

Fish habitat restoration underway on East Fork Beech Creek

Blue Mountain Eagle

Work on East Fork Beech Creek is intended to improve fish habitat and riparian system health.

Forest Service biologists have joined forces with the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, Oregon Natural Desert Association, Grant Soil and Water Conservation District, private landowners and livestock permittees to restore riparian systems, and the natural processes and functions which keep them healthy long into the future, according to a press release from the Malheur National Forest.

Permittees have been working hard to manage livestock on the low-gradient areas of East Fork Beech Creek, as evidenced by the steady recovery of riparian areas along this creek. However, inadequate water in these stream reaches (a length of a stream or river) continues to limit Endangered Species Act listed fish recovery. As Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife retired fish biologist Jeff Neal described it, a lot of fish spawn in the gravels of the upper reaches, but as the water dries up in the summer, the little fish born in this creek congregate in one large pool, often dying as the pool shrinks.

To accelerate fish habitat recovery efforts and eventual-



Contractors install posts that will form the backbone of porous beaver dam analogues, which will store water and cause deposition of gravels in East Fork Beech Creek.

ly get these fish de-listed, the Forest Service and partners are targeting streams that provide critical habitat on the Malheur National Forest, starting with the low-gradient (wide-valley) and connected reaches. These areas provide the greatest return in terms of direct beneficial impacts, such as raising water tables, storing water across the adjacent floodplain and promoting stream meandering, which slows water velocity along bends and deposits gravels adult fish need for spawning.

Complementary work, such as tree-thinning in upland forests within the Magone planning area, is expected to have beneficial influences upon snowmelt volume and timing, adding this and other water sources to the system. When this extra water reaches the log jams and other structures being placed along East Fork Beech Creek this summer, the water will be slowed, dispersed across the newly functioning floodplain — with berms removed and historical side channels reconnected —

and stored there for late-season use. Based on the success of previous work, such as the Camp Creek Headwaters project last summer, biologists predict juvenile fish will have access to more water for much longer into the season, increasing their survival rates.

The Forest Service acknowledges the work may look “messy and destructive” in the short term. It may take a few years before all portions of the disturbed ground have been revegetated, although other portions of the reach



BEFORE: East Fork Beech Creek showing a single-thread channel with only large, embedded cobbles visible.



AFTER: East Fork Beech Creek after a large wood log jam was installed. The log jam will disperse water over the floodplain and reduce water velocity.

may see more rapid and vigorous vegetation response due to higher water levels, wider water distribution and the deposition of sediment and gravels that build up nutrient-rich soils.

Full restoration may also be enhanced by making the

area more attractive to beavers. If beavers join East Fork Beech Creek restoration efforts, their dams would create new pools, and help spread and store water over new areas of the floodplain, further stimulating riparian ecosystem health and vigor.

Grants benefit Grant County elk habitat

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The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation awarded \$269,750 in grant funding to assist with habitat stewardship projects and elk research in the state of Oregon.

The grants benefit 9,106 acres across Baker, Crook, Douglas, Grant, Klamath, Lake, Lane, Lincoln, Linn, Morrow, Tillamook, Union, Wallowa and Yamhill counties.

In Grant County, the grants will provide funding to place radio collars on five elk on the Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area so researchers can better understand elk migration from winter to summer range in order to guide future collaring projects and management decisions including harvest timing and allocation; thin encroaching conifers to improve the health and vigor of 240 acres of aspen habitat bordering the southern edge of John Day on the Malheur National Forest to benefit elk and mule deer calving and fawning habitat as well as habitat for an array of other species; and prescribe burn 3,000 acres, followed by noxious weed treatment on 100 acres, of the project area in the Heppner Game Management Unit on the Umatilla National Forest to improve forage on late winter and spring elk range.

Since 1986, RMEF and its partners completed 856 conservation and hunting heritage outreach projects in Oregon with a combined value of more than \$56.9 million. These projects conserved or enhanced 792,276 acres of habitat and opened or improved public access to 90,703 acres.

Volunteers in Oregon raised the funding by hosting chapter banquets, membership drives and other events.



Contributed photo

A small portion of Olive Lake will be closed for dam and spillway work from Aug. 7 to Oct. 1. The half-acre closure represents less than 1 percent of the 149-acre lake.

Small portion of Olive Lake closed for dam work

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Forest officials have closed a small portion of Olive Lake on the North Fork John Day Ranger District to complete maintenance work on the dam and spillway.

The closure went into effect Aug. 7 and will prohibit boating and swimming within the closure area, according to a Forest Service press release. Work will be intermittent and is anticipated to last until Oct. 1.

The area closed to public entry is approximately one-half acre and will be signed, fenced and defined by a string of buoys extending from the dam into the water about 200 feet to notify swimmers and boaters of the closure. The closure area is located on the northeast side of Olive Lake. The campground will remain open, but sites near the dam should be avoided. The hiking trail in the vicinity of the dam and spillway will be closed during construction, but

boating and swimming are still allowed outside the restricted area. Currently less than one percent of the 149-acre lake surface area will be

affected by the closure.

For more information, contact the North Fork John Day Ranger District at 541-427-3231.

Culvert replacement to close forest road 2402 periodically

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Construction work on a portion of Forest Service Road 2402 at South Fork Big Wall Creek will begin this week.

The construction project, which is located 25 miles northeast of Spray, is a continuation of ongoing aquatic restoration work in the Wall Creek area. South Fork Big Wall Creek is a perennial cold-water stream that is home to Mid-Columbia River steelhead and redband trout.

Henderson Logging will replace the stream crossing culvert at this location with a new 14-foot wide bottomless arch culvert that will allow for improved fish and aquatic organism passage and larger stream flow events to pass under the road without causing infrastructure damage.

This bottomless arch culvert is anticipated to last 40-50 years. The construction work will require that a section FSR 2402 between FSR 2300 and FSR 2402060 will be periodically closed from Aug. 7-31 and will reopen once work is completed. Closure signs will be posted on FSR 2402 at the junction with FSR 2300 and on the FSR 2402 at the junction with FSR 2402060.

Henderson Logging will begin hauling heavy equipment and supplies in to FSR 2402 this week, and construction activities will be ongoing for several weeks.

For more information, contact the Heppner Ranger District at 541-676-9187. For more information on the Umatilla National Forest, visit fs.usda.gov/umatilla.

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