The Alsea River was once rated the top coho spawning basin in Oregon. Today, it still sustains viable populations of Chinook and coho salmon, steelhead cutthroat trout and is at the southern range of chum salmon distribution. However, historical alteration of the Alsea Bay has resulted in the loss of between 40 and 60 percent of marsh and other intertidal habitat, and overall wildlife populations are considerably reduced.

Pursuing its mission to secure critical wetland acreage as the first step in protecting and restoring vital habitats for salmonids, waterfowl, shorebirds and other avian species, The Wetlands Conservancy has recently acquired 241 acres of marsh and forest habitat in Alsea Bay with funding from a diverse group of community, state, federal interests including TWC, the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (Oregon Lottery funds), and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. The Foundation Purchase brings Alsea Bay Properties into Central Coast Wetland Protection Area

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supports the conservation of wildlife habitats identified in state wildlife action plans such as the Oregon Conservation Strategy, which includes the Bayview oxbow and Starr Creek within the Alsea Bay Opportunity Area.

The new acquisitions will conserve 75 percent of the Bayview oxbow, as well as tidal marshlands and forested uplands adjacent to Starr Creek and near the Drift Creek wilderness area. The Wetlands Conservancy is working with its new neighbors in the Bayview oxbow to understand the hydrology of the area and to explore the feasibility of reconnecting the historic oxbow back to Alsea Bay.

These activities, as well as Conservancy acquisitions in the Yaquina estuary, and collaboration with Oregon State Parks and Recreation at Beaver Creek, are part of a multi-partner effort for conservation in a connected system between Newport and Waldport. This complex collaborative partnership will ensure the preservation and restoration of some 10,000 acres of Oregon’s coastal forest, river, wetland, and estuary habitats. “It’s tremendously exciting to have this vast jigsaw coming together, and the Alsea acquisitions are key pieces of the puzzle,” comments Esther Lev, Executive Director of The Wetlands Conservancy.”

TWC Studies Oxbow Reconnect

Bayview Oxbow is an extensive area of former tidal wetlands riddled with interconnecting ditches, old dikes and a pair of failing tidegates. In photos from 1939, the site was already ditched, diked and actively used for agriculture. Despite years of attempting to drain the site, much of the site is dominated by soft rush, reed canarygrass and slough sedge.

With the recent acquisition of lands in the Alsea basin, TWC is now working to reconnect Alsea Bay and the Bayview Oxbow to improve the habitat quality and function for anadromous fish, juvenile marine fish and mammals, shorebirds and waterbirds. This would be accomplished by removing hydrologic barriers that alter tidal flow, so natural processes can develop and support and maintain a full functioning system.

Hydrologists from Phillip Williams and Associates are studying the feasibility of reconnecting the oxbow and with special attention given to assure that any potential restoration will not adversely impact adjacent landowners. Twenty neighbors joined TWC staff and consultants at a potluck to share stories of how and where water flows and learn about TWC’s Bayview Preserve goals.

TWC BENEFITS FROM LUSH CHARITY POT

LUSH Cosmetics Charity Pot has given TWC $8,000 to support restoration and maintenance at our new Bayview Oxbow and Starr Creek Preserves. LUSH funds will be used to purchase materials for wildlife friendly gates and fences, design and fabrication of signs and purchase of native plants.

100 percent of the retail price of LUSH Charity Pot hand and body cream goes directly to charities around the world that support animal rights, environmental protection and humanitarian concerns. Visit their website at www.lushusa.com or their Portland store at 803 NW 23rd Ave, Portland.

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Local Teens Help Maintain Beaver Creek and Alsea Bay Preserves

Federal stimulus funds and an Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Education grant to the MidCoast Watersheds Council employed 63 high school students and two college-age crew leaders to assist with Lincoln County land management projects this summer.

The Oregon Youth Conservation Corps worked with TWC and Oregon Parks to remove invasive yellow flag iris (see side bar) at TWC’s Beaver Creek Preserve. Crews also did trail work and maintenance at the new Beaver Creek State Natural Area adjacent to TWC’s Happ Preserve.

