



**Salmon Creek  
Watershed Council**  
Clark County, Washington

Fall  
**2010**

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Golden Banks on Salmon Creek  
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# Salmon Creek Watershed *Quarterly*

A seasonal look at the state of Salmon Creek, its stakeholders and its watershed council.



## Corporate Contributions to Habitat

### Clark Public Utilities takes on two important projects

This fall, Clark Public Utilities (CPU) spent three months driving 70-foot logs into the ground and strategically placing one-ton boulders along a 300-foot stretch of Salmon Creek near the greenway trail.

The \$171,000 erosion-control project, funded by a Washington State Department of Ecology grant, rebuilt the eroding river bank, while also improving salmon habitat. The framework of logs, root wads and boulders was constructed to absorb water energy over time, and a manmade oxbow was added to offer migratory fish a rest area.

Jeff Wittler, CPU's Environmental Services Manager and Vice Chair for the Salmon Creek Watershed Council (SCWC), said the ideal outcome is to shape deep pools, collect additional debris from the currents and slow the water down.

"Controlling the erosion on this important stretch of creek also gave us an opportunity to include other features," Wittler said. "Salmon habitat was a big focus with this project."

Pools will provide shelter for fish looking for relief from fast winter flows



**Above:** Construction workers help a crane operator carefully place a boulder.

Photos by Steven Lane for The Columbian

and cooler temperatures during the summer, while root wads will protect juvenile salmon from predators. More directly, the reduced erosion will keep silt from covering spawning gravel and damaging gills.

"This is a very large restoration project, and demonstrates how environmental restoration can benefit the community through job creation and environmental capital," Wittler said.

Another significant CPU project offers similar benefits, but isn't directly related to restoration. The new South Lake Well Field allows CPU to reduce dependency on 34 wells—many located near Salmon

Creek—that can draw down groundwater which feeds surface water flows.

The \$10 million project draws from a larger source of groundwater below the Columbia River—potentially delivering 10 million gallons of water per day to CPU's 30,000 water customers. While pumping water from one location might spell increased costs, it also keeps Salmon Creek flowing at more natural levels.

"Our drinking water basically originates from waters that are recharged in a complex system of streams and wetland areas," Wittler said. "Therefore, it's in our benefit to make sure these natural structures endure."

With this in mind, CPU's watershed enhancement program has planted over 630,000 trees along Salmon Creek in an effort to reverse the loss of valuable forests and wetlands and restore the landscape's natural ability to capture, purify and disperse rainwater.

For more information on similar CPU projects, please visit their website at [www.clarkpublicutilities.com/ourevironment](http://www.clarkpublicutilities.com/ourevironment) or contact Jeff Wittler at [jwittler@clarkpud.com](mailto:jwittler@clarkpud.com).

# Taking a Stand for Trees

Local man helps neighborhood forest find a financial taproot

Having explored hundreds of forests as a professional with the U.S. Forest Service, the woods have become a part of Ray Steiger, and in his own backyard he's become a part of them.

Since Steiger retired 12 years ago, he has become a fixture in the 81 acres of woods that back up to his home in Brush Prairie.

In Steiger's words, there's something "special" about the forest adjacent to The Cedars golf course—special enough to gain his respect, and inspire him to advocate for its inclusion in Clark County's Conservation Futures Program. Though the memories he and his family have rooted into these woods since moving to the area in 1988 may contribute to his sentiments, his Forest Service years grant him the expertise to recognize it as a remarkable gem.

"I've traveled to many areas with the forest service," Steiger said, "but this is probably one of the most beautiful and unique natural areas I've ever seen, and it should be preserved as such."

Pristine aptly describes this diverse ecosystem that has been undisturbed since it was last logged in the early 1900s. The eastern portion is primarily comprised of western red cedar with intermittent big leaf maples and alders, while immensely tall Douglas firs and grand firs fill the western reaches—sometimes rising over 150 feet. In addition, visibility is ideal thanks to a list of native groundcover species, such as

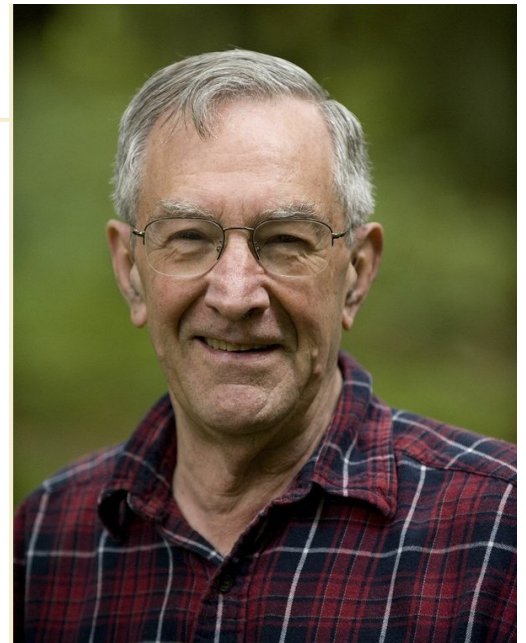
sword fern and oxalis, which are generally low-lying.

