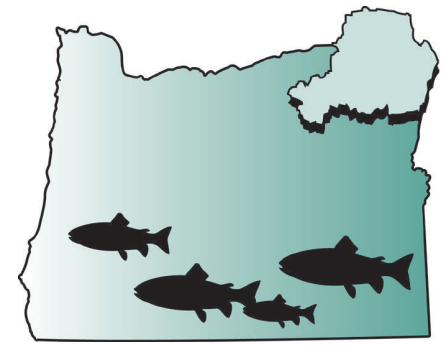


# RIPPLES IN THE GRANDE RONDE



SUMMER  
FALL 2019

RIVERS UNITING NEIGHBORS · NEWS FROM THE GRANDE RONDE MODEL WATERSHED

## A Day to Remember



by Tim Bailey, *Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife*

Last spring, I experienced one of those days in the career of a fishery biologist that will forever stand out among the thousands of other days I have spent in the field.

If you were to ask 100 fishery biologists why they chose this career, most probably would relate a desire to work in the natural environment and a fascination with creatures that live in water. In addition, you likely would find that days afield are treasured and that some days or moments afield are truly spiritual, per the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of the word as “of, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit.” I recall a time on the upper Minam River watching a pair of Chinook salmon spawn as one of those spiritual moments, even though I had watched salmon spawn hundreds of times. Something about that day was special, and it truly was a

privilege to just be there, thinking of the journey from egg to spawning and the opportunity to witness the beginning of yet another generation of Minam River Chinook.

June 28, 2019, was another one of those days that meant more than simply completing a task. My partner, Winston Morton, and I found evidence that steelhead had spawned in upper Beaver Creek (a Grande Ronde River tributary) after having been blocked from accessing this habitat for more than 100 years. The blockage was removed in 2017 when the City of La Grande constructed a fishway over the dam that forms Beaver Reservoir (see “Reconnecting the Habitat Dots” in the Summer 2017 issue of *Ripples*). What made this day even more meaningful is that I began the survey feeling pessimistic about what we would find. It was not that there was a flaw in the fish passage project that had made this survey possible, but I was concerned that steelhead returns to the Columbia River Basin this year had been quite low. We already had completed a number of surveys on other streams where we found no redds (nests where salmon/steelhead deposit their eggs), and on the streams where

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The Beaver Creek fishway allows access for steelhead, which were found spawning in Beaver Creek above the reservoir. These spawning grounds were previously inaccessible for more than 100 years (courtesy of Winston Morton).