United States Environmental Protection Agency

This document is one of the project summaries from the EPA's Targeted Watershed Grants 2005 Annual Report published in December 2005. The reference number is EPA 840-R-06-001. You can find the entire document at **http://www.epa.gov/twg**.

EPA'S TARGETED WATERSHED GRANTS 2005 ANNUAL REPORT

December 2005

Siuslaw River

OR

WHY IS THIS WATERSHED SPECIAL?

The Siuslaw River meanders 150 miles through Oregon from the edge of the Willamette Valley to the Pacific Ocean. Half of its watershed is managed by federal agencies, industrial timber companies own a third, and the flat valley bottoms, lower hill slopes, and estuary are privately owned and not industrially used. The watershed includes inland valley oak savanna forests and meadows; the Coast Range mountains, one of the best tree-growing areas in the United States; and the tidally influenced estuary zone. The Siuslaw's stands of old-growth forest are the largest remaining tracts of intact coastal temperate rainforest on the north coast of Oregon. The basin once supported huge runs of Pacific salmon, including the largest run of coho salmon south of the Columbia River, which is now at less than 2 percent of its historical population and listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Because of the fertile soil and moderate climate in the Willamette Valley, the watershed includes some of the most productive farming land in the nation.

Landowners along the Willamette Valley put buffers along the river to improve habitat and water quality. (Gary Wilson)

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

Eight watershed assessments have been developed for parts of the basin, in addition to a whole-basin assessment. Based on these findings, restoration activities will focus on debris flow cycle, the movement of organic material, sediment, and water, as well as riparian connections to streams. Major threats include:

- Draining, diking, and installing numerous tidegates in the estuary and valley bottoms, which prevent tidal flows in the estuary
- Aggressive forest practices on steep slopes and in riparian areas, which have led to an increased risk of sediment delivery to streams
- Elevated lead and temperature levels in the river, which exceed EPA standards

RESTORATION ACTIVITIES

This project seeks to implement a basin-wide restoration initiative to improve the economic integrity in local communities through restoring natural processes in the upper basin. It combines innovative market-based incentives with specific habitat restoration and monitoring and evaluation projects. Targeted Watersheds Grant project tasks include:

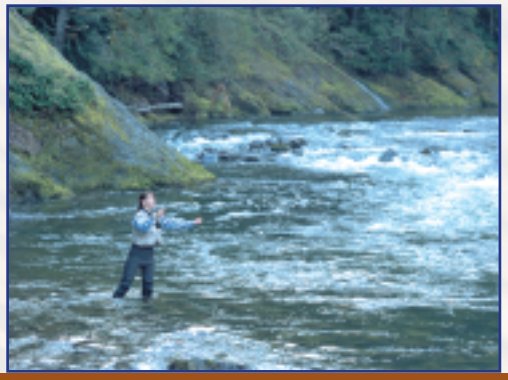
- Restoring natural landscape processes by repairing culverts and roads
- Using market incentives to reduce the risk of sediment delivery to stream channels from 10,000 acres
- Restoring 30 miles of riparian habitats and processes
- Protecting and restoring a 5-mile estuary corridor
- Developing and implementing a water quality monitoring and evaluation program

A STRONG PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE

Since the 1980s, academic researchers, agency personnel, and community members have been working to develop and implement an integrated ecosystem-based approach to restore the Siuslaw. Five entities – Ecotrust, the Siuslaw Watershed Council, Siuslaw Soil and Water Conservation District, Siuslaw Institute, and Siuslaw National Forest – will manage this project under the EPA Targeted Watersheds Grant. Other partners include:

- Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians
- McKenzie River Trust
- Shorebank Enterprise Pacific
- Pacific Coast Watershed Partnership
- Siuslaw and Mapleton School Districts
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- Private landowners and many others

Stream in the Coast Mountain Range in Oregon. (Ron Nichols)



Recreational fly fishing in a mountain stream. (Ron Nichols)

"The Siuslaw Basin Partnership is working to restore what was historically one of the most productive salmon-producing rivers in the Pacific Northwest. With help from the EPA's Targeted Watershed Grants program, we will not only restore the watershed but develop a monitoring plan and conservation incentives that can be replicated in watersheds all over the region."

– Brent Davies, Coordinator, Pacific Coast Watershed Partnership, Ecotrust