

# Behind the Scenes

March 2022



Dear Friend,

The first day of Spring is still a couple of weeks away, but the signs of reawakening life already can be seen and heard all around us. Osoberry flowers are beginning to open, and fuzzy catkins are appearing on some of our earliest-blooming willows. Early risers may now be able to enjoy a dawn serenade with their morning cups of coffee as both our resident and returning migratory birds are beginning to warm up their voices for breeding season.

In this issue of *Behind the Scenes*, I am excited to better acquaint you with a project that holds special significance to the LWC, and not just because we are one of the restoration partners involved. The J<sub>2</sub>E River to Ridge Diversity Project is located on a beautiful stretch of land nestled in the foothills of the Coast Range in northern Benton County. Dave and Sarah Ehlers, owners of J<sub>2</sub>E Tree Farm, have both been very much involved in the LWC for many years, both as volunteers and donors. Dave has been a member of the LWC Board for six years and part of multiple LWC committees for many of those years; and Sarah has contributed countless hours and her extraordinary baking skills at many of our outreach events. In addition, the Ehlers have opened up their property to the public for several tours and bird walk events that showcase some of the beautiful landscapes and remarkable biodiversity that exists in our area. In fact, our first bird walk of 2022 will take place at J<sub>2</sub>E, so be sure to keep an eye on your inbox for your early-bird invitation!

Thank you, Friend, for your ongoing support of the LWC and for your commitment to a healthy watershed for all. May you welcome the arrival of Spring in happiness and good health!

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

## LWC 20th (+1) Anniversary Celebration



Get the details and fill out the RSVP form on our website at [www.LuckiamuteLWC.org/20th-anniversary-celebration](http://www.LuckiamuteLWC.org/20th-anniversary-celebration)

## Spring Bird Walk at J<sub>2</sub>E Tree Farm

When: May 21 @ 8am - 12pm



Join Salem Audubon members for a stroll through the many different habitat types of this working tree farm. In addition to learning more about the restoration work happening here (see feature article), you will be learning how to look and listen for the resident woodland birds and returning migrants we discover along the way. Early-bird registration invitations will be sent to all current Friends of the LWC later this month!

## 100th Anniversary of Oregon State Parks & LSNA Guided Walking Tour

When: June 4

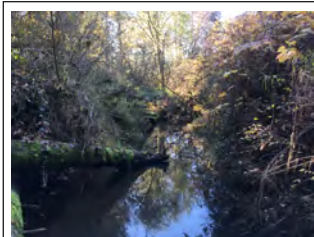
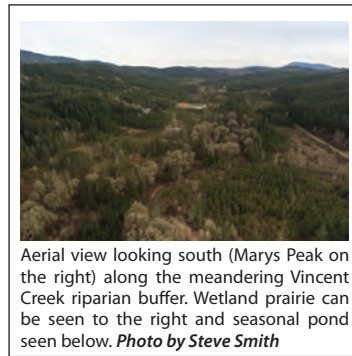
On June 4, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) will celebrate the 100th anniversary of our state park system at Sarah Helmick State Park, our very first Oregon state park! Join this community celebration and then head to Luckiamute State Natural Area (LSNA) afterwards for a guided walking tour around the North Unit loop trail. The tour will include both hosted and self-guided learning stations, where you will get an overview of the ongoing restoration work at LSNA, and learn more about the native plants and birds that can be found here. *More info coming soon!*

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# Watershed Notes

## Nurturing Relationships from Ridge to River

In many cultures around the world, trees are used to symbolize interconnectivity and relationships. Their very presence imbues the surrounding landscape with an aura of health and prosperity. This ability of a treed landscape to fill us with a sense of wellbeing is no accident. Trees provide an incalculable array of benefits to all the inhabitants of an ecosystem—from soil microbes and nectar-feeding insects, to nesting birds and dam-building beaver. These organisms in turn, provide the trees with essential benefits and services like nutrients, pollination, seed dispersal and access to water. These continuous reciprocal cycles ensure the healthy functioning of an ecosystem, and promote resiliency to environmental disturbances and climate change.



Watershed health also relies on the human members of an ecosystem. At the J<sub>2</sub>E Tree Farm near Hoskins in Benton County, owners Dave and Sarah Ehlers manage their woodlands in a way that honors the reciprocal relationships of trees, humans, plants, wildlife and the surrounding landscape. In addition to providing income, the Ehlers recognize and respect all the ways that a tree might provide value—whether it is used by acorn woodpeckers for acorn storage, by an industrious beaver family that is building a lodge, or even as a living scratching post for a cougar eager to display its territorial rights. “We can do good by growing trees in a way that promotes diversity and provides habitat for all the wildlife that live here,” explains Dave.

The J<sub>2</sub>E Tree Farm is a 360-acre small woodlands operation located along 1.5 miles of Vincent Creek, a tributary to the Luckiamute River. Two-hundred-twenty acres of the farm are dedicated to sustainable timber production and 135 acres to maintaining and restoring habitat and ecosystem function. In 2018, the Ehlers launched a partnership with Benton Soil & Water Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, Xerces Society and the LWC, which was awarded funding by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board in 2020 and became the J<sub>2</sub>E River to Ridge Diversity Project. This partnership project focuses on a holistic approach to enhance the broad range of habitat types found here, and support a diversity of fish and wildlife.

For the past four years, Dave and his son Jake, as well as crews from Miller Timber Services and D. Franco Contracting, Inc. have been controlling invasive weeds along 13 acres of the banks of Vincent Creek and Sarah’s Run, 21 acres of riparian (streamside) forest, and 19 acres of wetlands and pine flats. Next week, D. Franco crews will be planting these 53 acres with approximately 22,000 native trees and shrubs. The Ehlers and D. Franco crew members have also thinned out encroaching Douglas fir and applied invasive species treatments across 16 acres of wet prairie and oak savannah. These habitats will be re-planted in the fall with native grasses and understory vegetation that will improve habitat for pollinators, including the Taylor’s checkerspot butterfly, one of our rarest butterflies and found in only two locations in Oregon (both in Benton County!)



The in-stream portion of the project was successfully completed in the summer of 2020. This included resolving the fish passage barrier on Sarah’s Run (a tributary to Vincent Creek), extending cutthroat trout access to cold-water refuge habitat. This was done by constructing a pool below a perched culvert that raises the surface water level below the culvert to meet the surface water level in the culvert. Eleven large wood structures were also built along 1.5 miles of Vincent Creek by weaving root wads in and among existing streamside trees. This woody material provides nutrients and shelter for fish and other aquatic life, and it slows water velocity, reducing the erosive power of the streamflow and allowing gravels to accumulate. Willow stakes were planted in these areas as well, to attract and support populations of beaver, which can be an invaluable ally in restoring the health of degraded streams and reconnecting them to their floodplains. Because parts of Vincent Creek have been incised—or cut off from its floodplain due to erosion—the Ehlers hope to encourage beaver activity, which can help restore connectivity between a stream channel and the low-lying lands that surround it. Re-establishing this reciprocal relationship between a river and its floodplain would bring a cascade of benefits to the entire ecosystem, including floodwater storage, groundwater recharge, better water quality, and improved habitat for both aquatic and terrestrial life.

The J<sub>2</sub>E River to Ridge Diversity Project is a terrific example of how long-term watershed health can be achieved through strengthening and supporting relationships among the human, plant and animal members of the ecosystem, and the LWC is proud to be a partner in this team effort! Learn more at [www.luckiamutelwc.org/j2e-river-to-ridge-diversity-project](http://www.luckiamutelwc.org/j2e-river-to-ridge-diversity-project).