

Cash incentives for salmon habitat can help fish and landowners

By Bill Langmaid

In recent years, it has become more lucrative for landowners to improve the health of America's rivers, streams and wetlands. A large part of the immediate need for clean water is the decline of salmon populations throughout the Pacific Northwest. Initiatives began about ten years ago to turn around the trend in salmon populations, hoping for a return to the economically significant numbers of the past.

A large portion of Northwest Oregon is privately owned, and landowners may find it difficult to justify spending money on stream improvements that have little private benefit. Riparian projects initiated by the various watershed councils have begun to address this problem, but there are still large areas of marginal pastureland that border salmon streams. Various state agencies have collectively decided that it benefits salmon to have trees bordering streams, but the presence of

livestock makes it difficult to establish a riparian buffer.

The state of Oregon has tried to address this dilemma by partnering with the US Department of Agriculture through a voluntary program called the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). This program, offered to private landowners, provides annual payments and cash incentives to those interested in planting buffers of trees and shrubs and, if needed, installing fence to limit livestock access on potential salmon streams. Non-salmon bearing streams may qualify for other programs with similar incentives.

Property owners must agree to maintain the practices for 10 to 15 year periods so that the plantings have sufficient time to establish. Since Americans support clean water initiatives, the Federal government and state of Oregon have made CREP worthwhile financially. For landowners willing to install stream buffers, a variety of payments are extended.

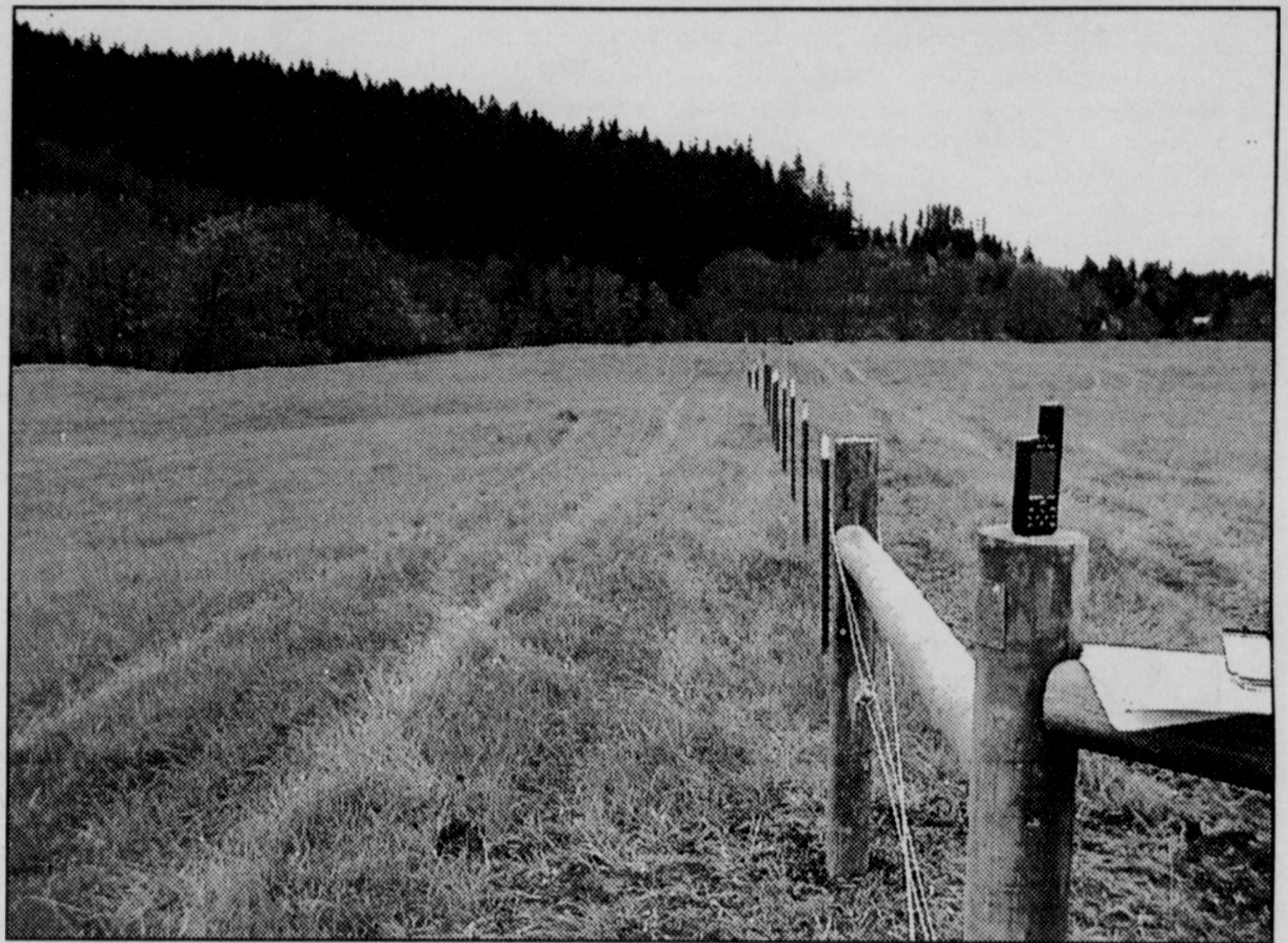


Photo shows a fence installed to restrict access to the river bank by cattle. Area on the left of the fence is slated for tree planting; area to the right of the fence is pasture land.

Landowners receive annual

rental payments based on the leasing value of the land. In Columbia County, for example, marginal pastureland is currently set at a rate of \$66 per acre along a perennial stream. That rate increases 50% if a tree and shrub buffer is installed along the stream. Property owners also receive up to \$9 per acre for maintaining plantings, fencing, and water developments installed through the program.

Landowners will also receive a one-time payment for signing a CREP contract. This is calculated by taking \$10 per acre for each year of the contract. On 10 acres with a 15 year contract, the payment would be \$1500.

The CREP program will pay 75 percent of the approved cost of installation, as well as assisting with any necessary water developments for stock. Also available is a one-time pay-

ment incentive providing an additional 40 percent bonus on the approved cost of installing the riparian buffer. For example if it costs \$5000 to install fencing and tree plantings, when complete, the enrollee receives \$2000 beyond the normal cost share of 75 percent.

A cumulative bonus impact incentive may be awarded if a long stretch of river is entered into CREP. This incentive is designed to encourage owners, and possibly adjoining landowners, to enter larger stretches of streams into CREP. Larger stretches of river have a greater impact than shorter lengths of stream, and a one-time payment is awarded

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program can provide the best of both worlds. While giving private landowners some economic incentive for installing costly stream buffers, it, in turn, provides the public with environmental values that improve the health of Oregon's streams and rivers.

For more information about CREP and other conservation programs, contact the SWCD CREP specialist 503-429-4787.

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