



IT WORKED! FLOODPLAIN RECONNECTION A WIN-WIN FOR WILDLIFE AND COMMUNITY

A few hours after the February flood peaked, the north end of the Circle Creek floodplain was still under water, but Highway 101 was clear.

It took years of planning, but reconnecting the historical floodplain at Circle Creek Habitat Reserve finally got underway last fall when a 1.5-mile-long berm bordering the Necanicum River was removed, followed by anchoring of woody habitat structures across the former pasture. The concept: allow the river to flood naturally in the winter, restoring habitat for coastal wildlife—waterfowl, salmon, frogs, elk, and dozens of other animals, large and small—while tempering the chronic flooding of U.S. Highway 101 at that site. It was a great concept, but would it work?

The big test came in late February, when days of rain raised the Necanicum River high enough to flood and briefly close the

highway at its junction with U.S. 26. In the past, flooding at that site meant worse flooding—often days of road closure—at the Circle Creek project site a mile to the north. But there was no flooding! Highway traffic kept moving even as huge flocks of ducks and geese moved in to rest and feed on the flood waters and, unseen, juvenile salmon darted among that woody debris, finding refuge from fast-moving waters in the river channel. It worked!

The February storm wasn't the project's first test. High rainfall in September flooded Circle Creek as well yet failed to flood the highway, though it was anybody's guess whether that flood would actually have been high enough to inundate the highway. But

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now the guesswork is over. Just days before the February storm, an independent hydrology consultant working with Clatsop County released a draft of a study comparing the September 2013 flood event to previous flood events of similar magnitude at the same site. He determined that the highway would indeed have flooded, twice, with about one foot of *(continued on Page 4)*

IT'S BACK TO THE LAND AT NCLC

This winter, while gardeners were perusing seed catalogues and dreaming of summer gardens, NCLC Volunteer Coordinator Penny Paulsen was imagining a fresh slate of summer walks and paddle trips to offer conservation supporters, old and new. Penny has collaborated with staff and volunteer naturalists and tour guides to assemble this year's array of free guided outings on our habitat reserves that are not normally open to the public.

This year's outings include favorite sites such as Circle Creek Habitat Reserve and Stanley Marsh in Seaside, as well as to new sites such as Clear Lake and Skipanon Forest in Warrenton. We're offering new perspectives on what may be familiar landscapes: the impact of the berm removal and floodplain reconnection (and two episodes of flooding) on Circle Creek, for example, and Stanley Marsh after dark. This year's paddle trips visit John Day River Marsh and Skipanon Forest.

You'll find detailed descriptions at
NCLCtrust.org

Space is limited, so please register in advance so we can reserve your place. (We keep groups small to ensure a great experience for all.)

CONSERVING THE QUIET WATERS NEAR THE COLUMBIA RIVER

The wetlands that characterize the land immediately south of the mouth of the Columbia River have been a particular focus of our efforts over the past year. They are part of what we call our Columbia Quiet Waters Conservation Initiative, one of six such initiatives that target key habitat types or ecological values within the different coastal regions we serve, from the Columbia south to Lincoln City. Using this strategic approach to land conservation and acquisition, we seek to create links in the landscape that will help us keep habitats healthy on a broad scale and allow plants and animals to move and mingle across that landscape.

The Columbia Quiet Waters Initiative concentrates on the interdunal wetlands—lakes and swamps in lowlands between dune ridges—within the Urban Growth Boundary of the City of Warrenton and wetlands associated with the lower Skipanon River and Tansy and Alder Creeks. The Sitka spruce forested wetland and swamp communities found here are globally rare.

Warrenton is an area of rapid population growth and land development, yet it hosts one of the largest intact interdunal spruce swamp systems remaining in the lower Columbia, making it an area of particular interest for conservation.



Wild Ace Lake

WETLANDS CREATION ENHANCES CLEAR LAKE

An ambitious habitat improvement project is under way at one of North Coast Land Conservancy's newest properties in the Warrenton dune lake area. Shortly after acquiring the 45-acre Clear Lake property in late 2013, NCLC began creating habitat on the site, first by excavating a bare sand dune. This dune had been intensively grazed to the point where it was devoid of vegetation, presenting NCLC with the opportunity to create a new wetland in its place. Drainage ditches that had been dug throughout the property to drain existing wetlands are being plugged, allowing the wetlands to recover and, in concert with the newly created wetlands, enhance the ecological services this natural property provides. The site is already a beauty, with an active bald eagle nest overhead and red-legged frogs below.

In late March, Stewardship Director Melissa Reich and a group of volunteers from NCLC and Skipanon Watershed Council spent a day replanting the wetlands with willows and bare-root native shrubs. An established dune ridge already hosts large Sitka spruce trees; it is being planted with additional riparian plants where it borders 7-acre Clear Lake—centerpiece of the property—and the adjacent wetlands. Clear Lake's proximity to NCLC's Gardenia Wetland and Ridge Road Swamp is boosting NCLC's efforts to maintain and promote wildlife corridors and other kinds of ecological connectivity at the mouth of the Columbia River.

INTERESTED IN SEEING CLEAR LAKE FOR YOURSELF?

Melissa Reich and Jon Wickersham are leading guided walks at Clear Lake on June 26 and July 17.

For details, visit [NCLCtrust.org](https://www.nclctrust.org) and look for the complete listing of On the Land outings.

SKIPANON FOREST

It took seven years, but late in 2013 NCLC finalized acquisition of Skipanon Forest, the most recent addition to our collection of habitat reserves in Warrenton, and a big one.

