

Restoration work begins at Portland Harbor site

Tribal input seeks more data on juvenile lamprey

By Ron Karten

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PORTLAND — Work has started on the 52-acre Alder Creek restoration project, which is within the Portland Harbor Superfund site at the southern tip of Sauvie Island.

The site is in the Tribe's ceded lands and when the project is done it will have a positive effect on the local environment with many cultural benefits for the once devastated harbor.

Alder Creek is the first project designed specifically to benefit fish and wildlife in the Portland Harbor Superfund site. The area used to have abundant habitat but now has little. This project will provide habitat for salmon, lamprey, mink, bald eagle, osprey, and other native fish and wildlife.

Specifically, the restoration will remove buildings and fill from the floodplain, reshape the riverbanks, and plant native trees and shrubs. The project will create shallow water habitat to provide resting and feeding areas for young salmon and lamprey, and foraging for birds, according to a news release from federal, state and Tribal participants in the project.

"The project will also restore beaches and wetlands that give mink access to water and food, and for forests to again have shelter and nesting opportunities for native birds," the press release states.

"Work has started," said Michael Karnosh, manager of the Tribe's



Courtesy photo

Work has begun on the Alder Creek restoration project, which is within the Portland Harbor Superfund site.

Ceded Lands Program and representative for the Tribe on the Portland Harbor Natural Resource Trustee Council. The council oversees the restoration work and ultimately approves it, Karnosh said. "Something good is happening."

The harbor was named a Superfund site in 2000. The Trustee Council formed in 2002 to develop and coordinate damage assessment activities at Portland Harbor, and plan for the restoration of natural resources.

Preliminary planning for restoration projects began in 2010. Along with this project, the council has started planning for other projects in the harbor, but this is the first one to reach the construction phase.

"We're hoping it's the first of many," said Karnosh.

Holly Partridge, a member of the

Tribe and Ceded Lands specialist, also represents the Tribe. She serves on the Restoration Committee with eight active participants.

Industry representatives and other parties interested in restoration, who are not on the committee, make presentations for projects they want to work on, said Partridge. The committee then makes sure the projects "sit with what we want to do. We make sure the proposals are going to do what advocates for the project say it will. The committee sends projects that meet the criteria to the Trustee Council for approval."

A specialist in Indian law, Partridge contributes technical input to the restoration projects, being sure that they support Tribal cultural and environmental priorities.

An important player in the restoration is a for-profit company, Rocklin,

Calif.-based Wildlands, a habitat development and land management company that funds the project and recovers its investment by selling credits to companies that are potentially responsible for contamination in the Portland Harbor. A company's credits can be used to reduce its liability for the cost of cleanup and restoration. With enough credits, these companies can reduce their liability to nothing, said Karnosh.

Wildlands "focuses on creating open market solutions that protect our environment," according to the company website. Through in-house mitigation and conservation banking, Wildlands takes total responsibility for the success of the project.

All of the stakeholders work with Wildlands to ensure the best result.

For the Grand Ronde Tribe, construction of habitat is important, said Karnosh, who also notes that surveying and monitoring juvenile lamprey going through the harbor will uncover a world of new information for the Tribe.

"Through this project," Karnosh said, "we'll get a lot of data on whether lamprey prefer this type of habitat or not. The information is almost nil about juvenile lamprey. The Tribe negotiated for this to be part of the project."

For Partridge, what makes her participation worthwhile is "to get to see that what I do every day translates into the Tribe's cultural interests. The First Salmon ceremony was a huge connection for what I do: to see that it makes a difference for all Tribal members." ■

'Engine rental revenue ... drives the program'

FIREFIGHTERS continued from front page

tection Program manager.

"Nationwide, California and the Pacific Northwest are where most of the action is this year," Nepstad said.

The Tribe owns six fire engines, five able to hold 200 to 400 gallons of water and one with a 1,000-gallon capacity. The larger engine and one of the smaller engines stay in Grand Ronde for potential fires. The other four are rented out for fires within federal jurisdictions beyond the local area.

The Department of the Interior and the regional office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs direct the fire program. The Tribe's authorization to take part in emergency management incidents nationally comes from these federal agencies and the Tribe's cooperative fire agreement with them.

Through the beginning of September, federal wildland fire funds have reimbursed the Tribe more than \$800,000 for the cost of labor, supplies, travel and engine rentals. Of that, rentals accounted for \$140,000.

"Engine rental revenue is what drives the program," said Nepstad. "With the lack of federal prepared-

ness funding, more Tribes are getting into this same business model. Total reimbursements for this fire season will more than likely exceed \$1 million."

The reimbursements completely fund the Tribe's firefighting program, which costs the Tribe nothing while bringing benefits back to the community, including fire protection for reservation woodlands and career-building.

Logan Kneeland, 24, was certified as an engine boss this year, his sixth with the Tribal program. "I've really enjoyed my experience," he said, "and it is something I would like to keep doing."

"More and more, the Grand Ronde fire crews are known in the fire community," said Natural Resources Department Manager Michael Wilson. "They now have a solid track record of being hard working and they know fire. To be successful in firefighting takes teamwork and leadership, and these skills help the Tribe in many other ways. It is hard and dangerous work, and I am especially proud of the outstanding safety record of our crews."

Earlier this month, two Tribal fire engines with crews of three were at work at the Happy Camp Complex in northern California. They started Aug. 12 and Tribal

crews were in early September in their third week there.

"They could be down there for another month or longer," Nepstad said. "I'm predicting this fire will burn until it rains."

For two weeks in August, a hand crew of 20 Tribal firefighters helped out at the Devil's Elbow Complex on the Colville Reservation in Washington state.

To date, fires across the country have burned more than 2.7 million acres and about 1.2 million acres have burned in the Northwest. Northwest fires account for 43 percent of the nation's total. At the season's peak, the Northwest had 8,000 firefighters working.

On Sept. 4, Grand Ronde 20-man hand crews departed to fight the northern California July Complex.

The 10-year national average number of fires is 56,278 covering 6.16 million acres. This year, up to early September, there had been 38,395 fires covering 2.76 million acres.

"The year is far from over," said Nepstad. "The Northwest and California are currently in high to extreme fire danger. NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) is predicting a moderate El Nino year, which causes the

Northwest to be drier and warmer than normal."

In 2002, another El Nino year, the Natural Resources Department fought fires into November, said Nepstad.

Everybody working fires this year has seen that most are significantly understaffed. So many covering so much acreage has driven the shortages of firefighters, said Nepstad. Most are caused by lightning storms, but others start from campfires and other recreational activities, and arson.

At the South Fork Complex near John Day, three Grand Ronde engines and crews were at work. Kneeland's engine spent two weeks there and the other engines stayed for a second two-week tour.

"It was nice to have some of our own guys with us," said Kneeland. "After day 14, it definitely starts to wear on you, but it is also what we prepare for all year long. This fire season, it has been pretty much 16-day fire assignments."

For Kneeland, the job is more than fighting fires. "It's serving the Tribe," he said, "and I really do enjoy what we do back here: pre-commercial thinning on the Reservation, helping with future timber harvests. I take a lot of pride in that. It's for the future generations." ■