



Spring &
Summer 2025

The Confluence

ROGUE RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

On the Ground

This summer, we're implementing five projects throughout the Watershed. Our restoration project managers are busy during this field season making sure everything is running smoothly.

We have two culvert removal projects along West Fork Trail Creek at River Mile 4.2 and Chicago Creek at River Mile 0.1. These undersized culverts will be replaced with appropriately-sized, open-bottom bridges. This helps eliminate the current velocity barrier in the winter and spring and the difficult passage at low water levels in the summer and fall. Interested in learning more? Check out our interview on Jefferson Public Radio titled ***"Salmon just want to spawn; can we let them?"***

Winter & Spring
Velocity Barrier



&



Summer & Fall
Low Water Barrier

Moving into the Wild & Scenic Elk Creek, we have recently completed implementing Phase 2 of our project at River Mile 5.6. This included riparian rehabilitation and large wood placement along an additional 1.4 miles of mainstem and side channel. Elk Creek is one of the focal watersheds identified in our Coho Strategic Action plan, and this project is essential to improving conditions for these threatened species to thrive. For more on this project, check out our recent interview with KDRV ***"Restoring the Rogue: Group works to restore local ecosystem to improve fish recovery."***

If that doesn't seem like enough, don't worry! We have another project heading into construction this summer at North Fork Little Butte Creek River Mile 2.9. Little Butte Creek is another focal watershed that is essential not only for Coho, but also for protecting our drinking water. This ecological restoration project involves large wood placement, noxious weed treatment, and nearly 5 miles of riparian fencing to help protect water quality.

Lastly, we have a large wood project this summer at West Fork Trail Creek River Mile 1.5 that will strategically place 60-70 logs along roughly 1 mile of creek. These will help to slow water during high flows, sort substrate, provide habitat, and connect water to the floodplain. It's safe to say we'll be busy out there!



Chronolog

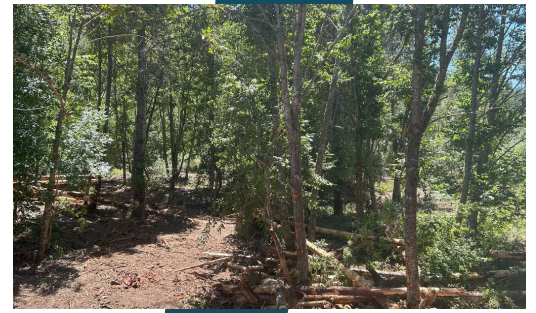
A community science initiative

Our staff recently set up several Chronolog stations along recently restored sites to create timelapses over the next *five* years! This community-powered science tool gives you the chance to help us monitor the site.

Two of the stations are located along the Bear Creek Greenway in Talent. One site shows evidence of beaver activity, and the other exhibits an excellent downstream view of several log structures. With your help, we can get a good visual of how our restoration actions affect water movement during high and low flows.

The third station is located along the Elk Creek trail (near our Elk Creek River Mile 5.6 project). Similarly, this timelapse will help us monitor large wood structures and site responses to variation in water flows.

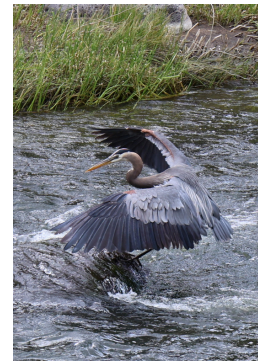
Each sign has instructions for you to help us monitor these sites through high flows, low flows, and everything in between. All you need is a phone and an email– no app needed! Explore our sites and more at chronolog.io/map.



Great Blue Heron

(Ardea herodias)

One of the most easily recognizable species along our rivers with its long neck, long legs, and vast wingspan is the beautiful Great Blue Heron. These wading birds forage for fish, amphibians, and insects in slow-moving rivers. Swooping down to perch on a rock poking out of the water, it patiently waits for its next catch. Although they lead a mostly solitary life, they nest in colonies (or *rookery*) of 500 or more individual nests in trees near the water's edge.



Throughout ancient history, the heron was often associated with the divine, and some believed it was a messenger between worlds. In Native American cultures, the heron was a symbol of good luck, and its presence was seen as an indicator of abundant fish and plentiful harvest. Standing motionless in preparation for striking its prey, it has an elegant and calming reputation that persists today. Many admire the beauty of the Great Blue Heron, and their graceful presence indicates a healthy habitat for all.