The 106-acre preserve includes land on both sides of nearly a half-mile of the Skipanon River where its tidal waters flow through a forest of Sitka spruce and native crabapple between Warrenton High School and US 101. Or round it up to 109 acres, including two other small NCLC parcels nearby. Skipanon Forest is among nearly 300 acres NCLC has conserved in the past year within the city limits of Warrenton alone.

In NCLC's recently completed Columbia Quiet Waters Conservation Plan, Skipanon Forest ranked as a top priority for preservation, with its globally rare Sitka spruce forest and swamp habitat. Wetlands such as these provide natural flood control and keep water clean by filtering out sediments, excess nutrients, and pollutants. They also provide essential wildlife habitat, enhancing the area's biodiversity.



To see Skipanon Forest for yourself, join us this summer on one of two guided paddle trips we are offering on the Skipanon as part of our On the Land schedule of outings.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



WETLAND SCIENTIST CONTRIBUTES TIME AND TALENT

You've heard of the "life lists" some birdwatchers keep, recording all the avian species they've ever spotted? Stan Geiger (pictured above) has a life list too—of algae.

"There's an aesthetic element that I think drives anyone who begins to focus on certain species," he says, "regardless whether they're birds or mammals"—or, in his case, primitive aquatic plants often invisible to the naked eye. "There are all these different forms, shapes and colors: a whole world that people don't know anything about."

Stan, 77, is a retired wetland scientist and phycologist—algae expert—and one of NCLC's newest volunteer site stewards: people who adopt one or more of our conserved properties and conduct quarterly site visits to provide on-going monitoring. Stan has adopted not one but five wetland properties, all in the Warrenton area: Clear Lake, Wild Ace Lake, Creep and Crawl Lake (a property that also includes Abbot and Crabapple lakes), Cottongrass Lake, and Beaver Ridge Point.

As a consulting scientist, Stan has worked throughout Clatsop County, including conducting an inventory of the relative value of wetlands in the Warrenton area, and he is continuing to research lakes and wetlands in this region in his own time, as a retirement project. He has a particular interest in the beneficial role of "brown water" produced by wetlands in controlling algae. He has studied brown water in Upper Klamath Lake, and he is interested in its role in the shallow interdunal lakes in Warrenton, including Clear Lake ("which isn't clear, it's brown!" he notes).

"I told Melissa (Reich, NCLC stewardship director) I was interested in shallow, standing water wetlands in order to pursue my interest in what kind of algae lives in those wetlands as well as what kind of zooplankton eat those algae." He is particularly interested in NCLC properties because of their status as perpetually conserved preserves; they present him with the opportunity to collect and analyze data in the long term, without risking that those wetlands will be turned into big-box stores or housing. He and Melissa managed to fight their way to each of the lakes for the first time last fall (some are deep in scrubby vegetation, making them difficult to access), where he collected water samples to analyze. He also plans to place mesh screens in the lakes to observe what kinds of organisms attach themselves to it.

Stan and his wife live in Portland, but they own a time-share condo in Seaside, which they occupy four weeks of the year—a perfect match with NCLC's quarterly site monitoring schedule.

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Preserving the Oregon Coast Forever

North Coast Land Conservancy is a nonprofit land trust dedicated to safeguarding Oregon's vital coastal landscapes. Working with a wide-range of community partners, we acquire strategic lands and manage a living network of coastal habitats—from Astoria to Lincoln City—necessary to support abundant wildlife and diverse community needs, now and forever.

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MARSH WREN MAKEOVER

For more than a quarter-century, the marsh wren has been our unofficial mascot and the inspiration for our logo. It still is—we've just updated that logo for a cleaner look. The time had come; we needed higher-resolution scans, but the original artwork by Linda Newberry was destroyed in our December 2012 fire.



Now more than ever, the marsh wren is a perfect metaphor for the land trust. As NCLC founder and nature photographer Neal Maine put it, the marsh wren “lives and interacts with all the pieces of the system. Like the land trust: It works in the context of the community, sort of inconspicuously. And busy, busy, busy! Marsh wrens never leave their tasks. It's all eagerness for the next second.”

STAFF TRANSITION



THANK YOU TERESA!

After supporting our fund-raising, communication and outreach efforts for four years, Teresa Retzlaff has left NCLC to focus on her own 46 North Farm as well as North Coast Food Web, which promotes local, sustainable agriculture. Teresa helped NCLC grow to become the robust land trust it is today. Thank you, Teresa, for your hard work, creativity and ready smile! And welcome to Bonnie Henderson, longtime NCLC supporter, who has stepped in as communication coordinator.

FLOODPLAIN RECONNECTION

(continued from Page 1)

water on the road, had the project not taken place before the heavy September rainstorm.

North Coast Land Conservancy led the effort that was undertaken on our land, but removal of the berm and the floodplain restoration still under way would never have been accomplished without our partners. Clatsop County provided planning and project management for the levee removal and the continuing data collection, while the Oregon Department of Transportation provided essential wetlands mitigation funding and planning. NCLC is just one important part of what has ultimately become a highly successful community collaboration and a landmark floodplain restoration project for Oregon.

JOIN OUR E-MAIL LIST

If you only receive newsletters from us in the mail, you're only getting half the picture. North Coast Land Conservancy also sends out monthly e-newsletters (just once a month, not more than that) with breaking news, upcoming events, and blog posts focused on seasonal changes and wildlife on the Oregon Coast.

To subscribe, visit NCLCtrust.org and click on the “Join our email list” button on the home page.

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