

Clackamas SWCD using Community Forest Program to enhance habitat 05/21/2019

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With a U.S. Forest Service Community Forest Program grant, **Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District** (SWCD) partnered with the Trust for Public Land (TPL) to acquire 319 acres of forested land to protect and improve for wildlife habitat.

About a year ago, a local property owner reached out to the SWCD about the former Weyerhaeuser Company land in the hopes of finding a way to maintain the property's forest character rather than see it developed for residential use. Since then, the Eagle Creek Community Forest was acquired by the TPL and subsequently sold to the SWCD in April.

"It's all very early and we're learning as we go," Clackamas SWCD General Manager **Tom Salzer said**. "It helps to have really strong partners in the Forest Service and the TPL, and neighboring landowners have been great, but we're taking a big step and it's a step into the unknown."

The year-long effort included a \$550,000 Community Forest Program grant that cut the conservation district's cost to \$750,000. The Eagle Creek Advisory Committee is working on a community forest plan that will guide land management direction for the next 50 to 100 years.

Among the district's goals are improving wildlife habitat, adding public and community recreation opportunities, and gaining revenue from occasional timber harvests that will go back into maintaining the property. Any surplus revenue will go toward supporting the district's conservation programs.

The property connects to more than 1,000 acres of public and conserved land, and neighboring property owners – Portland General Electric and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) – have expressed interest in working with the district on management of forest tracts that adjoin the property, Salzer said.

As the advisory committee tours the site and develops the community forest plan, Clackamas SWCD is preparing for wildlife habitat improvement efforts. Streams on the property host runs of salmon and steelhead. Salzer said they hope to establish no-cut zones around them.

Elk tracks are rampant throughout the property; recently, the district set up trail cameras to gather information on how many and what types of other wildlife are living on the land to assist in plan development. A bird biologist also has been engaged to conduct surveys to ensure species protection.

Clackamas SWCD is close to securing a contract with a forester to plan out any necessary treatment for understory, thinning, potential harvests and to implement efforts to transition from Douglas fir to a more mixed species with different age classes, Salzer said.

“A lot of our non-industrial private forest landowners love their forest, and they do harvest, but they don’t want a moonscape left behind; they still want to enjoy the forest and see wildlife,” **Salzer said**. “We have a chance to mimic this on a larger scale and demonstrate different treatments that will reduce fire risk, what a thinned stand next to unthinned looks like... the list is probably infinite,” **he said**.

The property can be used for community workshops and a variety of demonstration sites.

Salzer says there will be challenges, among them changing the property over from hunting land and industrial forest use to public recreation, addressing dumping issues, and controlling and eliminating invasive weeds. There also is an access road on the conservation district property that is utilized by the neighboring landowners, Portland General Electric and BLM. Clackamas SWCD is working with both to keep that area cleared of brush and trees.

“It’s the largest single property we’ve ever acquired,” **Salzer said**. “It’s kind of daunting, but at the same time it’s really, really exciting to have this permanent asset that will over a long time protect fish and wildlife habit and also provide revenue to the district.”

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