“The OYCC crews did a great job of helping remove invasive plants and cleared nearly three miles of hiking trails,” said South Beach State Park Manager Dennis Comfort. “It was fun to see the season wrap-up reports put on by the crews. Clearly the youth not only learned ‘work ready skills,’ but also pick up some stewardship ethic.”

The OYCC crews are also doing invasive plant removal on TWC’s two new Alsea Bay Preserves. “It’s always a pleasure to see the enthusiasm of our young students working on protection and restoration strategies in their own watersheds,” says TWC coastal steward Paul Engelmeyer.

The OYCC crews spend July and August working for TWC, The MidCoast Watersheds Council, Audubon Society of Portland, Oregon Parks and Recreation, Lincoln County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the US Forest Service. The seven natural resource crews, one video crew and one head start crew were trained in kayak safety, first aid, CPR and tool use. Funding for the program came through the Department of Labor as part of the American Reinvestment and Recover Act (ARRA).

www.wetlandsconservancy.org

Showy Attractive Iris Invades Wetlands

Yellow flag iris (Iris pseudacorus) is an attractive fast-growing and fast-spread- ing invasive plant that can outcompete other wetland plants, forming almost impenetrable thickets. Like cattails, yellow iris colonizes into large numbers. Each plant produces from several dozen to several hundred rooted rosettes and flowering shoots that are connected by durable rhizomes. It is spread by the wind and water. The wind catches the seed and blows it into the water and the water carries it downstream to its new home.

It’s beautiful yellow blooms have encouraged gardeners to transplant them into well-watered gardens throughout world. It has also been used in sewage treatment, and is known to be able to remove metals from wastewaters. One of the most useful ways to control this plant is to use chopping machines that destroy the bulbs/roots. There is no biocontrol for this species at this time.
The mouth of McCaffery Slough in Yaquina estuary is once again open after removal of 160 strings of raft oyster culture. In 2006, Senior Trooper Greg Torland, Oregon State Police Newport, began a lengthy investigation regarding abandoned oyster gear on McCaffrey Slough and Yaquina Bay. The abandoned gear was comprised of 160 strings of raft oyster culture; more than 12,000 plastic buoys; 12,000 mesh bags; and scores of 750-pound concrete anchors. The abandoned oyster racks were limiting public access for boating, fishing, providing potential hazards to commercial boat navigation, possible entanglement of marine mammals and birds and negatively impacting the scenic aesthetics of the estuary.

The case was complicated, involved numerous players, and took over two years to complete. Bogged down by legal issues, the investigation ground to a halt, as defining ownership of the abandoned oyster gear and criminal prosecution seemed unlikely due to an assumed lengthy court battle.

Trooper Torland asked for the assistance of the Oregon Attorney General’s Office through the OSP Fish and Wildlife Division. As a result, Senior Assistant Attorney General, Mark Schumock was assigned to the case. Through diligent work and numerous hours reviewing legal documents and research, Schumock was able to draft release agreements relieving numerous parties of any liability or ownership of the abandoned oyster gear. Fran Recht of Pacific States Marine Fisheries introduced Torland to Taylor’s Shellfish, an Oyster grower in Washington. Taylor was able to remove and salvage all of the oyster gear.

Many lessons were learned throughout this process, including acquiring a better understanding of agency roles and responsibilities regarding the regulation of commercial aquaculture. But most importantly, the removal of the abandoned oyster gear resulted in improved biodiversity, public access, the elimination of potential hazards to commercial boat navigation, and enhanced scenic aesthetics to McCaffrey Slough and Yaquina Bay.
Brackish water wetlands have been restored to TWC’s Matson Creek Preserve on the Central Oregon Coast, near Coos Bay. The Coos North Bend Water Board has implemented TWC’s restoration strategy for reestablishing tidal flooding and natural drainage patterns.

“This project is a tremendous success,” said Coos North Bend Water Board Director Rob Schab during a recent visit to the restored tidal marsh. “Working with TWC, we are able to restore important wetlands and bring water to fish, wildlife and people.”

The Water Board implemented TWC’s rehabilitation plan as a mitigation requirement of their Upper Pony Creek and Joe Ney Water Supply Expansion Project. The project enhanced 49 acres of brackish water wetland marsh and 23 acres of freshwater marsh. The Water Board made an additional donation of 16 acres to TWC.