"There isn't one particular thing that's important about this forest," Steiger said. "It has such a combination of things that make it remarkable. It's a truly unique ecosystem."

Highlights for Steiger include features such as nurse logs, yew trees and the remnants of springboard holes carved into cedar stumps that were once part of logging practices in the early twentieth century. He also enjoys Morgan Creek where it passes through the forest, and Salmon Creek where it borders the north end of the property. They've all been inspiration for Steiger's backyard explorations, but it was the advice of a city consultant that moved him most significantly.

Bill Dygert, a conservation consultant then working with the City of Battleground, pointed Steiger to the county's Conservation Futures program. This program allows the county to acquire and conserve open space, farms and forest land to stem future residential development. Dygert urged Steiger to present a case for this natural area to the conservation areas acquisition advisory committee in 1997.

As a forestry veteran, Steiger had no qualms about tackling the task, and presented to the selection committee just two weeks later. It wasn't long before the site was approved to be considered for program funding, and thanks to the heirs of William Saunders



**Above:** Ray Steiger stops for a photo.

**Below:** Steiger hikes the Salmon/Morgan Creek Natural Area for recreation on a regular basis, and has been its unofficial caretaker for over 20 years.

Photos by Steven Lane for The Columbian

Sr. (founding owner of The Cedars)—for approving its purchase—the county was able to procure the acreage under their Legacy Lands Program in 2009.

As part of the Conservation Futures program, the intention is to conserve it indefinitely for the benefit of the environment, wildlife and the community. For Steiger it represents what determination can do, as well as an opportunity for people in Clark County to see a unique ecosystem and develop a sense of stewardship towards it.

"It's been personally satisfying to support this forest," Steiger said, "and I'm glad to see things turn out the way they have."



“ It's been personally satisfying to support this forest, and I'm glad to see things turn out the way they have.   
 - Ray Steiger ”

**For more information on the Salmon/Morgan Creek Natural Area or the Conservation Futures levy please contact Patrick Lee with Clark County's Legacy Lands Program via e-mail at [patrick.lee@clark.wa.gov](mailto:patrick.lee@clark.wa.gov). The Legacy Lands website also answers frequently asked questions. Visit them online at [www.co.clark.wa.us/legacylands](http://www.co.clark.wa.us/legacylands).**

# Nonprofits Team Up to Clean Up

A bi-state effort brings helping hands to Salmon Creek

On September 25, roughly 30 people crouched down and hunched over to shuffle through large swaths of green foliage in a wooded area just west of Kline Pond.

They weren't harvesting mushrooms or picking wild flowers though. Rather, this was a concerted effort to extract something devious—an invasive species known as garlic mustard—from the riparian habitat around Salmon Creek.

Organized primarily by the Salmon Creek Watershed Council (SCWC), this particular effort was one of the 164 projects that made up SOLV's annual Beach and Riverside Cleanup. In all, the cleanup included numerous city and state agencies, non-profit organizations, private businesses and thousands of volunteers working toward the collective goal of improving our region's water quality and natural habitats.

Randall Pearl, Restoration Coordinator for the SCWC, guided the volunteers who were tasked with deciphering invasive species from native plants. This is particularly difficult during the fall, because garlic mustard takes on striking similarities to a native species of saxifrage that's beneficial.

That didn't discourage anyone from getting their hands dirty, including a group of younger volunteers whose enthusiasm helped unearth and remove a 4-foot tractor tire from the worksite. As for the main environmental culprits, volunteers pulled nearly 600 pounds of invasive garlic mustard and himalayan blackberry.

**Above Right:** Bank of America employees and their families turned out strong and helped roll this tractor tire out of the site.

**Below Right:** Bags, provided by SOLV, were filled with invasives and debris, collected and later disposed of by CPU.

**Below Left:** Garlic mustard in its Fall, rosette form lacks its defining flower and seed stalk.



"Reducing the impact of invasive species is important because they tend to compete with, and suffocate, naturally occurring plants," Pearl said. "The native plants and trees are ideal because they provide healthy ecosystems for the native wildlife we all enjoy."

The majority of the invasive species were extracted from an area where Clark Public Utilities recently planted native, juvenile trees. This makes the impact of this considerable effort more meaningful, as the native trees are now more likely to thrive. In turn, the effort became part of a larger, ongoing plan to restore water quality and habitat in the Kline Pond recreation area.

The volunteers—who ranged from concerned citizens, to high school students, to corporate employees—enjoyed contributing their time and energy to ensure healthier, natural habitats that will be enjoyed by hikers and families for years to come. Nature even returned the favor when a mother deer and her fawns appeared just 30 yards away and fed for 15 minutes.

