

WATERSHED *from page 1A*

Get the executive director talking, and he'll acknowledge many of the SWC team members and contractors and their accomplishments. Many of these individuals, such as Jesse Beers, Johnny Sundstrom, Kyle Terry and Ana Hernandez, were highlighted in the SWC's video series that debuted in March at "Stories of Restoring the Siuslaw" at City Lights Cinemas. The eight short films in the series have been shared across the U.S. One, featuring Jesse Beers, the cultural director for the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, was entered into the River Restoration Northwest Film Festival, with showings in Portland, Seattle and Bend.

"One thing we tried to highlight in our video series was peoples' connection to this land and why it's important, and the different ways that people are connected, too," Tome said.

The series was made possible through SWC's partnership with Ecotrust, which began when the watershed council was founded in 1997. The nonprofit, based in Portland, also works with the SWC on grants and hosts the watershed's newly updated website at siuslaw.org.

"Ecotrust has been a really important partner to us in our entire history," Tome said. "From the beginning, we worked with Ecotrust to help us. ... They've been a critical partner on several restoration projects ... and we owe our organizational facelift over the last year to our partnership with Ecotrust. They've helped us reach a much wider audience."

In light of the recent and historical work, the watershed council acknowledged Ecotrust with the Spirit of Siuslaw Award, given annually to an individual or organization that has contributed positively to health and well-being of the watershed.

According to Tome, Ecotrust's work this year has brought awareness of the Siuslaw to Portland, Salem and Eugene, showing the area's "unique opportunity for recovery" of native habitat. Due to the area's lack of manmade dams, restoration dollars going into the Siuslaw are more efficient in directly benefiting salmon traveling upstream.

"Siuslaw" was one of the first Oregon words I learned how to say," Tome said, who first came to Oregon in 2012 for an internship mapping stream morphology. He worked with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), based in the Siuslaw National Forest Office. "It's always been a really special place, and a special place to work for salmon restoration. "We have such an opportunity to recover a species here. There's a lot of community support for our work, and people are so connected to the water and to salmon. It's a very unique place to live and work in that regard."

The annual report included updates on several big restoration projects, including Fivemile Bell, a project that started in 2013 with USFS, and the Indian Creek Watershed.

"We just secured over \$300,000 in grant funding to finish the last phase of the Fivemile Bell project. We'll be finishing that in summer 2020," Tome said.

The Indian Creek project has involved contracting with Columbia Helicopters, MBL Timber Services and Bateman Forestry Management to airlift trees into the creek's watershed.

A future restoration project will include 207 acres east of the Cushman Bridge as the SWC works with partners to

create elevational diversity in the watershed.

For residents who live along waterways, SWC will once again provide free native plants for waterside (riparian) planting in the Siuslaw and Coastal Lakes Area.

Trees planted along streams help reduce erosion, filter nutrients, and keep the water cool for salmon and trout.

"Last year we gave away 13,000 native plants to over 100 different riparian community members, more than we've ever done. It was a big year for us," Tome said.

People who want to take part in the program should sign up by the priority deadline tomorrow, Dec. 15. Additional orders may be placed through Feb. 1, and the distribution will take place Feb. 15.

Tome said that grant funding from the Siuslaw National Forest's Coast Range Stewardship Fund and private donations mean that a similar amount of plants will be able to be given.

Grant funding was also essential in the formation of SWC's new position, an education coordinator, for which the council is now seeking applications.

"We finally raised enough money to hire an education coordinator, which we're really excited about," Tome said. "People can apply through Jan. 1 at siuslaw.org/employment."

The SWC will be consulting with the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians and working with Ecology in Classrooms Outdoors (ECO), based in Portland, on curriculum.

"We're using ecology curriculum to teach classroom lessons to local schools in Siuslaw, Mapleton and Reedport school districts, and then run field trips and take them out into the field to see work and ecology principles in the field," Tome said, adding that the educator position will also lead tours of the watershed's restoration projects.

