

Using Partnership and Prioritization to Achieve Whole Watershed Restoration in the Pacific Northwest

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The goal of the Whole Watershed Restoration Initiative (WWRI) is to restore the natural functions of whole watersheds in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho while amplifying community-based partnerships focused on the restoration of Pacific salmon and steelhead ecosystems. The WWRI partners are shifting the project selection and funding paradigm within our region from *opportunistic* to *strategic* by identifying "Priority Basins" and "Focus Watersheds" that represent shared regional priorities. Partnership funds are targeted to these areas in order to produce meaningful, measurable progress toward whole watershed restoration and salmon recovery. Over the past three years the partnership has succeeded in allocating over \$5.5 million to almost 80 projects in the Pacific Northwest. For more information, please visit <http://www.ecotrust.org/wwri/>.

The Whole Watershed Restoration Initiative

The Whole Watershed Restoration Initiative (WWRI) is a public-private competitive grant program that funds salmon habitat restoration efforts in targeted areas of high ecological importance in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. The partners' shared philosophy is that by concentrating and coordinating restoration efforts where there is strong community support, effective collaboration, and high ecological value, measurable and sustainable recovery is achieved faster than when efforts are spread randomly across the landscape.

Prioritization

Our planning and prioritization process takes a *Protect the Best* approach, by focusing restoration activities in a few important watersheds per basin. Our collaborative identification process is based on the convergence of several prioritization approaches:

- 1) Ecotrust's Conservation Opportunity Area modeling tool (Figure 2);
- 2) NOAA-approved salmon recovery plans (where available, see Figure 3); and
- 3) US Forest Service's Aquatic Restoration Strategies (Figure 4).

By overlaying these approaches the WWRI has identified **nine Priority Basins containing 28 Focus Watersheds** throughout Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. We rely on our community-based partners to identify the most needed work in these watersheds through their local watershed action plans and analyses. The goal of our restoration activities is to restore and protect the major ecological functions by removing risk factors and restoring damaged habitat-forming processes in the watershed, across all ownerships. Once we have completed work restoring the major ecological processes in the watershed, we hope to move on to focus restoration efforts on the next priority watershed.

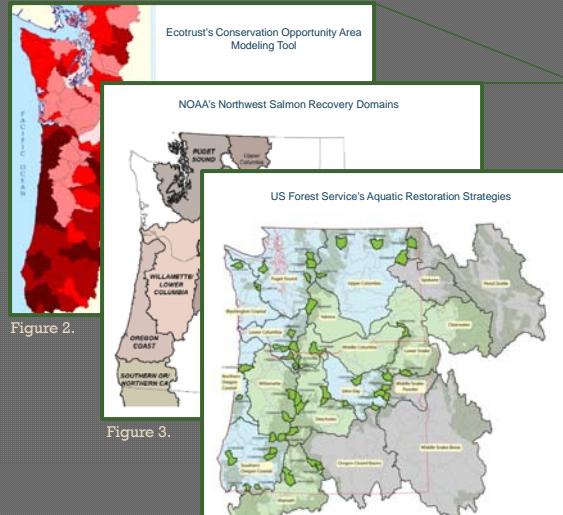
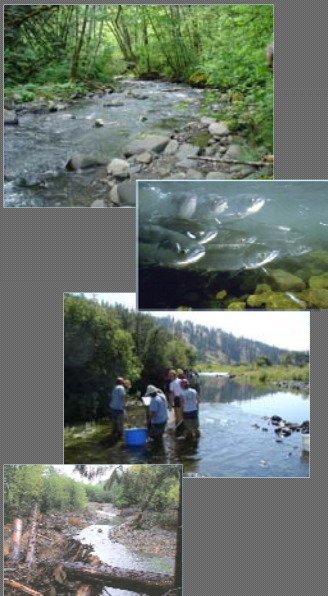


Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Figure 4.



Figure 1. Map of the WWRI's Priority Basins and Focus Watersheds

Measuring Progress

The partnership has been able to identify and track measurable progress toward completion of high-priority restoration actions within its designated priority basins. Over the past 3 years the partnership has:

- Restored more than 4,639 acres of habitat
- Opened over 125 miles of stream to fish passage
- Improved more than 308 miles of stream for the benefit of anadromous fish and other species.

The WWRI is also looking to track the social and economic benefits of habitat restoration projects implemented through the partnership. In order to understand the larger impacts these projects have on their communities, project proponents are being asked to track the number of paid and volunteer labor hours worked, percentage of budget spent locally, and number of community partners involved in their projects.

Acknowledgements

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- Ecotrust
- Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
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- National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, Restoration Center
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Resource Conservation Service.