

## Lower Columbia Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program Project in Oregon Focuses on Water Quality Improvement

The Lower Columbia Watershed Partnership was approved for a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) Project in 2016. The project over a five year period will put \$8.8 million dollars in streambank and floodplain restoration in the Lower Columbia Region of Columbia County which includes the Clatskanie River watershed and the neighboring systems just east of the City of Rainier along Hwy 30 to West of the City of Clatskanie, Oregon.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is providing \$3 million through the authorization of the Public Law 83-566 Watershed Program. Two million dollars will go to fund projects and one million dollars will be utilized for technical assistance such as engineering and project management. Local partners have committed \$5.8 million. This partnership will be able to involve landowners in the project to make measurable improvements to the health and viability of the Lower Columbia River Watershed.



Streambank erosion is one problem that will be addressed by the project

The project will focus on water quality degradation, with an emphasis on reducing excessive sediment in surface waters by designing and implementing several stream bank protection projects and floodplain improvements. These improvements will also increase vegetation to minimize excess nutrients and pesticides from getting into the stream systems and will assist in improving inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife by addressing fish passage and large woody debris.

“One of the first required steps was to develop a comprehensive watershed plan which NRCS is assisting us with utilizing the PL-83-566 Watershed Program authorities,” said Kari Hollander, District Manager for the Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District.

“We have about thirty projects planned so far,” said Hollander. “These include placing large woody debris, floodplain reconnection, streambank protection, riparian improvement, and other practices that benefit salmon habitat improvement.”

“What drew me to the RCP concept was the idea of bringing a variety of partners together along with obtaining both technical and financial assistance from the NRCS” said Hollander.

Progress to date as of October 1, 2018

- Four fish passage projects were completed during the 2017 and 2018 summer in-water work time frames.
- Weyerhaeuser and a local landowner replaced a failing culvert with a bridge in the summer of 2017.
- Two crossings on the Clatskanie River were replaced with fish friendly culverts in the summer of 2017 using funds from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. (See [photos below])

- The Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District alongside Hancock Forest Management removed a culvert restoring the stream to natural state and decommissioned a forest road in August 2018.

These four projects have put almost \$600,000 on the ground in just over a year's time, and opened up more than four miles of stream habitat cumulatively.

## Clatskanie Crossing 6

Before and after photos: Construction conducted July 17<sup>th</sup> -August 31<sup>st</sup> 2017



### **Partners that have committed to assist with the RCPP project:**

Lower Columbia River Watershed Council  
Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District  
Columbia County Road Department  
US Fish and Wildlife Service

Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership  
NOAA  
Clatskanie Middle/High School  
Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board  
Department of Environmental Quality  
Columbia River Youth Corp  
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

The RCPP is authorized in the Agricultural Act of 2014. RCPP is a comprehensive and flexible program that uses partnerships to stretch and multiply conservation investments and reach conservation goals on a regional or watershed scale. NRCS has identified critical conservation areas in the nation where projects may utilize the authorities of PL 83-566 Watershed and Flood Prevention Program to implement projects. Other USDA programs authorized under different authorities may also be available in approved projects.

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