



TRUST TALK

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Conserving signature landscapes and vital habitat together with the communities of the Columbia River region

Parhaniemi siblings conserve family farm

By Mary Bellotti

Next summer, Columbia Land Trust will begin crucial salmon and wildlife habitat restoration work on the Walluski River, about six miles south of Astoria, Oregon. This will be the Land Trust's first restoration project in the Walluski watershed. Its goal is to create free-flowing access for salmon between the property's floodplain and the Walluski, and to protect adjacent forest land for birds and other wildlife.

In September, Columbia Land Trust acquired the 50-acre Walluski River property from Portland sisters Lydia Kerr, 86, and Sylvia Davis, 85. The sisters are daughters of Finnish immigrants, Simon and Edla Parhaniemi, who arrived in Astoria in 1913, joining other Finnish settlers who made their living fishing and farming. The couple bought the farmland and wooded property in 1920, establishing a small dairy farm. "We had so much fun there," Lydia recalls, of growing up on the land that is part forest and part pasture. She remembers picking berries, rowing a skiff out onto the Walluski River and hiking through the forest. Until his death last year at age 89, Lydia and Sylvia's brother Waino Parhaniemi stayed in the Astoria area to take care of the property. "Now," Lydia says, "the time has come to ensure the future of the family property. "We want to preserve our land and restore it to what it used to be, and that's what Columbia Land Trust is doing."

"We want to preserve our land and restore it to what it used to be, and that's what Columbia Land Trust is doing."

~ Lydia Kerr



from left: Sylvia, Waino and Lydia

Lydia and Sylvia donated the property's 13-acre forest parcel to Columbia Land Trust, and the Land Trust bought the 37-acre parcel that lies within the floodplain. Growing up on the land had a big impact on Lydia's adult interests. An avowed conservationist and animal lover, Lydia is a founding member of Portland's Feral Cat Coalition and cares for five once wild cats. She also supports a number of conservation organizations. The sisters sold the family home, which still stands on the property, to a family who will live in it. Funding for this Land Trust acquisition and the upcoming restoration project comes from a number of sources including: \$107,685 from Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board; \$50,000 from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act; and a \$54,000 Bonneville Power Administration grant obtained through the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership.

Columbia Land Trust stewardship director, Ian Sinks says the planned habitat restoration project could take up to a year and a half to complete. Initial project planning, which includes consulting with engineers about breaching existing dikes and building a setback levee to protect adjacent farmland from flooding, is currently underway. "Watershed Council members are often reluctant to approve dike-breaching projects for fear of

taking farmland out of production," Sinks explained. "This project, however, received the endorsement of the local watershed council because it restores valuable habitat, while protecting neighboring farmlands," he said. Lydia Kerr hopes students and others will visit the property to study its ecology and wildlife, and already the Land Trust is receiving help from Astoria High School aquatic lab students who are conducting fish sampling studies. "It is all part of an effort to restore the health of the Columbia River estuary," he said.

Mary Bellotti is a Portland freelance writer and Land Trust volunteer

Everyday inspiration

Glenn Lamb's Muse

You inspire us. Simple, but true.

Every day we receive membership gifts here at the office. These gifts allow us to keep the office open, to be here by the phone when landowners and donors call wanting to conserve their land. Truly, you make this work possible.

Last month, we heard from a man who wants to spend \$100,000 to acquire forestry land that could be conserved forever while being sustainably harvested.

A week later, we heard from a 79-year old woman in Indiana who told us about her parents who homesteaded in the Columbia River region. Now she wants to honor them by investing as much as \$250,000 to conserve important land here in the Columbia River region.

That same week, we heard from a national company that is investigating the possibility of donating up to \$1 million for the Land Trust to buy important Columbia River habitat.

Shortly after that, we accepted the donation of critical salmon habitat along the Walluski River in Oregon from Lydia Kerr. You can read about the gift of her family lands on the front page of this newsletter.

Finally, we just bought at bargain sale another 550 acres of important Klickitat River oak habitat from rancher Bill Giersch, which you will read about in our next Trust Talk.



Walluski tree

These calls and contacts happen literally every day, every week. And you make it possible. If only you could be at the office to see it, to hear it. I'm telling you, it is fun and a real privilege to be able to do this work.