Advancing Forest and Community Resilience in the South Obenchain Fire Footprint

Ellie Zignego, Jackson Soil & Water Conservation District

Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District (JSWCD) is continuing its efforts to improve ecological health and reduce wildfire risk in areas affected by the 2020 South Obenchain Fire. By combining hands-on land improvements with local knowledge and involvement, these efforts are helping to create a stronger, more fire-adapted landscape and community.



reduced ladder fuels

With a focus on restoring riparian and upland habitat, supporting landowners in wildfire risk reduction, and promoting long-term forest resilience, JSWCD has been working across multiple project areas including the Reese Creek watershed and the Crowfoot Road corridor. These efforts are supported by local, state, and federal partners and reflect JSWCD's commitment to community-driven conservation.

Project Highlights to Date

- Over 750 acres of forest and woodland improved by clearing brush, thinning overcrowded trees, and reducing flammable materials
- More than 50 acres of streamside habitat restored with 6,000+ native plants
- 2 miles of stream protected by fencing to keep out livestock and allow plants to recover
- 35 wildfire risk home assessments completed, with customized reports to help landowners take action
- Growing landowner interest in wildfire preparedness and land stewardship



How does it work?

These projects are building resilience by improving both the land and the community's ability to handle future challenges. Clearing excess vegetation reduces the risk of fast moving wildfires and helps forests stay healthy during drought and pest outbreaks.

Restoring streams with native plants protects water quality, prevents erosion, and creates better habitat for wildlife. Working directly with landowners through assessments and planning gives people practical tools to protect their home and properties.

For more information about JSWCD's forestry projects and how to get involved, visit www.jswcd.org.

Nestled in the Brambles: Rethinking Restoration for Riparian Birds

Elva Manquera, *Klamath Bird Observatory*

In the shaded tangles along Oregon's creeks and rivers, a quiet drama is unfolding. Birds are nesting, ecosystems are shifting, and one team of biologists is asking whether a well-intentioned act of restoration might be inadvertently reshaping the story of riparian bird communities.

It started with a puzzle. Years ago, data from the Trinity River Project revealed that a surprising number of bird nests—about half of all nests for the riparian species being studied, and an astounding 90% of Yellow-breasted Chat nests—were tucked into the dense sprawl of non-native Himalayan blackberry. “That realization caught our attention,” says Dr. Sarah Rockwell, a research biologist with Klamath Bird Observatory. “We started wondering—what happens to the birds when we remove the blackberry?”

Clusters of restoration sites in Oregon's Rogue Valley—particularly at Cantrall Buckley Park and Hamilton Road with the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council—offered the perfect outdoor laboratory. With blackberry removal planned at one of the sites this coming winter, the opportunity to study before-and-after effects on birds was too good to pass up.

The Science of Shrub and Song

At its core, the project examines how blackberries—and their invasive nature—affect bird abundance, nesting success, and nestling health. The team uses spot-mapping to track territory density, nest-searching to monitor reproductive success, and nestling weight as a metric of health. For the first time at KBO, insect sampling has been added to assess shifts in food availability, and vegetation surveys document blackberry cover at each site. While birds frequently choose nest sites in blackberry, we don't know if it provides ample insect food resources as native plants, or if nestlings raised in blackberry-dominated areas are as healthy and robust.

Some field challenges require creative solutions. “You can't always see inside higher nests to count the eggs or chicks,” Sarah explains, “so we built a four-meter collapsible pole with a car mirror duct-taped to it. Low-tech, but effective.”



Josephine checking Black-headed Grosbeak nest; Ellie Outred

These methods mirror recent community science efforts. Since 2021, more than fifty local volunteers have assisted in surveying seven riparian sites between Ashland and Central Point for the Bear Creek Community Bird Survey.

The focus? A set of 13 indicator species that together reflect the ecological health of these riparian habitats.*

*[excerpt] read the full article on our website under *Stories!*



Black-headed Grosbeak, Lucas Rot

New Drinking Water Resource

Forest to Tap

Protection

Policy

Your Water

The Rogue Drinking Water Partnership (RDWP) has been working diligently to create a new website resource hub. One of the biggest challenges to water conservation (and many other natural resource related issues) is getting information out and available to the public. Our goal with this resource is to provide a breakdown of the main factors affecting our drinking water source, treatment, and sustainability.

Soon, you'll be able to dive in to four tabs of information, including where your water comes from, how to protect it, what regulates it, and an interactive map that allows you to zoom into your water source.

In the Rogue Valley, and across the country, we are seeing growing threats to water quality & quantity. RDWP is working collaboratively to address these issues, and local drinking water providers are continuing to work to provide clean, safe drinking water to all their patrons.

