



SEA LIONS IN THE FOREST: CONSERVATION COLLABORATION PROTECTS SAND LAKE ESTUARY



A sea lion pokes its head above the water in a tidal channel at Sand Lake.

Have you ever walked the beach near the outlet of Sand Lake, north of Pacific City in Tillamook County? Perhaps you've walked the loop trail on Whalen Island or kayaked the "lake's" waters at high tide, exploring sloughs that reach deep into the forest at its fringes. Sand Lake is one of only four bar-built estuaries on the Oregon coast (distinct from the more common coastal plain estuaries at river mouths) and the only one still dominated by native plants, due to minimal agricultural or commercial development around it. Sand Lake is now Oregon's best-conserved estuary as well, thanks in part to North Coast Land Conservancy.

northeastern edge of the Sand Lake estuary (and is in the process of acquiring more; see below). The property includes intertidal salt marsh, tidal channels and forested wetlands that connect to a number of stream systems, including 1.5 miles of Sand Creek, which provides a migratory pathway for spawning salmon and steelhead and rearing habitat for steelhead and salmon smolts. The forest is dominated by Sitka spruce, creek dogwood, Hooker willow and remnants of what was once and will again be a large western redcedar swamp—perhaps the largest in coastal Oregon. "It's a rare place where forest and sea not only meet but blend," says NCLC Executive Director Katie Voelke.

"IT'S A RARE PLACE WHERE FOREST AND SEA NOT ONLY MEET BUT BLEND."

Parks and Recreation Department also took ownership of 357-acre Beltz Farm, at the estuary's southwest corner, intending to manage its wetlands and uplands mainly as a natural area. OPRD already owned Whalen Island, in the middle of the estuary, and more upland habitat nearby. Add in wetlands managed by the Oregon Department of State Lands and those owned by conservancies such as NCLC, and Sand Lake's high-functioning estuary and rainforest are now poised to provide their many benefits to humans and wildlife in perpetuity.

In May NCLC acquired 167 acres on the It was a big summer for Sand Lake. Oregon

FROM PEAKS TO BOGS: CONSOLIDATING CARE OF COASTAL PRESERVES

By the time you read this, North Coast Land Conservancy may own an additional 47.6 acres of wetlands at the edge of the Sand Lake estuary. Bradley's Bog is one of three coastal properties that the Oregon office of The Nature Conservancy is formally transferring to NCLC. It is adjacent to our newly acquired Sand Lake Habitat Reserve; Sand Creek flows from one property into the other. Acquisition of Bradley's Bog will bring the total area of our conserved lands at Sand Lake to nearly 215 acres—that's 0.3 square miles.

The Nature Conservancy is also transferring a 466-acre conservation easement and transferring ownership of 47 acres in the Gearhart Fen, the vast wetlands east of US 101 characterized by sphagnum moss, stunted pines, and a wealth of wildlife. Together with two adjacent properties we already own, NCLC will soon be the steward of more than 500 acres in the Fen. In addition, TNC is transferring a 387-acre (continued on Page 4)



Gearhart Fen

A WHOLE-WATERSHED APPROACH TO CONSERVATION

What we call the Necanicum Wildlife Corridor encompasses the nearly 49,000-acre Necanicum River watershed: all the land and all the streams contributing water to the Necanicum River as it flows from its headwaters 2,800 feet high in the Coast Range to the Pacific Ocean in Seaside. It includes some of our best-known habitat reserves: 364-acre Circle Creek, for instance, as well as Neawanna Point, Thompson Creek and other conserved lands in the coastal plain at the river's mouth. Less well known are some of our conserved forest lands upstream (see Volunteer Spotlight). As of summer 2014, NCLC has conserved about 633 acres of land within the Necanicum watershed.

The name Necanicum Wildlife Corridor refers to the important role this watershed plays in the lives of the region's wildlife. More than 70 percent of all terrestrial species use river corridors in some way. In the Necanicum watershed, river offers range up waterways hunting for food, elk browse the streambanks, and coho salmon follow their natal streams to their spawning beds; their carcasses transport nutrients from the ocean deep into the forests of the upper watershed.

