



HOOD RIVER WATERSHED GROUP

2020 Annual Report

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2020 has been a year of adaptation, introspection, and strategic development for the Hood River Watershed Group.

For almost 30 years, the Watershed Group has been harnessing the tools of community education and cooperative conservation to sustain and improve the 339 square mile Hood River Watershed. We continued our efforts in 2020, albeit with a few adaptations. We held our last in-person meeting in February and postponed the fish habitat project planned for the West Fork Hood River until next summer. In the meantime, we took advantage of the “free” time to finish and launch our new website, delve deeper into the Strategic Action Plan, fine tune next year’s habitat projects, and reimagine our public presentations. With excitement and trepidation, we hosted our first virtual Watershed Group meeting in September with a presentation from ODFW’s Ben Clemens on Pacific lamprey. It was a wonderful talk with people joining in from all over Oregon and beyond (watch the recording on our website if you missed it)!

The Watershed Group and its partners have had great success with project funding this year, securing over \$3 million - with another \$2 million pending - for the East Fork Irrigation District’s water conservation pipeline project, and \$460,000 for fish habitat restoration on Neal Creek. These projects will benefit threatened salmon and steelhead, as well as local farmers. Take a look inside for more information.

As fall settles in, we are reflecting on the great importance of our community and our partnerships. We invite you to get to know your watershed better, whether it is through our website, virtual presentations, or giving us a call to explore how you can connect to and be a steward of the watershed. We are committed to fostering new relationships and understanding who has been left out of the conversation so that we can be a more inclusive organization, dedicated to bringing people together around protecting our natural resources.

Cindy Thieman, Watershed Coordinator
& Alix Danielsen, Restoration & Outreach Project Manager



**OUR MISSION IS TO SUSTAIN AND IMPROVE THE HOOD RIVER WATERSHED
THROUGH EDUCATION, COOPERATION, AND STEWARDSHIP.**



2020 WATERSHED GROUP PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

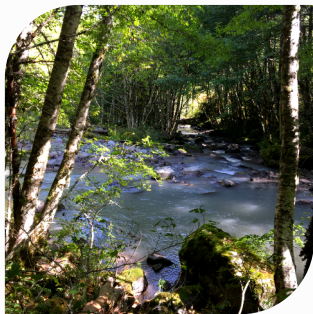
Habitat Restoration Projects

Neal Creek Fish Habitat Restoration Designs

Neal Creek is one of the few clear water (non-glacial) tributaries of the lower Hood River and provides habitat for winter steelhead, coho salmon, cutthroat trout, and resident rainbow trout. The Watershed Group is working with private landowners to mitigate the effects of past land management by reconnecting the creek with its floodplain and improving fish habitat instream. The goal of these projects is to aid in the recovery of threatened steelhead and salmon in the watershed.

☿ **PHASE 1** - The Watershed Group completed restoration designs for two sites along Neal Creek (0.5 stream miles) with funding from the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs (CTWS) (\$30,000), Pacific Power Blue Sky Habitat Fund (\$27,500), and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (\$63,433). The project will be implemented next summer with additional funding from the CTWS (\$310,000) and the Pacific Power Blue Sky Habitat Fund (\$38,000).

☿ **PHASE 2** - In 2020, we began working with four new landowners to develop instream restoration designs in a 3/4-mile reach of Neal Creek. With funding from CTWS (\$57,343), the design process began this fall and includes topographic surveying, hydrologic and hydraulic modeling, and design drawings. The Watershed Group will pursue funding in 2021 to implement the project in 2022.



Fish Habitat Restoration Design for the West Fork Hood River at Red Hill

This project will take place on the West Fork Hood River in the vicinity of Red Hill Creek. The design was completed by the US Forest Service with input from Watershed Group and CTWS staff. The project will be implemented next year and will place up to 440 logs in the stream and floodplain to create pools, trap spawning gravels, and reconnect floodplain habitat. This will benefit threatened spring Chinook salmon and winter steelhead.

Improving Pollinator Habitat Along Irrigation Pipelines

With Farmers Irrigation District, Farmer's Conservation Alliance, OSU Extension, and the HRSWCD, the Watershed Group is managing an innovative pilot project that will replace invasive weeds along irrigation pipeline with native flowering plants to increase pollinator habitat. The goal is to develop a method that can be replicated across the western U.S. The project is funded by a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Innovation Grant (\$60,292).