What if I don't have a drinking water provider?

We also have resources for protecting and testing your well. We compiled testing recommendations, local drinking water study information, and source water protection resources all in one place. Keep an eye out for the release later this summer!

LOCAL CONCERNS

Between March and June of 2011, nitrate testing and public education events were conducted within the Rogue Basin.

Elevated Nitrate Concentrations

47%

Wells that had elevated nitrate concentrations within Jackson County (>3 mg/L)

Well tested above the drinking water standard of 10 mg/L

8%



Where is it coming from?

In many cases, nitrate concentrations of 3 mg/L or lower in groundwater are the result of fertilizers and animal manure, while concentrations higher than 3 mg/L are often associated with anthropogenic contributions, such as septic system activity and irrigated agriculture.

Arsenic Detections

Wells with detectable arsenic levels

44%



well water study



rogueriverwc.org/what-we-do/rogue-drinking-water-partnership

Wildlife Wisdom

Looking for something fun to do this summer? Join Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, Jackson County Parks, and yours truly for our summer interpretive series. Every Saturday from July 12 - Aug 16 there will be an educational program with hands-on opportunities in Jackson County.

More details on each event can be found on our website (check the calendar). All ages are welcome, and we hope to see you there!

In collaboration with:



	July 12	Wiggly Water Explorers  10:00 AM - 11:30 AM Cantrall Buckley County Park Jacksonville	with 
	July 19	Under the Turtle Shell  10:00 AM - 11:30 AM Joseph Stewart State Recreation Area Prospect	
	July 26	Coats & Shoes: Animal Edition  10:00 AM - 11:30 AM Joseph Stewart State Recreation Area Prospect	
	Aug 2	Flying Mammals Unleashed:  the nocturnal life of bats 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM Joseph Stewart State Recreation Area Prospect	
	Aug 9	Tracking Tails: pursuit of the wolfpack  10:00 AM - 11:30 AM Joseph Stewart State Recreation Area Prospect	
	Aug 16	Survival of the fish-est  10:00 AM - 11:30 AM Joseph Stewart State Recreation Area Prospect	

Fresh Air Fridays

Not able to make it out to these programs? We also have a new resource hub on our website called *Fresh Air Fridays*. This was developed in partnership with Jackson County Soil and Water Conservation District, and it includes guides, resources, and ideas for getting kids outside and learning about the world around them. From cloud watching and exploring textures of nature to fun experiments and art activities, we have it all.

Activity Example:



Federal Funding

A note from Executive Director Brian Barr

Like a roller coaster, the first half of 2025 was exciting for the Rogue River Watershed Council. We experienced bouts of exhilaration mixed with bouts of anticipation, anxiousness, concern, and relief.

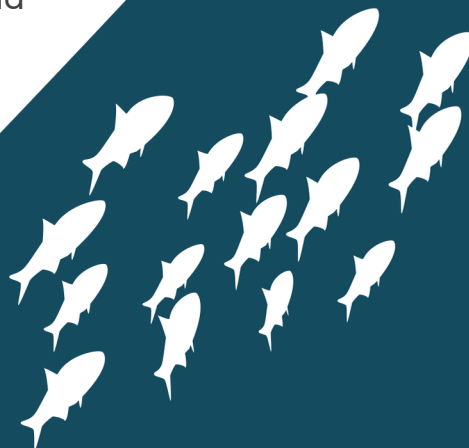
In February, we learned that eight of our federal grants were “frozen” and might be rescinded. Because we had just selected contractors to implement six projects, five of which relied on these grants, this development posed a huge challenge.

After consulting with contractors (and funders) and devising back-up schedules and funding plans, all of the federal grants “thawed” in time for us to pursue five restoration efforts. While we are excited that Elk, North Fork Little Butte, and Trail Creeks will undergo restoration June through August of 2025, we feel unease and concern for our 2026 through 2029 plans. Given what we have been hearing, the near future of grant funding is very uncertain and feels limited.

We’re doing what we typically do in daunting situations.

We’re thinking hard, exploring options, and tapping into our creativity. We may all need to accept a slower pace of project implementation while the organization spends more time planning for a future when funding is more abundant.

But we won’t take our eyes off of the prize: resilient stream and streamside habitats that support abundant native plant & wildlife populations, community benefits like high-quality drinking water, and unparalleled recreational opportunities.



Pacific Ocean

**Rogue
River**

Acknowledgments

Thank you to our guest authors for sharing their valuable insights and perspectives. All graphics are by RRWC staff unless noted otherwise.



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