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WATERSHED *from page 1A*

Ana Hernandez, fisheries biologist with the Siuslaw National Forest; and Graham Trask, owner of Trask Design and Construction, an aquatic contracting business — were released weekly through the event at City Lights, culminating in the unveiling of the eighth video.

“We’re hoping that this is the video that is the most inspiring and that we can use to really get the word out there about the Siuslaw,” Tome said.

Each film showed people and wildlife interacting with the landscape and waters of the region, complete with jumping salmon, wriggling amphibians and the humans who are working to restore the complex ecosystem of the region.

“The order is not insignificant on how we want to show these films to you,” Tome added. “This is how we want to set the tone for this project: by looking to the past to inform how we are restoring the watershed. The word ‘restoration’ inherently means that, that we’re looking backwards at ecological processes that used to exist and we’re trying to mimic those today and set up our watershed to be more resilient in the face of change.”

Each speaker represented the many partners that Siuslaw Watershed Council works with — though Tome emphasized that there are many more partners that were not highlighted but are equally important to restoration efforts.

“This is a chance to look at the different lenses of how people look at restoration. It’s a really compelling story,” he said.

All the videos are now available on the watershed council’s new website, www.siuslaw.org, and linked through the organization’s social media.

In between introducing the films during the event, Tome offered insight into the coun-



CHANTELLE MEYER/SIUSLAW NEWS

Siuslaw Watershed Council Executive Director Eli Tome worked with the watershed’s partners to produce a series of eight short films explaining restoration efforts throughout the Siuslaw and coastal lakes watershed. The films are available at siuslaw.org.

cil, its partners and its goals of restoration.

“What we’re doing is looking to the future and setting up our streams and our watershed to be healthy in the face of change. Restoration is a loaded word because it means we’re trying to restore it to some previous condition — but we’re really just trying to mimic those functions and set up our watershed to be resilient in the future,” he said.

Beers and Sundstrom both talked about the region’s history during their films. During a question and answer period at the close of the evening, they and a gathering of other representatives talked with the audience about future solutions, progress and getting people involved.

“You want a forest, you’ve got to have the fish,” Sundstrom said. “You’ve got a crisis with the fish, you’ve got a crisis with the forest, you’ve got a crisis with the economy, you’ve got a crisis with the students — and you also have pessimism.”

While salmon numbers aren’t anywhere near their historic high — 400,000 used to return to the Siuslaw basin each year — or lows — a mere 500 in the 1990s — there has been some progress.

Sundstrom continued, “It isn’t something that happens quickly, or can be determined right away. These species are coming back here in 3 to 4 years. ... What we do know is we are working and putting the landscape on a trajectory for passive restoration to bring back the functions of a work-

ing watershed, and that may take a long time. But it’s not really getting worse.”

“We know that it once was a huge stronghold for coho and we know that it can be that again,” Tome added.

While much of the watershed council’s focus is on salmon populations, they are just one part of the big picture.

“One reason we are focusing on coho is that it is what we call a keystone species,” Tome explained. “They are the most sensitive one in the environment, so if we see them trending in a good direction, that means we are doing something good for many species. They are the most sensitive one, but lots of other species rely on them. If we set up a landscape to be resilient for coho, we’re setting it up for many other species, too.”

During his film, Mead spoke of the importance of salmon for the future of the entire region.

“Seth spoke a lot in his film about connections to future generations,” Tome said. “That’s what we’re really wanting to do — to set up our watershed to be strong for future generations.”

The council and its educational partners are working to bring back ecology education, a topic that has been cut from area schools thanks to a lack of state funding. Additional educational resources are available through the council’s website.

“There’s no way to measure the education of a child who then grows up to become a fish biologist and saves the world,” Sundstrom said.



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Besides learning for themselves, people can also join the watershed, donate to important projects or get involved with the many outdoor restoration activities in the area.

“I would say people should get out to the sites and see what’s happening on the ground,” said Kelley. “There’s nothing better than visual representations of what you can see out there. And have conversations with these guys. They’re the ones doing the work every day and they know so much about the watershed. They have a lot of different voices to share, different perspectives, and by opening yourself to learning their stories, you can learn a lot about what’s going on here.”

People who own land in the watershed can also take part in the Siuslaw Watershed Council’s annual Native Plant Giveaway. In February, the council gave out more than 10,000 native plants to homeowners. A second giveaway is scheduled for next week, though people need to indicate interest by Sunday, April 7.

People should also get involved with the council’s many partners who are working to preserve and protect the entire coastal region.

“Up here in the Siuslaw, we have some great partnerships,” Beers said. “We’re the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw — so we’re not just focused on the Siuslaw watershed, we’re focused on the Lower Umpqua, Coos Bay and the Ring of Fire Watershed, the big ocean. We’re on the West Coast Ocean Planning Committee and different partnerships in every area. In Coos Bay, we’re working on something called the TCP, the Traditional Cultural Property designation that hopefully will designate the entire Coos Bay as a National Historic Preservation Area. That’s because of the hundreds of village sites, gathering sites and all the different sites on the bay. It would assist the federal government in communications with local county, state and tribal entities, especially when they are pushing federal projects.”

“We have great partnerships up here and we look forward to the ability to work with any partners we can to protect our land and waters.”

From large-scale projects at Tenmile Creek and Tahkenitch Lake, to revegetation and habitat reestablishment, the mission of the Siuslaw Watershed Council is stretching beyond the Siuslaw with a message of restoration.

“A lot of folks, especially in the region and state, don’t necessarily know the Siuslaw, they haven’t heard of us, and we really wanted this to be our chance to introduce ourselves and to showcase what an amazing place this is to work in salmon restoration, and how we can once again be a stronghold for coho,” Tome said.

The Siuslaw Watershed Council is a nonprofit membership organization. For more information on its history, projects, plans or to get involved, visit siuslaw.org.