

Behind the Scenes

November 2022



Dear Friend,

The transition from summer to fall brings many changes to both the watershed landscape and to our watershed council activities. Now that the rains have returned, our contractors are wrapping up their in-stream work and their invasive weed treatments, while our revegetation crews are going out to plant many thousands of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants within our project sites. But just what makes fall the best season to plant native plants?

Planting out seeds and bulbs in the spring season when the earth is alive with new growth and energy is something many of us enjoy and look forward to. However, the cold, wet and sometimes dreary fall season is actually the best time to plant the vast majority of our native species. While many plants are wrapping up their fruit and seed production and preparing for dormancy at this time, fall is an incredibly important time of growth for many native trees and shrubs - albeit mostly underground. After our dry, hot summer is over and the rains return, the soil is suddenly alive with activity. The soil has retained warmth from summertime sun, and now is also infused with moisture from falling rains. This combination stimulates root growth, which is essential for healthy plant establishment. As the season progresses and the soil cools down further, root growth ceases and the plant goes dormant. But compared to a spring-planted plant, a plant that is planted in the fall has had the advantage of extra time to develop and strengthen its root structure. This allows the plant to shoot up earlier and produce flowers faster, giving it a headstart at completing its growth cycle and a big advantage over weeds! If you are looking to add native plants to your yard, I highly encourage you to check out your local SWCD Fall and Winter plant sales over the next several weeks (information about Benton's is listed below).

Happy reading!

--Suzanne Teller, LWC Outreach Coordinator (contact me at Outreach@LuckiamuteLWC.org or 503-837-0237)

Upcoming LWC and Partner Events:

Benton Soil & Water Conservation District Winter Plant Sale

Order Date: *Ordering is open now and will remain open until February 1 or until plants are all gone, whichever comes first!*

Pick-up Date: Saturday, February 25

Pick-up Place: Benton County Fairgrounds, Corvallis (110 SW 53rd St., Corvallis)

Plants ordered are on a first-come, first-served basis and in limited quantities from local Willamette Valley nurseries (no onsite purchases). See the available bulbs and seeds at [https://bentonswcd.org/shop/!](https://bentonswcd.org/shop/)

The History of Fire in the Luckiamute Watershed

When: December 14, 2022 @ The Sippery, Monmouth

More details and RSVP info coming soon!

Pleistocene Paleoecology of the Mid-Willamette Valley - A Ghost Story

January/February 2023 - date info coming soon!

Discover the lost world beneath our own feet. Join us for a tour of a land both familiar and surprisingly wild. Hear about exciting fossil discoveries in our watershed and its neighbors. Learn about local Pleistocene paleoecology; the mammoth-sized hole it has left in our modern world, and the lessons it holds for our future. You are invited to reimagine how you think of the land; to engage with it on its own time scale instead of our own.

Your Land. Your Rivers. Your Community. Your Watershed.

Watershed Notes

J₂E River to Ridge Diversity Project Update: Prairie Planting Underway!



Aerial view of J₂E project area looking South. You can see the meandering Vincent Creek, as well as the wet prairie on the right and seasonal pond below.

When Euro-American settlers first arrived in the Willamette Valley, they were awestruck by the wide-open landscapes covered by tall grasses and wildflowers, punctuated by groves of spreading oak trees. These prairie and oak savanna habitats were actively managed for thousands of years by the Kalapuya, who used fire to keep shrubs and tree seedlings from encroaching and crowding out the plants they relied upon for food and fiber. As settlement progressed, the Kalapuya population declined due to new diseases and forced removal from their homelands. The grasslands and oak savannas that characterized this area quickly disappeared as fires were suppressed and land was cleared for agriculture and settlement. Today, these iconic Willamette Valley ecosystems are found on less than 3 percent of the land they used to cover.

Because most of the remaining grassland prairies and oak savannas are found on private land, landowners can have a remarkable impact on the future of these imperiled ecosystems. At the J₂E Tree Farm, owners Dave and Sarah Ehlers value the diverse and increasingly rare habitat types found on their land and have dedicated almost a third of their 360 acres to watershed restoration and improvement, wildlife habitat enhancement, and recreation. This includes the restoration and enhancement of 4 acres of wet prairie and 3.8 acres of a butterfly corridor consisting of a mix of upland prairie/oak savannah and oak/conifer woodlands extending from Vincent Creek to the tallest point on the J₂E ridge.

Since 2018, the Ehlers family and contracted reforestation crews from Miller Timber, Wild Habitat Contracting, Inc. and D. Franco Contracting, Inc. have conducted targeted herbicide applications focused on invasive weeds in the prairie and oak savannah habitats. The Ehlers, Wild Habitat, and a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) team have also mechanically removed encroaching trees and shrubs, which were later burned in slash piles on-site. At the end of this month, Wild Habitat is scheduled to seed these prepped areas with native grasses and wildflowers, and plant almost 8,300 native bulbs, plugs and rhizomes. Some of the species included in this planting effort include camas, biscuitroot, narrow-leaf onion, ookaw and yampa — all of which play an important ecological role within these landscapes and are culturally significant food and fiber plants for the Tribes of this region.

A special shout-out goes to Jarod Jebousek, USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Biologist, who is playing a significant role in many of these activities. At the J₂E, Jarod and a team of USFWS crewmembers have been working alongside the Ehlers to plan, advise, coordinate and accomplish many of the site preparation activities. USFWS has also provided Nelson's checkermallow (*Sidalcea nelsoniana*) seed, which will be planted by Wild Habitat at the wet prairie site as part of the recovery plan for this federally threatened wildflower species.



Nelson's checkermallow was listed as a federally threatened wildflower species in 1993. Its beautiful pink blooms appear from May to August, and attract a wide variety of pollinators.

The J₂E's close proximity to Beazell Memorial Forest (2000' as the crow flies) also makes it an ideal location to expand the range of Taylor's checkerspot butterfly (*Euphydryas editha taylori*), which is listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Once abundant in the great swaths of prairie and oak savannah habitat that used to characterize the Willamette Valley, it is now found in only two locations in Oregon — one of which is Beazell Memorial Forest. Ongoing efforts to restore and expand butterfly habitat at J₂E will not only benefit the Taylor's checkerspot, it will also help countless other pollinators and wildlife that depend on prairie and oak savannah habitat for their long-term survival.

When asked to describe what it's been like to work with USFWS on this project, Dave comments, "We have done forest and riparian restoration activities with USFWS prior to the J₂E River to Ridge Project, but this is our first prairie restoration project. Jarod and the USFWS crew have been great partners throughout the entire process, from application, education, planning, mowing, hand-holding, Nelson's checkermallow seed and now execution of the plan. Sarah and I, as well as our children and grandchildren, are very excited about and thankful for all the flowers and wonderful habitat headed our way."

The LWC is proud to be a part of the large partnership that is involved in this project, which includes Benton Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Bonneville Environmental Foundation and Xerces Society. This project is funded through an Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board grant administered through the Benton Soil and Water Conservation District. Learn more about this project on the LWC website at <https://www.luckiamutelwc.org/j2e-river-to-ridge-diversity-project.html>.