

Whychus Creek Restoration - Pelton Fund Updates

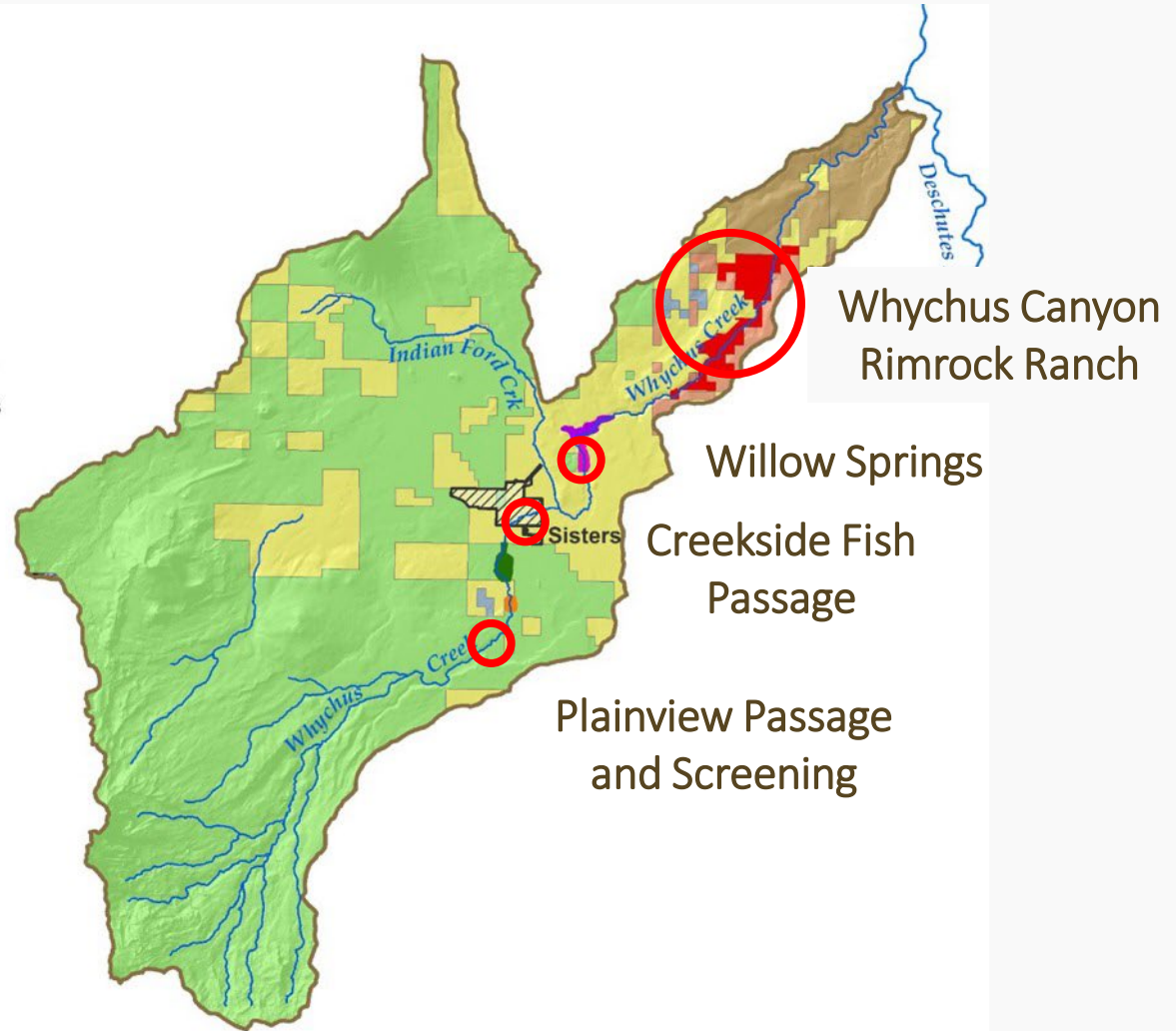
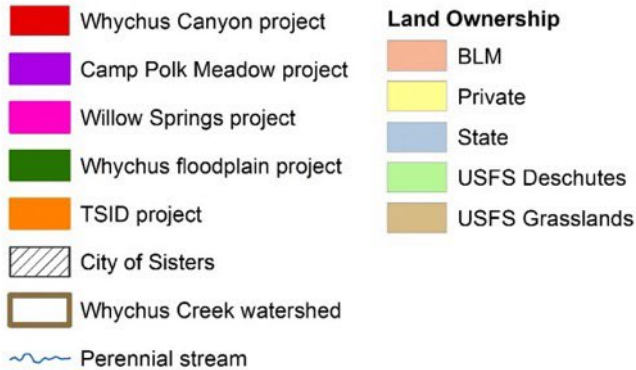


