

# Klickitat River Haul Road Restoration Project

## *Project and Access Info*

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*Imagine the legacy left to future generations if eight miles of a beautiful, productive, fish-bearing river could be restored to a wild, natural condition. Imagine you could take your children and grandchildren to this river and still see or catch salmon and steelhead in the resulting deep pools and braided river channels decades from now. Imagine removing asphalt and eroding road fill from a wilderness where no other built infrastructure exists. There are few places in the Pacific Northwest where this is possible, and it happened right here, on the Klickitat River.*

**Who is Columbia Land Trust and what is the Haul Road?**  
Columbia Land Trust is a non-profit organization that conserves and cares for the northwest places you love. See our website for more information about our work.

The Haul Road was a privately owned railroad turned two-lane, paved road that traversed the floodplain of an otherwise undeveloped 12-mile section of the Klickitat River between the Twin Bridges on Hwy 142 north of Klickitat, WA and Dead Canyon Creek. