

The Confluence

Spring &
Summer
2023

Credit: Justin Clifton



Notes From the Executive Director's Desk

Connectivity — Connection — Connectedness

In this issue, you can see our efforts to improve connection, connectivity, and connectedness. We live and breathe these words here at the RRWC. And we strive to channel them into our work.

With 34 business sponsors and 177 community members attending Celebrate the Rogue! in April, we made strides to improve our connection to the community. The community responded by helping us raise funds to support the development of new engagement and restoration projects.

We have been increasing connectivity within streams as well. Restoration in South Fork Little Butte Creek at river mile 6.2 is a terrific example of improving connectivity among the main channel, seasonal side channels, and the floodplain. As stream flows increased in November 2022, we watched the re-connected side channel carry water. It flowed all winter, engaging large wood, soaking into the adjacent floodplain areas, and washing long-hidden gravels clean. We observed Coho Salmon spawn in this seasonal channel as willows “popped up” along its banks. Now, we await summer months to see if a winter of “connectedness” might make a difference to the pasture that we are converting back to a floodplain forest.

The objective of the Rogue River Basin Report Card project is to strengthen the connectedness among communities in the region and assess the condition of various social and environmental components of the watershed. And building on the Report Card, the Council recently hired Marie Trammell as our Partnerships Coordinator to help the Council participate in and build robust, goal-oriented partnerships that accomplish “needle moving” actions that improve the quality of our water, and the resilience of our streams, forests, and communities.

If you run into Marie, please welcome her. And if you have ideas for how the Council can weave connectivity, connection, and connectedness into the work we do to accomplish our mission, do not be bashful about letting us know. We are always striving to improve.

In the beginning, there was Ray

I don't know very much about Ray Tharp. But I spent a lot of time with him over the past 8.75 years. From the time he offered me the Executive Directorship at the establishment of this Council (conditional, of course, upon the outcome of that first board meeting) and into the final preparations for our most successful fundraising event—Ray was there. And he was willing to roll up his sleeves, smile a little, speak a lot, and lean into whatever needed to be done with those broad shoulders. We'll be okay without Ray's presence. But I, for one, will miss him a great, great deal. Rest in peace, Ray.

The passing of Ray Tharp, May 2023



Credit: Frizz Studio

The Rogue Basin's first report card

All 315,000 people living in the Rogue River Basin depend on a healthy watershed for high-quality drinking water, jobs, quality of life, and recreation. They also desire communities that offer resiliency, sustainability, and abundant fish and wildlife resources. Whether members of local communities realize it or not, their resiliency, sustainability, and quality of life all depend on healthy watersheds in the Rogue Basin.

RRWC and more than 15 project partners have been holistically examining the condition of the Rogue River Basin by assessing key aspects (indicators) of rivers and creeks, their surrounding landscapes, and communities, to develop the first-ever Rogue River Basin Report Card that scored a moderate grade of "C" in 2021!

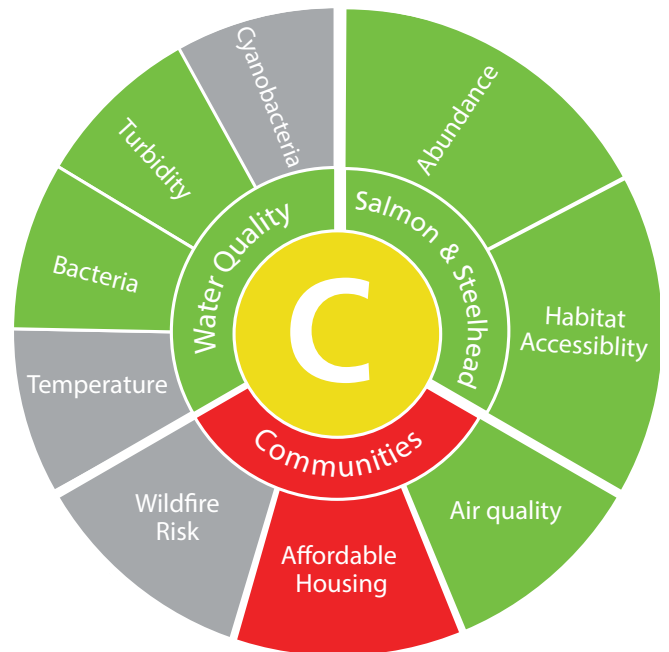
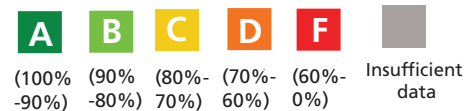
Why affordable housing?

