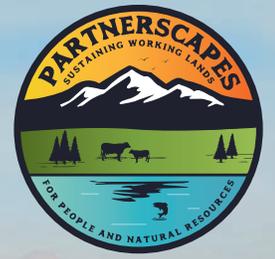


# PRIVATE LANDS PARTNERS DAY



REDMOND, OREGON - OCTOBER 7-9, 2024



**P**artnerscapes, held the 16th annual Private Lands Partners Day (PLPD) in Redmond, Oregon, on October 7-9, 2024. Although the Oregon PLPD was originally scheduled to occur over four years ago, the COVID pandemic and other factors caused the event to be postponed until 2024. It was well worth the wait for an incredible event with 200 people in attendance. Like other PLPD events, we had a broad mix of attendees, with private landowners, Tribal members, federal and state agency staff, and non-governmental organizations from across the country.

# STOP 1



Participants enjoying the Oregon Showcase

## Opening Reception

PLPD kicked off with an interactive reception called the Oregon Showcase. Knowing that it was impossible to see and hear about all the diverse partnerships across Oregon, the planning team brought the partnerships to us. Key partners put together booths throughout the room and participants mingled throughout the various exhibits, while enjoying delicious local foods and beverages. Everyone enjoyed learning, catching up with old friends, and meeting new collaborative partners and landowners.

## Field Tour

The focus of the field tour was partnerships and water conservation in the Upper Deschutes River Basin. Historically, anadromous sockeye salmon, Chinook salmon, and steelhead trout migrated from spawning areas in the upper Deschutes River to the Pacific Ocean. The building of dams and water diversion structures nearly extirpated wild salmon and steelhead runs in the river system. Through the work of many federal, state, Tribal, NGO, and industry partners, new innovative ways are being developed to return water to the river and restore and enhance habitat for fish and wildlife. The field tour included four separate stops, sharing a variety of collaborative partnership success stories in the watershed.

## Reintroduction of anadromy and landscape conservation planning



Bridget Moran, Deputy State Supervisor, USFWS

The hydroelectric companies have a highly managed water system. For over one hundred years they have been storing water and diverting it for agriculture. When relicensing occurred, they were looking to modernize the system and find win-win solutions for threatened and endangered species, as well as for agriculture. Key partners worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on a Habitat Conservation Plan which allows for irrigation to continue and puts water in the streams for fish, Oregon spotted frog, and other species.

In the early 2000s, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and Portland General Electric worked with over 20 additional partners to restore fish passage, including cities, counties, NGOs, and Tribes. There is now a new modern fish passage facility and selective water withdrawal, which is working very well. Long-term efforts required habitat restoration, hatchery management, and fish passage all working together. They went from having only 10 adult steelhead to now having 95 adult steelhead returning. While there is still lots of work to do, things are going in the right direction.



Lyman Jim, Confederate Tribes of Warm Springs



Megan Hill, Portland General Electric

# STOP 2



Jim Bond (left) and Lisa Seales (right), Deschutes River Conservancy

## Water needs and efficiencies

The mission of the Deschutes River Conservancy is to restore stream flow and improve water quality of all the tributaries in the Basin. What is unique is the collaboration and partnerships that take place among the Tribes, environmental stakeholders, and irrigation districts. With 900 miles of canals and ditches throughout the Basin, water management is very complex. Because water rights are over appropriated, the Wickiup Reservoir was created, and they are now working to restore the flows coming out of the reservoir. Water flows are gradually improving, and they are getting closer to meeting their goals.

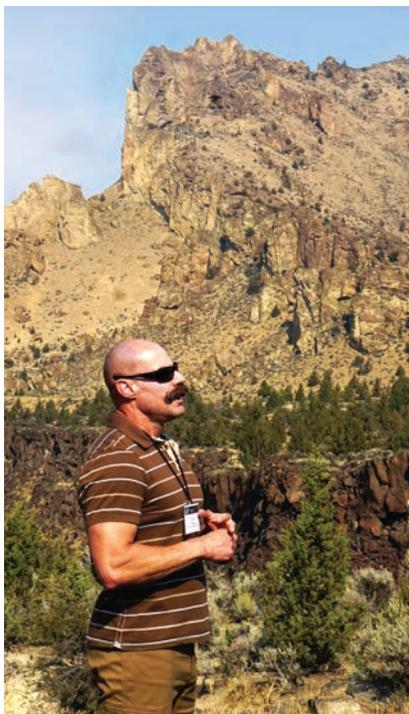
A water facility unit was built in 1968 and included nine pumps, which had the ability to pump the river dry. The North Unit Irrigation District and other partners worked to develop a modernized infrastructure to create efficiencies and support wildlife habitat for species such as the Oregon spotted frog.

