

Couse Creek

The goal of the Shumway Project on Couse Creek is to reconnect perennial flows, reduce shoreline erosion, enhance riparian cover for fish and wildlife species, and improve stream form and function. The project is located along Couse Creek (a tributary of the Walla Walla River) on private property some four miles south of the town of Milton-Freewater.

We know that Couse Creek - despite all its problems - was and is an important contributor to wild summer steelhead production in the upper Walla Walla River with 49 redds counted in 2002 and 48 in 2003. The two mile reach above the project area (and possibly a couple of miles higher up in the watershed) is good year-round salmonid rearing habitat. There is about a ½ mile of perennial flow downstream from the project area that gets too



warm to support salmonids during the summer. Relatives of the Shumway family remember perennial flow through the entire project reach. It is hoped that this restoration project will someday provide conditions that allow the stream to flow again through the entire project reach all year long. In addition to steelhead, bull trout in very low numbers may also inhabit the reach during some months of the year.

The project consisted of bioengineering 120 feet of stream bank (placing stabilization measures), placing rock and root wads with boles attached, planting vegetation (including willows, cottonwoods, shrubs, and native grasses), and erecting fencing along the stream to protect the riparian corridor. The bulk of the work took place from Fall 1996 to Fall 1998, with monitoring and planting continuing to the present. The many partners who have worked together on this project, providing technical expertise, equipment, labor, and volunteers, included: the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (at the time called GWEB), Salmon Corps, Tri-State Steelheaders, Mac Hi STELLAR students, Umatilla County Soil and Water Conservation District, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, US Fish and Wildlife, and the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council.

We entered into this effort knowing that the area had been used as a feed lot for some 60+ years. Therefore, we did not expect to see results magically appear overnight. Through fencing, planting, and letting the area rest, the project has begun a many-year process to realize the ultimate goal of perennial flow. The photos from 2001 show a stream that still looks somewhat degraded. However, the recovery so far is an immense improvement over the initial conditions.

The cumulative effects of all the restoration efforts going on in the Couse Creek sub-watershed (Milton Ditch water right, passage & screening; OWT in-stream lease(s); Shumway project; Tribal habitat restoration project upstream and downstream), as well as all the other watershed restoration projects occurring in the Walla Walla River basin, will go a long way toward salmonid recovery, & ultimately delisting species under the federal ESA. The best part of all of these efforts is that the local community is committed to working together to cooperatively address these issues in a manner that benefits everyone.