

An aerial photograph of a river confluence, likely the Rogue River, surrounded by dense autumn foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and red. A large, vibrant red maple leaf is superimposed over the center of the image, partially covering the river and the surrounding trees. The leaf's veins are clearly visible, and it has a warm, glowing appearance. In the background, a residential neighborhood with houses and a paved road can be seen under a clear sky.

Fall &
Winter 2024

The Confluence

ROGUE RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

Coming to a River Near You...

Wondering what projects we'll be implementing this summer? Well, we have quite a few on deck...



On Chicago Creek (RM 0.1) and West Fork Trail Creek (RM 4.2), we are on the path to improve fish passage by replacing two undersized culverts. These culverts have a pronounced scour at the downstream "lip," making passage difficult, particularly for juvenile fish seeking cool water refuge during the summer. RRWC will work with partners to design, permit, construct, and monitor new road & stream crossings that do not impact fish movement.

Just downstream of the culvert replacement projects, we will be implementing an ecological restoration project on West Fork Trail Creek (RM 1.5) in collaboration with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Medford District. Our efforts will involve installing large wood structures in 10 to 15 locations along the creek to enhance habitat and improve stream processes.

Moving into the Elk Creek subbasin, we have partnered with the BLM to construct wildlife-friendly livestock fencing along Sugarpine and Hawk Creeks, protecting 1.5 miles of these creeks, aiding in the restoration of natural stream processes and the recovery of the native ecosystem.

Additionally, in the Elk Creek subbasin, we will be implementing Phase 2 of an ecological restoration project along Elk Creek at river mile 5.6. The project includes large wood placement at 23 strategic locations and 16.8 acres of riparian forest rehabilitation. The Wild & Scenic section of Elk Creek has the potential to be excellent habitat and spawning grounds for Coho Salmon and other native fish.

Lastly, we'll be working along North Fork Little Butte Creek at river miles 0.9 and 2.9. The Little Butte Creek watershed is a critical part of our drinking water source, and protecting it is a priority for RRWC and our partners. At river mile 0.9, we are upgrading an irrigation system that currently requires continuous assembly and maintenance of a seasonal slotted-board dam. At river mile 2.9, we will be implementing a project with large wood placement, riparian rehabilitation, and riparian fencing.



Slotted dam at NF Little Butte Creek RM 0.9

**Want to support these projects and more?
RSVP is now open for our Celebrate the
Rogue! fundraising event. Head to our
website to join us for this year's event.**



Project Update: Bear Creek River Mile 19

John Speece, Project Manager

We are seeing restoration actions at work in Bear Creek this winter! Last summer, we opened up historic side channels that had been blocked over time. This allows better connection to the floodplain during high-flow events, recharging groundwater resources. It also opens up habitat to juvenile salmon to hide and seek refuge during winter & spring.



Cascade Stream Solutions

What to watch

During the holiday period the region experienced a large rain event and associated high flows in the region's creeks and rivers, including Bear Creek. This was exciting as the side channels were activated and the floodplain was inundated. We're keeping an eye on the project, but you might notice some sediment and small debris moving around this winter and spring as the creek adjusts during high flow events. The large wood structures, however, won't be going anywhere. These are bolted and built to last and provide protection for the Greenway and habitat for wildlife.

To help stabilize the banks further, we are hosting several volunteer willow staking events this winter. Areas that are more susceptible to erosion have been carefully selected, and volunteers will be helping us hammer in willow stakes. Willows have extensive root systems that hold sediment and soil in place. They also provide habitat, filter pollutants, and provide shade (helping to cool the stream).

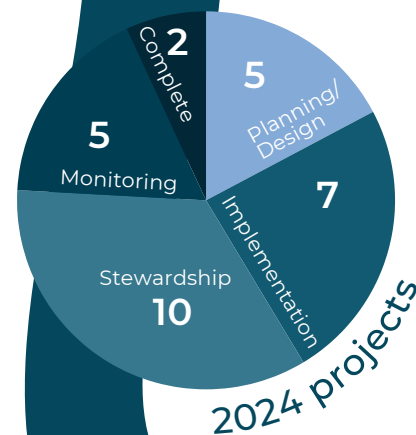
If you're walking by, you might also notice new interpretive signs next to the project footprint- we hope you like them!