The historic brackish and freshwater wetland was converted to pasture land with the installation of tide gates under Catching Slough Road which separated the property and Matson Creek from the brackish waters and tidal influence of Catching Slough, and construction of dikes and ditches to manipulate water movement and quantity.

Native wetland plants have naturally reestablished in the bottomland, demonstrating that native wetland plant seeds were dormant in the substrate, awaiting the return of proper hydrologic conditions.

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Oregon Wetland Explorer Prepares for Fall Launch

Wetlands are uniquely productive and valuable ecosystems, often limited in size, they occur in all corners of Oregon and are among the most biologically productive and species-rich habitats in the state. Coastal salt marshes, pitcher-plant bogs, mountain fens, valley bottom vernal pools, wet prairies, spruce swamps and desert saltgrass flats are a small sampling of the diversity of wetland types in Oregon. Wetlands are habitat for plants, animals, invertebrates, fish, and fungi. They store flood waters, maintain base flows, and recycle nutrients and chemicals while providing opportunities for recreation, education, and aesthetic experiences.

Oregon has lost over half of the wetlands present when the first settlers arrived in the 1800’s. To ensure that the remaining wetlands are conserved,
TWC Enters Year 2 of Hedges Creek Marsh Rehabilitation

This fall begins year two of our project to improve the wetland function and habitat value of Hedges Creek Marsh and increase awareness and interest in urban wetlands.

With funding from Oregon Department of State Lands, Clean Water Services and the City of Tualatin and the assistance of REI, volunteers and adjacent businesses, we have been removing non-native reed canarygrass, ivy, blackberry and nightshade and replacing them with native dogwood, spirea, willow, ash, snowberry and pine.

Twenty acres of the 57 acres marsh have been through three treatments of invasive plant removal and control and planted with 12,500 native shrubs and herbs and 4,000 native plant cuttings.

An Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife State Wildlife Grant will support adding an additional 5 acres to the restoration effort and further fish and wildlife habitat improvements that support Oregon’s Wildlife Habitat Conservation Strategy.

For updates on the Hedges project and volunteer opportunities check the TWC website.

The goal of the Hedges Rehabilitation Project is to improve wetland function and increase habitat value of the marsh.
Deer Creek Sees the Light of Day

For decades, Deer Creek in Aurora Oregon was confined to subsurface drainage tile, with no above ground trace or hint of a creek. When Pacific Natural Foods bought the property where the former creek once flowed freely, founder Chuck Eggert saw the potential to daylight the stream and restore the floodplain and wetlands.

The 90-acre property was an agricultural field with a broad, shallow swale, which had been farmed for decades when Pacific Natural Foods purchased it in 2006. The property and adjacent lands had regularly been sprayed with pesticides and herbicides. Pacific Natural Foods stopped the use of pesticides and have achieved organic status for the farm.

With the guidance of Pacific Habitat Services, the creek and wetlands were restored by excavating a meandering 2,200 foot long shallow channel within the field, removing the drain tiles and re-grading the channel and floodplain to enhance water flow and storage. More than 4,500 native trees, shrubs and wetland plants have been added since the spring of 2008.

For more photos and information on the project visit www.pacificfoods.com.

Oregon Wetland Explorer

TWC identified Oregon’s Greatest Wetlands and working with the Institute for Natural Resources and Oregon State Libraries have developed the Oregon Wetland Explorer. The Wetland Explorer provides information on wetland ecology and threats; and on opportunities to promote collaborations, and partnerships for the conservation and restoration Oregon’s most biologically important wetlands. The wetlands portal is designed to support the work of citizens, agencies and watershed councils and conservation non-profits in conservation of Oregon’s Greatest Wetlands.

With generous funding from Murdock Memorial Trust, US Environmental Agency and Federal Highways Administration, we have spent the past two years collecting, overlaying and integrating existing information on Oregon wetlands.

In October visit oregonexplorer.info/Wetlands to learn more about Oregon wetlands.
Help Support Wetlands Preservation by Becoming a Member

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- Steward $120
- Benefactor $240
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**The Wetlands Conservancy**

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Newsletter design: Laurie Causgrove Design
Printed on recycled paper