

Three Creeks Community Restoration Project

What a dramatic difference a year makes!

Less debris and trash (4.83 tons removed); no significant transient camps; 161 volunteers contributing 692 hours during three community events to install more than 5,000 new native plants (including more than 30 different species of trees, shrubs, and herbs); and a new wave of heightened community awareness and stewardship generated!



In 2007, Three Creeks Community Restoration Project volunteers reach a milestone and plant the 20,000th native tree (a 7-foot Western Red Cedar).



It is apparent that transient traffic contributed to the state the Three Creeks area was in before the restoration project began.

Volunteers and Sheriff Sweeps Making Dramatic Difference in Three Creeks

In 2006, Water Environment Services (WES), in cooperation with eight partners and partial sponsor funding from a Metro-Nature in Neighborhoods grant, initiated the Three Creeks Community Restoration Project (TCCRP). The Three Creeks area is a natural ecosystem classified as a Regionally Significant Habitat located at the confluence of Mt. Scott, Phillips, and Dean Creeks just west of the Clackamas Town Center.

In less than a year and one-half, community partners working together have achieved the project's short-term goals and successfully completed all four of their community objectives including: 1) conducting more frequent (monthly) Sheriff patrol sweeps; 2) performing cleanups of illegal camping and dump sites; 3) carrying out three volunteer planting events; and 4) conducting community outreach through a public awareness campaign.

In September 2006, **Clackamas County Sheriff's** Department began more frequent (monthly) patrols and sweeps of the 89-acre County owned site. Three subsequent area cleanups involving **Clackamas County Community Service Crews** along with **Waste Management** during September and October resulted in a total of 4.83 tons of debris and trash removed. The photos reveal partial results from the before and after effects of these more frequent patrols and community cleanups. "Garbage and camps have had a long, nasty history on the Three Creeks Natural Area. This grant has put extra emphasis on the problem and been hugely successful so far in removing the garbage and camps", Tsunami Crew leader and founder Chris Runyard noted.

In October, 2006, WES developed a TCCRP page on its Web site and has since sent out a series of press releases and has been featured in several news articles. From December 2006 through early January 2007, WES mailed out a flyer to thousands of local surrounding residents and businesses announcing the upcoming volunteer planting events. Then from January through March 2007, three volunteer planting events were conducted with assistance from **Friends of Kellogg and Mt Scott Creek Watersheds, Tsunami Crew, and Friends of Trees (FOT)**. FOT coordinated these events that resulted in 84 adults and 85 youth volunteers who showed up and contributed more than 692 hours of effort. A second event was held February 3, 2007 where volunteers planted more than 1,000 native trees, shrubs, and herbs adjacent to a WES-sponsored streambank biostabilization demonstration project.



After clearing more than four tons of trash from this area, nature probably breathed a sigh of relief.

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Volunteers and Sheriff Sweeps Making Dramatic Difference in Three Creeks (continued)

Since 2001, the **Tsunami Crew**, a small dedicated group of local volunteers led by Runyard, has contributed more than 14,000 volunteer hours, and removed tons of non-native invasive plant species! During the third planting event for this grant project they have led the way and reached an amazing milestone of installing 20,000 native plants on the Three Creeks site.

Investing time installing native plants is one thing, keeping up and committing to the on going maintenance of these plantings is another. And, if one believes 14,000 hours is just a nice large number, think about the community value of its real worth — about \$252,560 (for comparison, the amount is about 12 percent of the entire annual WES Surface Water Management program budget). The functions and values of our urbanizing watersheds could not be protected, enhanced or restored without partnerships with these critical volunteer groups and environmental organizations.

The Three Creeks Community Restoration Project's long-term goal is to provide a safer and cleaner area for community members, as well as a more functional and sustainable habitat for fish and wildlife.

“We meet at least once a week and we are all volunteers. We have invested more than 14,000 work hours since we came to the Three Creeks back in 2001 and we plan to keep it going for the next several years,” said Runyard. “Our big blackberry work is getting rare but we will plant a bunch of stuff next winter and will always be picking at the weeds. We find new designer weeds trying to make their way onto the site. Garlic mustard and Japanese knotweed are some new arrivals that will get ground up by the big grinding wave of the Tsunami Crew!”

Other grant partners who have contributed matching staff time to the success of this important project have included: **Clackamas County's Departments of Transportation and Development Code Enforcement and Community Environment, and Business and Community Services (County Parks and North Clackamas Parks & Recreation District).**

This grant project is just one of a number of projects, together with many partners; WES has participated in, led or coordinated during the past decade. WES continues to monitor watershed health conditions throughout the Kellogg-Mt. Scott Creek watersheds. For example, in October 2007 benthic macroinvertebrate (bottom-dwelling aquatic insects) surveys were completed in 14 stream reaches throughout WES's Clackamas County Service District No. 1. Monitoring watershed health indicators generally including hydrology, habitat, water quality, and biological communities is an important component of WES's new Integrated Watershed Management program.

Local media coverage has also been impressive. Several in-depth articles about all of these projects were published in the *Clackamas Review's Sustainable Life* section. A national publication, *Stormwater Magazine*, also interviewed WES staff concerning the project and a article will be coming out in a future issue (www.gradingandexcavating.com/sw.html).

Balancing the growth and development pressures with protection of these sensitive areas and their functions and beneficial values is critically important. One of WES's Stormwater goals includes attempting to minimize the impacts of urbanization. Finding creative, practical, and effective ways to reduce and soften our impervious surfaces, protecting our native soils and vegetation, and controlling stormwater at its source will be important to protecting our creeks and wetlands. Research has shown that approximately 50 percent of annual rainfall is intercepted by vegetative foliage and evaporated during the rainy season. As a result, every tree counts and is crucial in maintaining ecological integrity and the health and sustainability of our watersheds. Education and awareness and working with the development community and other partners and stakeholders to implement sustainable development practices will be important in our urbanizing watersheds.

Three Creeks is a “living laboratory” for research and restoration and is a valuable tool in the future educational need of our community.

The Master Planning of the Three Creeks natural area will soon begin. Numerous opportunities exist to strategically plan for connecting and integrating environmental stewardship and education with the Community College and other organizations and their expansion plans as part of the Harmony Vision project. To find out more go to www.harmonyvision.org.



After several clean-up events by Clackamas County Community Service Crews, the Three Creeks area's natural beauty is restored through the TCCR project.



Benthic Macroinvertebrate Sampling.

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