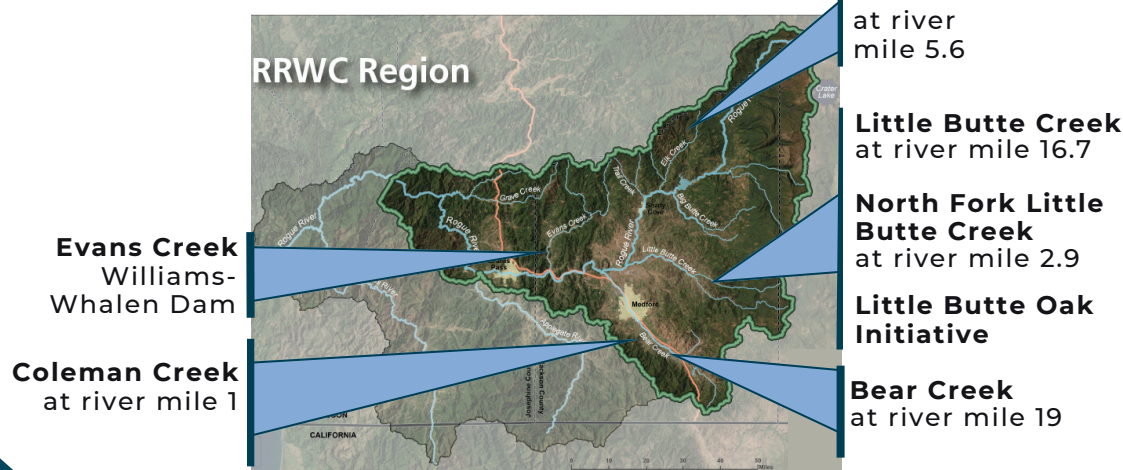
2024 Annual Report

Our 2024 Annual Report will be released soon! Here's a preview~

Our staff managed 29 projects throughout our service area while developing new projects and working to secure additional funding. We implemented restoration actions on Bear Creek, Coleman Creek, Elk Creek, Evans Creek, and Little Butte Creek. Our work continues to improve fish passage, mitigate the effects of humans and climate change, and promote more resilient ecosystems that can support diverse wildlife species.



2024 Implementation Sites



American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)



For millennia, beavers have been building the living conditions that native fish and wildlife require. Beaver benefits are not restricted to dams alone: their bank tunnels shelter young fish; native turtles bask on their lodges; and migratory birds nest in the shrub materials they leave behind.

Project Beaver is working to assist landowners in the Rogue and Umpqua Basins, in partnership with US Fish & Wildlife Service, by implementing coexistence solutions for living with beaver neighbors. The “Beaver Believer” bill was signed into law in July of 2023 and removed the “predator animal” designation that led to the unrestricted killing of beavers. A new bill was introduced in 2024 to create an ODFW grant program that focuses on beaver-benefitting projects.

Northwestern Pond Turtle

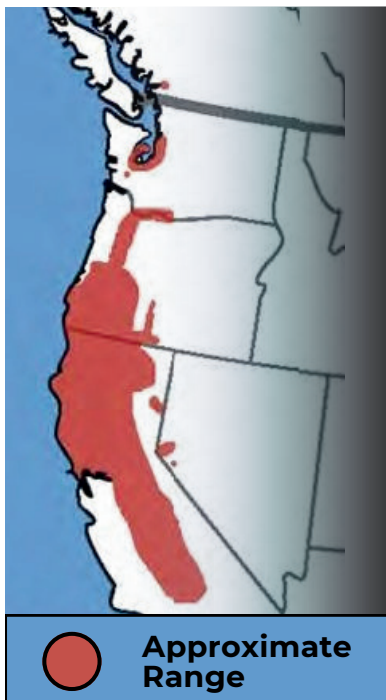
(*Actinemys marmorata*)

River restoration benefits more than just fish, even though sometimes that's what we get excited about at the Watershed Council. Amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals– they all benefit from clean water and safe habitat. Let's take the Northwest Pond Turtle, for example. This reptile is federally listed as a *Species of Concern*. This species is under threat from habitat loss, loss of nesting sites, and road mortality.