Floodplains and associated wetlands and riparian ecosystems in the Necanicum Wildlife Corridor also play a key role in flood protection for downstream communities, making the rivers and surrounding areas vital to all the watershed's inhabitants, including humans. The South Fork Necanicum River sub-watershed serves as the drinking water source for the City of Seaside.

NCLC staff recently completed a comprehensive new conservation plan for the Necanicum Wildlife Corridor. It's a compelling read and full of informative graphics; check it out at NCLCtrust.org. Our staff is developing strategic plans for each of our conservation initiatives to help us better target key habitat types and ecological values within our service area on the northern Oregon coast.

BUSTING BERMS, PULLING WEEDS, PLANTING TREES

Thoughtful stewardship—be it passive, active, or full-scale restoration—is at the heart of North Coast Land Conservancy's management of all our lands, but this past year has seen a particular focus on our properties in the Necanicum Wildlife Corridor. Highlights include the massive and successful floodplain reconnection project at Circle Creek, followed by planting tens of thousands of trees and shrubs to help jumpstart the property's transformation back into a rainforest. In a separate project also at Circle Creek, off-channel wetlands were sculpted in the land near our barns and former office site, giving juvenile coho salmon a quiet refuge during winter floods.

Thanks to a grant from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, we hired—for the first time—a robust summer stewardship crew of four. They surveyed and mapped the invasive plant species on all of our properties from the Necanicum Wildlife Corridor north to the Columbia River, but most of their time was spent cutting, mowing, and digging weeds, clearing some 300 acres of invasive plants. They also supervised youth crews and adult volunteers, leveraging even more stewardship.

This summer more woody debris was placed on the southwest pasture at Circle Creek to help suppress invasive grasses, to add nutrients to the soil, and to provide—as they decay—nurse logs where more tree seedlings can take root. More planting is planned at Circle Creek this winter. Next summer, thanks to a generous donation, a new wetlands boardwalk trail will be built at Circle Creek.

SITE STEWARD PRIVILEGED TO PROMOTE PERSONAL, PLANETARY WELL-BEING

North of US 26, just inland from the coast and a few miles up the Necanicum River, lie some special places within the Necanicum Wildlife Corridor. A tunnel of old vine maples skirts one corner of a 40-acre site known to North Coast Land Conservancy as the North Fork Necanicum Habitat Reserve. The second-growth spruce forest here houses a healthy native habitat largely untouched by invasive plants. The Necanicum River's North Fork meanders through the lower side of the property, providing a diverse and dynamic ecosystem for native plants and animals.

Farther downstream, 33-acre Necanicum Forest Habitat Reserve situates itself where Klootchey Creek meets the Necanicum. This gentle confluence reflects the peace of the surrounding forest. This site is nearly as pristine as the North Fork site, and it provided the perfect place for me to meet Keyaho Rohlfs, volunteer site steward for the two properties.

Keyaho feels passionately about the lands he maintains. He is humble and soft-spoken, and he fully appreciates the opportunity to manage these scenic, wild habitats. "I consider it a privilege," he said as we sat down under a tree by the riverbank, "to walk the land and to be a part of the work the Conservancy is doing." He and Stewardship Director Melissa Reich selected the two sites as a good fit for Keyaho about a year ago. And he has enjoyed stewarding them ever since, preferring their relative remoteness to other more accessible sites. "I enjoy being out there alone," he says. "I'm comfortable in the environment."

As site steward, Keyaho visits quarterly and walks as much of the properties as possible. He keeps an eye out for possible encroachment and visits photo points in the area, comparing the ecology with previous notes taken of the sites. Thankfully the sites don't change much, because the land is in such good condition, he explained.

As a result, very little active restoration is planned for the areas, allowing Keyaho to mostly observe and appreciate the properties he traverses.

Keyaho's relationship with the Conservancy is a valuable one. He provides an essential service to the organization, which in return allows him to realize the rewards of working on the land. "Everything comes from the Earth, and any time you can restore that, it is beneficial to your well-being," he mused. As our discussion wound down, he mentioned how fortunate he is to be able to work with NCLC. "I get fulfillment just knowing that the trees that I'm walking among will never be harmed. They can live the way they were intended to." The Conservancy is fortunate as well to have such a dedicated and conscientious individual in Keyaho as a site steward in the Necanicum Wildlife Corridor.