There is no part of my job that I enjoy more than thanking each and every one of you for your gift to Columbia Land Trust. When you get a personal note from me thanking you for your gift, please know that I'd really like to be writing pages to you, telling you of the next great thing that you have made possible. I'd really like for you to be the one talking to Lydia Kerr or Bill Giersch. You are the one who helps pay for the office and the phone that bring us together with Lydia and Bill and supporters like them.

Don't underestimate the power of your gift. I see, each day, how every single dollar donated to Columbia Land Trust conserves more land.

We at Columbia Land Trust believe that every donation is like a vote - a vote for conserving our great lands, a vote for Columbia Land Trust.

You have made yourself heard.

Unlocking the potential of Schoolhouse Creek

By Kate Keck

After years of meticulous planning and preparation, work began in September on an exciting salmon habitat restoration project on Schoolhouse Creek north of Washougal, Washington, just east of the Clark-Skamania County boundary.

The project is on a 22-acre site owned by Columbia Land Trust along the creek, a tributary of the Washougal River. Its goals are to restore fish access through the property, create a new wetland and stream channel complex, and build areas of backwater habitat for rearing salmonids.

A number of factors make the site excellent for habitat conservation and restoration. First, the Washougal River is one of the least disturbed streams in the area, with large native salmon populations and high water quality. Also, the Washougal River system is constrained within steep hillsides and rocky outcrops. Smaller tributaries, floodplains and riparian wetlands offer the type of habitat critical for rearing salmonids and maintaining water quality within the watershed.

The Schoolhouse Creek property itself is a vital connection between the Washougal River and upstream spawning habitat. The site has relatively level ground, a perched water table and water that flows from natural springs, all of which result in high-quality wetland and salmonid-rearing habitat. Its low slopes and reliable water sources create slow, meandering channels that form complex, interconnected systems with different types of habitat.

Together, these features will give the fish access to high-quality spawning habitat, enhance and protect rearing habitat and maintain water quality within a premier regional watershed.



Young coho salmon being relocated on the restoration site

Creating a safe passage

When Columbia Land Trust acquired the Schoolhouse Creek property in 2002, the staff recognized its potential for habitat restoration. But the site had problems that needed to be corrected. The restoration project will provide the habitat young salmon need to survive, including cool, slow-moving water with complex channels as well as vegetative cover that lets the fish hide from predators, feed, rest and grow before they become big enough to continue their journey out to sea.

When settlers first began altering the area's ecosystem, some of their actions hampered the development of healthy salmon populations. They dug drainage ditches that increased the water's speed of flow. They logged the site, reducing the amount of vegetative cover and increasing the water temperature. They built a road and piped the water under it, making it impossible for fish to swim from the stream to the river.

In 2000, Skamania County officials replaced a barrier culvert under Washougal River Road, allowing fish to return to the property. But the fish did not have reliable access to upstream habitats. Columbia Land Trust, Washington Trout and the Lower Columbia Fish Enhancement Group are working to correct these problems, with funding from the Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board and the Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board.

The work includes:

- digging new channels that curve around in a natural way to slow water flow and improve the complexity of the channels;
- helping fish move from the stream to the river by installing a berm and fishway structure near the mouth of a culvert that carries the water under the road; and
- growing native trees and shrubs along our new channels to shade the stream, after construction has ended.

When finished, the project should offer young fish a welcome "rest stop" along the Washougal River and safe passage to upstream spawning grounds.

As work progresses over the next few years, we hope to feature stories about fish returning to this important site. Watch for announcements about ways to volunteer and get involved.

The (Mollusk) Hitchhiker's Guide to Schoolhouse Creek

By Kate Keck

No being exists in isolation; we all are part of the "web of life." Lately, the Land Trust has been tugging at the web of life on the Schoolhouse Creek north of Washougal, Washington. And, as is often the case when we deliberately tug on this web, we are made more immediately aware of how rich and complex it is.

The Land Trust acquired the Schoolhouse Creek property knowing that it had excellent potential for fish habitat restoration. Through a long planning and design process, we decided to restore fish access through the site, create a new wetland and stream channel complex, and create areas of backwater habitat for rearing salmonids.

Right now work is being done on a new channel. Because the work cannot be done while water is flowing through the stream, one of the first steps was to divert water flow. Although the construction dates are carefully timed to coincide with periods when very few fish need to use the stream, we knew we ran the risk of drying out some of the creatures in the project area. In order to protect the fish and other beings in the stream, staff and contractors worked for more than two days to carefully remove mussels and fish from the stream before construction work started. We hand-picked

over 600 freshwater mussels and placed them upstream so they will survive the project. We carefully caught young coho and lamprey and returned them to an area where water still flowed.



