

Restoring Coquille Valley coastal wetlands for the benefit of fish, wildlife, agriculture and people

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The Nature Conservancy, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Beaver Slough Drainage District and other partners have begun conservation efforts to restore 546 acres along the Coquille River in Coos County to benefit threatened coho salmon and other fish species and to provide nesting and feeding areas for a wide range of wildlife.

Tidal wetlands—critical to the survival of salmon and migrating birds—once covered more than 17,450 acres of the Coquille Valley. Today, only five percent of the historic wetlands in the Coquille estuary remain undiked. Coho salmon populations have declined, because salmon need these areas to eat, hide from predators and escape the main river during winter floods.

An important element of the restoration plan is to provide public access to the land for wildlife-related recreation, including wildlife viewing, fishing and hunting.

The wetland property consists of portions of the Winter Lake and Beaver Slough areas, some of which is grazed by cattle. Plans are to continue selective grazing practices to meet resource management objectives.

Restoration Monitoring and Planning is Underway

- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife staff has started pre-restoration monitoring of fish and wildlife species.
- The Nature Conservancy has been awarded a National Coastal Wetland Conservation Act grant and will be applying for a matching grant from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board for restoration work in both areas. Restoration work is scheduled to begin in the summer of 2014.
- The Beaver Slough Drainage District, TNC and ODFW have begun collecting preliminary data on the Winter Lake area to replace existing tide gates with new systems. New tide gate systems will result in improved fish passage, improved water management for adjacent agricultural landowners and reduced maintenance costs.
- Preliminary studies funded by a variety of partners are underway to gather data for permitting, engineering and design of the restoration and tide gate projects. Additional funding is being sought by all three major partners to replace the existing tide gates.

Fish, wildlife and ecosystem benefits of the wetland restoration

- Improve the infrastructure through collaborative efforts, allowing improved water management capabilities, which support landowner goals to restore wetland habitat, improve water quality and support agricultural operations.

- Restore productivity and access to historic coho and chinook salmon habitats.
- Reestablish a forested wetland habitat that will greatly benefit juvenile coho and chinook salmon, cutthroat trout and lamprey populations. Coho salmon populations in the Coquille watershed could see an increase of up to 3,200 to 4,000 returning adults post restoration.¹
- Support American wigeon, mallard, northern pintail, northern shoveler, ring-necked duck, ruddy duck, wood duck, tundra swan, green-winged teal, and others migrate through and/or overwinter here.
- Benefit many species identified in the Oregon Conservation Strategy, including bald eagles, western meadowlarks, Townsend’s big-eared bats.
- Complement other conservation work in the Coquille Valley.

Economic benefits of restoration

- Restoration supports recreational fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing activities that currently bring Coos County about \$40 million a year. ²
 - Shellfishing: \$5,630,000
 - Fishing, recreational: \$14,810,000
 - Hunting: \$3,440,000
 - Wildlife Viewing: \$15,750,000
- Based on a recent economic report,³ restoration work at this site will provide between 18 and 20 local jobs.
- Oregon law requires ODFW to pay in lieu of property taxes and drainage district assessment fees at the same rate as private landowners on the Coquille property.
- By Oregon State Statute, ODFW will pay fire assessments at double the rate as private landowners on the Coquille Valley wetlands.
- Local economies are expected to benefit from increased fishing opportunities as salmon populations—both coho and chinook—increase from restoration activities.
- Economic benefits from agricultural operations are enhanced due to better drainage, improved irrigation capability and improved water quality.

Recreation benefits of Coquille Valley wetlands

- Restored habitat will increase natural fish production, increasing recreational and commercial angling opportunities.
- Wildlife viewing will be excellent for much of the year.

- Waterfowl hunting will be allowed in season.
- Fishing opportunity for cutthroat trout will be allowed on the Coquille Valley wetland properties.

1. Source: *Futures Analysis for Wetland Restoration in the Coquille River Basin: How many adult coho salmon might we expect to be produced*, Nickelson, 2012 (in Lit.)
2. Source: *Fishing, Hunting, Wildlife Viewing, and Shellfishing in Oregon 2008 State and County Expenditure Estimates, May 2009*. Dean Runyan and Associates. Includes travel and equipment.
3. Source: Sheeran, Kristen and Taylor Hesselgrave, 2012. *Analysis of the Economic Benefits of Salmon Restoration Efforts on the Lower Coquille River and Associated Economic Impacts*. A report to the Nature Conservancy, April 2012.