

Restoration on Thompson Creek gaining statewide support

BY ELIZABETH MURPHY

Turn south at the Applegate Store and you'll wind your way along one of the most important fish-bearing tributaries in the Middle Applegate. Thompson Creek still maintains the greatest number of fish distribution miles in the Middle Applegate and, as of a 2004 assessment, has chinook salmon to reach Mile 1, coho salmon to reach Mile 9, summer and winter steelhead to reach Mile 10.8, and trout to reach Mile 12.8. In addition, numerous Thompson Creek tributaries, such as Tallowbox Creek, Jamison Creek, Ninemile Creek, and Darnell Gulch, are also fish-bearing.

The suitability of Thompson Creek for fish habitat is largely due to its wide valley and low gradient. From Ninemile Creek to the Applegate River, over 56% of Thompson Creek has less than a 4% gradient. The valley form of Thompson Creek points to the historical existence of a gentle meandering stream that deposited the deep fertile soils prized by farmers in the valley.

Despite its innate potential for fish habitat, Thompson Creek, like most of the low-elevation waterways in the Applegate Valley, is critically degraded in condition. Elevated stream temperatures and dissolved oxygen severely limit water quality important for aquatic life.

This has placed portions of Thompson Creek on the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's 303(d) list for water-quality-limited streams. Thompson Creek also lacks important fish habitat conditions, such as large wood, off-channel alcoves, and complex pools, which create conditions that fish need for rearing, refuge and spawning.

Thompson Creek is not unique in its degraded condition. Across the Applegate Valley, logging or clearing of riparian areas, pasture encroachment, and stream straightening have interfered with the benefits of a functioning riparian area. Riparian zones are the transitional areas between land and streams. They provide shade, pollution control, and large wood to improve water quality and conditions for aquatic life. An example of the effect of riparian areas on stream condition is that many Applegate Valley tributaries have elevated temperatures due to lack of streamside shading.

Since 2004, the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council (APWC) has recognized Thompson Creek as one of the priority areas for restoration work. In 2008, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board funded the development of a restoration action plan to identify the most

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important actions to improve conditions on Thompson Creek.

One of the key factors in successful restoration work is the participation of engaged and enthusiastic landowners who are interested in improving the condition of riparian and aquatic systems. Thompson Creek is fortunate enough to have a large group of such landowners, who value stewardship of the creek and their role in it. Because of this, the APWC has been working with landowners along two contiguous miles of Thompson Creek to implement riparian restoration work and

instream habitat improvement.

This project has attracted the attention and support of numerous agencies and partners, including the US Forest Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Freshwater Trust, because of the effect that this scale of restoration work could have on stream condition as a whole. This winter, riparian restoration will begin on the downstream portion of the project area with money from Pacific Power's Blue Sky Habitat Fund. Funding is pending for planned future phases of the project that could begin as early as summer 2013. The APWC and the Thompson Creek community look forward to the start of this exciting project, which promises to be a model of community-supported restoration and the strategic prioritization of restoration to benefit Applegate Valley fisheries as a whole.

For more information on riparian and fish habitat restoration in the Applegate Valley, please contact Elizabeth Murphy at riparianprogram@arwc.org or 541-890-8458.

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OSU Small Farms to offer online course

BY GARRY STEPHENSON AND MAUD POWELL

Oregon State University (OSU) Small Farms is offering a hybrid version of its flagship farm business course, Growing Farms, at the Southern Oregon Research and Extension center in Central Point this winter. The course will run on Monday evenings from January 28 to February 25 with two additional field trips.

Small farms, ranches and vineyards shape the character and landscape of the Applegate Valley, and the Growing Farms course helps to ensure that new businesses can become financially viable.

Growing Farms Online converts and expands OSU's highly successful beginning farmer workshop series, Growing Farms: Successful Whole Farm Management, into an online course. Like the workshops, the online course fosters holistic planning by integrating the physical, biological, family and business components of farms and ranches. The online course will be ready for full use in late 2013, and will be offered in

combined online and face-to-face, as well as other methods.

In Oregon, geography, distance and driving time can be an obstacle for farmers to attend educational programs. For instance, the OSU Small Farms Program has offered its eight-week face-to-face beginning farmer and rancher workshop series since 2007. Although the workshops are highly effective, they are limited to several sites per year where OSU Small Farm Program faculty are located. Also, in the face of shrinking resources, distance education is vital to accessibility of extension educational programs.

The process of converting what we teach face-to-face into a form for delivery online is challenging and time-consuming. The OSU Small Farms Program has been working closely with an online curriculum specialist and OSU's Professional and Non-Credit Education division to develop the content and appearance of the course.

Content areas for Growing Farms have been refined in workshops since 2007. The framework and titles are:

- Dream It: Strategic Planning
- Do It: Farm Operations
- Grow It: Production
- Manage It: Farm Finances
- Sell It: Marketing Strategies
- Keep It: Managing Risk and Entrepreneurship Developments

Online learning technology now makes it possible to create and deliver a very high-quality educational product, one that is graphically rich and engaging. A key part of the online course is six "case study" farms and ranches. Through in-depth videos, these growers offer their first-hand experience and advice. The case studies represent a variety of production systems and scales.

Our preferred method for offering the course will be a blended or hybrid online and face-to-face approach. Participants will

use the online course for basic learning while face-to-face meetings will be used for discussions, hands-on learning and farm tours. Another option will be a standard, fully online method supported and facilitated by instructors.

The project is supported by a USDA/NIFA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program grant and is a powerful partnership between nonprofits Ecotrust, Mercy Corps Northwest and OSU's Small Farms Program and Austin Family Business Program. The project is also part of the innovative partnership between Oregon Tilth, Inc. and the OSU Small Farms Program.

For more information and to register for Growing Farms, contact Shaina Bronstein. To register online, go to <https://secure.oregonstate.edu/osuext/register/488>.

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