Mussel salvage in old channel



Returning mussels to Schoolhouse Creek

Picking mussels was a lesson in evolution. Mussels live in gravel beds made up of small round brown and black rocks. Not coincidentally, the mussels themselves are also small and round with brown and black coloring. Over the course of evolution, the camouflaged mussels eluded predators, allowing them to reproduce and pass on their coloring to their offspring. There's no better time to marvel at this precision of evolution than when you are crawling along a stream bank, sifting through the stream bed with your fingers trying to find rock-shaped animals in beds of rock.

There are also evolutionary reasons why mussels grow in gravel beds similar to those used by salmon for spawning. Since mussels cannot swim, they have evolved a clever hitchhiking technique to disperse to new habitats. They stick out the tip of their foot in the universal gesture of hitchhikers everywhere. Curious salmon swim by, enticed by the suggestion of a meal. As the salmon swim near, the mussel releases a small larval baby mussel into the water. The larva clamps onto the gills of the fish and hitches a ride until it metamorphoses into a juvenile mussel. When the fish spawns in gravel beds, the juvenile mussel falls off in its new home. This new home is made of round brown and black rocks, a good home for the young mussel.

These mollusk hitchhikers are a great reminder that all beings depend on the others. From this project, we see how mussels, fish, birds, and even beavers- which make pools and channels for the fish to live in- all help each other to

survive. Saving the mussels and fish felt good, knowing that being involved with the Land Trust is part of a personal commitment to weave, not tear, the web of life.

Klickitat Oaks

By Lindsay Cornelius

On any typical day in eastern Washington's Klickitat River watershed, the bold scenery seems to intensify one's mood. A catalyst for adventure cascades downriver in whitewater rapids suitable for kayakers; productivity bursts from cattle enclosures and tribal fishery platforms; reverence permeates the golden peaks that harbor wildflowers beneath a canopy of gnarled oaks.

There are many ways to appreciate this incredible and still-wild-landscape. Columbia Land Trust tries to see it from many perspectives - from those of the kayaker and bird watcher to those of the rancher and hunter. One viewpoint being used more frequently by the Land Trust is that of the restoration ecologist, looking for indicators of history and the function of a landscape.

How old are the lichens on the rocks? Is the soil gray clay, and typical of wetland soils, or is it dry and well-drained, like upland soils? Are there remnant stumps from historic logging? If so, what species were the trees? How densely did they cover the landscape? And what's that aggressive seed that keeps working its way into the thick socks of anybody who traverses the understory of the oak woodlands? (Answer: ripgut brome)

The information a landscape offers is infinite and ever-changing. When the Land Trust embarked on oak woodland restoration planning in the Klickitat River watershed, we enlisted both casual observers and trained scientists to develop a plan to improve the habitat for more than 200 species of wildlife and plants that depend on oaks for acorns, nesting cavities and other resources.

Oak habitat on the Klickitat River evolved in concert with a regime, in which relatively cool understory fires burned every five to 10 years. An absence of these fires enabled fire intolerant Douglas fir trees - which typically grow on the west side of the Cascades- to flourish on the east side, out-competing oak and pine. As oak woodlands disappear wildlife and plant species that rely on this community type disappear or are forced into increasingly smaller areas.



Treated oak stand

ecologist. We are in the midst of a "cutting-edge" project that involves removing scores of oak and Douglas fir trees to free up canopy space and to safeguard against catastrophically intense fires. For years to come, Columbia Land Trust's stewardship program will follow the project using wildlife surveys, acorn counts, vegetation studies and photo monitoring. These project sites will also be presented as demonstration, research and observation areas for oak woodland owners and managers, biologists, botanists, ecologists and the community to advance our shared understanding of Oregon white oak woodlands.

JUST THE FACTS

about the Klickitat River watershed oaks restoration project

Restored acres: 100-plus

Estimated amount of trees removed: Up to 20 tons per acre (don't panic, oak wood is heavy)

Western gray squirrel nests found (and left alone): 23

Times our crews were stung by yellow jackets: More than 20

Amount of compaction exerted on soils by the "lightfoot" bobcat (machine used to thin oaks): less pressure per square inch than a human footprint.

