

Natural Resources starts native plants nursery

By Brent Merrill

Smoke Signals staff writer

The Tribe's Natural Resources Department is establishing a traditional plants nursery featuring camas lilies, Yampa plants and bare-stemmed biscuit-root among others.

Natural Resources Department Manager Michael Wilson said the need for a Tribal plant materials program has been building for several years.

Wilson said the Tribe would prefer that agencies like the Oregon Department of Transportation, among many others that work with the Tribe, use traditional plants in many of their habitat restoration and stream bank stabilization projects.

"We looked at the shrubs and vegetation we would like to see used to stabilize stream banks and thought we are spending money to acquire these traditional plants," said Wilson.

"Also, we talk to people like ODOT and other agencies and we really encourage them to use Native plants when they are doing restoration projects and certain types of ditch work. If they are building a road and they need to seed in the hillside and stabilize it, we encourage them to use Native plants."

Wilson said that the Tribe was often told that the plants it was requesting be used in projects were not available or too expensive to be practical. He said Tribal staff looked into the idea of establishing a small nursery of those plants.



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Harvest brodiaea lily is one of the plants growing in the traditional plants nursery at the Tribe's Natural Resources Department. At left, Yampa also is one of the plants growing in the traditional plants nursery.



Wilson said the Natural Resources Department staff worked with the Tribe's Land and Culture staff to arrive at a solution. Wilson said it was Grand Ronde Tribal member Melisa Chandler who had the initial idea for the Native plants nursery. Chandler, who has since moved to New Mexico, worked for the Culture Department as a compliance technician and has an environmental studies degree from the University of Oregon.

Wilson said bringing the two Tribal departments together on the project worked. He said they then began to work with staff at

the Institute for Applied Ecology in Corvallis.

"They do a lot of work growing plants," Wilson said of Applied Ecology. "We met with them and they were putting in for a grant to do some big restoration projects and part of that ended up being to help us establish a test nursery. We got a few thousand dollars and some technical expertise from them. They helped us a lot with the seed sources and the bulbs, and they helped us with labor to do the beds."

Cultural Protection Program Manager David Harrelson said the grant the Tribe applied for was a "Plants for People" grant that was submitted by Applied Ecology to the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.

Harrelson said the first time the Tribe worked with Applied Ecology resulted in the Tyee Nature Preserve in Grand Ronde located just south of the Tribal Housing Department.

What they came up with for the native plants nursery was two 60-foot-long raised beds for planting near the Natural Resource building and two lower, ground-level beds down the hill from the building.

Wilson tapped Silviculture and Fire Protection Technician Jay Ojua to be the lead on the plants material project and Ojua said he and fellow Technician Gabe Clift worked on the raised beds. Ojua said they also worked with Peter Moore and Guy Banner from Applied Ecology to construct the beds.

"They (Applied Ecology) played a huge role in giving us the infor-

mation, the knowledge and the technical skill to get this done," said Ojua. "They had built these types of beds before."

Moore, from New Zealand, is a restoration ecologist who works on a wide range of habitat restoration projects and Banner is a habitat restoration technician from Utah State University.

One of the raised beds is filled completely with 3,000 camas lilies and the other raised bed has Yampa, bare-stemmed biscuit-root, slender-leaved onion, harvest brodiaea lily and Tolmie's cat's ear lily. The camas was planted in October 2014 and is now 3 to 4 feet tall and the other raised bed was planted in November.

The lower beds, or "cutting blocks," are planted with Indian Plum, Mock Orange, Oceanspray, Ninebark, Pacific Willow and Red Osier Dogwood.

Ojua, who has worked for the Tribe since 2006, said the cutting blocks are tilled up beds that they are trying to keep free of weeds. He said the plan is to grow the trees and take cuttings off of them.

"You can take a cutting off a limb and pretty much jam it in the ground and it will start to put down roots," said Ojua. "This has a lot of potential."

"It's been really fun," said Wilson. "The guys that put these in are really into it. We did the construction part of this last year and the guys (NRD staff) all planted the bulbs. We will use these on our projects."

Wilson said Natural Resources staff looked at what the goals for a Tribal plants materials program should and could be and that they then prioritized the goals. He said they looked at what the benefits could be from a program like this and they prioritized those as well.

"The long-term goal is having the potential to have a Grand Ronde materials plants program," said Ojua. "We could be in a position to sell Native species to other Tribes and to other entities that need Native plants that might be hard to come by. The idea is to keep everything in the beds for two to three years and not take anything out so they can continue to drop seed and put bulbs down to basically stock the beds full of bulbs."

Wilson said the department wanted to focus on using plants historically valued by the Tribe for food, medicine, ceremonies and weaving and that Natural Resources hopes to someday create traditional gathering areas for use by Tribal members. ■

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