Walama Restoration Project

- Community Supported Rehabilitation and Native Revegetation of Our Watersheds -

Last year, 36 fourth and fifth graders at Westmoreland Elementary School in Eugene planted their own oak seedling into the ground at Crest Heights Park and embarked on a new kind of outdoor education ~ native habitat stewardship. Yotokko Kilpatrick and other staff and volunteers of the Walama Restoration Project (WRP) began working with John Newsom’s class at Westmoreland in the spring of 2002 and introduced the term oak-savanna by taking his students on an interpretive field trip to Tugman Park. The field trip included native plant identification, history and ecology of oak ecosystems, and ended with an interactive game connecting the food web with animal and plant species that depend on the habitats unique to this valley. Eight months later, many of the same students took to the fields carrying shovels and hauling mulch to help bring back a native oak-savanna at Crest Heights Park in South Eugene. They searched in the leaves for oak galls, looked at the pointed and lobed edges of Black and Oregon White oaks, and lastly, planted seedlings that were previously grown and propagated by WRP volunteers and a local home-school association. With simple hand tools, these local youth recognized their own spirit of place by working together and empowering themselves to design a natural landscape within urban boundaries.

Walama Restoration Project is a 501 (C)(3) non-profit, founded in fall of 2001 and dedicated in the rehabilitation, enhancement, and restoration of the waterways, grasslands, and forests within and adjacent to the Central and Southern Willamette Valley. In addition to ecosystem restoration, we facilitate experiential education in habitat awareness and rehabilitation. With the support of community members, our dedicated staff and board members, volunteers, local watershed councils and non-profits, and the City of Eugene, we have been able to actively restore habitats in 10 parks throughout Eugene, work with 7 school groups and after-school programs teaching Willamette Valley ecology, and host seasonal work parties at two of our “stewardship sites” for the neighboring public.

Other accomplishments and on-going events include:

♦ Neighbors south of Crest Dr. participated in the enhancement of Lafferty Creek in South Eugene by helping WRP remove non-native species, and planting trees and shrubs along the creek.

♦ Local community youth came out to the Whiteaker neighborhood this past summer with WRP restoration practitioner Tobias Policha and other staff to learn the concept of native seed saving. Participants cleaned and processed native seeds collected in Central Lane County by WRP staff and volunteers.

♦ WRP’s skilled crew of restoration technicians removed over 12 acres of English Ivy and Himalayan blackberry at four parks in Eugene and eliminated invasive grasses and weeds to enhance a wet prairie in Amazon Park. With the support of the City of Eugene and the Nature Conservancy, WRP mended two oak-savanna habitats at Skinners Butte and in Coburg Hills by clearing woody debris to provide space for native grasses and standing oaks.
Our goal as environmental educators and restoration stewards is to connect Lane County citizens with the importance of maintaining the natural and cultural integrity of the Southern Willamette Valley’s native habitats. The largest concern is that many of our native habitats in the Willamette Valley rank among the highest nationally in terms of priority for restoration. At-risk ecosystems include oak savannas, wetlands, upland prairies, and bottomland hardwood forests. Our remaining oak savannas, many of which border urban areas, provide some of the ecoregion’s most important wildlife habitat. For example, the Oregon White Oak provides nesting habitat for at least 200 wildlife species, representing all classes of terrestrial vertebrates. The valley’s bottomland forests, which define the health of our riversides, have declined by more than 70% from historic levels. The valley’s wetlands once comprised extensive bottomland wet prairies, oxbow lakes, and permanent marshes while providing critical habitat for at-risk species such as the Fender’s Blue butterfly, western pond turtle, and western bluebird. These fragile and irreplaceable habitats will be lost in history forever, unless humans intervene and begin restoring them NOW.

With your help, we will continue to fill a niche for Lane County by combining community involvement and youth stewardship with active land rehabilitation in this bioregion. We depend on members in the community because your support provides the backbone for our educational outreach and stewardship programs. Your donation will allow us to continue our work with our existing partnering schools as well as foster new connections with other youth groups in Lane County. Membership support will also help us to continue restoring our four stewardship sites with local youth and community members at the following parks in Eugene: Maurie Jacobs Park, Lafferty Park, Crest Heights Park, and the Whilamut Natural Area.

Please take the time to fill out our membership form. With your membership, you will receive our new biannual newsletter, opportunities to attend WRP workshops, email (or snail mail) updates on local events, and our continuing efforts to bring back native landscapes to our urban parks. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Please contact Stephanie Schroeder, Outreach Coordinator, at info@Walamarestoration.org or 541-484-3939 to find out how you and/or your children can become involved in our local projects. Also, please visit our website at www.Walamarestoration.org to learn more about our involvement in Lane County.

Thank you again for supporting our work.

Towards A Wilder Landscape,

Stephanie Schroeder
Outreach Coordinator
Walama Restoration Project