

# Upper Nehalem Watershed Council had many projects in 2004

By Maggie Peyton and Bill Langmaid

For the Upper Nehalem Watershed Council, 2004 was an eventful year. The council continued to serve as an advocate for improving watershed health, basin-wide, and as a conduit through which thoughtful activities are conceived from identified needs. The council has been in existence for eight years and has funneled over a million dollars into the local economy for watershed health and salmon recovery efforts.

The year began with a new chairperson for the council, as Bill DeJager was succeeded, after several years of dedicated leadership, by Dennis Nelson. 2004 was also our first full year as a 501(c)3 non-profit cooperation. The momentum continued as we developed organizational capacity to provide the appropriate support needed to identify and effectively accomplish watershed improvements. As a result, many hours of volunteer service were required to meet the council's goals and the expectations of funding entities.

## Riparian Reforestation

Our riparian re-forestation efforts continued last winter as the restoration crew was in full swing, planting over 6,500 trees and shrubs along high priority reaches of the rivers and streams of the upper to mid-Nehalem valley. Since the council formed in 1996 and began this effort, over three hundred acres of riparian area has

been planted with native trees and shrubs, across 78 different ownerships. Since that time, we have installed 14 miles of riparian fencing and stabilized multiple eroding stream banks with specialized planting and staking techniques. Currently we are performing project maintenance in order to assure plant survival and fence integrity. We will begin planting new projects early in 2005 with native plants that we have grown, at the BLM nursery, from locally collected seeds as part of the recently established Native Plant Nursery Cooperative.

## East Fork Assessment

In the spring the council began an in-depth assessment of the East Fork Nehalem, familiar to anyone who has driven Scappoose-Vernonia Highway. The assessment will be completed in Spring of 2005. The council will then initiate an action planning process involving interested stakeholders. Assessment findings will be used as a basis for identifying potential new projects.

We are looking forward to continuing the watershed assessment process in partnership with the Oregon Department of Forestry as they move into conducting the Nehalem Watershed Analysis on state forest lands. At that time, we hope to branch off on a collaborative project with the City of Vernonia to perform a watershed analysis of Rock Creek. We eagerly anticipate developing and implementing many

new watershed health and salmon habitat improvement projects in cooperation with local landowners as a result of these efforts.

The council continued a long-standing effort, initiated by the Nehalem Valley chapter of the Izaak Walton League, to collect data on water quality and quantity. We are currently working to summarize 10 years of stream temperature data, six years of macro invertebrate data and four years of turbidity data collected basin wide by council staff and volunteers.

## Stream Flow Gauges

The Rock Creek flow gauge that was installed in the summer of 2003 continues to function as planned and will serve the purpose of measuring stream flows for many years to come.

The US Geological Survey installed a stream gauge several miles upstream of Vernonia after the flood of 1996. Data collected from both of these gauges will be useful in the city's application of summer water conservation measures, and will provide early warning information for the community in case of rising flood water.

