

Historic dredging site reclaimed for fish

Projects benefit steelhead, trout and salmon

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Two fish habitat improvement projects were completed this year in tributaries of the Middle Fork of the John Day River just downstream from the historic mining town of Galena.

Both creeks are designated critical habitat for threatened Mid-Columbia steelhead and bull trout and provide important cold-water rearing habitat for spring chinook salmon, according to Forest Service hydrologist Bob Hassmiller and Forest Service fisheries biologist Dan Armichardy.

About 4 miles of Bear Creek was dredge-mined in the 1930s after being hydraulically mined by Chinese prior to that. Mine tailings created several ponds rather than a continuous surface water flow from the creek to the river. Other past impacts included overgrazing and logging.

The Bear Creek Project called for reconnecting the creek and river. Adding woody debris to the creek would improve riffle and pool formation, restore floodplain connectivity and create rearing and spawning sites. The project also called for removing road berms and reducing elevated summer stream temperatures.

The Blue Mountain Ranger District completed 2.4 river miles of instream enhancement this fall. Two excavators placed 720 pieces of large wood into the channel and floodplain and reconstructed 240 feet of valley terrain. Crews planted 3,000 cottonwoods and 6,500 willows and thinned 200 acres of overstocked dry forest stands.

The Bear Creek project cost \$167,186, with 42 percent provided by the Forest Service and 58 percent by the North Fork John Day Watershed Council and Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. The Forest Service's Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program assisted with staff time.

Further downstream and on the opposite side of the river, Big Creek was worked by Chinese miners in the 19th century and by Camm-Texx in the 1980s. This activity left a levee that constrained natural movement of the creek. Fish habitat was further impaired by large cobbles left along the stream bed and four large ponds that formed in the floodplain.

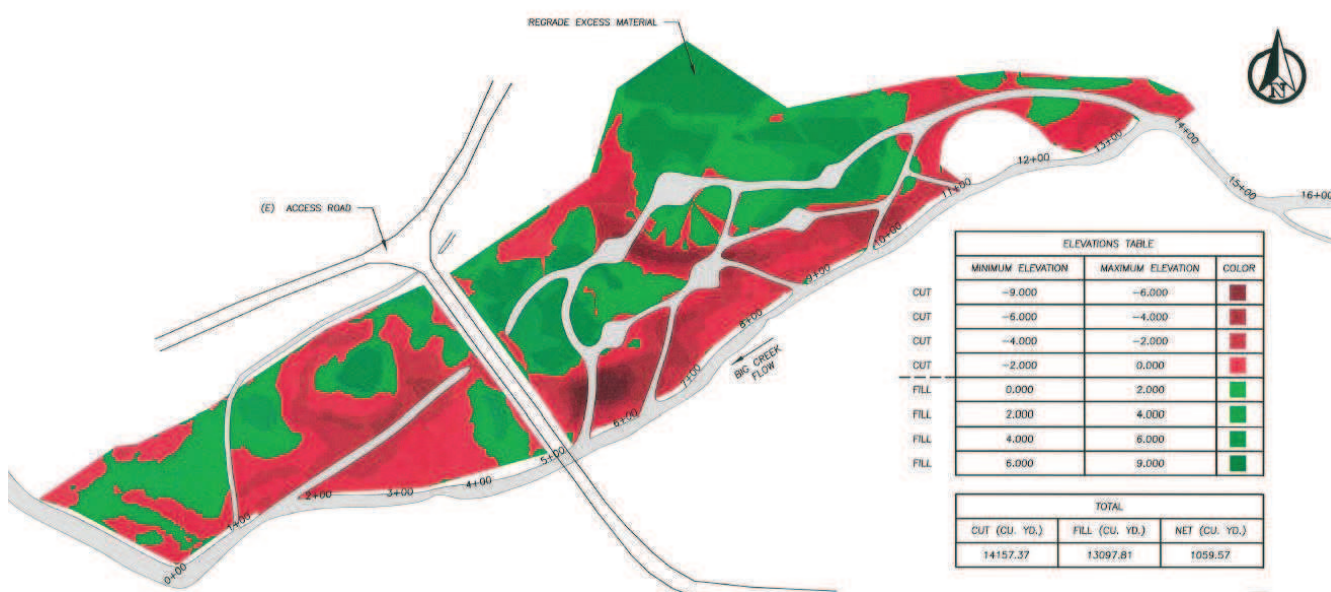
The Big Creek Mine Reclamation Project called for improving streamflow and water retention, and building up floodplains by sediment retention and revegetation.

Crews tipped trees in 11 acres of overstocked forest, added 150 large trees to the floodplain and side channels, reconnected 6.5 acres



Greg and Kyle Ontko use excavators to remove historic mine tailings to reconnect Bear Creek to the Middle Fork of the John Day River near Galena as part of a 2018 fish habitat restoration project.

Contributed photo/U.S. Forest Service



A diagram of the 2018 Big Creek fish habitat restoration project on the Middle Fork of the John Day River near Galena showing how cut and fill engineering changed the streamflow pattern.



Contributed photo U.S. Forest Service

Kyl Ontko shuts down his excavator at the 2018 Bear Creek fish habitat restoration project to allow the engine to cool off in 107-degree temperature.

of floodplain by removing 1,500 feet of man-made levee and regrading 6,300 cubic yards of floodplain material, and created 0.6 miles of side channel.

Oregon Natural Desert Association work parties planted 2,600 willows as well as dogwood, tufted hairgrass and sedge. The plants were harvested earlier from around the ponds and cached in a creek by the Oregon Youth Conservation Corps.

The Big Creek Mine Reclamation Project cost \$286,769, with 24 percent provided by the Forest Service and 76 percent provided by the Grant Soil & Water Conservation District and Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. The district also helped design the project and provided needed aquatics engineering.



Contributed photo U.S. Forest Service Big Creek after the 2018 fish habitat restoration project on the Middle Fork of the John Day River near Galena was completed.

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Request for Proposals

Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, Inc. is accepting proposals for an agency-wide single audit conducted in accordance with Code of Federal Regulations Title 2 Part 200 for the period ending June 30, 2019.

Licensed CPAs may request a copy of the RFP from Diana at 541-963-3186 x1004. Deadline for submission is January 15, 2019.