



COORDINATED SALMON HABITAT RESTORATION ON PRIVATE LANDS FACT SHEET TWO • SPRING 2013

This fact sheet series highlights innovative ways that family forest and ranch owners are prospering from protecting and enhancing ecosystem services on their land. Ecosystem services are the benefits people receive from nature such as water quality, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration.

Salmon recovery requires restoration of spawning habitat to improve egg-to-smolt survival. Private lands play a crucial role. Funds for restoration are available from both federal appropriations and legal settlements for dam mitigation. Federal agencies responsible for recovery are often limited in their ability to work on private lands however, not only by legal authority, but also by the absence of landowner trust.

In the Methow River Valley in north central Washington, an innovative partnership between a federal agency and a local nonprofit is bridging that gap by working together to facilitate and fund salmon habitat restoration on private lands. The partnership merges available funding with local knowledge to deploy funding strategically across the Valley. Landowners benefit from assistance for restoration projects that often increase the value of their properties beyond the small match required for the funding, in addition to increased irrigation efficiencies.

PARTNERS

The federal Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) manages 600 dams and reservoirs across the U.S., delivering water to municipal and agricultural areas. In recent years, BOR has had to shift its focus to satisfy legal requirements to mitigate the impacts of its infrastructure—for example, restoring salmon habitat in the Methow River—and participate in Endangered Species Act implementation.

The Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation (MSRF), responding to local landowner concerns about the federal government's "heavy hand" in early ESA implementation, was created to help landowners comply with laws and find a balance between the needs of farmers and fish. MSRF aims to "empower landowners to recognize ways to comply with ESA that would also benefit them."



THE PROGRAM

BOR provides technical assistance to MSRF through a cooperative funding agreement to identify, plan, design (often with BOR engineers), and permit projects. This begins by assessing the ecological function and problems on a particular reach of river, and prioritizing possible fixes. MSRF then does outreach with local landowners and sets up individual meetings. As a BOR biologist explains, "We sit down in people's living rooms and talk about the realm

of possibility and what they would like to see, what their vision is for their property."

Once interested landowners are identified, the partners approach the appropriate funding and coordinating entities, such as the Bonneville Power Administration and the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board, for implementation funding. MSRF then implements the project,

which may include screen irrigation diversions, replacing culverts or irrigation diversion dams with structures that allow fish passage, and restoring habitat complexity and natural river processes.

MSRF tends to work directly with the landowners since it has fostered trust. BOR and MSRF understand the importance of maintaining good working relationships with landowners since it instills confidence in the project and ensures quality conservation outcomes in the long-run.

OUTCOMES

Because of its local roots and flexibility working with landowners on an individual basis, MSRF has been able to bring many landowners to the table with BOR. For example, the partners had met with about 50 of the 80 landowners on a reach of the river between Winthrop and Twisp, and were moving forward on projects with 20 of them as of summer 2011.

Restoration projects and increased streamflows have opened significant new salmon territory, and the fish are using it. Salmon runs have improved since the 1990s, which BOR believes is tied in large part to restoration. Farm and ranchland owners have benefitted from greater irrigation efficiencies and increased property values.

CHALLENGES

River restoration is technically complex, but the human side can be just as challenging—even beyond the bureaucratic complexity of federal contracts. Landowners may not be ready for a “wilder” river. They may also take offense at the very idea of “restoration,” which might imply their own management is at fault.

While early implementation primarily targeted irrigators who identified costs savings from cooperation, the reach-based and habitat complexity projects have been more challenging, as landowners are not obliged to cooperate and may not perceive personal benefit. Some are also concerned about their own liability if, for example, an installed logjam were to rip loose and destroy downstream property or becomes a “strainer” and injure or kill a boater. Oregon and Washington both have some state-level protections, but MSRF is currently working with the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board on legislation to indemnify landowners who agree to engage in local, state, or federally sanctioned fish and wildlife restoration projects that are professionally engineered.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

In 2012 MSRF and BOR began constructing the first of several reach-based projects on the Methow between Twisp and Winthrop, in a popular recreation area within an established residential neighborhood. Designed to re-connect isolated side channel and floodplain habitat, the project added more than 600 pieces of large wood to the river and required more than 10 weeks of work on-site with heavy equipment. Given the high visibility, MSRF could not have implemented the project without the collaborative relationship with BOR and other community groups. The project marks a shift from isolated small projects toward implementation of larger, coordinated, reach-scale projects necessary for salmonid survival.



LEARN MORE

MSRF's website and an overview of restoration projects: <http://www.methowsalmon.org/>.

A portal to the groups working collaboratively in the Methow Valley: <http://methowrestorationcouncil.org>.

For more information about the project and to read the full fact sheet series, go to:

www.tinyurl.com/SNWEcosystemServices, or contact:

Hannah Gosnell, Oregon State University
gosnellh@geo.oregonstate.edu

Lauren Gwin, Oregon State University Extension
lauren.gwin@oregonstate.edu

Cass Moseley, University of Oregon
cmoseley@uoregon.edu

Alaina Pomeroy, Sustainable Northwest
apomeroy@sustainablenorthwest.org

Max Nielsen-Pincus, University of Oregon
maxn@uoregon.edu

This fact sheet series is part of a multi-state research collaboration involving Oregon State University, University of Oregon, and Sustainable Northwest, with funding from the USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture, Grant #2009-85211-06102-C0405A. Photo credits: header—Emily Jane Davis; p.1, 2—Freshwater Trust.



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