

SHS students repair Whychus riparian area

By Jim Anderson
Correspondent

“I think it’s a good way to give back to the ecosystem that provides so much for us, and to study our environment and learn how it changes,” said Lauren Wattenburg, Sisters High School (SHS) junior, reflecting on her time helping to replant the riparian zone on the banks of Whychus Creek.

Last Tuesday afternoon, 20 juniors from Glenn Herron’s SHS science and Interdisciplinary Environmental Expedition (IEE) class arrived by school bus at the creek to help repair its banks.

IEE is composed of a community of learners working together to gain a balanced, in-depth understanding of the world around them. Using an integrated approach, students are provided with the educational opportunity to study and learn about the natural environment through a hands-on format.

Plenty of hands-on work is needed along Whychus Creek.

Years of flood damage and historical water usage had left Whychus in less-than-desirable condition to maintain fish populations. USFS Sisters District fish biologist Mike Riehle is charged with the responsibility to correct those conditions and make things right.

However, even with Riehle’s wide experience as a biologist it would have been impossible for him to take on such a project by himself. With the help of the Upper Deschutes Watershed

Council (UDWC), and leaders like education director Kolleen Yake, Deschutes County Juvenile Community Justice participants, Sisters High School IEE students, Children’s Forest volunteers, and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), he took it on — and the job he’s doing is looking good.

“Yeah...” Riehle said, while giving out willow, alder, cottonwood and spirea seedlings to the IEE students, “sometimes I feel more like a gardener these days than a fish biologist.”

Before handing out the seedlings, both Riehle and Yake explained to the students how important is the work they’re doing to reconstruct the side channels the Forest Service created in a recent project. Those side channels will keep the creek from running amok downstream, and destroying the hundreds of riffles, log structures and riparian habitat necessary for healthy fish habitat.

Each year in fall, Xerces Society biologists come over from Portland to conduct an inventory of the invertebrate population in Whychus Creek (with the irreplaceable help of local volunteers). They are finding more diversified invertebrates that indicate a healthy ecosystem. Those invertebrates are vital as food for the introduced salmonids that will make the long voyage to the sea and return to breed.

It took most of the afternoon for the IEE students to plant a variety of hardy trees and shrubs along shoreline of the creek.



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON
Junior Emily Skalda (left); Kolleen Yake, UDWC; SHS teacher Glenn Herron; and junior Johanna Geisen (front) planted alders on Whychus Creek.

About an hour before returning to the school there was time to conduct another facet of the IEE program. Students separate, one person will drift off to sit under a pine or cottonwood, while others, in twos and threes, will go off and sit down next to Whychus to write reflective thoughts and poems about their day.

Yake, who has worked with over 3,000 students in watershed restoration projects, knows this time is as important to the individual students as the restoration is to the creek.

“What the students develop during this period will ultimately bring about a sense of place, and the desire to become life-long stewards of Whychus,” she said.

In the spring, a select group of students will return to the creek for another IEE experience aimed at developing an even deeper understanding of the resources they have been working with, to create music, art and poetry that sings of what they have learned and what’s in their hearts.

BIKE PARK: Additional phases will be more complicated

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plans and decided that the park could be built in phases, Hughes reported.

Because of donations from the community and the Central Oregon Trails Alliance (COTA), resources were available to construct the pump track portion of the park as Phase 1. Other phases of the park, including the skill features, will be much more time-consuming and costly to construct.

On Sunday, October 18, a team of local volunteers, spearheaded by Joel Palanuk from COTA and Paul Lissette from Dirt Mechanics, shaped and formed the donated dirt the committee has been gathering into an exciting new small pump track appropriate for kids and adults alike. Once the dirt was roughly shaped out, they packed it down the fun way — by riding it. Casey Meudt from Blazin Saddles ran back to his shop and grabbed a few fat tire bikes and let people ride them around to help pack the dirt.

“The pump track is part of a much bigger park we have planned, but it’s great to get something done so that the kids can enjoy it before winter hits,” said Palanuk.

For more information or to donate to the project, contact Hughes at SPRD, 541-549-2091.

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