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Native Coho returning to Boxler Creek

By Bill Langmaid

My recent article highlighting the immediate successes of the Sanders Creek barrier removal project by Longview Fibre prompted some local folks to ask about a project that was completed in 1999 on Boxler Creek, a tributary to Fishhawk Lake. The two projects were similar in that barrier culverts were removed, at Boxler Creek, however, the barrier was replaced with a railcar bridge. This complicated the project, due to a four foot gradient change created by the undersized culverts, so a series of rock and wooden weirs were installed to step down the creek and reduce upstream erosion.

The Boxler Creek problem was identified by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, with assistance from the Fishhawk Lake Recreation Club and the Upper Nehalem Watershed Council. It was determined that 1.5 miles of prime Coho habitat was effectively blocked by a double culvert perched five feet above the creek, blocking fish passage for 20 years or more.

After a lot of innovative design work by the Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District with support from the Natural Resource Conservation Service engineers, and many grant proposals developed by Maggie Peyton, coordinator of the Nehalem Watershed Councils, the project was fully funded and ready to start.

The INDEPENDENT newspaper reported on the culvert removal and construction of the new bridge in 1999. Now the exciting news is the results of recent salmon surveys.

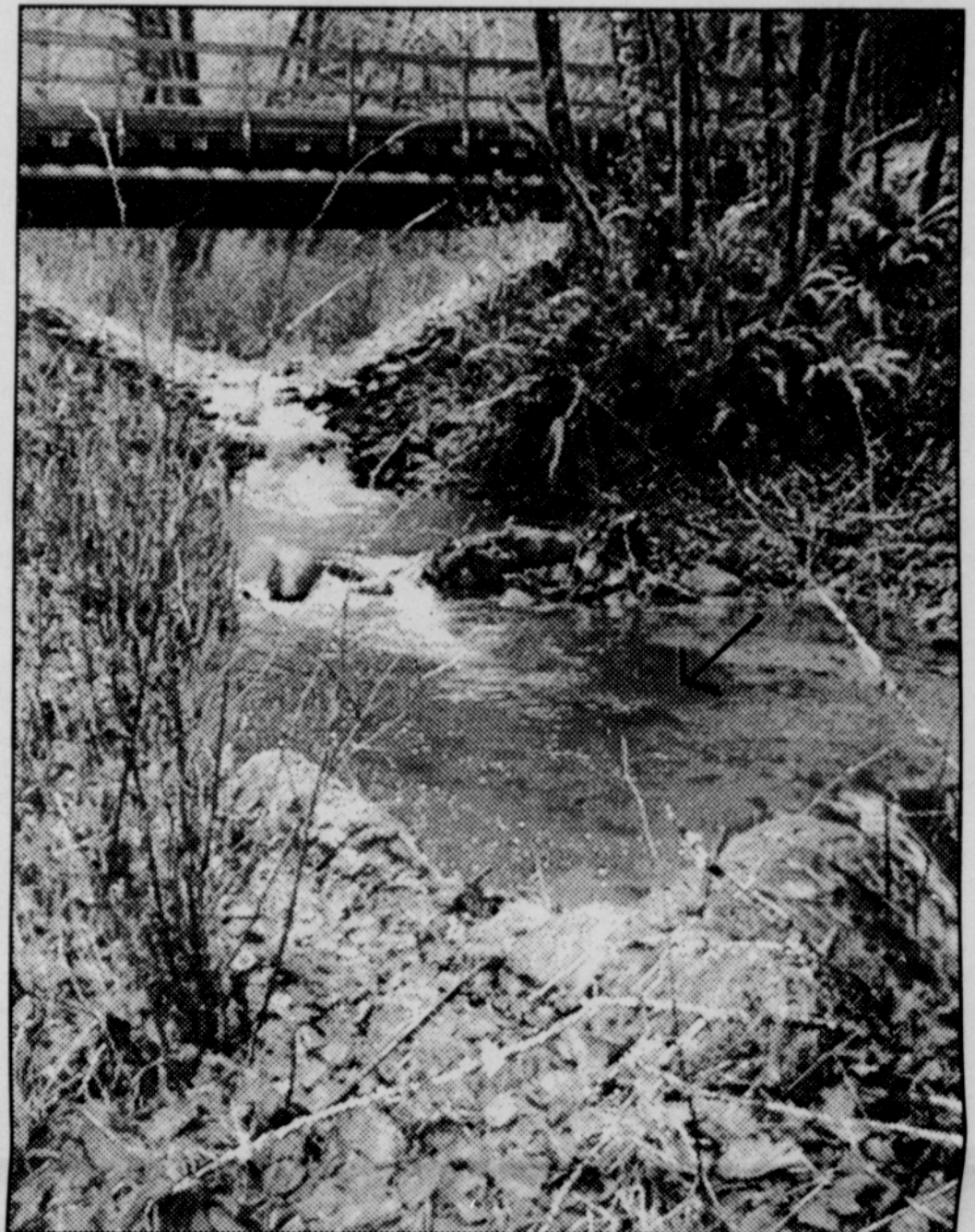
Coho spawners discovered the new territory quickly, with surveys in December 2000 showing 26 adults and 23 jacks. A juvenile Coho presence survey conducted July 9, 2002, by Michele Long of ODF&W, showed promising results. Michele reported "each pool seen from the bankside visual assessment was packed with young of the year coho. Numbers counted ranged from 15-30 fish in each pool."

Fishhawk Lake resident Troy Horton has been actively in-

involved in the watershed council, and devotes many hours to monitoring the various projects around his community. His

from start to finish.

The Upper Nehalem Watershed Council is a group of area residents that meet monthly to



The bridge above spans Boxler Creek where badly placed culverts once blocked salmon from returning to their natural habitat. The arrow points to a native Coho.

salmon presence report from this spawning season shows that habitat restoration work really does succeed.

"It was exciting!" Troy reported recently, after spending a couple of days checking the streams going into Fishhawk Lake. "Boxler Creek, where we replaced a non-passable culvert with a bridge, had 26 coho below the bridge and 141 above." He also noted that this is the third year since the first spawners entered Boxler Creek, and wondered what the future will bring.

Project funds came from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, ODFW Restoration and Enhancement Board, Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation and Columbia SWCD. Some materials and labor for the project were donated by Longview Fibre and the Fishhawk Lake community. ODFW provided valuable technical and field support for the project

discuss ways to restore salmon habitat. It is endorsed by Clatsop and Columbia Counties and the State of Oregon, but is an independent organization with no regulatory or enforcement powers. The main function of the council is to help make projects like Sanders Creek and Boxler Creek possible.

Maggie Peyton, coordinator of the Upper and Lower Nehalem Watershed Councils, can be contacted at (503) 429-2401 for more information. Questions about stream restoration, enhancement or watershed health are encouraged. The council meets at the Mist/Birkenfeld Fire Hall on the fourth Thursday of most months. Ask to be put on the mailing list to receive meeting announcements and agendas. All are welcome to join in council meetings and a variety of worthwhile activities. Please join us when you can.