Rancher Kathy Bowman shared that when she first bought her farm in 2005, water delivery systems in the area were very inefficient at providing water to ranchers. Water was difficult to manage and

highly unpredictable, year to year. By upgrading her system with piping, she can now use her water much more effectively and efficiently. The modernized irrigation infrastructure took out leaky canals, created efficient piping, and pressurized water. Nicole Kovach, Basin Engineer for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) collaborated with Kathy and other producers on irrigation improvement projects.



Kathy Bowman, landowner



Gary Diridoni, Oregon Assistant State Conservationist, NRCS



Nicole Kovach, Basin engineer, NRCS



Mike Britton, North Unit Irrigation District



Marc Thalacker, Three Sisters Irrigation District, speaking to the group



Julie O'Shea, Director, Farmers Conservation Alliance



Mathias Perle, Restoration Program Manager, Upper Deschutes Watershed Council

## Irrigation piping and fish passage

The Whychus Creek Watershed was historically one of the most important spawning areas for Chinook salmon and steelhead. However, 90% of the summer flow was diverted, with significant fish entrapment occurring at the historic fish screen that was designed to keep fish out of the irrigation ditch. The Three Sisters Irrigation District started working with partners to create efficiencies to provide downstream fish passage, retrofit the diversion to provide a more “fish friendly” fish screen, and restore Whychus Creek below the dam. They built one of the largest modern fish screens in the area and now steelhead are returning and safely navigating around the diversion structure.

Ten years ago, the Farmers Conservation Alliance, together with several partners, started an Irrigation Modernization Program. The collaboration has been outstanding. Twelve communities signed up and they were able to work together, take advantage of funds and get projects put together. This took significant collaboration, hard work, and perseverance.

Partners, such as the NRCS and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) Program, are working together on river restoration projects as well. Federal and state partners came together to provide support for funding and permitting. They also involved students in the projects (e.g., plantings). They are now planning to expand and replicate these restoration efforts in other areas.

# STOP 4



Eric Williams, Restoration Grants Manager, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

## State partnerships (Metolius River)

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) was established through a ballot measure in 1998, directing 7% of Oregon’s lottery funds to go towards protection and restoration of important native fish and wildlife habitat around the state. This funding is commonly disbursed in Oregon through many of the 70 Watershed Councils that exist throughout the state. As a result, OWEB is successful by not being “top down,” but rather, being reliant on local knowledge and experience to determine what gets funded.

The Wizard Falls Fish Hatchery, managed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), was built in 1947 on the Metolius River. With new modern infrastructure, the hatchery is now much more efficient and can supply trout for recreational sport fishing and support conservation efforts through the rearing of anadromous salmonids for reintroduction into the Upper Deschutes River Basin. Additionally, ODFW conducts various research studies, and works with landowners to provide access to private lands, which is critical for helping ODFW acquire data.

ODFW is near completion on a statewide blueprint for identifying priority subbasins in Oregon to conduct flow restoration. Within these priority subbasins, ODFW will work with partners to create farm efficiency upgrades and support split-season leasing.



Jerry George, ODFW, holding a GPS fish tag



Luke Allen, ODFW Hatchery Manager (right), with CalLee Davenport, Oregon PFW (left)



Spencer Sawaske, ODFW



*PLPD attendees at the Black Butte Ranch*



*Keynote speakers Hugh Morrison (left) and Gina Shultz (right)*

## Reception and Dinner

After a very successful field trip, we ended the day at the Black Butte Ranch. Participants enjoyed a wonderful evening filled with great conversations and celebrations of the outstanding collaborative conservation partnerships taking place both locally and across the nation.



*Sunset at the Black Butte Ranch*



Fall colors at Eagle Crest Resort, the conference location for PLPD 2024.

# Presentation Day

## Keynote Speakers

**Belinda Brown**, an enrolled member of the Kosealekte Band of the Ajumawi-Atsuge Nation (Pit River Tribe) and the Tribal Partnerships Director for the Lomakatsi Restoration Project, shared that water is life — it is “blue gold.” She thanked everyone for coming and for taking care of the land and keeping the sacred element in our mind and our hearts and keeping us working together.

