

River Talk

Barry Lopez and community on the McKenzie River BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

The McKenzie River quietly bubbles up from cool, blue-green springs at Clear Lake, high in the Cascades, then tumbles down the mountains, flowing stronger and deeper as rain, tributaries and runoff add to the flow, finally passing through Eugene to spill into the Willamette near Green Island.

"It is an incalculable amount of water that comes down the river," says nature writer Barry Lopez of the river that flows past his home. It is "a sonic landscape, the most animated part of the landscape."

"Watching that river over 40 years I can tell from the speed of the water, the pulse of the rapids, the color of the water, what's going on," he says.

Lopez is a well-known figure among lovers of literature and lovers of nature worldwide, but "I guess my tendency has been to be more or less invisible in this part of the world," he says of the McKenzie River valley where he had made his home for so long.

From the cold north of *Arctic Dreams* to the heat of the islands in *Light Action in the Caribbean*, Lopez writes intimately of people and landscapes from the barren to the lush. But only rarely does he make himself known near what has become his home place, his quiet retreat near Finn Rock, and the McKenzie River that runs past it.

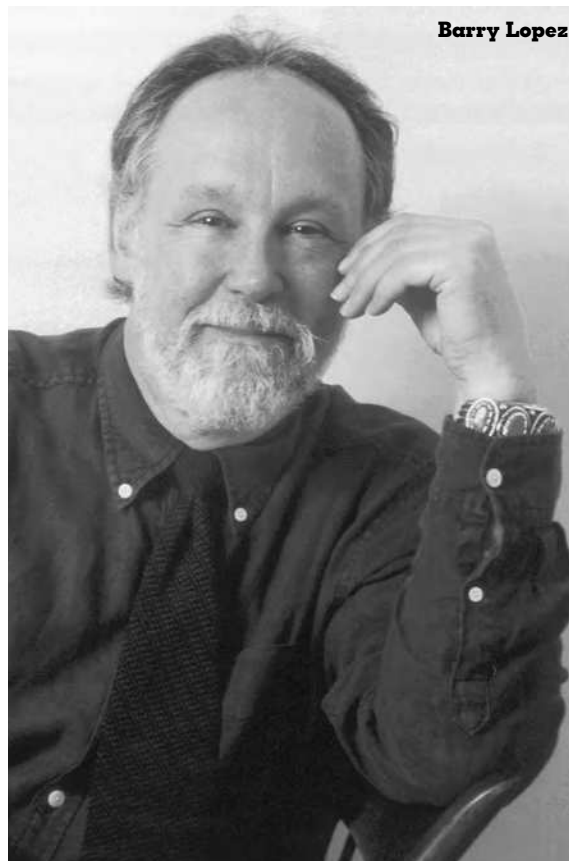
What drew him out, and brings him to speak at the Hult Center this Friday, is the 20-year anniversary of the McKenzie

River Trust (MRT), a non-profit land trust that seeks to protect critical habitat and scenic lands on the McKenzie, Siuslaw, Long Tom and the Coast and Middle Forks of the Willamette Rivers. MRT's work protects the river and its dwellers, from salmon to birds to people.

Joe Moll, MRT's executive director, used to work with grizzly bears, but now he has a more difficult task. He and the staff of MRT try to bring together the full spectrum of people who live on and use the river, from conservationists to hunters, landowners, farmers and businesses, to protect what he calls "the wealth of our community."

"Wealth is such a loaded term," Moll says, "but you don't live in Eugene because you think you're going to make money." He says, "As I see it; the wealth of this community isn't money, it is the cleanliness of the McKenzie River, the open spaces and the forests."

To preserve the rich natural resources of the McKenzie and other rivers in Lane, Douglas and more recently Linn and Benton counties, Moll and MRT develop long-term



Barry Lopez

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relationships with landowners. Moll says it can take a year or two from when they first contact someone to when they reach an agreement to either put land into trust or allow a conservation easement. "The kinds of deals we work on with people," says Moll, "are going to have an impact for generations."

In addition to managing and acquiring lands, like the 1,000 acre Green Island at the confluence of the McKenzie and Willamette rivers, MRT works to restore lands, both what is owned by MRT and lands managed by watershed councils and landowners. "You can recycle all you want," says Moll, "but you don't really see any immediate impact from that. When you do restoration, you see the impact."

It is both the Trust's willingness to take the middle ground and work with diverse groups on both sides of the political spectrum and their restoration work that drew Lopez to do the Hult Center talk in support of the MRT's work. "If you take care of the place, it will take care of you, psychologically as well as in the physical sense," he says.

Lopez says "People have been talking about restoration in a formal sense. Not very much has been written about what healing can take place when you put plants, forbs and trees into the ground — figuratively and literally on your hands and knees in the physical earth."

"The middle is also a position," he says, speaking not only about environmental protections, but of recent political events, such as the election of President Barack Obama. "I think what the Trust can do is knit this community of people that lead separate lives. We all have a stake in this."

Lopez will speak on "Nature and Community on the McKenzie River" at 7:30 pm Friday, May 8, at the Hult Center (www.hultcenter.org). To participate in upcoming MRT restoration efforts, go to www.mckenzie-river.org and to read the works of Lopez, visit www.barrylopez.com or head over to your nearest local bookstore. **EW**

Jenna Jameson

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