UPPER DESCHUTES
WATERSHED COUNCIL

Kris Knight, July 23rd, 2026

Photo Credit: Deschutes Land Trust – Rimrock Ranch





Plainview Fish Passage Project

- Last dam on Whychus Creek to be removed or retrofitted for fish passage (removed in 2021)
- Engineered Riffle Constructed along 400+ft of creek up and downstream of dam location



Plainview Fish Passage Project

- New Diversion Vault with Fish Screen Installed



Plainview Fish Passage Project

- Some vertical adjustment in channel observed after the December 2025 flood and erosion around diversion vault. Fish passage and screening still being provided but continued monitoring needed



Creekside Park Fish Passage Project

- Collaboration with City of Sisters
- Fish passage provided at utility line crossing by again building an engineered riffle upstream and downstream



Creekside Park Fish Passage Project

- Restored riparian zone and improved recreational access
- Accessible for tours and for the general public to learn about broader work in the Whychus Creek watershed



Creekside Park Fish Passage Project

- Some vertical adjustment in engineered channel during December 2025 flood. Fish passage still provided but continued monitoring needed



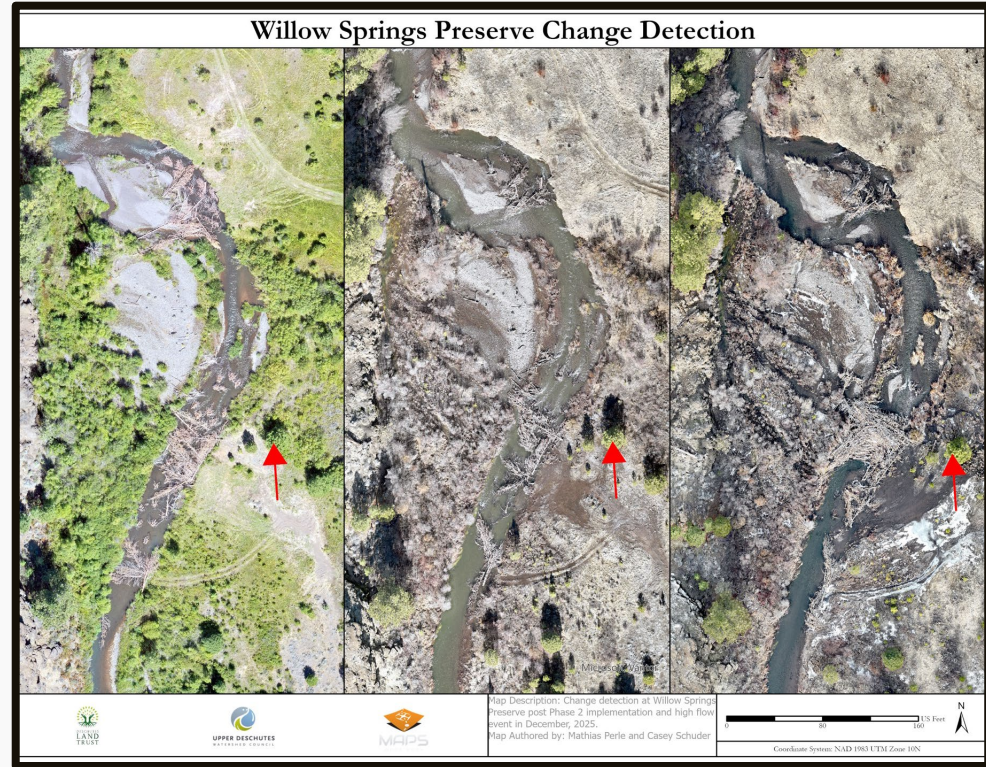
Willow Springs Preserve Restoration Project

- Phase I (2022) and Phase II (2024)
- Low tech, process based restoration project
- High flow events in 2022 – 2025 including ~1,500 cfs December 2025



Willow Springs Preserve Restoration Project

- Wood movement and significant habitat evolution in distinct reaches
- Phase III currently being planned for 2027 implementation



Whychus Canyon 3 miles of restoration



Pre-restoration (July 2016)



Post-restoration (October 2016)

Jay Mather – Deschutes Land Trust



Three years post-restoration (July 2019)

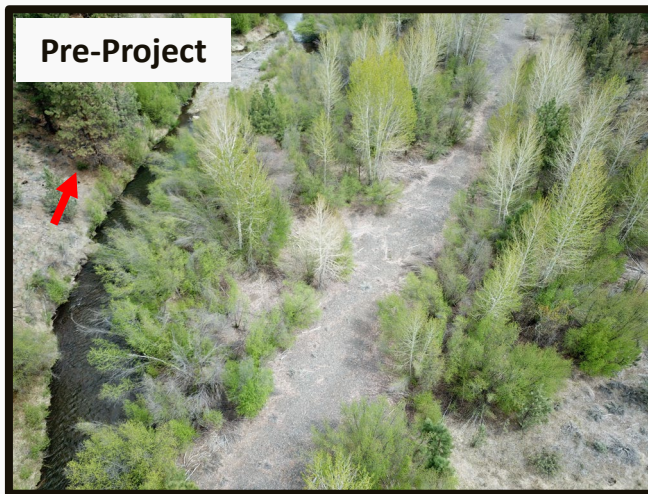
- Phase 1 completed in 2016 (1 mile), Phase 2a in 2021 (0.5 mile), and Phase 2b in 2023 (1.5 miles)
- All properties owned and conserved by Deschutes Land Trust (Whychus Canyon Preserve and Rimrock Ranch)