**Cynthia Martinez**, Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System, shared her reflections on working with Partnerscapes for many years. She shared that

there are two essential words that define the work of partnerships — collaboration and trust. “It is the relationships and the people that need the most care. We work together because we know the incredible results that come from shared goals. All of you in this room are making a lasting impact through conservation conversations that inspire powerful partnerships.”

**Astor Boozer**, NRCS Western Regional Conservationist, shared that he is excited about all the collaborative efforts that are taking place. He is always looking for ways that we can do more, continue to engage more people, and increase innovation. “With this we can take what we are learning, look at what science is telling us and help move the needle with the things we are doing.”



Belinda Brown, Lomakatsi Restoration Project



Cynthia Martinez, Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System, USFWS



Astor Boozer, Western Regional Conservationist, NRCS

# Individual Presentations

## **Karl Wenner, Lakeside Farms (Klamath Basin Wetland Restoration)**

Historically, there were 350,000 acres of wetlands, shallow lakes, and marshes in the Upper Klamath Basin. There was

a tremendous abundance of salmon and millions of native suckers and waterfowl. Major developments for agriculture and railroads took place, which decimated fish and bird populations. Lakeside Farms began working with a wide variety of partners to restore the wetlands. It has been an incredible success story with the biodiversity of plants up 70% and the return of endangered fish, such as the C'waam sucker. The farm is doing better than it ever has. Karl believes this work can be done in the entire Klamath Basin with collaborative partners working together.

## **Josiah Jacobs and John Heywood (Innovations in Restoration and Fuels Management)**

Josiah is with the Pit River Tribe in northern California. The Tribe has worked with multiple agencies to eradicate junipers and is now finding innovative ways to conduct soil amendment with those trees. They are doing a large-scale native plant species project, going out and collecting seeds and then growing them and reintroducing them in the area. They are also growing fruits and vegetables and teaching the Tribal members how to cook the vegetables and use them for medicinal purposes. Josiah is working in partnership with John Heywood and others with Third Source Water, Inc. (3SW).

John Heywood shared his expertise on soil amendment. He partnered with VRM Biologic out of Australia and learned new ecological restoration tools to cycle carbon and get it back into the soil. Soil amendment is a fermentation process, where you take biomass and add catalysts, which then stimulates bacterial growth. Effective biomass management is the goal. Microbes in the soil help to build more carbon, converting it to a healthy soil amendment. We can use it to assist with invasive species and restoration after fires. They are continuing to build more partnerships like the one with the Pit River Tribe.



*Josiah Jacobs, Pit River Tribe (right) and John Heywood, Symbiogen – 3SW (left)*

## **David Byrd (Preview of PLPD 2025, Virginia)**

PLPD will be held next October in Williamsburg, Virginia. Approximately 83% of Virginia is in private land ownership, with the average farm size at 186 acres. Given the small farm size, it requires a great deal of collaboration, working with a tremendous number of different private landowners. At PLPD in 2025, participants will visit a working farm that is doing a wide variety of innovative projects. They will also visit Piney Grove Preserve and Bill Owens' farm (Raccoon Creek Pinelands) to learn about his longleaf pine restoration work. We will end the field trip at the historic Shirley Plantation.



*David Byrd, Virginia State Coordinator, PFW Program*



Panel, from left to right – Greg Becker, Oregon State Conservationist, NRCS; Sara O’Brien, Ex. Director of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB); Debbie Colbert, Director, ODFW; Mike Kroon, Oregon Department of Forestry.



Moderator Greg Becker, Oregon State Conservationist, NRCS

## Habitat Conservation Plan for the Deschutes River (Drivers, Implementation, and Benefits) Panel

One of the biggest drivers to the success of the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) was the endangered status of the Oregon spotted frog, the loss of Chinook salmon and steelhead, and water scarcity in the Deschutes River Basin. Successful implementation of the HCP required a modernization plan and significant funding partners coming together for irrigation infrastructure and for river restoration projects. It also required daily monitoring of flow requirements and predator removal (e.g., bull frogs). Panelists shared that it required a tremendous amount of funding, collaboration, and a can-do attitude. The benefits of the collaborative HCP effort are restored populations of endangered species, such as Oregon spotted frog, and healthy populations of numerous fish and wildlife species. In addition, junior water users are now getting water. A key take away is that collaboration is hard. Therefore, it takes people that are sincere, honest, and willing to work hard to make these collaborative partnerships work. Building trust is key to success.