"A big part of our work here is education," Tome continued. "It's educating the community, but it's also educating ourselves. Restoration work is always changing, and we're always learning new information. That's part of the reason why we're monitoring all our projects to figure out if we're having the desired effects. Then we can take what

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The watershed council shares educational events on the last Wednesday of most months. While staff is still planning 2020 events, the next one is scheduled for

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— *Eli Tome, Executive Director of the Siuslaw Watershed Council*

Jan. 29 at the Siuslaw Public Library Bromely Room in Florence.

Education was also a focus of the SWC's Watershed Camp in June, where 48 local youth from Mapleton, Siuslaw and the coastal lakes areas attended a week-long camp. Students learned about restoration projects, participated in service-learning opportunities activities such as archery and rock climbing at Camp Baker Boy Scout Camp.

"We took them all over the watershed to show them what's happening in the field," Tome said.

This has the added benefit of exposing youth to different careers than they might have thought about, as well as encouraging them to come back to the area as adults.

"I didn't know there were river morphologists when I was 10," Tome said. "A big goal of our education program is to take students out to our local restoration projects and meet our local partners just to see different career options they may not know existed. They'll get to meet our partners in our community and hopefully see a career pathway they might take. They can go get a degree and come back to work in the local community. You can work in natural resources or the forest. There's other career options out there."

The annual report also touched on the new website, video series and expanded social media, as well as some new digital features that will show up in 2020, such as a dynamic story map of the Siuslaw and the watershed's current and future projects.

Many of those projects couldn't be possible without the 250 volunteers who work with the watershed.

"We have a big group of people we engage with, and have a ton of partnerships, especially with local organizations," Tome said.

This year saw the creation of the Siuslaw Coho Part-

nership, which includes 10 different agencies, groups, nonprofits and tribes who prioritize restoration and work closely together for salmon restoration.

Tome said the watershed council prefers to be a col-

laborative organization, both in its planning and implementation of projects. The SWC is constantly monitoring the effects of its activities, as well as climate change.

"All of our work is super strategic," he said. "It's all built into this plan that was based on years of modeling and a local and regional knowledgebase. Now, we're monitoring everything, too, to make sure we are doing what we want to be doing and we are having those effects. It's all very complex and thought about."

Much of workers' goals of restoration is to ensure the Siuslaw remains a healthy habitat for all its inhabitants.

"We want to make sure that our coho down here have good habitat so they grow big. The bigger they are when they go to the ocean, the more likely they are to survive," Tome said.

One new method SWC is looking into would be to



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bring beaver back to the Siuslaw through beaver dam analog structures, or fabricated beaver dams.

"There used to be a lot more beaver in our watershed than there is today," Tome said. "There was a lot of trapping in the 1800s, and beaver tend to be pesky for agriculture because they will chomp down trees, willows and fruit trees, especially, and they clog up culverts. It turns out their work is really important as they create these big wetland complexes that are important for salmon and help them grow strong."

"I think in the future we're going to see a lot more beaver restoration, and a lot more of those beaver dam analog structures being built. ... It could be a more cost-effective way to restore streams just by bringing back the species that should be there, and were there for thousands of years. They coevolved with salmon and their habitat."

Looking to the future is

part of a Siuslaw Tribal Storytelling map that will be unveiled in 2020. Beers has been working to gather information on important historical sites and stories.

"One of my favorite part of our jobs is working to lift up our tribes' voice and helping people know more about our local tribe," Tome said. "We all live on stolen land, and there were some atrocities that happened here. We're all kind of culpable in that, and recognizing that and moving forward, allows them to have a voice at a table for natural resource management."

The future for SWC also includes more grant writing, working with the Surfrider Foundation on nearshore ocean habitats, replacing culverts, finishing Fivemile Bell and developing restoration projects in Deadwood and Indian creek basins. The work extends all over the Siuslaw.

"Water affects all of us, and the river affects all of us. We want to make sure that we're reaching all those people," Tome said.

For more information about the Siuslaw Watershed Council, visit siuslaw.org.

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