

# A partnership for life

BY BARBARA CHASTEEN

As you drive up Thompson Creek Road, you pass a stretch of stream that looks as if it has been invaded by plastic pads and chopsticks lined up along the banks and the floodplain. The plastic pads surround new plants; the sticks protect them from brush cutters that will keep invasive competition like blackberries from returning. It takes some imagination to see a future riparian forest.

When I arrived on this land two years ago, the creek looked battered, sunburned, and used up. Isolated old trees looked down on a stream that had been channelized, mined, and poisoned with herbicides. Blackberry thickets had taken over most of the banks and the floodplain.

To me, the stream is not just a conduit for water or a sweet sound to hear on quiet evenings. It's part of an interactive system, a life cycle. Thompson Creek begins when water rises out of the Pacific Ocean into clouds that drop rain and snow onto Grayback and Steve Peak. It runs off the rocks and percolates down through the forest soils that filter and slowly release it downstream. Some of it sinks into groundwater basins to replenish wells and springs. As it moves downstream, the water supports wildlife and farm animals, irrigates crops, and nurtures trout, salmon, and many species of birds before joining

the Applegate, the Rogue, and the ocean once again.

Another life cycle enriches the land as well as our plates: the salmon that are born in the stream grow large enough to head for the ocean and eventually return to spawn and die, bringing back essential nutrients, especially phosphorus, from the sea.

To me, it was a priority to restore this riparian area to a healthy condition. I imagined tall cottonwoods, pines and cedars, aspens and maples shading the stream, with shrubs and bunch grasses scattered on the banks to shelter and feed a host of animals.

How to make restoration a reality? It requires not only money but knowledge, energy, and extra hands. I was fortunate enough to connect with the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council (APWC). Once we found endangered coho salmon clustered in a sheltering pool, there was a strong impetus for finding grant money to add this stretch of the stream to the ongoing restoration projects along Thompson Creek.

An enterprise like this takes a team. As the landowner, I am responsible for providing a "good faith" cash contribution, a source of summer irrigation water, other support such as space and shelter for materials, and long-term access for contractors

and observers. I am also committed to stewardship of the plants that are putting down roots in their new and improved home.

APWC has 25 years of experience in riparian restoration partnerships. The project team has listened to my ideas and questions and been respectful of our privacy. I've been kept in the loop as the stages of the project moved forward. As a citizen scientist, I am pleased that this project includes studies of various planting techniques.

I was (and still am) impatient for quick results, but neither nature nor partnerships work that way. APWC is committed to a number of projects that need to be coordinated with staff, volunteers, and contractors, with the weather and the seasons, and with availability of machines and materials. Considering all these factors, our project is moving forward well, and I know that those thousands of young plants are growing as fast as they can.

We share the stream with our neighbors, not only humans but the birds that continue to float, fly, feed, and nest along



Top photo: Before restoration work looking downstream from Thompson Creek Road, March 16, 2016.

Bottom photo: After restoration work, maintenance, and planting, December 1, 2017.

Photos: Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council.

the banks, the weasel that braves the open to drink, the deer that step carefully between the stakes (and hopefully are discouraged from eating new shoots by deer repellent), the beaver that help engineer a healthier watercourse. We have created a living and ongoing partnership as we work for leafy shade, healthier soil, cooler water, and cleaner air.

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