Upper Deschutes Watershed Council - Deschutes Land Trust Whychus Canyon Preserve

Whychus Canyon Phase 2a (2021)





Resilience to wildfire through floodplain restoration



Whychus Creek restoration and wildfire resilience

GUEST COLUMN

BY KRIS KNIGHT, NATASHA BELLIS
AND KATE FITZPATRICK

This past year intensive wild-fires impacted Central Oregon. One area hit particularly hard was the Whychus Creek watershed. Whychus Creek starts on the east side of the Three Sisters mountains and flows through the community of Sisters before it joins the Deschutes River south of Lake Billy Chinook. The Alder Springs Fire burned more than 3,000 acres in June in the lower part of Whychus Creek and threatened communities in Crooked River Ranch. The Flat Fire burned more than 23,000 acres near Sisters in August and burned along 11 miles of Whychus Creek. Thankfully, because of the amazing response and heroic efforts of fire-fighters, no lives were lost and many homes and neighborhoods were saved from the fire. That said, five homes were destroyed and numer-

ous properties suffered great damage and our hearts go out to those who were impacted.

The fire impacted two properties along a six-mile stretch of Whychus Creek owned by the Deschutes Land Trust, known as Whychus Canyon Preserve and Rimrock Ranch. For more than a decade, a group of organizations including the Deschutes Land Trust, Deschutes River Conservancy and Upper Deschutes Watershed Council have been working together as the Deschutes Partnership to restore and protect Whychus Creek. This work has involved restoring streamflow to the creek, removing barriers to fish passage and migration, screening off irrigation diversions, protecting land from development and improving habitat to benefit the reintroduction of salmon and steelhead to the watershed. Between 2016 and 2023, the Partnership restored approximately three miles of Whychus Creek on Land Trust properties, reconnecting the creek to the floodplain and enabling



This shows part of the restored area of Whychus Creek. (Peter Cooper/Deschutes Land Trust)

natural processes to function across the bottom of the valley.

As our organizations start to assess the damage from the Flat Fire, we are seeing that the areas where we restored Whychus Creek to its adjacent floodplain were more resilient to the fire compared to areas that had not been restored. The three miles of restored floodplain is in many ways a ribbon of green through what is now

a sea of black and was likely an oasis for fish and wildlife during and after the fire. Drone images from above the canyon speaks volumes – the un-restored areas were almost entirely burned by the Flat Fire while restored areas retained vegetation and in many ways were unscathed. Areas that had been dry pastures were restored with additional streamflow to become meandering stream channels

and wetland areas that served as fire breaks. This shows us how restored ecosystems can withstand impacts from wildlife and is an important reminder of the value restoration plays in making our rivers and streams more resilient to fire and climate change. We do expect that fine sediments from areas upstream or adjacent to these restored areas will wash down and impact the creek but our hope is the floodplain restoration will accommodate and buffer this disturbance.

While we do not mean to minimize the impacts to other properties from the Flat Fire, we hope there can be a hopeful message from Whychus Canyon Preserve and Rimrock Ranch that we can restore and protect our rivers and streams where needed to be more resilient and recover from impacts from wildfires.

■ Kris Knight is executive director of the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council. Natasha Bellis is conservation director of the Deschutes Land Trust. Kate Fitzpatrick is executive director of the Deschutes River Conservancy.

- Next Steps: Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Funding secured by Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs to support design of Whychus Canyon Phase 3 restoration – co-led by Deschutes Land Trust and UDWC
- Design efforts just kicking off and will focus on upper 2-3 miles Deschutes Land Trust's Whychus Canyon Preserve



Steelhead Redd Surveys (completed spring of 2025 and 2026)

- PGE, UDWC, USFS and volunteers supported steelhead redd surveys every 2 weeks January to May 2025 and 2026
- Encouraged to see O. mykiss (steelhead and redband trout) redds in these restored areas such as Whychus Canyon and as far upstream as Willow Springs



Thank You to Funders and Partners! It Takes a Village!

- Funders, Partners, and Supporters

- Pelton Fund
- U.S. Forest Service
- Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
- Oregon Department of Forestry
- Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Portland General Electric
- Deschutes Land Trust
- Bureau of Land Management
- Deschutes River Conservancy
- Sunderland Foundation
- Three Sisters Irrigation District
- City of Sisters
- Deschutes SWCD

Kudos to the crew at UDWC that makes all of this possible!

Mathias Perle, Lauren Mork and Casey Schuder



Thank You!!



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- Visit our website to learn more: www.restorethedeschutes.org
- Contact: kknight@restorethedeschutes.org