

PROJECT from page 1A

“For the fish that lived in there, when the flows came up, it was like a fire hose or being in a culvert because water would push those fish downstream without any place for them to escape to for rearing,” said Paul Burns, Fisheries Biologist and USFS project manager.

Over time, many people moved out of the valley and into towns for employment, and by the 1960s many of the old homestead parcels used by dairy farmers were bought out by the government when there was a glut of milk products on the market. Still, the lands continued to provide timber for harvesting until 2003 when Davidsons Industry Inc. sold the 640-acre-parcel to the USFS.

“We acquired the parcel with Pacific Northwest streams acquisition money through the Land and Water Conservation Fund,” Burns said.

The funding program helped state and federal conservation agencies like USFS acquire land that provides key habitat for at-risk fish species.

Sixty people came together in 2005 from various federal, state and local agencies, universities and conservation groups to evaluate the land and begin brainstorming a restoration plan.

“We examined what would be the best way to restore the function of the land and kind of repurpose it for anadromous fish and other aquatic species,” Burns said. “One of the big pushes as well was to restore the native plant communities that were out here, because the pasture that was there when we acquired it was 98 percent non-native species, so a lot of reed canary grass, Himalayan blackberry, velvet grass and pasture grasses that were planted for feeding the cows.”

When ground broke on

the project in 2011, the plan was to complete the restoration in five phases spanning a decade. The area was split into five sections, each being the focus of its own phase.

In the first phase, the Forest Service and the Siuslaw Institute removed the levees that prevented the creek from moving freely while the Siuslaw Watershed Council began to restore the native plant communities.

“One of the nice things about doing this project in phases is it gives you the opportunity to learn what works well and what doesn’t because this is a fairly new restoration technique; it’s kind of cutting edge,” Burns said.

The process of each phase begins with relocating any critters such as young Coho, brook lampreys, crawdads, Pacific giant salamanders, freshwater mussels and stickleback minnows from the area before the stream is emptied and filled in. Then all the non-native vegetation is scraped off the floor and replaced by native vegetation.

“It’s amazing how fast the native vegetation has come back,” Burns said. “The willows which were planted at the start of the project are now over 20 feet tall. It’s like walking through a bamboo jungle, it’s so thick in there, and the water is everywhere with juvenile fish throughout the area.”

The goal of this all is to allow the water to move freely and find its own path, according to Burns.



PHOTOS BY LENA FELT/SIUSLAW NEWS

USFS Fisheries Technician Kiley Graham and Hydrologic Technician Jeremy Milana carry buckets full of young Coho and crawdads to a relocation site downstream.



“A stream shouldn’t be something that is pretty and flows in this kind of one certain channel for all of time,” he said. “The stream needs to be a dynamic, chaotic system to be able to function properly. And you know, when you come out here and walk through the vegetation and see all the life, it really shows why it’s all worth it.”

Burns noted that people are often shocked when they see the amount of ground disturbance that goes on with a project of this size, but he’s confident the long-term benefits outweigh the initial impact.

“It’s not that there aren’t impacts initially on this, because when you scrape off the vegetation, you get a lot more solar radiation on the shallower water,” Burns said. “But that’s something we disclose in our environmental assessment for the project. And based on our experience, within three to five years you start seeing those temperatures drop down until they’re back at pre-project temperatures that are desired for Coho salmon rearing.”

Burns put an emphasis on how many partners it took to make such a large and inno-

vative project feasible. The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Siuslaw Institute and Confederate Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw are just a few of the many organizations that partnered with USFS.

The Siuslaw Watershed Council has also been involved as a major partner from the beginning phases on the project, when it applied for funding and focused on sourcing contractors locally.

“In every phase, people from the coastal area have worked on this project, and that’s millions of dollars that have gone back into the local economy,” Burns said.

The other role of the watershed council is to manage and carry out the replanting of native vegetation.

“It’s a big job,” said Mizu Burruss, recently named executive director of the Siuslaw Watershed Council. “There have been tens of thousands of plants planted, and once you plant them, you don’t just immediately walk away and leave them. They get regular maintenance for several years to be able to survive and thrive.”

Burruss said she is blown

really contributed to the success of the project,” she said.

A more recent partner on the project is the Florence Salmon and Trout Enhancement Program (STEP), a local volunteer-run fish conservation group that got involved in Fivemile-Bell two years ago during the fourth phase. This summer, the group is coming back to the site to help relocate more creek critters for the final stage of the project.

“I think we’re going until about Labor Day and we’re trying to bring up three volunteers three days a week,” said Roger Emigh, vice president of STEP’s board of directors. “It just makes it go faster and also gets people in our STEP group involved, contributing volunteer hours and feeling like they’re making an impact.”

According to Emigh, people often don’t pair “fisherman” with the word “conservationist,” but he understands that without making the fish supply sustainable, there will eventually be no more fish to catch.

“These streams are important to what’s a threatened species that we very much prize here on the Or-

gon coast for fishing and harvesting when it’s sustainably doable,” Emigh said. “Fishermen can catch one per day and a total of five for the whole year, so it’s a limited fishery. We get plenty back, but it’s all contingent on the salmon being able to go up and spawn in these small creeks.”

Emigh pitched the project to the STEP members as an opportunity to increase an opportunity to increase Coho fish count in the tributaries and lakes nearby, which will allow for more sustainable fishing in the future.

He also just enjoys the hands-on experience of volunteering.

“It’s a lot of fun,” Emigh said. “You’re in the mud in waders for the day with a bunch of young Forest Service people and it’s just a good day’s work out in nature.”

He encouraged anyone in the community, young or old, who is passionate about enjoying fishing for many decades into the future to get involved. He added the Florence STEP group participates in many volunteer opportunities and is always looking for new members.

