

Mill Creek: stream will wind into side channels

(Continued from page 1)

While the ponds were in active use, Mill Creek existed only as an overflow channel skirting the ponds on the north. A deep gully now marks the path of that channel.

The ponds were used to store logs until the early 1970s. In 1980, high runoff breached the berms and reclaimed part of the old channel. However, the sudden release of the large volume of water resulted in significant scouring and erosion of the channel.

As of this date the stretch of the creek once occupied by the log ponds has not recovered, and now functions as a narrow, high-velocity channel with little or no riparian vegetation and a non-existent floodplain.

As is often the case with dam builders, the consequences of their activities on salmon and steelhead was not a major concern at the time, and would not be known until several decades later. Basically, the thought process at the time was this: The mills needed log storage, ponds were a convenient way to store logs in a way that kept them fresh, ponds need a steady supply of water, and the whole setup needed to be close to existing logging roads.

Mill Creek fit the bill and Potter's Ponds were created.

Toward restoration

Such activities would be prohibited in today's regulatory environment. The tribes' Integrated Resource Management Plan (IRMP) has several provisions, including buffer zones, limits on entry and disturbance of creek channels, and water quality standards, to name a few.

In fact, the work to be undertaken in Mill Creek will have a long list of conditions to meet in terms of turbidity



Courtesy BNR.

View from above, Mill Creek restoration area.

and sedimentation, or the stirring up and muddying of the water. Monitoring equipment downstream of the project site will measure suspended solids in the water and when certain levels are reached work will have to cease.

Scott Turo, habitat biologist with the tribe's fisheries department, will oversee work on Mill Creek's damaged channel and banks beginning in June.

"In the ten years I've been here," Turo said, "this is the biggest project I've seen for tribes, except for the new school. I think it's something people can rally around."

The project will restore significant chinook habitat on the reservation, and could serve as the model for future restoration work, such as on Beaver Creek, he said.

The Shitike Creek improvement of 2009 is similar in some ways to the Mill Creek project, but the improvements on Mill Creek will be even larger, Turo added.

Channels and pools

With funding from the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund, Bonneville Power Administration, Portland General Electric, among others, the Fisheries Habitat Program developed a plan to revitalize roughly a mile of Mill

no longer be confined to a deep, narrow channel. Instead, with re-grading of the entire area between the outer banks, the stream will wind through a series of S-turns, feeding off into side channels and deep pools. Sinuosity is the side-to-side wandering of the stream within its floodplain. Sinuosity helps to create side channels and pools and is a feature of a healthy stream system.

Riparian fencing is necessary to protect the newly created habitat from overgrazing that would damage vegetation and stream banks.

In time, Mill Creek will provide suitable habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife species. How long is anyone's guess, but the Mill Creek Restoration Project will help the natural process along and reduce the recovery time, by decades, perhaps centuries.

(This is the first of the three part series on the Mill Creek Project. Part Two will examine the actual in-stream work. Part Three will give a before and after look at the site).

Creek from the upper end of Potter's Ponds to about a half-mile downstream of the B-100 Bridge.

Within that area, the project objectives include measures to reconnect the floodplain, increase sinuosity, enclose the riparian area with fencing, eliminate livestock presence, remove the lateral berms (dams), enhance off channel habitat through the development of side channels, ponds and alcoves.

Reconnecting the floodplain means that the creek will

Couples tourney at KNT

Kah-Nee-Ta Golf hosted the Teepee Chapman Mother's Day couples golf tournament earlier in May. Here are the results of the two-day tourney:

First flight (0-19 handicap): first gross team: Chuck and Jane Paulson, 148.

Second gross team: Steve and Kimberly Wood, 150.

First place net: Krystal Stoneking and Bill Beacher. Second team net: Gary and Marcy Holt.

Second flight (20-36 handicaps): first place gross: Shawn and Pam Aldritt.

Second place gross: Frank and Helen Francis.

First place net: Scott and Jennie Sandler.

Second place net: Ken and Joan Wellman.

The Warm Springs Community Center will be on summer hours starting on Monday, June 2. The center will be open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m..

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