As omnivores, their diets include invertebrates, tadpoles, frog eggs, leeches, fish, algae, and cattail roots (to name a few).

It takes 10-15 years for females and 8-12 years for male pond turtles to mature. Mating takes place in the spring and sometimes in the fall.



In Oregon, this species is found predominantly west of the Cascades, but there are populations within Rogue River watersheds, including Elk Creek. They typically look for slow moving water with ample emergent vegetation for cover and nesting. Logs and rocks instream also provide protection from predators and relief from fast currents. You may also see them basking in the sunlight- sometimes they even stack on top of each other to enjoy the sun's rays and conserve warmth. Our projects improve turtle habitat as they provide additional structure instream and increase floodplain connection where nesting occurs.

Interested in learning more? Check out our recent video series featuring Dr. Michael Parker of Southern Oregon University to see these critters in action.

<https://www.rogueriverwc.org/get-involved/ctr>

Flow Restoration

Julie Cymore & Greg Fitz, Trout Unlimited

Water supply and allocation are crucial issues facing communities and watersheds. These challenges have led to a water sharing collaboration between Trout Unlimited (TU) and the Butte Creek Mill in Eagle Point. Low streamflow is the primary limiting factor for fish growth and survival in the Rogue Basin. Recognizing this need led to the Mill and TU working together on a project to restore streamflow in 12 miles of Little Butte Creek, an important tributary of the Rogue River. The transfer of a portion of the water right instream for fish permanently protects critical flows for salmon and steelhead while ensuring water is available for the historic Mill's unique water-powered grist-mill operation. It is the largest water right transaction of its kind in Oregon to date.

Chrysten Rivard, TU's Oregon Director, secured funding from Oregon Water Resources Department, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Medford Water Commission for the purchase and transfer of the water right. *"Across Oregon, like many places in the*



west, we are seeing reduced snowpack each winter and less rain during the summer. In times of water scarcity, trust and collaboration among stakeholders is critical. Trout Unlimited staff members live and work in these watersheds and are providing a boots-on-the-ground commitment to building win-win situations for rivers, struggling fish populations, and the communities and people that depend on both," she explained. In the Rogue, Trout Unlimited focuses on building local partnerships with landowners to conserve water and restore streamflow for native fish such as agricultural irrigation efficiency and piping projects.

Exhibit Project

Rogue River Watershed Council is working with Trout Unlimited and Butte Creek Mill Foundation to develop new interpretive exhibits at the Mill. The partners want to hear what YOU want to see in this historic, community stronghold along Little Butte Creek. Check our website homepage (or the Mill's) this spring for updates on this project and ways you can provide input on this exciting project.



A Future in Regional Stormwater Facilities

Ben Poaster, Rogue Valley Sewer Services

In undeveloped areas, light to moderate precipitation typically soaks into the ground. However, as we add buildings, parking lots, and roads, that water has fewer places to soak in and the resulting runoff is known as stormwater. In the Rogue Valley, stormwater amounts to over 20 billion gallons per year - it flows over our streets and picks up pollutants from our yards, cars, pets, and trash, then heads into the storm drain and directly into our creeks – untreated.

Rogue Valley Sewer Services' (RVSS) mission is to protect and preserve public health, quality of life, and economic vitality in our community. Bear Creek is a major area of concern, it only takes a cursory look at the 28-mile course the creek forges from Ashland to the Rogue River to see the reality of the impact an urban area can have on water quality. That is water we hunt and fish in, we enjoy through recreation, and we drink from.

While there is no treatment plant for our stormwater, we can mitigate many of the problems that come with urban development and expansion. RVSS supports and implements green infrastructure low-impact development strategies (LID) that minimize impervious areas and use Best Management Practices (BMPs) to both treat stormwater and control peak flows from larger storms. In the realm of LID, Regional Stormwater Facilities (SWFs) are an indispensable BMP in managing stormwater, especially in areas with historic development where stormwater isn't treated on site. These are larger-scale facilities that manage flooding, improve water quality, and increase cost-efficiency when compared to their smaller, privatized counterparts.

