISHAADCOUTXPS  
 ZDDHANERSDTNIYRJ COHO  
 JIJZQQENBIUHKDAGUIDJ  
 KLEZPNRHNFGZOJTKAOJN  
 WJRF TISACQNKNINGABI  
 ETARBELECTOLAVOMERLH  
 CRAYFISHQRIOQLNUBZUA  
 PPHAZSOISGKKRXQASYEQ



## Changes to the RRWC Board...

The Rogue River Watershed Council established a new Southern Oregon University (SOU) student liaison position on its board of directors this fall and welcomed Crystal Nichols, a graduate student in the Environmental Education Program, as the new student liaison. Crystal's undergraduate work (at Ball State University in Indiana) focused on aquatic biology and fisheries, and a recent research internship at Vesper Meadows allowed her to study stream morphology, macroinvertebrate populations, and water quality in Dead Indian Creek, a tributary of South Fork Little Butte Creek.

With the addition of this liaison position, the RRWC board has three—the other two being with our primary partners, Medford Water Commission (MWC) and Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District (JSWCD). These liaison positions were created to help us engage more fully with our partners, enabling us to more fully carry out our mission. Craig Harper has been serving as our MWC liaison since taking on the role of Watershed Administrator for that agency. Stan Dean, who had served as the JSWCD liaison since the RRWC board was created, recently stepped down to devote more time to his position as chair of the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts' Advocacy Committee. Randy White, JSWCD manager, is filling in until a new liaison is appointed.

## ...and RRWC Staff

Alexis Larsen, our fish passage project manager, finished her tenure with us upon completion of the Smith-Myer-Roper dam removal. She relocated to Corvallis to take her dream job of coordinating a native seed program at the Institute for Applied Ecology in Corvallis. We will be filling this position in the near future.

RRWC added a new staff position to manage instream projects and work on the projects emanating from the Coho Action Plan currently in development. Lance Wyss assumed this position in late October. Much of his initial work will be centered around improving stream processes and habitat through large-wood placement and side-channel/floodplain reconnection in South Fork Little Butte Creek and Elk Creek.

Lance has been managing restoration projects since 2013, first with the Calapooia Watershed Council in the Willamette Valley, and most recently in the Rogue Valley for The Freshwater Trust. He received his bachelor's (in fisheries and wildlife science) and master's (in wildlife science) degrees from Oregon State University. Lance has a special affinity for Pacific lamprey and has experience both monitoring and painting them (Lance was the artist for our popular lamprey board)!

In his spare time, Lance enjoys running, hiking, bird watching, and trail building.



### UNDER THE SURFACE

## Entrapments of a Wandering Mind

by Jay Doino

Lately I've been thinking about trees. There're all different kinds. Big ones, little ones, and ones in between. Some lose their bark, some grow berries, and some even have flowers. But what I've really been thinking about is the ones that grow by creeks. They make it shady and cool on hot summer days. But sooner or later most of them lose their leaves. All their leaves. Ever notice that?

So then, I started wondering, what's losing leaves do for anything? Turns out, for creeks, it's not so bad for trees to lose their leaves in autumn. Around then, it's not too hot but streams are still thirsty after a long summer. And when the leaves fall, trees don't take as much water as they did before they fell and that lets streams flow a little better. So, there's that.

Then there's this: allochthonous material. That's what the leaves are. They're stuff from outside the creek that gets eaten by stuff inside the creek—the bugs, etcetera. It's food, man, nature's food. It's also habitat—stuff lives in those piles of leaves—for a while, anyway. Other stuff is allochthonous too, not just leaves going into creeks. It's pretty much anything nature-made that ends up in somewhere it didn't start out—from one ecosystem to another.

So sure seems like trees and stream figured out a way to work together. Might be there's something to learn from that.

*Jay Doino is a fisheries biologist who has been working in the Rogue Basin since 1999.*



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

## *Support Our Work!*

### **Make a Donation**

All donations are greatly appreciated, put to good use, and are tax-deductible. Donate online at <http://www.rogueriverwc.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 Celebrate the Rogue 2019!*