Project partners: Eugene Bureau of Land Management, Integrated Resource Management, Forest Restoration Partnership, WDFW, U.S. Forest Service, Columbia Land Trust Stewardship Committee and several volunteers and members who have numerous hours conducting surveys and providing valuable insight. Thank you!

This situation is one reason the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has designated the state's oak woodland as a priority for restoration and conservation. The removal of fire in this system also results in an increased density among surviving oaks because small saplings that would have perished in fires continued to grow. The resulting "doghair" oaks (densely packed, small-diameter trees with undeveloped or awkward crowns and branches) do not provide as large or as many cavities for wildlife as their larger predecessors once did. Acorn production, an important resource for wildlife, is also suspected to be significantly lower than in more openly grown oak communities. Ultimately, The Land Trust and our partners are concerned about elevated fuel levels that could result in a catastrophic fire where all trees and habitat are lost and area homes threatened. So here's where we are today from the standpoint of a restoration

For more information about the Klickitat oak woodland restoration projects or to help with various projects-such as conducting surveys of bird, acorn, wildlife and plants, weed pulling or treatment, piling and hauling wood-contact Lindsay Cornelius at (360) 696-0131 or by e-mail at lindsayc@columbialandtrust.org.

Klickitat oaks thinning project



pre-treatment (450 trees per acre)



post-treatment (100 trees per acre)

Note: Historically (as indicated by older trees and stumps) there would have been as many as 15 trees per acre.

Frances

By Les Zimmer

Back in January 2002, when I opened Columbia Land Trust's coast and estuary office in the basement of the Astoria post office, I urgently needed someone to help with the paperwork and filing.

To my amazement, a local member, Frances Burham, showed up in our new office asking if we could use a volunteer. So began a fruitful friendship. For nearly three years now, Frances has spent almost every Friday putting our files in order and helping out with any pending projects.

As a retired registered nurse, she brings a practical approach to record-keeping, a valuable asset in an office with so much paperwork. An Astoria native who has also lived elsewhere, Frances returned home because of her love for its beauty and familiarity.

"My folks taught me to respect the land and the rivers as well as enjoy them," she says. "I believe strongly that we must fight to preserve land and encourage conservation in order to have healthy green space to pass along to future generations."

Her first experience with a land trust was working on a Nature Conservancy project in southeastern Arizona. Back in Astoria, she heard about Columbia Land Trust from a friend and quickly became a member.

For me, a relative newcomer to Astoria, Frances provides a distinct perspective and historical context for local events. She is a concerned citizen willing to speak her mind on a range of topics and she has become a good friend.

At home, Frances and daughter Valerie keep busy with their large garden, home improvement projects and an award-winning, backyard wildlife habitat. Besides the Land Trust, she volunteers for other organizations, including the Columbia River Maritime Museum where she once worked. Frances attends Land Trust events and meetings whenever she can and, luckily for us, is a wonderful cook who often delights us with tasty treats. Columbia Land Trust is fortunate to work with Frances, who shares our passion for Land Trust conservation and is so willing to give her time to help keep things organized in our branch office.



Frances Burham

I am grateful to have her on the Columbia Land Trust team and hope she will continue to help us for years to come. Thank you, Frances.

Columbia Heritage Circle

Leave a Legacy of Conservation



Columbia Land Trust
Conserving Land Forever

Become part of Columbia Land Trust's ever-growing **Columbia Heritage Circle**.

Columbia Land Trust has pledged to care in perpetuity for the land that you as a member are helping conserve today. By including the Land Trust in your estate planning you are establishing a legacy of conservation that will stand the test of time and will support the kind of work that matters to you long after your own lifetime. By leaving a legacy through the Columbia Heritage Circle, you will ensure the stewardship of these vital lands - forever.

For information on including Columbia Land Trust in your estate planning, check the box on the enclosed reply envelope, or call Lisa DeGrace at 360-696-0131.

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Your membership is matched dollar for dollar up to \$100,000 through the 2004 Columbia River Membership Challenge. This challenge is made possible by Ray Hickey and an anonymous donor.

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Columbia Land Trust, a private, non-profit organization, was founded in 1990. We're dedicated to conserving signature landscapes and vital habitat together with the communities of the Columbia River region. Questions, comments, or concerns may be directed to info@columbialandtrust.org

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