

Ridgetop to Ridgetop Restoration

By Colleen Withers and Marci Schreder, Lake County Umbrella Watershed Council.

The Lake County Umbrella Watershed Council (LCUWC) and ~~its~~our valuable partnerships have served property owners and managers in Lake County over the last decade by planning, securing funding, and implementing a wide variety of land restoration projects. These projects have ranged from upland juniper and pine thinning to large-scale meadow and stream restoration. ~~fish passage and irrigation improvement.~~

In 2017, the Council accomplished much during the field season~~;~~, hiring ten local contractors, ~~beginning~~ ~~or~~ completing 12 restoration projects, and securing funding for 17 projects, ~~to which will~~ begin or continue in 2018. Within the next decade, the goal of the Council is to plan and implement projects more holistically by focusing on “ridgetop to ridgetop” restoration.

A “watershed” can be defined as “all of the land that drains to a common water body.” It is often described as “the area between two ridgetops.” The concept of ridgetop to ridgetop restoration stems from this description and means to restore several or all components of a watershed: the uplands, stream headwaters and tributaries, riparian areas and meadow systems, the water body itself, and groundwater. Embedded in the concept of ridgetop to ridgetop restoration is the idea of “working landscapes.” Limited water in the eastern Oregon desert means that watersheds are a critical water source to both native species and the farmers and ranchers who that have generationally managed these landscapes.

Lake ~~C~~eounty is made up of multiple, diverse watersheds, all included in the management boundaries of the LCUWC. Understanding how watersheds function and their importance to Lake County livelihoods is essential to the LCUWC’s operation. The most recent example of ridgetop to ridgetop restoration is the ~~completion of the (still working on the upland projects)~~ Crooked Creek Restoration projects. This effort, beginning in 2013 initially focused on stream and meadow restoration, but has now shifted to forest health conditions in the upland timber stands.

Crooked Creek, a 23-mile stream system located in the Chewaucan Watershed holds a history of stream channel modifications that date back to the 1800’s. A variety of activities and the ~~area’s~~areas use as a major transportation corridor resulted in stream channel incision, a diminished water table, channel headcutting, low late-season flows, and fish passage barriers—all of which have been under the restoration potential microscope for years.

Through planning meetings with local resource agencies and the private landowners that reside along the stream, the Council determined that much could be accomplished through the formation of quality partnerships and the opportunity to cross jurisdictional boundaries. ~~Thirteen~~Sixteen private property owners, the Lakeview SWCD, NRCS, ODFW, Fremont-Winema National Forest, Oregon Department of Forestry, Chandler State Park, and US Fish and Wildlife worked cooperatively to address issues identified from the headwaters of the Crooked Creek ~~watershed stream~~ to the valley floor.

Between 2013 and 2017⁶, the LCUWC and its partners implemented high priority projects that addressed land use, irrigation infrastructure, forest health, and transportation corridor concerns, which were each identified as limiting factors affecting instream, riparian and upland ~~and riparian~~ habitats, ~~as well as the Chewaucan redband trout population~~. Beginning with upland enhancement and selective thinning, the Council and its partners worked to enhance ~~the wetland meadow pastures by stabilizing headcuts, improving meadow hydrology through pond and plug treatments,~~ updated irrigation structures while providing fish passage, and enhanced stream channel stability.

~~and plug method, improve irrigation structures by updating or replacing fish passage barriers, and stabilize the streambanks and head cuts.~~

Ultimately, ridge top to ridge top restoration incorporates opportunities to work together across private and public land boundaries to ~~develop~~bring about a well-functioning watershed. Many of the restoration and management improvement projects that have been implemented~~occurred~~ across the Crooked Creek Watershed will be used as models for other Lake County projects. Although each project focuses on one resource and a small corner of the ~~watershed, collectively~~watershed; collectively, these projects provide a working landscape with healthy plants, streams and wildlife habitats throughout the watershed system.

If you would like to know more about the Lake County Umbrella Watershed Council, please visit our website at www.lakecountywsc.com or contact Project Manager and Council Coordinator, Marci Schreder at 541-219-0830.