## Panel Discussions

### Oregon State Agency Leadership Panel (Challenges and Opportunities)

The biggest challenges we are facing are social and political change. There is a particularly low level of trust with the government right now. There are also many stressors, and those stressors are additive. If we are feeling it, we know private landowners are as well.

One of the biggest opportunities we have is working collaboratively to get things done on the ground and supporting capacity for this work. Investing in local groups is key. It allows people to be responsive and invest in communities and partnerships. We also need to listen to producers and let them tell their story. We need to double down on this notion of relationships, trust, showing up, having difficult conversations, and being creative and flexible.



Panelists, left to right. Craig Horell, Managing Director, Central Oregon Irrigation District; Bridget Moran, Oregon Deputy State Supervisor, USFWS; Lisa Seales, Programs Manager, Deschutes River Conservancy; and Julie O’Shea, Director, Farmers Conservation Alliance.



*The Metolius River, a tributary of the Deschutes River.*

## Resilient Forests Stewardship in SW Oregon Panel

Two million acres of Oregon have burned this summer, and there are dozens of fires burning all over the west, tapping all the resources. Altered landscapes and climate change have created hotter temperatures, drought, and issues with air and water quality. Peter Winnick shared that to help landowners address these issues, we need to provide funding through various Farm Bill programs and additional education about forest health and wildlife habitat.

Marko Bey shared that in the past things were very contentious and people did not work together. The Collaborative Forest Initiative was created as a framework for how partners could work together. Key partners worked with Watershed Councils, industry, agencies, landowners, and Tribes to protect old growth trees, reduce fire hazard, and benefit spotted owls. The integrated plan utilized stewardship agreements, engaged the timber industry, and worked with the conservation community.

Tucker shared that as both a private landowner and the Executive Director of an organization he works to reduce fuels, restore meadows and grasslands, increase habitat diversity, and reintroduce healthy fire. His organization focuses on innovative ways to put resources, relationships, and partnerships to work to protect landowners and communities and adapt to climate change. His organization's tag line is that "resilience happens at the speed of relationships."



*Panelists, from left to right – Marko Bey, Executive Director, Lomakatsi Restoration Project; Peter Winnick, District Conservationist, NRCS; Tucker Teutsch, Executive Director, Fire Brand Resiliency Collective and private landowner.*



*Moderator CalLee Davenport, Oregon PFW State Coordinator, USFWS*



Final collaborative wall mural sharing the highlights from PLPD 2024 with artistic contributions from a variety of attendees.

# Breakout Discussions

Jalene Littlejohn, Regional Coordinator for the PFW program, facilitated a session that allowed everyone to work in small groups and discuss what they were going to take home with them as new innovative ideas. Everyone had a chance to work in small groups, while also circulating around the room and having conversations with other participants. Jalene then had a large group discussion, with the opportunity for participants to share their thoughts. It was a lively and interactive session, with the opportunity for everyone to contribute to the wall mural that was put together during the conference.



Jalene Littlejohn, Region 1 PFW Regional Coordinator, USFWS



Small group discussions during the breakout session.





Agee Smith (left) and Jason Derow (right) answering questions after the film.

# SAVE THE DATE!

The 17th Annual PLPD will be in Williamsburg, Virginia, October 7-9, 2025.

## Evening Banquet

PLPD 2024 ended with a wonderful banquet dinner, including delicious Pacific salmon. We watched the new film *Against the Herd*, produced by Jaxon Derow and featuring Cottonwood Ranch. The film shared the magnificent work that the Smith family has done on their sixth-generation ranch in Nevada. Their daughter Mackenzie now runs the ranch and is passionate about land stewardship, which has created a system for both wildlife and livestock. The film shares their story about how they have worked for many years to restore and enhance the ranch after years of overgrazing in the past. With holistic management approaches on the operation, the Smiths now have healthy diverse grasslands with excellent soil health. Agee Smith said, "this is how systems are supposed to work." They have put GPS collars on their cattle and established virtual fencing. This ranch is now a showcase operation for others to learn from.

## Conclusion and Thanks

Many thanks to all the individuals and organizations in Oregon who were involved with the planning and delivery of PLPD. Thank you to all the attendees, speakers, sponsors, and co-hosts who made the event a tremendous success. It was an exhilarating event, with everyone taking home new innovative ideas and inspiration to continue to build upon collaborative conservation efforts across the country.

## Stay Connected!

### Websites

<https://partnerscapes.org/>  
<https://www.fws.gov/program/partners-fish-and-wildlife>

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Report and photos by Heather Johnson, H-Big Sage, LLC