

TRIBAL MEMBER NEWS



PRIME HABITAT - Siletz Tribal Natural Resources Manager Mike Kennedy points out prime marbled murrelet nesting habitat at Arnold Creek near the Alsea River. The Tribe acquired the land as part of the New Carissa oil spill settlement.



Photos by Brent Merrill

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conservation organization or one of the Trustee Tribes managed the property. The kicker was that whoever managed the land had to be willing to pay the property taxes.

At this point, the Siletz Tribal Council tasked the Tribe's Natural Resources Department, Planning Department and Cultural staff to collectively put together a proposal for the Tribe to own and manage the land.

"The Trustees reviewed the Tribe's proposal, along with those submitted by two national conservation organizations, and eventually selected the Siletz Tribe to receive and manage the lands for the benefit of marbled murrelets," said Kennedy.

"The original proposal called for the Tribe to manage 3,851 acres in two adjoining parcels located along portions of Cedar Creek and Reed Creek," said Kennedy. Those locations are seven miles north of Siletz.

This block of land, now known as the Reed Creek parcel, was transferred to the Tribe on July 20, 2007.

According to Kennedy, this transfer of land came at no expense to the Tribe.

Kennedy said another parcel of land known as the Arnold Creek parcel was supposed to go to the U.S. Forest Service.

That parcel was 412 acres surrounded by U.S. Forest Service land and is located six miles east of Waldport.

The Forest Service changed its direction on managing the land and the Tribe was contacted about taking over ownership and management of that parcel as well. The Tribal Council again said it was interested and the transfer is now in process.

Kennedy said the transfer of the Arnold Creek parcel could be complete by the end of 2008.

Both properties come with a legally binding conservation easement in favor of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"The conservation easement calls for the Tribe to manage the land in perpetuity for the benefit of the marbled murrelet," said Kennedy.

He added that about a third of the 4,263 acres is currently either suitable for or already being used as nesting grounds for the seabirds. The other two-thirds of the property is accounted for in the land transfer agreement.

"The conservation easement calls for the Tribe to manage the land in such a way that it leads to the creation and protection of a total of 2,842 acres of suitable

marbled murrelet habitat," said Kennedy. "This will be accomplished through pre-commercial and commercial thinning of the younger timber stands."

According to the conservation easement, all revenue from timber harvest or other commercial activities on the properties are to be used for property expenses, including property taxes and management expenses.

Kennedy said the lands come with \$850,000 for road maintenance, timber stand surveys, murrelet surveys and pre-commercial thinning expenses.

"The conservation measurement requires that the land remain in fee status and not be put into trust status – thus guaranteeing that it will be subject to payment of property taxes," said Kennedy. "Currently, those taxes run about \$25,000 per year. Any other costs of management of the properties will come out of timber harvest revenue from the properties, the survey and maintenance fund or existing Tribal Forestry funding."

Kennedy said a 10-year management plan is also a requirement of the conservation easement agreement and the plan is being established now. He said the completion date for the plan is summer of next year.

Key for the Tribe in all of this business of international shipwrecks and locally endangered seabirds is that the Tribe now has more than doubled its timber land base to 8,500 acres and the only cost to the Tribe is the \$25,000 annual property tax fee.

The value of the new properties is more than \$15 million. For perspective, if the Tribe were to purchase this property at its current value and pay it off at \$25,000 a year, it would take more than 600 years to pay for the land. And that's without interest. Normal, current property value interest rates would be more than the \$25,000 annual tax paid by the Tribe and preclude the property from ever being paid off.

Future Tribal members can know that current Tribal leaders and Tribal members continued the tradition of being good stewards of the land and looking seven generations into the future. Current Tribal members can look back on one of the worst ecological disasters to ever hit the Oregon Coast since shipping began and know that the Siletz Tribe, in cooperation with others, helped turn a negative into a positive. Aho.