

An unlikely partnership removes a dam and restores Forest Creek

BY KEVIN SWEENEY

Tom Maddox sometimes can't believe he let staff from the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council (APWC) stop by to talk about the dam at his mill site. But with the dam removed and the creek restored, he is happy he did.

Maddox, whose family ties in the Rogue Basin go back four generations, runs a one-person sawmill along Forest Creek in Ruch. The mill, on property owned by Dan Hunter, came with a diversion dam to provide water for two log ponds. The mill hadn't used those ponds for decades, so the dam was unnecessary.

But the dam remained in the stream, requiring fish to jump three to five feet to gain access to more miles of prime habitat. Only a small percentage of adult fish made it past; juvenile fish were completely blocked.

The dam also caused problems for Maddox. High flows cascading over it ate into a stream bank abutting a road he uses. If the dam stayed put, the road would begin crumbling. Maddox assumed he would remove the dam, or parts of it, when he had time.

"I gave thought to doing it quietly, on my own," Maddox said with a smile.

Even with a need to remove the dam, Maddox was wary about working with APWC, which wanted to talk with him about alternatives to the dam. APWC is a nonprofit group that evaluates local watershed conditions and works to find solutions to natural resource management issues.

"My family had contact with them a number of years back with less-than-happy results," Maddox said. "I know the staff and board were different back then, but we were still skeptical." His reservations were big enough that he ignored their initial calls, but APWC persisted.

"The more we looked at ways to improve fish passage, we saw that removing Forest Creek Dam would be a huge help," said Janelle Dunlevy, APWC's executive director. "The high dams are gone from the Rogue, but there are still hundreds of obstructions on tributaries—diversions, push-up dams, culverts, all sorts of passage issues. Removing these is now the best opportunity to restore fish populations and bring economic gain to the region. So we kept asking."

After the first calls, months passed before Maddox and Hunter allowed APWC onto the property. From there, progress was slow but steady.

"It took so long mostly because I was busy," said Maddox. "But it also took time to build trust. Once I could tell they were listening to what I wanted and needed on the property, I figured we could work together."

When discussions began in 2015, the team decided to keep part of the dam



Before. Forest Creek dam obstructed fish passage—adult fish had to jump several feet; juveniles couldn't advance. Photo: ODFW 2005.



After. Forest Creek's new channel enhances fish passage and restores natural conditions. Photo: Jason Jaacks 2019.

structure intact to stabilize the bank and protect the road. In 2018 parts of the dam were buried, helping to shift the stream channel.

Local logs stabilized the stream banks and provided nutrition for soil microbes. Native shrubs and trees were planted, also for stabilization and to restore habitat. Maddox insisted on saving some of the stream's trees—the original plan called for removing all vegetation during restoration—and the discussions leading to that decision reinforced trust among the team.

The project created riparian and instream habitat, improved water quality, increased stream bank stability, and restored fish passage for both juveniles and adults.

APWC secured project funding from public and private sources. Design, labor, equipment, and materials were all locally sourced.

"They listen, and they're practical," Maddox said of APWC. "They do what they say they're going to do. They're good at finding funding. I'd tell anyone approached by them to consider working with them and at least have that first conversation with them because this is a different APWC from 20 years ago."

"We learned a lot from Tom. We always do with these projects," said Janelle. "He knows that creek as well as anyone, and he studied ways to improve the project. He invested time and effort, took ownership, and is a great partner. Stopping by to talk and look at the creek these days is really a great reward."

APWC assists landowners on projects that include irrigation efficiency, energy and fuels reduction, riparian restoration, and fish passage improvements. To learn more, visit applegatepartnershipwc.org or email contact@apwc.info.

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Winter nature inspires at Siskiyou Field Institute

BY KATHLEEN PYLE

Winter is a time of peace and learning through quiet observation at Siskiyou Field Institute (SFI). Our beautiful view of the often snow-topped Siskiyou takes center stage, and the two creeks that cross our property raise their voices in a roar. Red-shouldered hawks and other raptors, including an occasional bald eagle, circle our pasture and perch in the Ponderosa pines. Our Deer Creek Lodge remains open to overnight guests, who may enjoy a comforting fire in the great room and a glass of local wine.

Holiday Open House. On Sunday, December 8, from 3 - 6 pm, SFI will throw open its doors to the community, for our annual Winter Holiday Open House. Holiday treats and drinks, live music, an educational program, and activities for kids are on tap as we celebrate nature. A special SFI Members' Hour is from 2 - 3 pm.

In December and January, we mold and sculpt the final details of our 2020 field courses and youth education season. Adult Education offerings will include a late April Edible and Medicinal Plants workshop in the Applegate Valley, with Erin McKinsey and Lauren Kemple. At least two art classes: Sketch Your Way to Better Botany on May 1 - 3 and Forest Fragments: Drawing Native Plants in an Ethnobotanical Sketchbook, are also on the calendar. Look for preseason Free Learning programs scheduled for Friday evenings or Saturday afternoons throughout the winter and publicized on our website. Coming up:

- Salmon Saturday in late fall, cosponsored

by the Illinois Valley Soil and Water Conservation District

- Friday night movie night in January
- Darwin Day celebration on Saturday, February 8, on a topic to be announced.

We also invite local school kids to discover Mt. Ashland's winter wonderland and explore the source of our local watersheds through SnowSchool conducted by Siskiyou Field Institute. SnowSchool is a nationwide science curriculum that connects elementary through high school students with mountain snowpack and illuminates the importance and characteristics of snow as the source of our watersheds. All SFI and SnowSchool curricula align with Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core standards. Topics explored include watershed science, snow-to-water equivalency, snow pit analysis, animal/plant/human adaptations, snow crystal exploration, avalanche education, belly sliding, and other fun winter games.

Groups meet SFI instructors at the Mt. Ashland Ski Area, strap on snowshoes, and head out for a fun-filled half day of science and exploration. SnowSchool is available in four-hour sessions on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays from mid-January through March, and the maximum group size is 40 students. Need-based scholarships will be available. For details, interested teachers and parents should email [Angie Fuhrmann at thesfi.org](mailto:Angie.Fuhrmann@thesfi.org).

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