

# Behind the Scenes

July 2020



Dear Friend,

Now that it is really looking (and feeling) like we are in the midst of summer, I hope that you are finding ways to enjoy the beautiful natural areas of our watershed - whether it is in a local park or in your own backyard. During the month of July, the LWC has been brainstorming new ways of staying connected to you, our watershed community, while following COVID-19 safety precautions. We've also been hard at work finishing up new project grant proposals and preparing to break ground on some of our recently funded projects. In this month's issue of *Behind the Scenes*, we provide you with an update about one of our most exciting and long-term restoration projects, and announce the start of our annual Love Your Watershed fundraising campaign!

A heartfelt "thank you" goes to each and every one of you reading this issue. Your ongoing support of the Luckiamute Watershed Council and all of our restoration and outreach programs helps make us successful in our efforts to create a healthy watershed for all. And for those of you who choose to contribute an additional amount this year to help support our Love Your Watershed education and outreach programs, we are exceedingly grateful! THANK YOU!!

Take care, stay safe, and happy reading!

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

## **Love Your Watershed News: Watershed Care Packages for Friends of the LWC**



Many of you have already received a package in the mail from the LWC and your local Soil & Water Conservation District, filled with helpful resources, a native plant guide, native seed packets and fun kid-focused items. If you haven't yet received one, it most likely means that we don't have your mailing address on file! If you would like to receive a Friends of the LWC Watershed Care Package, please send your mailing address to Suzanne Teller at [Outreach@LuckiamuteLWC.org](mailto:Outreach@LuckiamuteLWC.org) or leave a voicemail at (503) 837-0237, and we'll be happy to send one out as soon as we can!

## **Love Your Watershed Campaign Begins!**

For the entire month of August, we are focusing on raising funds to support our *Love Your Watershed* education and outreach program! Although our usual line-up of activities and volunteer events had to be dramatically altered this year due to COVID-19, we are engaging our watershed community from afar in many exciting new ways. We have already launched our *Love Your Watershed At Home* webpage, released a virtual Plant ID Walk, and sent out Love Your Watershed care packages to our Friends of the LWC. This Fall, we plan to roll out an online version of our Sips 'n' Science pub talks and explore other new ways to engage with our watershed community while distanced. If you would like to make an additional contribution to help us keep our communities engaged and inspired to take action for watershed health, just head to our Love Your Watershed 2020 donation page at <https://donorbox.org/support-the-love-your-watershed-program-2020>. Thank you!

Haven't seen our Native Plant ID Video yet? Take a virtual tour of Sarah Helmick State Park with OSU Extension plant experts by heading to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UrFA82MRgl&t=2s>

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

# Watershed Notes

## Reconnecting the Luckiamute: Why Rivers (and All of Us) Need Floodplains

Close your eyes and imagine a river. What do you see? A single sinuous channel weaving its way across the landscape? Or perhaps you see a network of interconnected streams criss-crossing the land like the branches of a tree? No matter what your vision of a river looks like, it most likely includes only the waterway itself. A complete picture of a river, however, should also include the low-lying land surrounding the channel as well - or its *floodplain*.



Photo Credit: River Design Group

Aerial photo of Luckiamute River spreading into its floodplain in February 2017.



Photo Credit: Jean-Paul Zagorola

Flooding allows for nutrient exchange between rivers and floodplains, improving habitat for plants, fish and wildlife.

When rivers overtop their banks and flood the surrounding low-lying land, they deposit nutrient-rich topsoil essential for a healthy, productive ecosystem. Flooding rivers also allow water to slowly seep into the soil, which helps recharge groundwater aquifers. The rivers themselves are also enriched with soil nutrients, microbes and leaf litter from the surrounding floodplain. This natural cycle helps to support an incredibly biodiverse landscape, and is also a key reason why human communities have had such a long history of settlement along the Willamette River and its tributaries. The ebb and flow of floodwaters sustained the Native American communities that have been thriving here for thousands of years, and has helped make the Willamette Valley one of the top agricultural regions in our country.

In addition to depositing nutrient-rich sediment onto the surrounding land, rivers that have connected floodplains also provide refuge for fish during the winter when our rivers are swollen with rainwater and moving very fast. This "winter rearing habitat" is especially important for young salmonids, which use their time in the inundated floodplain to rest from the high velocity flows, feed on insects (which are feeding on the leaf litter), hide from predators, and prepare for their long journey out to the ocean.

Over the last several decades, human-built structures like dams, levees, culverts, and artificial channels have altered many of our rivers, and in many cases, completely disconnected them from their floodplains. The disruption of the natural ebb-and-flow cycles of our rivers has contributed to a decline in fish and wildlife habitat, loss of soil fertility, a reduction in groundwater recharge, and the loss of more than 85% of historic riparian (streamside) forests along the Willamette River (Stan Gregory. "Summary of Current Status and Health of Oregon's Riparian Areas," *State of the Environment Report*, 2000).

For these reasons and more, the Luckiamute Watershed Council and Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) have been working with our partners for the past 10 years to restore floodplain habitat at Luckiamute State Natural Area. To date, this work has consisted primarily of invasive plant removal and reforestation with native plants. In addition to this revegetation effort, the best opportunity to benefit threatened Willamette spring Chinook salmon and winter steelhead trout is to restore the ability of these fish to access LSNA's floodplain forest habitat, and eliminate the risk of stranding when water recedes. We are now poised to begin this new phase of this restoration work and we are happy to report that after a host of site evaluations, permitting, and contract negotiations, we finally break ground in two weeks!

The LSNA Floodplain Reconnection Project is being funded by grants from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), Meyer Memorial Trust (MMT) and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). The project work set to start in August will involve excavation and earth moving to improve the connections between the Luckiamute River and its floodplain at existing low-lying areas (swales). In addition to the work on the swales, a portion of an old oxbow at the northern edge of LSNA's boundary will be lowered to allow this disconnected section of the river to be reconnected to the main channel. As we begin this "ground-breaking" work, we will be documenting the transformation of the landscape with on the ground photos, aerial images, video and progress reports. You can see data reports and grant proposals for this project at <https://www.luckiamutelwc.org/lсна-reconnection.html> Stay tuned for more updates on the project webpage, in our emails and future issues of *Behind the Scenes!*