Volunteer Spotlight author Eric Owen was one of our three summer stewardship interns along with Kristen Daly and Colin Gilbert and led by land steward Andrew Fraser. Eric is now back at Oregon State University, where he is completing a bachelor's degree in environmental science with a minor in writing.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



NECANICUM COHO: STILL STRUGGLING, STILL WILD

Of the three species of salmon common to Oregon rivers, coho is the one most closely associated with the coastal landscape. Coho salmon spawn in small coastal rivers and their tributaries, and it is in these tributaries and quiet backwaters that juvenile coho spend their first full year before heading to the ocean.

The Necanicum River watershed hosts a distinct population of coho salmon; each winter over the past decade, anywhere from 400 to 4,500 spawning adults have returned to Neawanna Creek, Thompson Creek, and dozens of other named and unnamed streams in the Necanicum watershed. It is essentially a wild population; no hatchery releases of coho have been made in the Necanicum basin for more than 20 years.

A shortage of high-quality wintering habitat—streams with rocks and woody debris and quiet off-channel sloughs, where juvenile fish can take refuge in high water—is the primary limiting factor for coho in the Necanicum watershed, according to Chris Knutsen, North Coast District Fish Biologist for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Of the watershed's roughly 70 miles of coho salmon habitat, only about 10 miles provide the high quality habitat juvenile salmon need to survive and thrive. "Many groups have worked hard in the past ten years to restore natural processes, provide fish passage, and improve riparian function in the Necanicum," he says—including North Coast Land Conservancy.



**NORTH COAST
LAND CONSERVANCY**

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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**PREVIEW
LISTENING TO THE LAND**

The Oregon Coast is a landscape in constant flux. How has the coast changed through time? Since our arrival more than 10,000 years ago, how have humans experienced, adapted to and altered the natural landscape?

These questions are at the heart of this year's Listening to the Land speaker series, which begins in January 2015. In its sixth season, Listening to the Land will focus on the natural and cultural heritage of the Oregon coast. The series is produced in partnership with our friends at the Necanicum Watershed Council, with support from event host Seaside Public Library and with generous funding from the Seaside Chamber of Commerce. Programs take place on the third Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m. at the Seaside Library January through May.

Watch for a flyer in the mail listing this year's speakers and dates and other opportunities to engage with North Coast Land Conservancy this winter, including hands-on stewardship days. To sign up for our monthly e-newsletter, announcing each of our upcoming events, visit our website at NCLTrust.org.



Painter Jeffrey Hull speaking in 2014.

STAFF TRANSITIONS

**WELCOME
LYNETTE!**

Lynette Villagomez has joined the staff of North Coast Land Conservancy as its new administrative and outreach assistant. Lynette grew up in the Coachella Valley of southern California and went to college at Humboldt State University, where she earned a bachelor of science degree in environmental policy with a minor in environmental and natural resources planning in 2012. After graduation she went to work for the Mono Lake Committee, a nonprofit conservation organization in California, as an intern and project specialist before moving to Cannon Beach last fall. Her education, her administrative experience and her personal commitment to conservation make her an ideal fit for North Coast Land Conservancy.

"I know NCLC is really respected in the community," Lynette says. "It's a great resource to help me meet the pillars of the environmental community and help set my roots in this area."

In August we said good-bye to Allison Wilski, who will now be able to focus more energy toward her family. Allison joined NCLC in 2012 as our first administrative assistant. She helped us transition office management away from the executive director, allowing for even more focused conservation efforts on the ground. Thank you, Allison, for your hard work and sense of humor over the last two years!



**FROM PEAKS
TO BOGS**

(continued from Page 1)

conservation easement on forest and subalpine meadow high on Onion Peak, between Arch Cape and Manzanita—the second-tallest peak in Clatsop County (second only to Saddle Mountain). This easement is adjacent to land NCLC is hoping to conserve as part of its fledgling Coastal Edge Conservation Initiative.

"The Nature Conservancy has several conserved lands on the Oregon coast, including its well-known Cascade Head Preserve," explains NCLC Associate Director Jon Wickersham. "We have worked closely with TNC and provided local management of some of their lands in our service area. It just made sense to formally take over their management, allowing the stewardship to be local and freeing up TNC to work in the more underserved areas of the state."

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