

# Behind the Scenes

February 2023



Dear Friend,

This month's Behind the Scenes Bulletin features a mix of happy and sad news. Though we have to say farewell to one of our beloved staff-members, we look forward to hearing about the great contributions she will make in her new position. And although hungry deer caused some significant losses within one of our planting areas along Ash Creek, it gave us the opportunity to plan a fun and fruitful tree planting and fencing excursion for LWC staff and associates.

Mid-winter is the perfect time to keep your eyes open for all the signs of life that are beginning to pop up amidst the gray backdrop of a still-dormant landscape. Already, the buds are beginning to swell on some of our earliest flowering native trees and shrubs—an excellent reminder that spring is just around the corner!

Happy Reading!

--Suzanne Teller, LWC Outreach Coordinator (contact me at [Outreach@LuckiamuteLWC.org](mailto:Outreach@LuckiamuteLWC.org) or 503-837-0237)

## Upcoming LWC and Partner Events:



### Save the Date: LWC Social & Celebration

Sunday, March 5 @ 2:00 - 4:00 pm

General Federal Women's Club - Polk County (340 S. 3rd St., Independence)

We are putting the final touches on plans for our first LWC Social since 2020! We are so excited to be able to welcome back our Friends of the LWC and Business Circle members to this annual celebration of the good work that we can accomplish because of YOU! Stay tuned for more information and an RSVP link, coming to your inbox (or mailbox) soon!



### Winter Wildlife Field Days - Independence

Saturday, March 18 @ 10am - 1pm

Riverview Park, Independence

Join LWC and Polk Soil & Water Conservation District at Riverview Park for a bilingual, family-friendly activity that will explore this year's Winter Wildlife Field Day theme—*Water: the Life in Wildlife*. Look for an email with more details coming soon to your inbox! To see a full schedule of Winter

Wildlife Field Days activities, dates and locations, visit <https://www.winterwildlifefielddays.org/>

## Goodbye and Congratulations to Amanda!



Over the past several years, the LWC has been fortunate enough to be able to hire several fantastic individuals to its staff. Yet with all the joys of increasing the size our team, this also means we have a greater number of potential goodbyes. On January 27, we had to say goodbye our incredible Monitoring Coordinator, Amanda Brackett. While it is sad to lose such a talented member of our staff, we are incredibly proud of Amanda and excited for her new role as a faculty research assistant at Oregon State University's tree ring lab! In this new position, she'll be doing fire and disturbance history research to provide guidance on the new forest plans across Oregon, as well as some mentoring of undergraduate and graduate students developing their own projects. Amanda, we wish you all the best in this exciting new chapter of your career!

Your Land. Your Rivers. Your Community. Your Watershed.

# Watershed Notes

## Restoration Project Manager Channels Inner Artist for Ash Creek Planting



LWC Staff from left to right: Kristen Larson, Maya Cook, Ross Hiatt, Suzanne Teller and Aubrey Cloud. Photo by Kendra Callahan

On Friday, January 27, six LWC team members headed to a small area alongside Ash Creek in Independence to add native trees to a restoration site that had suffered significant loss from heavy deer browsing. A total of 34 trees were planted, and cages were constructed and placed around each tree to prevent hungry deer from mowing them down again. As they grow taller, these trees will help increase the canopy cover over Ash Creek, providing shade and leaf litter nutrients to the waterway. Their roots will help prevent erosion by anchoring the soil along the streambank. Yet in addition to these general benefits to the landscape, each species also has a unique contribution to make.

Just as a painter chooses their paints and color palette depending on the subject and style of their work, restoration project managers choose which species match the site characteristics and goals of the planting area. For this site, Project Manager Aubrey Cloud chose Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*), ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), white alder (*Alnus rhombifolia*), cascara (*Rhamnus purshiana*) and Scouler's willow (*Salix scouleriana*). So, what were some of the reasons these species were chosen?

Climate change is now one of the main considerations restoration practitioners must take into account when making their planting choices. With Oregon's average temperature already more than 2°F warmer than it was 100 years ago, Aubrey has to consider not only what trees and shrubs are currently growing at a site, he also has to plan ahead to make sure the species he chooses will continue to thrive as the climate gets increasingly warmer and dryer. White alder, for example, is a choice for this site based on climate change considerations. While white alder is still not as prevalent as red alder (*Alnus rubra*) is on the current landscape, this is changing as the climate becomes more favorable to the survival of the more heat-tolerant white alder.

There are also more site-specific reasons that certain trees and shrubs are selected. Like many urban waterways, Ash Creek has been straightened to make it easier to develop housing and infrastructure, and the trees and branches that naturally fall into the creek tend to be removed to reduce the risk of flooding. This simplification of a waterway and the removal of large wood results in a faster, high energy water flow, which scours out the soil and rock on the river bottom and along the banks, and deepens the channel. When it comes to planting along these "incised" channels, species adapted for upland, or dryer, conditions are chosen because the roots may not be able to reach the water table for several years.



Kendra and Suzanne construct a deer fence for a newly planted sapling. Photo by Kristen Larson

Restoration project managers also have to consider pest outbreaks and disease when making their species selections. Oregon ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*) is a hugely important native tree, and a critical component of riparian (streamside) forests. It used to be a staple of our riparian planting projects, but it is now being phased out due to the threat of emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*) which has recently been documented within 60 miles of the Luckiamute and Ash Creek watersheds.

Finally, once all the long-term survival considerations are made, there is definitely a bit of the artist's eye involved in making decisions about what to plant and where. For instance, the Oregon white oak – though slow-growing – has enormous habitat value and, once established, will support a rich diversity of wildlife. The Scouler's willow will shoot up particularly fast, stabilizing the ground with its spreading root structure and quickly providing canopy cover over Ash Creek while the slower-growing species establish themselves. The cascara is a small-statured tree, and will provide some structural diversity in the riparian forest. All of these roles and habits are considered when project managers choose their palette.

Even at this small site that happens to be situated just behind a bustling apartment complex, it is easy to see how valuable urban waterways like Ash Creek really are. They are important for wildlife, of course — providing refuge from a human-built environment, a safe travel corridor, and a wide variety of different types of food and shelter. But urban streams are also immensely valuable for the surrounding human community by providing a place to recreate, connect to nature, let go of stress, and feel rejuvenated. I invite you to find a publicly accessible stream or other natural area, and look at it with the eye of an artist (or restoration project manager). Take note of what is growing there, how it fits into the landscape, and what role it might be playing in the larger ecology of that area. Whether you are already familiar with the names of the plants or starting from scratch, this type of observation will result in a deeper connection to and understanding of the landscape around you — and it may even inspire you to start planning your own native tree planting project at home or in your community!

If you'd like to learn more about climate-adapted planting strategies, you can watch a 2021 Sips 'n' Science webinar on this topic on our website at <https://www.luckiamutelwc.org/sips-and-science-plant-nurseries.html>

For advice about choosing which native species to plant in your own yard or garden - and where to plant them - you can view an online workshop on our website at <https://www.luckiamutelwc.org/native-plant-workshop.html>. And don't forget to check out the options at your local SWCD plant sale (more info at <https://www.luckiamutelwc.org/2023-swcd-native-plant-sales.html>).