

# Behind the Scenes

September 2020



Dear Friend,

What a year we've had so far! Not only have we continued to grapple with the threat of COVID-19, we have also experienced unprecedented loss and devastation from wildfire, and smoke plumes that turned our region's famously clean air to the worst in the world. Today, however, I am feeling grateful for the rain showers last week that have helped quell the fires that have ravaged so much of the Pacific Northwest this month. I am also grateful to be able to take a deep breath of autumn-scented air untainted by smoke and ash. Finally, I want to offer a glimmer of hope for a brighter future.

This month, we celebrate with you the achievement of an incredible milestone - **1,000,000 native trees and shrubs planted in the Luckiamute and Ash Creek watersheds!** We are so grateful to our Friends of the LWC, as well as our partners, contractors, landowners, donors, volunteers and Business Circle members for helping us achieve this incredible milestone, and for making the watershed a healthier place for all. Without the support we receive from our community, this would not have been possible. So hats off to you, Friends of the LWC, for your role in making this watershed a healthier and more beautiful place for all to enjoy! We look forward to being able to raise a toast with you in celebration during summer 2021, which also happens to be the 20th anniversary of the LWC!

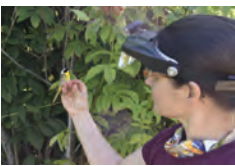
Take care, stay safe, and happy reading!

--Suzanne Teller, LWC Outreach Coordinator ([Outreach@LuckiamuteLWC.org](mailto:Outreach@LuckiamuteLWC.org) or leave a voicemail at 503-837-0237)



A BIG THANK YOU goes out to all of our Love Your Watershed campaign supporters, including Benton Soil & Water Conservation District, Starker Forests, Spiritopia, Willamette Habitat Restoration Fund, and many of our Friends of the LWC! We are excited to be able to continue connecting our communities to their watershed, even in the midst of a pandemic. Your support is what makes it possible to keep inspiring and empowering our communities to take action for watershed health!

## **Love Your Watershed News: Our Sips 'n' Science pub talks are going virtual!**



### **Sips 'n' Science: What Birds Reveal About Floodplain Function**

Date: Tuesday, October 13, 2020

Time: 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

Place: via Zoom (*registration required*)

Grab your favorite beverage and tune into this evening presentation by USGS forest ecologist, Joan Hagar, from the comfort of your own home! **Details and registration information at [www.luckiamutelwc.org/sips-and-science-lsna-birds](http://www.luckiamutelwc.org/sips-and-science-lsna-birds)**

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

# Watershed Notes

## Ground-breaking Change for Luckiamute State Natural Area

As we welcome back the fall rains to our corner of Oregon, we are not only looking forward to continued relief from fire and smoke, we are also excited to see one of our newest projects really come to life!



Photo Credit: River Design Group

This aerial image from February 2017 shows the Luckiamute River overtopping its banks and flowing into its floodplain.

The earth-moving phase of our Luckiamute State Natural Area Floodplain Reconnection project has just been completed, expanding the value of this beautiful natural area for many species of fish and wildlife that rely on floodplain habitat for survival. When the fall rains and spring snowmelt raise the water level, our streams and rivers sometimes spill out onto their floodplains - which are the low-lying lands that surround each of our waterways. This natural cycle leaves behind rich topsoil, which makes the Willamette Valley excellent for agriculture. It also allows fish access to a rich source of nutrients and safe habitat during fast flows.

Many of our rivers however, including the Luckiamute, have been disconnected from their floodplains over the years. Berms, dykes, dredging, development and the clearing of floodplain forests are just some of the activities that have resulted in the loss of this valuable habitat. In turn, floodplain disconnection has led to accelerated streambank erosion, more severe flooding events, and is a major factor in the decline of our native salmon and trout populations.

How is a river reconnected to its floodplain? Guided by surveys of the existing topography and vegetation and plans by River Design Group, contractors from Trask Design and Construction, LLC raised and lowered the elevation of different areas of the landscape in a way that would allow the waters of the Luckiamute River to once again be able to spill out into the surrounding floodplain during annual flooding cycles. Some areas of high elevation were also lowered in order to allow floodwaters to fully recede back to the stream channel as water levels drop back down. This allows fish an exit path back to the Luckiamute River as water levels drop, and avoids the risk that they will be stranded in shallow pools. Trask crewmembers were able to carefully maneuver their heavy machinery around areas we had planted in the existing swales and wetlands, minimizing impact to these thriving native plant communities. Our restoration crews and a team of volunteers will also be planting this area and the surrounding land with native grasses, trees and shrubs.



Photo Credit: Jean-Paul Zagarola

Trask Design and Construction, LLC completed the earth-moving phase of the LSNA Floodplain Reconnection project, taking extraordinary measures to protect existing native vegetation.

We have been taking plenty of photos and videos before and during the construction phase of the floodplain reconnection project, and will continue to document the changes to the river and its floodplain in the coming months. Ultimately, we will compile the footage into a project video, so that we can share this amazing transformation of a landscape with all of you. We also hope that we will be able to invite you to a project tour in the coming year, so that you can see this ground-breaking project for yourself!



Photo credit: Jean-Paul Zagarola

Mature native vegetation is left standing in "islands" and within existing swales that will provide additional habitat for fish and other aquatic wildlife when these low-lying areas are flooded.

**Correction:** in one of the photos featured in the August issue of *Behind the Scenes*, we incorrectly identified two of the mussels pictured on the streambed of Vincent Creek. Here is the photo (right) with the corrected caption. Thanks again, Emilie, for the photos and fantastic article you contributed to our *Behind the Scenes* bulletin last month!



Photo Credit: Emilie Blevins

The California floater (left) and Western pearlshell mussel (right) pictured here were found in Vincent Creek and relocated to a safe new home away from the project site. Since these mussels can live more than 100 years, we hope they will continue to thrive at J2E Tree Farm for many years to come!