

Restoring Indian Ford meadow

By Jim Anderson
Correspondent

Historically, Indian Ford Meadow northeast of Sisters was overgrazed. Grazing removed native grasses and riparian shrubs, causing an increase in canary reed grass and the sheep-borne cheat grass. Over-allocation of Indian Ford for irrigation also put a strain to native habitat and riparian meadow conditions.

In January 2016, the Oregon Department of Agriculture identified Indian Ford Creek as an impaired watershed according to (OAR) 603-095-3040. These regulations provided guidance to landowners to improve surface and groundwater quality to:

- Exclude livestock or cropping to allow streamside vegetation to establish and grow.
- Plant streamside vegetation appropriate to the site.
- Properly store or export manure from the site.
- Apply manure to crop or pastures at agronomic rates.
- Feed animals and store manure at locations safely away from the stream.
- Don't over-graze.
- Provide adequate runoff control from confinement areas.

Through the work with the Deschutes Soil & Water Conservancy District (DSWCD) and watershed specialist Dr. Michael L. Hughes of Oregon Technological Institute, a plan was formulated to bring Indian Ford meadow and the creek back to

life.

In November of 2016, young people attached to the Oregon National Guard Youth Challenge Program (ONGYCP), with oversight of DSWCD put Dr. Hughes' plan into action, spending a great deal of time and energy planting hundreds of willow and other riparian grasses and shrubs along the banks of Indian Ford Creek and meadow.

The positive attitude and eagerness of the ONGYCP students showed how they felt about what they were doing — conserving water and improving habitat conditions. Private landowners also got involved with removing invaders along the creek and were mostly happy to see the planting happen.

The list of riparian plants put in originally represents what is needed to put the meadow and creek back the way it was before the heavy hand of man almost killed them off. Ponderosa pine, Pacific willow, alder, dogwood, aspen, wild rose, snowberry, elderberry, golden currant, wax currant, and Douglas spiraea are the species planted originally.

Phase I was enacted in 2016 with the initial planting of willows, finishing with planting of other native species. Fifty percent of the original plantings of 2016 were protected from deer and elk grazing by cages the Guard students made to surround the plantings.

Other conservation efforts, such as illegal dam and culvert

removal, restored the natural flow of the creek. The cadets also removed reed canary grass and cheat, and planted bundles of native willows in the ditches. All concerned hoped this would bring the creek's temperature down to normal as the native riparian plants grew and created shade.

Everything looked good the following spring as the riparian plants took root and began to thrive. However, there is a natural mortality to such projects; deer browsing and lack of moisture, along with competition of reed canary grass has begun to choke off many of the 2016 plantings.

The Oregon Water Enhancement Board (WEB), DSWCD and other state agencies made several attempts to help the new native riparian plants gain a footing, but soil conditions kept deteriorating and alien grasses continued to gain more footing over time.

Phase II started in the summer of 2018 with preparation for additional planting and spot-spraying of the reed



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

Jan Roofner guiding Libby Stahancyk, operating post-hole digger, where another willow will be planted in Indian Ford Meadow riparian habitat.

canary grass. The answer to saving the restoration project came in the form of an OWEB/ODA grant which was enough to hire Libby Stahancyk, the owner and operator of a natural-resource consulting firm, to enhance the original restoration work of 2016 and 2017.

DSWCD has a strong, historical relationship with private landowners in the Indian Ford Creek watershed.

"We are encouraged by the participation we received from landowners and their efforts to

maintain this relationship," said Todd Peplin, DSWCD planner/technician. "We hope to continue working with the landowners and our state and federal partners to further coordinate conservation effort in the Indian Ford watershed."

It is hoped, with the replacement of the original plants that died and with future irrigation provided by snow and runoff, there will be enough water to restore Indian Ford Creek and Meadow to its original health and beauty.

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