

## WHYCHUS: Project will restore habitat and bridge

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vehicles or folks on foot from tangling with some of the massive heavy equipment rumbling through the forest hauling and pushing dirt and gravel and picking up and emplacing logs.

The closure, which has been in place since June, will end as soon as the bridge is completed, according to fish biologist Mike Riehle. That is expected to happen in late September.

The creek naturally wants to fan out in this area upstream of Pine Meadow Ranch, where a concrete irrigation diversion was removed last spring. The restoration work assists and enhances a network of braided channels. Riehle and Mathias Perle of the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council told *The Nugget* that the project covers 1-1/4 mile

of "valley length." With that comes three miles of perennial creek channel and five to six miles of seasonal channels that the water flows into during the winter.

Some of the heavy work involves filling in channels that were scoured many feet deep when the creek was confined. That involves some 40,000 cubic yards of gravel and a whole bunch of fill dirt.

Robinson & Owen Heavy Construction, who won the contract for the project, has eight personnel on site, operating two excavators, a bulldozer, several huge off-highway dump trucks and a water truck.

Marc Rickabaugh, who was out supervising on the job last week, said the work is fun. The operators don't have to deal with vehicle traffic and get to do work that they don't ordinarily do.

"These are good operators," he said.

They have to be to stay "light on the land" — to the degree that's possible with multi-ton equipment. And

they are maneuvering around trees and on very uneven surfaces.

"It's definitely not normal construction work," Riehle said. "You have to think differently."

One excavator was at work last week picking up logs that had been cut during the initial phase of the project and depositing them into the stream channel, following hand signals from hydrologist Cari Press.

Her job is about engineering good, natural channels.

"I look at it more in (terms of) channel function," Press said. "The purpose of all our wood structures is to dissipate stream energy; to slow it down."

That has a beneficial effect for fish, Riehle explained, as the excavator operator swung the bucket of his rig into the butt end of a log to seat it amid a tangle of other logs.

"It splits the flow and creates gravel disposition," he said.

When the creek floods, it



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

A bulldozer fills in a scoured-out ditch during Whychus Creek restoration.

scours out areas around such obstructions.

"When the flood recedes, that's a nice pool," Riehle said.

And all of that creates good habitat for fish. The ultimate goal is to see Whychus become rearing habitat for young fish. And, perhaps we will see the return of steelhead runs.

It took a determined effort to begin to return the creek to a more natural state, and

it took partnerships. Those partnerships include the Forest Service; Deschutes River Conservancy; the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council; the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs; PGE; the Deschutes Land Trust; and a variety of private landowners, all of whom have worked separately and in concert to restore these waters.

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