

# Forest Service fish biologist to speak in Sisters next week

By Craig F. Eisenbeis  
Correspondent

In the latest installment of its continuing quarterly speaker series, next week the Sisters Trails Alliance (STA) will host a presentation by Michael Riehle, the Forest Service district fisheries biologist in Sisters, who will be speaking on the restoration of salmon and steelhead habitat in Whychus Creek.

STA board member Bjarne Holm is the coordinator for STA's speaker series and invited Riehle to address the STA forum. Holm has a strong personal interest in the rehabilitation of Whychus Creek and the healthy restoration of fish populations.

Holm said that Riehle's "presentation will focus on his work as the team leader on the Whychus Floodplain Restoration and Dam Removal Project, which is a multi-year project to restore fish passage and flood channel connectivity on Whychus Creek."

Holm recounted how, following a disastrous 1964 flood, "Whychus Creek was tamed and controlled to minimize future flood damage by trenching and straightening the creek." That action, he said, brought a different kind of disaster to the stream's fish populations, since the flood prevention efforts, in turn, destroyed wetland areas and fish and wildlife habitat.

Riehle explains that the stream channel changes intended to control flooding and facilitate irrigation diversion "closed off various channels that historically

helped to spread out floodwaters and reduce channel erosion. Those multiple channels had provided habitat for young salmon and trout to escape the high flows. Those [eliminated] channels had supported a variety of riparian plants that are adapted to resist the high flows, while providing shade and habitat for many species of wildlife and fish."

Holm pointed out how current attitudes about the environment are changing.

"In recent years," he said, "a reawakening has taken place regarding the need to restore the natural health and functionality of the environment. Whychus Creek now once more flows the year around, dams have been removed, and natural stream channels and nearby riparian areas are being restored."

Holm cites Riehle's work as project team leader as a critical contribution to the success of the creek's restoration.

"On a regional basis he has been working with various agencies, irrigators and Portland General Electric to restore habitat for bull trout, chinook salmon and steelhead to the Upper Deschutes River Watershed," Holm said.

Riehle's presentation is

free and open to the public, and he will be sharing with the audience the important work that is being done right here at the edge of town. "The goal of the Whychus Creek Floodplain Restoration and Dam Removal Project is to restore fish passage and floodplain habitat to Whychus Creek," he explained.

"This multiyear project was just completed this fall," Riehle said. "With the removal of an irrigation dam, this project opens 13 miles of Whychus Creek to migrating salmon and steelhead. We thinned nearby stands of ponderosa pine and used the trees to build log jams and habitat for young fish.

"In the next two years we will be planting up to 45,000 riparian plants to restore the stream banks and shade along Whychus Creek. This project takes a big step in restoring a complex riverine environment along Whychus Creek that wildlife, fish and people can enjoy just outside of town."

Holm emphasized the importance of the project to STA and the people of Sisters. "The Sisters Trails Alliance maintains about 100 miles of trails in the Sisters area. One of those trails is the Whychus Creek Trail ... starting four

miles south along Elm Street from Sisters. The Whychus Creek Trail parallels the creek for about three miles... Everyone is excited about the prospect of seeing the reappearance of Chinook salmon and steelhead in Whychus Creek and how far upstream they and other species will be able to reclaim the habitat."

Riehle has been working in fish habitat and watershed restoration with the U.S. Forest Service for over 26 years. In addition to this current project, he has worked on various fish habitat projects such as Metolius Fish Habitat Restoration, Jack Creek Fish Passage, Trout Creek Wetland Restoration, and Three Sisters Irrigation District Fish Passage Project.

He also serves as the U.S. Forest Service representative on the Interagency Fish Committee that reviews implementation of the Federal hydropower license for Pelton and Round Butte dams on the Deschutes River.

Next week's program is the seventh in STA's quarterly series of free public presentations designed to promote



PHOTO PROVIDED

Mike Riehle will speak next week at STA meeting.

outdoor public recreation and education in Sisters Country.

The presentation will be held on Thursday, October 22, in the Sisters-Camp Sherman Fire Station Community Hall in downtown Sisters at 355 S. Elm St. Doors will open at 6 p.m., and the formal program will begin at 7 p.m. The program is free and open to the public. Snacks and refreshments will be provided.

For more information contact Ann Marland, STA's community outreach director, at 541-549-7006 or visit [www.sisterstrails.com](http://www.sisterstrails.com).

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