For more information about STEP or to become a member, go to www.facebook.com/FlorenceSTEP/.

This summer is the last of the major excavation work at the Fivemile-Bell Restoration Project, and then planting will continue for three or four more years with maintenance.

“We’ll see what the next step is for this but we’ll be moving on to some other areas,” Burns said. “We’ve got some potential sites up in Deadwood creek that we’re looking at doing next.”

For more information about the Fivemile-Bell Restoration Project, visit the USFS at www.fs.usda.gov/land/siuslaw/landmanagement and Siuslaw Watershed Council at siuslaw.org.



THE WEST ❖ THE SIUSLAW NEWS ❖ FLORENCE TIMES ❖ THE SIUSLAW OAR ❖ THE SIUSLAW NEWS ❖ SIUSLAW NEWS

A look back at 130 years

INSIDE EACH EDITION OF *SIUSLAW NEWS* THROUGH OCTOBER

1930

Chamber Meeting Tuesday is Peppy
—The Siuslaw Oar
Vol. 40, No. 43
April 28, 1930



At the adjourned meeting of the Siuslaw Chamber of Commerce Tuesday afternoon a report of Secretary Ponsler stated that a reply had been received from his letter to the Oregon Art Society wherein he has stressed the advantages of this locality as a suitable place for an art colony. A promise was made to visit this section before selecting a definite site. ...

A general discussion was had over the destruction of rhododendron plants along the highways. Tourists and others frequently dig up the plants and carry them off. It was revealed that such action is against the law when taken within 500 feet of any highway. The chamber proposes to protect the scenic beauty of the lower Siuslaw. ...

President Hill suggested that the Chamber hold a picnic and a big basket dinner at Heceta Beach. The idea was met with favor by all present.

1931

Talking Pictures Here Next Week
— The Siuslaw Oar Vol. 41,
No. 50 May 15, 1931

Next week Saturday is the opening day for talking pictures in Florence, according to C.L. Kezar, who has been working away for the past couple months getting the Princess in shape and in

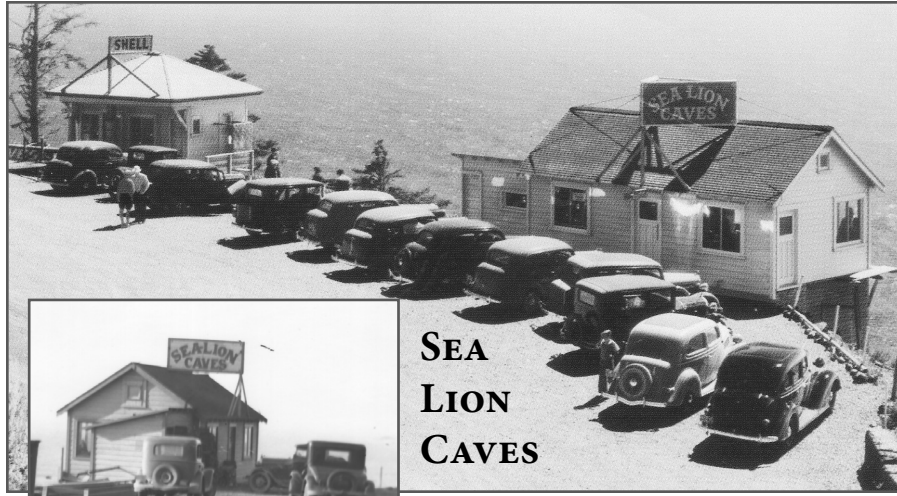
establishing a hook up for the best pictures.

In tryouts which are being made, Mr. Kezar is satisfied that the sound pictures will prove exceptionally satisfactory in the Princess.

The necessary changes have been made to assure this, and as rapidly as possible improvements will be made in the theatre for the comfort and convenience of its patrons.



1932



SEA LION CAVES

Captain Cox purchased the land containing the Sea Lion Caves in 1887 from the State of Oregon. He and his heirs owned the property until 1926.

R.E. Clanton acquired the land in 1927, with the specific intention of opening the Caves as a business.

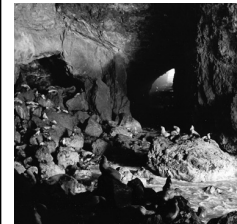
In 1930, when it became probable that U.S. Highway 101 would be completed, Clanton was joined by J.G. Houghton and J.E. Jacobson. The three partners decided to risk all that they owned and could borrow to build a safe access to the cave.

A trail 1,500 feet long was excavated by hand into the face of the cliff and at

its lower termination a 135 stair-step wooden tower was extended down to the north entrance of the caves. Despite the difficulty and danger of the construction, the trail and stairs provided safe access for visitors and Sea Lion Caves was opened to the public by this route in August 1932.

The traffic was light at first. The highway was only a graveled road until 1934, and until 1937 there were five ferry crossings within 100 miles. However, word of the amazing phenomenon spread and the number of people visiting Sea Lion Caves slowly grew until 1942, when virtually all such travel was halted by World War II.

The Year 1932 Sponsored by Sea Lion Caves



How would you like to be at the most exciting place on the Oregon Coast? At Sea Lion Caves you can do just that. With rock ledges outside, the largest and most beautiful sea cave in the world is home to wild, golden Steller Sea Lions. It's not often you can see these animals and so many of them this close. In season, Sea Lion Caves is a great viewing for seabirds: pigeon guillemots, coremorants, even rhinoceros anklets, and fabulous scenery.



On Scenic Coast Hwy. 101 North • Open 9 a.m. year round • 541-547-3111
Look for current weather on web page: www.sealioncaves.com

News and views that define our community.

SN Siuslaw News

Print, Digital, Mobile and More
thesiuslawnews.com