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# NFF GRANT BUILDS CAPACITY IN RURAL OREGON FOR COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Conservation

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Category: Conservation (<https://www.nationalforests.org/blog/category/conservation>)

by Stanley Petrowski

*Stanley Petrowski, President of the South Umpqua Rural Community Partnership, describes the benefits of community collaboration and the impact of support from the NFF.*

The listing of species has been a contentious issue in this once-thriving timber-based area of Tiller, Oregon. The post office closed down. The local town stores are shuttered and the only K-10 school in the area is empty. This part of rural Oregon has been hit hard by both ecological and economic constraints placed on this once burgeoning timber resource extraction based economy. Most folks thought it was about nothing more than birds and fish threatening their way of life.

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*Our vision was to scale up a holistic approach to restoration ecology to cover the entire watershed and to simultaneously employ a local workforce to get the task done.*

— *Stanley Petrowski, President of the South Umpqua Rural Community Partnership*

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Major changes took place in our small rural village within the Umpqua National Forest in 2004 when Coho Salmon, a listed threatened species, suddenly appeared in one of Elk Creek South Umpqua tributaries. The appearance of the salmon was a powerful catalyst for change that few would have guessed.

Once the first aquatic habitat restoration project was completed a collaborative community based non-profit was formed. Restoration work that was needed as a result of previous poor management decisions now became a cultural and economic back bone reviving South Umpqua river basin communities.



The South Umpqua Rural Community Partnership (<http://www.surcp.org/>) (SURCP) began facilitating collaborative community meetings to encourage cooperation between local communities of the South Umpqua river basin and Federal agencies charged with management of public lands.

Soon SURCP's Elk Creek Watershed Restoration Project emerged as a cooperative whole watershed resiliency project. Our vision was to scale up a holistic approach to restoration ecology to cover the entire watershed and to simultaneously employ a local workforce to get the task done.

We were self-starters and it wasn't easy. After seemingly endless volunteer hours by community members, the Tiller Ranger District Ranger, Donna Owens, suggested we submit for a Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program (<https://www.nationalforests.org/grant-programs/ccls>) from the National Forest Foundation. The grant became a game changer.



The extra support has gone a long way to empower SURCP to serve the region and develop other restoration projects. Currently 6,000 acres and many miles of coho habitat of the Elk Creek watershed is slated for terrestrial and aquatic habitat restoration as a collaborative project with landowners, stakeholders and the Umpqua National Forest.

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