\$625,788 in grants secured for restoration and conservation projects (\$2.04 mill pending)



6.5 acres of restoration underway



2 water conservation projects completed or underway; 3.5 cfs protected instream



3 fish habitat project designs underway

2020 WATERSHED GROUP PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Water Conservation Projects



Eastside Lateral Pipeline & Water Conservation Project

After several years of fundraising, permitting, and design, this project will break ground in November. The first construction phase will install ~4,000 ft. of pipeline and a pressure reducing station. This year, East Fork Irrigation District (EFID) was awarded an additional \$2.25 million for this project from the NRCS, adding to previous funding from NRCS and CTWS. The Watershed Group has managed the cultural resource assessments and secured OWEB funding (\$524,355) and a pending \$2 million grant from the Oregon Water Resources Department for the next project phases. When all phases are complete, six miles of open canal will be piped, leaving more water in the East Fork Hood River and increasing irrigation reliability for EFID patrons.



Dee Irrigation District Piping Project

This project, completed in 2020, replaced DID's 31,711-ft distribution system pipe with pressurized pipe, built a centralized pump station, and installed flow meters at all irrigation turn outs, saving energy and leaving more water in the West Fork Hood River to benefit threatened salmon and steelhead. The Watershed Group managed the funding requests and reporting for this \$2.8 million project.

Community Engagement

2020 presented unique challenges for in-person community engagement, and as a result we focused our time laying a solid groundwork for our future work. We finalized our Communications & Outreach Strategy and launched our new website (hoodriverwatershed.org). As a hub of information about the watershed, the website aims to foster a deeper connection with the community and a better understanding of the need to protect and restore the Hood River Watershed.



Monitoring

The Watershed Group monitors restoration projects to evaluate if restoration actions are having their intended effect and to improve future projects. In 2020, our monitoring of stream channel morphology at the Odell Creek Dam Removal site shows continued positive progress, with enhanced fish habitat and passage, natural flow, and the return of beaver! We also conduct water temperature monitoring in partnership with the Middle Fork Irrigation District to evaluate changes to stream temperature over time and evaluate the impacts of management actions.



Design & Planning Projects

Watershed 2040 Goal
"By 2040, watershed conditions support viable populations of native fish and other aquatic species.

Salmon, steelhead, and bull trout populations are on a trajectory towards recovery."

Watershed 2040 - Hood River Basin Partnership Strategic Action Plan

The Watershed Group received \$110,000 from OWEB to develop a Strategic Action Plan to guide the Partnership's conservation work for the next 20 years. The plan - referred to as Watershed 2040 - identifies and prioritizes restoration and management actions, like on-farm water conservation, irrigation delivery infrastructure, and habitat restoration, that will improve conditions and restore aquatic habitat for native fish species. Over the past three years, Watershed 2040 partners have met to identify long-term outcomes, develop progress monitoring tools, build financial strategies, and identify and map specific actions they will take to achieve desired goals. The plan will be released in December 2020.



LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021

In 2021, the Watershed Group will be working on:

- Kicking off Watershed 2040, the 20-year basin-wide Strategic Action Plan;
- Implementing and supporting several habitat restoration and water conservation projects, including a large wood project on the West Fork Hood River, a large wood project on Neal Creek, and the Eastside Lateral Pipeline project, and;
- Pursuing funding for future project implementation in 2021.

The Watershed Group is the designated watershed council for the Hood River Basin. We work with private landowners, community members, irrigation districts, tribes, farmers, foresters, and agencies to improve watershed health through projects including stream and riparian habitat restoration, irrigation modernization, water quality monitoring, fish screening at water diversions, fish passage barrier removal, and more.

We would love to work with YOU in 2021! Contact us or join our mailing list to learn about volunteer and stewardship opportunities in the watershed!

WHO WE ARE

Staff

Cindy Thieman, Watershed Coordinator
Alix Danielsen, Restoration & Outreach Project Manager

Operations Committee

HRWG Chair - Chuck Gehling
HRSWCD District Manager - Heather Hendrixson
Irrigation District Manager - Craig Dehart
Agriculture - Jim Wells
Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs - Chris Brun
At-large - Kate Conley
Recreation - Greg Short
Forestry - Sam Doak
Natural Resources - Phil Simpson

Our Core Partners

Hood River Soil & Water Conservation District (HRSWCD), Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs (CTWS), East Fork Irrigation District (EFID), Middle Fork Irrigation District (MFID), Farmers Irrigation District (FID), Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), & Columbia Land Trust (CLT).



Learn more about the Watershed Group:

We have a new website: hoodriverwatershed.org
We have social media: Instagram & Facebook @hoodriverwatershed

Monthly Watershed Group presentations take place most months on the fourth Tuesday of the month from 6-8pm (no meetings in August and December).
Join our mailing list for meeting reminders, volunteer opportunities, and project updates!

Thank you for your continued support for watershed planning and conservation.