The most common question posed since the release of the Report Card is, "why is affordable housing included?" This is a great question, that has a simple answer. This Report Card by design is a socio-environmental assessment and therefore takes into account both the health of the ecosystem and its community, both of which are inextricably linked.

The affordable housing indicator was developed by using U.S. Census data to determine the percentage of Basin community members spending less than 30% of their income on housing. This threshold is derived from the Federal Reserve's indication that a household spending more than 30% of their income on housing is "housing cost burdened."

While affordable housing is both a state and nationwide issue, regionally, this community issue was exacerbated by the 2020 Almeda Fire that destroyed 2,300 homes. Many of these homes were considered affordable housing.

Check out rogue-river-basin-report-card.com to learn more!



Report card indicator "pie wheel." Each colorful section represents an indicator that was assessed using data from report card partners.

We spent a lot of time exploring potential data sources for river recreation, tourism, agricultural production, and tribal governments but were unable to find Basin-wide data or standards that allowed for further development. With more time, we hope to develop additional community/economy indicators to provide a clearer picture of the health of the Basin community.

Match the hatch: salmonfly

Megan Samuelson, Leadership Team, Southern Oregon Women on the Fly

On a beautiful summer afternoon in early June, I don my waders and rig up my fly rod at Rivers Edge Park (the "Holy Water") on the Upper Rogue River. It is a magical time of year for hungry trout and eager anglers. The *Pteronarcys californica*, commonly known as the salmonfly, is the star of the show.

Salmonfly are found across western North America, from British Columbia down to California. Growing in excess of two inches, these giant stonefly species spend most of their lives as aquatic macroinvertebrates before they hatch out as winged adults and serve as an important food source for trout. In turn, they provide an exciting opportunity for anglers, like myself.

As I make my way down to the river's edge and begin to wade into the river, I can't help but feel startled by the aggressive thud of a huge bug crash landing on my shoulder. But it's exactly what I was hoping for - the salmonfly. Large orange body, broad wings with dark veins, and long sticky ticklish legs. I always delight knowing that the trout are likely enjoying a feast of these friends.

I pull out my fly box and carefully examine my fly selection to find one that replicates the salmonfly. I have learned to replicate the food source, and I'll likely find fish. I like to turn over rocks, inspect trees, brush, and grass, look around for airborne flies, enjoying the entomology and taking notes for what the fish might be hungry for that day.



Live salmonfly adult (above) and salmonfly fly (below).



June 2023 Upper Rogue Fishing Report:
There are trout: Go find 'em.
Water is fast: Bring an anchor.



