Mill Creek restoration at Potter's Ponds

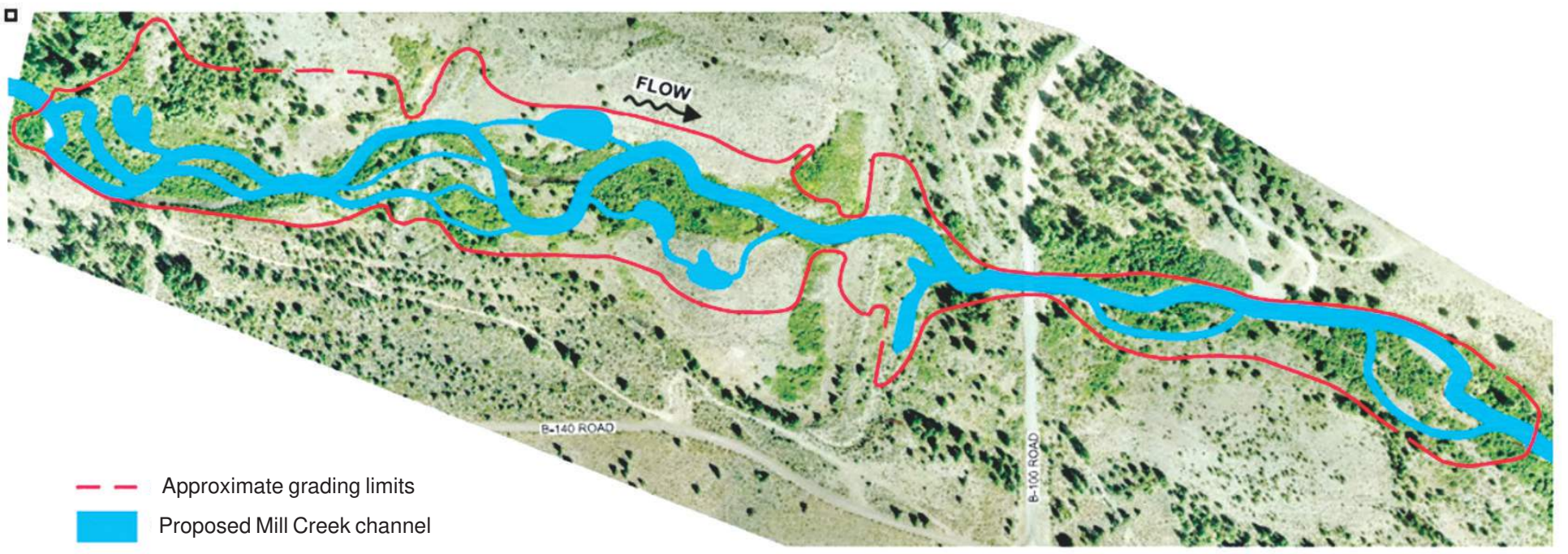

Illustration of improvements/Courtesy Natural Resources Branch.

The fish really had nowhere to spawn through most of the Potter's Ponds area of Mill Creek. The creek would run quickly through a narrow channel, while the fish need a slower moving, meandering habitat for spawning.

This situation existed for decades, but soon will be quite different: The creek will run in to side channels, at a slower pace. And there will be shade, and gravel beds for spawning.

The Potter's Ponds Mill Creek project is a large-scale effort to improve fish habitat on the reservation. The first phase of the project involves moving tons of earth, re-establishing the creek as fisheries habitat. This phase involves the creation of the side channels, providing more habitat and slowing the pace of the creek flow.

The final phase will involve the planting of hundreds of trees, and other native vegetation along the newly reformed creek.

This work is funded by the Bonneville Power Administration, the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund, and Portland General Electric, among others. Overseeing the work is the tribal Branch of Natural Resources.

The goal is to restore this stretch of Mill Creek to its original state: The area was badly damaged, starting years ago by the development of the log ponds, Potter's Ponds, on Mill Creek.

Habitat project manager Scott Turo compares the Mill Creek restoration project to the 2009 Shitike Creek project. The Shitike project was fairly large-scale, involving the creation of side channels along the creek just below the Hollywood Boulevard bridge. This has proven to be a benefit for fish and other wildlife.

The Potters' Ponds project is similar, though on a larger scale: The contractor crews, using heavy machinery, are moving much more earth than they did along Shitike. And they'll be planting much more vegetation.

The work within Mill Creek has to be done within a narrow window of time. The goal is to have the in-stream work done by mid August. So once the work began a few weeks ago, the pace was quick, and the crews stayed at it all day. The only delay happened last week, when the wildland fires on the reservation were at a peak.

Besides moving tons of earth, the construction team, BCI Contracting, is building stable structures along the creek path. These structures include large trees and boulders, stabilized to withstand the flow of the river. Once the vegetation gets going, the Potter's Ponds stretch should be good for fish.

The improvement area is about one mile in length: From the upper end of Potter's Ponds to about a half-mile downstream of the B-100 Bridge.

Close up of LWD Structure Downstream of B-140 Bridge

Removing the lower berm

Photos courtesy of Scott Turo/Natural Resources

Side channel under construction. Ground water in pools.

Habitat structure in side channel.