Afterward, the volunteers' hard work was rewarded with a meal of their own—donated by the Fred Meyer in Salmon Creek—as well as a few goodies from SOLV and the Oregon Lottery.

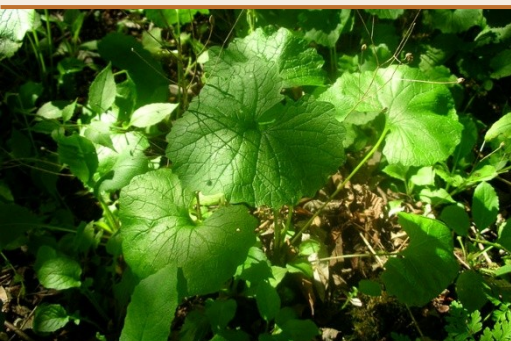
"It was a good effort overall," Pearl said. "In addition to controlling the spread of invasives in that area it also built community, which showed that collaboration is important to maintaining our watershed."



For more information about this project, or to get involved in our restoration efforts, please contact board member Randall Pearl via [board@salmoncreekwatershed.org](mailto:board@salmoncreekwatershed.org).

## SOLV:

SOLV was founded in 1969 and was among the first groups in the nation to pioneer volunteer beach cleanups. SOLV's mission is to bring Oregonians together to improve the environment and build a legacy of stewardship. SOLV annually provides resources to more than 250 communities, focusing on cleanup, native planting, invasive plant removal and environmental maintenance projects.



# Workshop Reaps Barrels of Education

Watershed Stewards teach practical ways to keep water clean

There's a faint smell of stir-fry in the small CASEE Center classroom housing roughly 30 four-foot, blue barrels that are prepped for a community Rain Barrel Workshop.

For Salmon Creek Watershed Council board member, David Page, the smell is almost endearing. He's quick to note that these barrels once held teriyaki, and that this "food-grade" designation makes them suitable as rain barrels.

This veteran knowledge comes from presenting roughly 20 workshops and logging nearly 800 hours as part of his volunteer contributions as a Watershed Steward of Clark County—a group of local residents interested in protecting our water resources.

Their goal is to make a positive impact on the environment through outreach, education, restoration, and water monitoring. The rain barrel workshops act as both outreach and education, but more specifically they make a huge impact on local water quality and use by equipping local residents with the knowledge and tools to harvest rainwater runoff from their roofs.

Rainwater harvesting is beneficial because it keeps water from hitting the ground and running. Due to increased development, local landscapes have become sprawling, interconnected im-



**Left:** David Page talks with a participant about water issues in Vancouver.

**Center:** A completed 55-gallon rain barrel is made of 10 items and stands 3 feet tall.

**Right:** Participants interact while building.

pervious surfaces such as concrete, pavement and rooftops. Together, these surfaces have contributed to a sharp increase in storm water runoff flowing directly into watersheds, such as Salmon Creek, instead of being filtered naturally through soil and vegetation. Simply put, this results in negative environmental impacts.

During its journey across roofs, driveways, parking lots and roads, rainwater collects contaminants that ultimately drain into our streams. These can include excess fertilizer, herbicides, oils, pet waste and other commonly used household chemicals. In addition, the excess runoff can often cause erosion, flooding, and habitat degradation because of the increased velocity and volume of water entering the watersheds.

By harvesting rainwater from roof-rooftops, homeowners collect a free source of clean water for gardening or landscaping while also reducing their impact on water quality issues. Rain barrels are designed to collect water from gutters or downspouts, thereby keeping it from running down driveways, sidewalks and streets—eventually traveling into local watersheds like Salmon Creek.

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If interested in hosting or attending a workshop, contact Jennifer Naas via [Watershed.Stewards@clark.wa.gov](mailto:Watershed.Stewards@clark.wa.gov) or visit their website for more info at [clark.wsu.edu/volunteer/ws](http://clark.wsu.edu/volunteer/ws). Other workshops cover rain gardens, permeable pavements and green cleaning.

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## Get *Your Hands Wet!*

Become a fan or volunteer of the Salmon Creek Watershed. You can find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or visit our [homepage](#) for more enriching opportunities in habitat restoration, stream monitoring, stream survey, cleanup, community outreach and fund raising.

As a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, the council depends on volunteers and donors alike. Your tax deductible donation or time helps fund restoration and educational efforts, and we're forever grateful for this support. [Donate online](#), or via e-mail [board@scwsc.org](mailto:board@scwsc.org).

Come watch a guest speaker or join the conversation at monthly board meetings. The hour-long meetings are held the second Thursday of each month at 5:30 pm in Clark Public Utility's education center located at 8600 NE 117<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Vancouver, WA 98662.



Visit us online @ [www.SalmonCreekWatershed.org](http://www.SalmonCreekWatershed.org)