As we look forward, RVSS is strengthening our investment in Regional SWFs. This last year, we worked with property owners and partners to install two new regional facilities in the area that are able to fully retain and infiltrate stormwater from the vast majority of our storms. These facilities also satisfy all stormwater management requirements for their entire drainage basins.



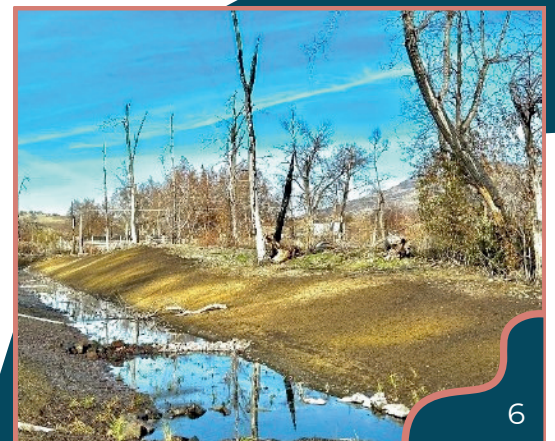
Glenwood Regional SWF

In response to the destruction wrought by the Almeda Fire, RVSS worked with DEQ to waive some water quality requirements for the rebuilding of the area. To balance this, RVSS partnered with Jackson County and ODOT to design and build the Glenwood Regional SWF. Located between East Glenwood Rd and the Greenway, this will provide stormwater management not only for Hwy 99 improvements, but for the entire 173-acre drainage basin in the city of Phoenix. The project is currently under

construction and is expected to be completed in 2025.

Cummins Regional SWF

Located on land which was donated to RVSS just east of the Cummins parking lot in the City of Talent, this facility was completed in November 2024. The Vegetated Retention SWF provides retention and detention for the whole 50-acre drainage basin, significantly improving water quality for large swaths of previously untreated runoff. This facility has, and will continue, to alleviate barriers to development and redevelopment efforts in areas burned by the Almeda Fire.



Coho Strategic Action Plan

Brian Barr, *Executive Director Rogue River Watershed Council*

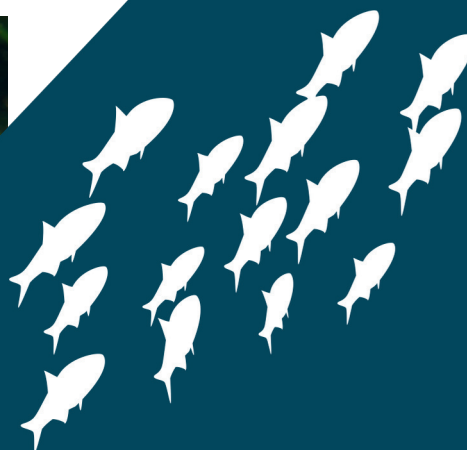
In the last edition of *The Confluence*, Dr. Tim Elder from the Wild Salmon Center described the importance of partners working together to deliver better ecological outcomes. This is the very reason that the Rogue River Watershed Council and our colleagues have developed the Upper Rogue Coho Strategic Action Plan (SAP). The plan, set to be released this Spring, describes those “better ecological outcomes” for the Upper Rogue and lays out a series of strategies and actions designed to achieve them by 2049.

The Upper Rogue Coho Partners have outlined four goals:

- ① enhance more stream miles that provide cool water in the summers;
- ② remove fish passage barriers to improve the connection to and among these cool stream segments;
- ③ connect streams to floodplains and side channels to help increase safe refuge areas for Coho during high flow events; and
- ④ sustain restoration with locally contributions to complement grants.

Over the first eight years of the plan, we’ve identified 122 actions in five focal watersheds (Evans, Little Butte, Trail, Elk, and Big Butte Creeks). The estimated price tag: \$38,881,000. We have our work cut out for us.

We are looking forward to leaning into the SAP. We need your continued interest and support as the Partners’ collective efforts swell and begin to restore streams and streamside forests so that they are resilient to longer droughts, warmer summer temperatures, and larger winter floods.



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.

 **ROGUE
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Watershed Council

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