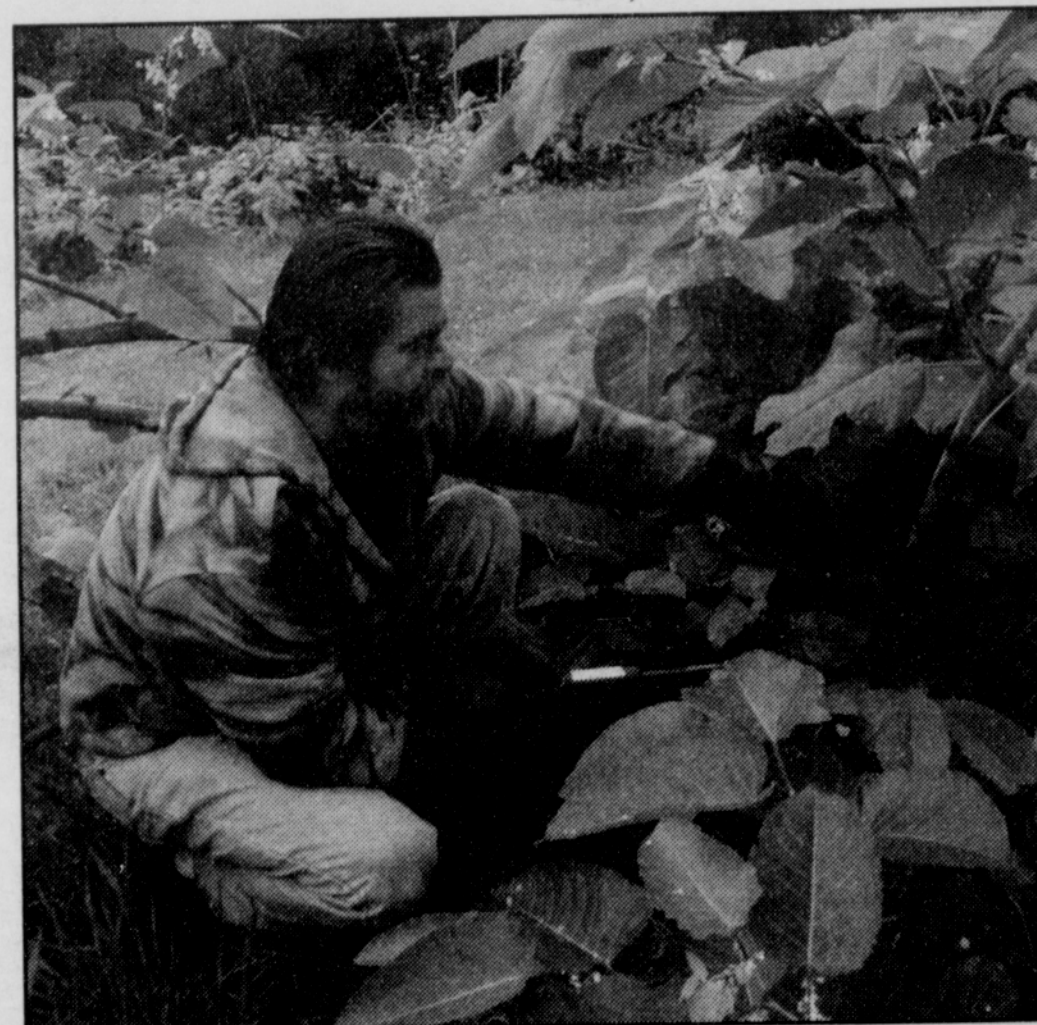
## Noxious Weeds

Interest in noxious, or exotic, weeds began to take hold in the area, with multiple weed management groups formed in the North Coast and Nehalem Basin, Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook Counties in order to coordinate eradication efforts. Several exotic weeds exist in the Nehalem, including Himalayan blackberry, Canadian thistle, Scotch broom, and Japanese knotweed. The Nehalem Knotweed Task Force formed specifically to work on

the Japanese and Giant Knotweed invasion that is taking place at an alarmingly rapid rate. The council received funding early in 2004 from the Oregon Department of Agriculture to survey, map and begin spraying Knotweed in the basin during the summer. The survey resulted in over 90 knotweed sightings and 44 infestations being treated with herbicide. We will seek to continue these efforts in the New Year, and in future years, as we have only begun to wage war on Knotweed.

matter because they show what issues can be addressed if we want to encourage an increase in the coho populations. Some of the things that can be done at the local level are to increase the quantity of coho habitat, and then improve the quality of that habitat.

The watershed council has worked with local landowners to open up more habitat for coho salmon by sponsoring replacement of undersized culverts and improving habitat complexity with the introduction of large woody debris. During 2004, the council worked with



Above, Lee Wonder spraying knotweed, one of the noxious weeds that have taken hold of land in Columbia County.

## Coho Habitat

A major underlying reason for the existence of the watershed council is the declining population of native coho salmon. Exact reasons for the decline are numerous, and

Longview Fibre Co., Weyerhaeuser, and Hancock to replace undersized or failing culverts with either bridges or larger culverts. Two new bridges were installed on Crooked Creek and numerous other culverts were replaced, opening up more than 10 miles of aquatic habitat in the upper basin. Several stream crossings were abandoned and the areas converted to a more natural state through tree and shrub plantings.

We are continuing to work with the landowners named above, plus Forest Systems Inc. and the City of Vernonia to develop several similar projects on Cedar Creek, East Humbug and Bear Creek. We are working to have these new projects funded and implemented by the fall of 2005.

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