

# Tribal fish restoration work highlighted

**Awarded \$4.9 million in federal money**

By Richard Hanners  
Blue Mountain Eagle



Contributed photo

**Two excavators lower a root ball at a Confederate Tribes of the Warm Springs instream restoration project to increase fish habitat and cover on the Middle Fork of the John Day River in 2015.**

Tribes' watershed restoration coordinator, updated the Grant County Court on the program.

The restoration program has seven full-time staff in the John Day office, established in 1996, and 10 more in Prai-



The Eagle/Richard Hanners  
**Amy Charette, the watershed restoration coordinator for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, speaks to the Grant County Court April 11.**

rie City to maintain a native plants nursery and manage Tribal properties in the upper watershed.

The Tribes acquired the 3,445-acre Forrest Conservation Area on the main stem of the John Day River east of Prairie City in 2002, where the nursery and McHaley Pond are located; the 33,557-acre Pine Creek Conservation Area in Wheeler County near Clarno in 1999 and 2001; and the 1,022-acre Oxbow Conservation Area along the Middle Fork from Bridge Creek to Camp Creek in 2002.

The Forrest property includes a 786-acre parcel on the Middle Fork between Bates State Park and Caribou Creek. They also manage the Nature Conservancy's Dunstan Homestead Preserve on the Middle Fork.

Charette said the restoration program receives most of its funding from the Bonneville Power Administration through the 2008 Columbia Basin Fish Accords, which provided the program about \$2.3 million per year for the past 10 years.

The objective of the Tribes' fisheries habitat program is to maintain and restore high-quality aquatic habitat to support fish populations,

including spring chinook, mid-Columbia steelhead, bull trout, Pacific lamprey and westslope cutthroat trout. The program seeks to foster partnerships to achieve holistic watershed-scale benefits, she told the court in her presentation.

Two significant problems for fish in the John Day watershed are higher water temperatures and lower stream flow in summer. When asked by Grant County Commissioner Jim Hamsher if constructing water impoundments would help with stream flow, Charette said the Tribes "prefer other strategies," such as using shade and water retention to keep headwater stream flow cold.

Projects that support water retention strategies include creating wet meadows at higher elevations, reconnecting floodplain areas to streams, planting in riparian areas and supporting construction of beaver dams, which hold back stream flow without blocking fish passage, she said.

Steelhead spawn in tributaries, while chinook spawn in the mainstem of the rivers, Charette said. The watershed generally has good spawning habitat but lacks sufficient habitat for juvenile rearing, she told the court.

Two ways to deal with that problem include removing fish-passage barriers, such as replacing or modifying any culverts where fish must jump more than six inches to pass through, and putting woody debris such as root balls in streams to increase stream volume, Charette said. The woody debris will not block fish passage but will help retain stream flow and provide juvenile rearing habitat.

In 2016 and 2017, the restoration program protected 1,325 acres of riparian habitat by erecting 10.46 miles of fencing; addressed five fish-passage barriers and installed 2 miles of irrigation

pipe; improved 11.3 miles of in-stream habitat by installing 256 log structures, creating 235 pools and 15 rock weirs for grade control, and removing or modifying 73 legacy weirs; removed juniper on 838 acres and invasive or hardwood species on 137 riparian acres; reconnected the floodplain to streams on 13.7 wetland acres with side channel construction, levee reduction and other projects; and completed 143 acres of riparian planting on 10.2 miles of streams.

The watershed restoration program changed its emphasis in 2017 to more monitoring, Charette said. The program's funding sources, including the BPA, wanted to know how successful the different restoration projects have been, she said.

In cooperation with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife personnel, the Tribes will utilize a structured implementation focus for restoration and monitoring in the Middle Fork from 2019 to 2021 and in the Upper John Day River from 2022 to 2024.

"We'll focus on larger-scale projects and plan longer ahead of time," she told the Eagle.

The program has also been awarded \$4.9 million from the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service for a Resources Conservation Partnership Project from 2018 through 2022. This includes \$1.1 million for irrigation efficiency projects and \$2.7 million for conservation easements, along with technical assistance for project partners and the NRCS.

"Private landowners apply to the NRCS for this money," Charette said. "All of this is on private land."

Overall, the Tribes are seeing good work by landowners and agencies in the John Day watershed, she told the court, but changes are coming in funding and requirements.

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