

# Williams Creek Watershed Council

BY EVELYN ROETHER

This time of year, many of us have our minds on water as we welcome the return of the rainy season. With the rains come the reduced danger of fire, the recharging of our thirsty wells, and the return of the salmon.

Clean and abundant water is, of course, the foundation of all life. Sufficient quantities of water are a key component to many industries including farming, fishing, mining and manufacturing. Here in southwest Oregon, our rivers and streams also provide habitat and spawning grounds for our regional totem: the salmon.

Recognizing the importance of water to virtually all aspects of our lives, Oregon took a tremendous step in 1997 with the creation of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds. The Oregon Plan was designed to restore the healthy function of Oregon's watersheds and natural aquatic systems.

The Oregon Plan called for the formation of "watershed councils, which are voluntary, non-regulatory groups organized by local citizens who care about the health of area streams, rivers and watersheds as a whole. Watershed councils exist in communities all over the state of Oregon, including seven here in the Rogue Valley. These councils represent a balance of interested and affected people within a given watershed. Instead of being formed along political boundaries, watershed councils are formed along the natural boundaries that make up the drainage area for a particular body of water.

Watershed boundaries have the ability to bring unlikely partners (conservation groups, farmers, ranchers, industry, urban landowners) together in a working relationship that benefits everyone and the water we all rely on. Together, council members reach agreements on particular actions to protect and restore their watershed.

In 1998, Oregon voters approved a ballot measure that set aside 15% of lottery revenues to help fund the restoration of watersheds, salmon runs and state parks. In addition, sales of salmon license plates are earmarked for protecting and improving watershed health. With these public funds, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) developed a grant program to help watershed councils and their partners accomplish important work on the ground. To date OWEB has funneled millions of dollars to watershed councils and other organizations and agencies that

carry out the tasks involved in assessing and improving watershed health. This work includes monitoring and improving water quality; protecting fish habitat; reducing surface water waste; and restoring instream and riparian habitat.

A 2005 University of Oregon study estimated that for every dollar that the state invested in watershed council support, each council brought another \$4.00 in additional state, federal and private funding into its local community. In the small community of Williams alone, the Williams Creek Watershed Council has generated over \$800,000 in total funding, over \$200,000 of which has gone directly to pay local contractors to perform the work. Altogether, \$538,000 of this money has been funneled into the Williams area economy, resulting in improved watershed conditions for wildlife, fish and humans.

Watershed councils thrive on community involvement. Here are some ways that you can help out:

- Buy a salmon license plate! The proceeds from your \$30 DMV fee go directly to addressing road-related impacts to salmon and trout streams and towards restoring fish habitat in Oregon state parks.
- Share your local knowledge! The Williams Creek Watershed Council welcomes you to join us at our Board meetings (the 4th Wednesday of every month at 7 pm), and our Project meetings (the 2nd Wednesday of every month at 3 pm). Both meetings are held upstairs in the old Williams Fire Dept building at 215 East Fork Road, Williams).
- Make a donation to your local watershed council! The Williams Creek Watershed Council focuses its efforts in Williams, but is involved in projects across the Rogue Basin. Support our work by sending a donation to: WCWC, PO Box 94, Williams, OR 97544.

Working together to take care of our watersheds just makes sense. After all, we all live downstream.

Evelyn Roether  
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— Buffalo Joe

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