

Update on Williams Community Forest Project

BY CHERYL BRUNER

It has been a year since the Williams community learned that 320 acres located just below Grayback Mountain was scheduled to be clear-cut. The land, of great value to the Williams community because of its many streams, recreation opportunities, animal habitat and healthy forest, was identified by the community to be important enough to be purchased for a community forest.

The Williams Community Forest Project (WCFP), a nonprofit organization, began the movement to acquire the 320 acres of forest through a fundraising campaign. Significant funds have been raised, but not yet a sufficient amount to purchase the property from the private landowner who is from Idaho. Although in February the owner began clear-cutting, the community still is continuing to fundraise to purchase the property, with the intent of creating a community forest.

WCFP's interest in community forests was born from the concern that clear-cutting and herbicide use in forests are creating a decline in coho salmon populations, heavy spring runoff and degradation in forest and stream health. This is evidenced by increased fire danger and insect infestation, rising stream temperatures and dying trees. In addition, local organic farms are at risk from herbicide use on upstream forestlands.

Forests managed ecologically can contribute to clean air and water, can mitigate fire danger, and protect endangered and threatened species and habitat. Community forests also offer an economic and social advantage to the local community. An example on the west coast is the Arcata Community Forest in northern California, which has been in existence since 1955. Mark Andre, Arcata City forester, in his book, *Human Dimensions of Ecological Restoration: Integrating Science, Nature and Culture*, wrote the following: "Management for the community forest is guided by the city of Arcata (population 16,900) government leaders, the city technical advisory committee, and local citizens...have expressed commitments to a sustainable management program that serves as a model of a managed forest for demonstration and educational purposes. Through volunteer activities, the citizenry is involved in an adaptive management approach to increase biodiversity, accelerate old forest conditions, provide

late-successional forest habitat, and sequester carbon while providing revenue. Community forestry in Arcata is designed to provide local residents the opportunity and responsibility to manage their natural resources."

Another great source of information on community forests is the publication from the Communities Committee in 2008 titled "Acquiring and Managing a Community-Owned Forest, a Manual for Communities." The publication lists the following as benefits of a community forest: "...protecting water sources, providing wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, educational opportunities, demonstration of sustainable forest management practices, income from forestry activities or forest products for community use, and heat and/or energy for local schools and other public buildings."

WCFP objectives include establishing an ecological model for timber management that will be an educational venue for southern Oregon K-12 grades, trade schools, colleges and universities. Because of the challenges of climate change, new ways of managing our forests are required. A community forest will provide a training ground for research and learning that will benefit people of all ages and communities. Adults and children can learn how well-managed forests provide clean water, protect wildlife and its habitat, promote biodiversity and create sustainability. There is also the potential for creating a sustainable rural economy by developing markets, processes and businesses that utilize the forest and its products. Local residents would have the opportunity to utilize ecologically harvested forest by-products for building, crafting, firewood, energy and food production. Increasing recreational opportunities in the forest, such as hiking, biking, horse trails and environmental education will also bring economic opportunities to the valley.

The southern Oregon community has a wonderful opportunity to create an ecologically managed community forest and a sustainable local economy.

Donations are critical to securing the W320 property. To donate or to learn more about the Williams Community Forest Project, visit www.williamscommunityforestproject.org.

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White Oak Farm & Education Center Food and fun down on the farm

BY TAYLOR STARR

Nestled in a quiet corner of the Williams Valley, White Oak Farm & Education Center is a working organic farm and a sustainable-living education center. The farm was established as a nonprofit educational organization in 2002 with the help of the Equity Trust, a national land trust group.

Here on the land, staff and volunteers spend time managing the gardens, fields and forests, hosting local school groups and summer camps for children, and teaching adult workshops in subjects ranging from natural building to ecological forestry. We are blessed with a great teaching farm with ponds for irrigation, swimming and wildlife habitat; three acres of organic gardens, pastures and an orchard with over 40 fruit tree varieties; diverse woods for hiking; and a straw-bale farmhouse. The farm is also home to flocks of chickens and turkeys, a small herd of goats and sheep, and many thousands of honeybees.

Over the last decade we have had the opportunity to welcome many busloads of children to the Farm from schools throughout the Rogue Valley. We have been extremely fortunate to work with Tim Franklin and the Applegate River Watershed Council for the last five years to bring classes from Williams Elementary to the farm for field trips focused on watershed health and salmon-friendly farming.

Some may wonder how farming and fish are connected, but as hundreds of students could tell you, how we treat the land impacts our rivers and streams in so many ways. During field trips, children learn about water cycles, native plants and soil science, while also having time to

meet our farm animals and play the class favorite, high-energy "Salmon Game." Since Tim Franklin's tragic passing this winter, we have redoubled our efforts to continue this great program in his honor by reaching out to include a broader range of schools. In 2012 we will even be hosting our first three-day residential school field trip as a part of the Healthy Watersheds Program.

This summer we are also looking forward to an exciting schedule of Farm Camps. We will be welcoming children from 5 - 12 years of age to White Oak for a week of farming, food, fun and friends. Farm Camps are an opportunity for children to experience the wild and domestic life of a small farm, from milking goats and tending to chickens, to making garlic braids, fishing poles, and other nature-based crafts. We also find time to hunt for lizards, catch fish, play games, tell stories and sing songs. Since farms are all about fresh food, campers also get to harvest, cook and eat straight from the garden. Kitchen adventures range from corn bread and pizza to homemade ice cream. Maybe this spring or summer we'll see your child at the Farm for a school visit or camp. We certainly hope so!

Check out our website at www.whiteoakfarmcsa.org for more information on the Farm and all our programs, or email us at info@whiteoakfarmcsa.org. Come and visit us at the Williams Farmers Market, Mondays at the Grange from 4 - 6:30 pm starting in June.

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(ages 5-7) \$100

Preschool: Mondays @ 9am-1pm starting in June
541.862.1314 or whiteoakeducator@gmail.com
www.whiteoakfarmcsa.org/2012-programs/