

# WELCOME TO THE BREWSHED

Local beer makers team up to keep McKenzie clean BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

If you want good beer, you need good water.

Eugene's water comes from the McKenzie River watershed. A watershed, according to geologist and explorer John Wesley Powell, is "that area of land, a bounded hydrologic system, within which all living things are inextricably linked by their common water course and where, as humans settled, simple logic demanded that they become part of a community."

Eugene is a beer-drinking town, and our beer is inextricably linked to our water. In fact, Eugene is tops in the nation for beer drinking, according to The Media Audit, which says in 2010 Eugene was the number one market for frequent consumers of beer. Almost 10 percent of our metro area's adult population frequently consumes beer on six or more occasions in a two-week period.

The McKenzie River watershed is also the McKenzie River brewshed — where Eugene taps the water for its awesome locally brewed beers. And Eugene Water and Electric Board, the Forest Service, conservation groups and local breweries are teaming up to protect that brewshed and keep Eugene's beer tasting good.

Oakshire Brewing founder Jeff Althouse says that Eugene has incredible beer drinkers and great water. Water is the number one raw material used in beer, Althouse says, and that puts local brewers in the unique position of depending on a public utility, EWEB.

If you want to keep drinking good beer locally made, you need to protect the water.

"The brewshed is a wild and crazy idea that we concocted while we were drinking beer," says Meg Mitchell, forest supervisor for the Willamette National Forest, which is home to the source and natural filtration of Eugene's drinking water.

Thanks to the unique geology of the Cascades, Eugene's water comes clean and cold from the top of the mountains,

and it bubbles up through lava rocks in springs, then flows through forests, which Mitchell says "are very good for filtering water."

Karl Morgenstern, EWEB's source protection coordinator, says the more treatment you do, the less natural taste you get in the water.

The water is so good, Althouse says, that Oakshire and other local breweries don't have to do anything to the EWEB-supplied McKenzie River water before they start the process of boiling and brewing. Breweries in other areas have to purify their water, which affects the taste, after which they try to rebuild the water with minerals. Not so in Eugene.

And yet, Mitchell points out that the McKenzie River faces septic systems, road construction, pesticide use and other threats to its water. That's where the brewshed project comes in. A brewshed would bring EWEB together with Oakshire, Ninkasi and other breweries that depend on the water. The coalition would develop a campaign that raises money for organizations that protect the water, like McKenzie River Trust and the McKenzie Watershed Council, as well as putting money toward a voluntary incentives project for private property owners along the river.

The incentives project would reward property owners who are good stewards of the river and maintain or restore riverside lands.

Joe Moll of McKenzie River Trust says he hopes the brewshed concept leads people to think, "I'm enjoying this beer, and I'm enjoying it in part because the McKenzie River is such an incredible treasure."

Morgenstern says that, taste aside, one of the reasons it's important to work with breweries is that of all beverage producing industries, brewing beer has the smallest



footprint, except perhaps for wine. Beverages like milk and juice use water to produce the product as well as in the product, where with beer the water pretty much goes right into what you drink.

And Oregon beer, Morgenstern says, also depends on good hops. Oregon is the number two hop growing state in the country. Morgenstern has been working with farmers along the river to reduce chemical use that could negatively affect the water. Morgenstern and EWEB also have been working with the McKenzie River Trust at the new organic demonstration farm, the Berggren Watershed Conservation area, where he hopes to start growing hops that could then be used by local breweries.

Last month EWEB and McKenzie River Trust teamed up with Ninkasi and released a new beer — Conservation Ale — with profits going to the trust for watershed protection. And Ninkasi Brewing is donating a year's worth of proceeds from its tasting room on the first Monday of each month (unless it's a holiday, then it's Tuesday) to Cascadia Wildlands to support its conservation efforts.

Oakshire plans to release three beers this summer, and Althouse says all of them, as yet unnamed, will have a water protection and conservation theme. Profits will go to the Berggren Watershed Conservation area and its demonstration farm. The first beer will be draft only, the second will be draft and bottle and the last one, he says, will be a very unique, bottle-only "wild" beer utilizing wild yeast caught from the air. It has an acidity that, according to Althouse, "makes it very exciting to pair with food."

"People who are about locally brewed beer and locally grown food have an eye on what's going on in the watershed," says Moll. Or in this case, the brewshed. ■



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