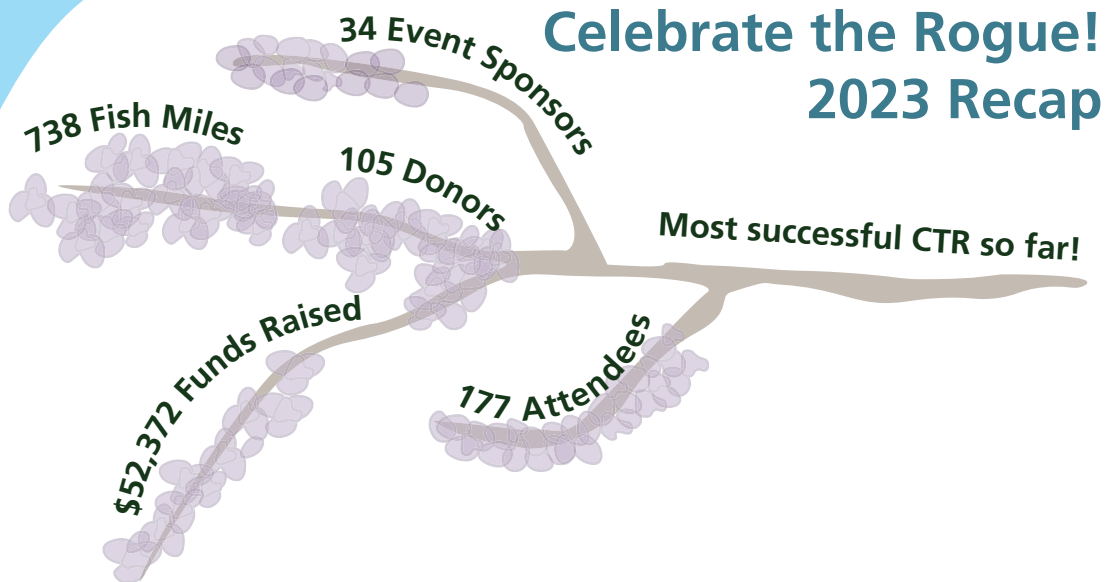
Credit: Jason Graham

I tie on a Chubby Cheronobyl and cast upriver, letting the flow carry my fly downriver for a while until all of the sudden, WHAM, a Rainbow Trout (*Onchoryhncus mykiss*), slurps my fly off the surface as my rod bends in response. After a good fight, I ease the beautiful fish into my net, and snap a picture before carefully releasing it back into the high-flowing Rogue to munch on some more salmonflies.



Credit: Tammy Dedrick

I have learned that when it comes to catching fish, it's actually all about the insects and bugs. In short, match the hatch, and catch. Happy salmonfly season!



Pollution, what's the "point" or "nonpoint"?

Marie Trammell, Partnerships Coordinator, RRWC

If you have spent time on the rivers and streams in Rogue River watersheds you have likely experienced the water and pondered its beauty and power as it bends, curves and falls with the landscape. On hot days we all wish we could go to a shady area of a stream and take a long drink of the cool water. While much of the Rogue River and its tributaries are safe for recreation, consumption of untreated water can have health consequences due to contaminants and pathogens. Water contaminants come from many sources and can enter our waterways at any location. Professionals in the field separate this pollution into two categories, point source and nonpoint source pollution.

Point source pollution is contaminants that are discharged into the environment at a specific location, often in the form of residential and industrial waste or sewage coming from pipes, drains, and ditches. Regulations have been put into place and are enforced to minimize and mitigate contaminants discharged in this way.

Nonpoint source pollution is a combination of pollutants over a large area that cannot be specifically located. Common sources of nonpoint source pollution include runoff from nutrients from fertilizers applied to agricultural fields, chemicals from automobiles and tires on roadways and parking lots, and soil, debris, and chemicals from construction, forestry, and mining sites. The sources of pollution are often associated with an activity rather than a location making them difficult to treat. Nonpoint source pollution often enters rivers and streams through storm drains and is mitigated by reducing the amount of runoff from these areas.

In effort to provide the highest quality drinking water for our community, The Rogue Drinking Water Partnership is developing a Geographic Response Plan which provides site-specific strategies for the initial response to a spill of oil or other contaminants near water. This plan allows for a faster response time minimizing impact to the community and environment.

Pollution doesn't just come from large corporations; it also comes from small businesses and individuals.



You can help keep our drinking water clean by implementing some of these actions:

- Keep litter, pet waste, and debris off streets and yards
- Control soil erosion on your property
- Apply garden chemicals sparingly and according to manufacturer instructions
- Dispose of automotive and household chemicals properly

Scan the QR code to learn more!

Species spotlight: American mink

Nicole Ferer, Environmental Educator and River Guide, Orange Torpedo Trips



It was my first time paddleboarding down the Rogue River when I first saw an American mink (*Neovison vison*). Picture this: ecology nerd (and river guide) swims through a class 2 rapid squealing “Mink, mink! Look at the mink!” while her paddle and board float past her. Now, spotting a mink is quite the treat; they are very sneaky, elusive little creatures. And no wonder they are so covert, given how prized their radiant, chocolatey pelts are. Unless you tend to slink around lake edges and snorkel rivers as I do, you may have never seen a mink. They are most active at dusk and dawn and can hunt in complete darkness thanks to great eyesight and hearing.

Credit: Needsmoretailln



The mink is found throughout the state of Oregon and is associated with river, lake, pond, and marsh environments. They forage along banks and peer into the water, quickly diving when they spot prey. Minks are semi-aquatic members of the weasel family, consisting of the most diverse species of carnivores including badgers, otters, fishers, skunks, weasels, and mink. Species in the weasel family (mustelids) can be found in nearly every terrestrial habitat: from below the ground to the treetops, and in fresh and saltwater environments. Minks live an amphibious way of life, not only do they swim well, but they are also strong climbers!

Weighing in at up to five pounds, the mink has a slender, elongated body up to 18 inches in length, with a furry tail as long as 10 inches. Short but powerful legs give minks a low profile so they can sneak around in cover and get into obscure places to find prey. Partially webbed feet make this species an adept swimmer. The mink’s fur is typically rich brown but can vary from tan to gray.

American minks are versatile and solitary predators. Carnivorous, minks eat a variety of small prey including fish, frogs, crustaceans, birds and bird eggs, insects, and small mammals. They are known for killing an excess of prey and stashing it to consume later. Seeing as they are adept anglers, don’t be surprised if you spot a mink scampering off at dusk with a rainbow trout in its jowls after an unsuccessful day of fishing for you.

And if you, like me, spot a slender, brown mammalian creature scuttling on the rocks as you boat down the river, hopefully now you will recognize it as your mate, the mink.

Community forest resilience-building

John Speece, RRWC Project Manager

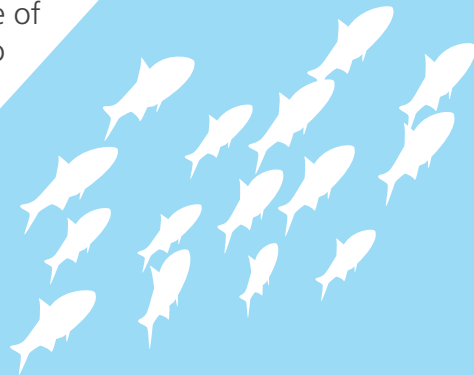
In 2018, when my now wife, Davi, and I relocated back to southern Oregon we moved into her family farm on Wagner Creek in Talent. The house was built in 1900, and was previously a working dairy farm through the mid-1900's. Her mother purchased the property in 1982 at the urging of one of her friends; Mr. Daniel Bish, the owner of Plant Oregon. The farm is 60 acres, about half of which is forested. Of course, I feel extremely fortunate to have moved into a community of like-minded folks who have become great friends, in such a beautiful location. I'm still amazed at the diversity of plant and animal species that call the farm their home.



There's a narrow road and an irrigation ditch that we often walk, and during our first walk of the property, I was wearing my "professional hat" and quickly realized the forest was overstocked with dense small and large diameter trees and shrubs, moderate to high fuel loadings, and structural characteristics that increase the risk of a high severity fire.

In late 2021, I recruited two neighbors and worked with the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District to apply for a grant to address the upland conditions through the Oregon Department of Forestry Small Forestland Grant Program. The project included 50 acres and was focused on decreasing the threat of uncharacteristically severe fire by completing forest stand improvement. Additionally, these prescribed fire actions sought to increase resiliency to drought, fire, insects, disease, and climate change; while providing fire resilient vegetation and enhancing healthy oak and old growth habitat. For the last 18 months, working on this project has occupied many of my weekends, but I'm happy to report that we just wrapped up work in the first week of June.

While we accomplished much, there's still much to do. I've found the process to be humbling because of the hard work, gratifying due to the results, and comforting because I get to work alongside neighbors and friends to protect our homes and properties while enhancing the health of the forest.



Rogue River

Acknowledgments

Thank you to our guest authors for sharing their valuable insights and perspectives.

Fish school and mink symbols courtesy of the Integration Application Network symbol library.

All graphics are by RRWC staff unless noted otherwise.



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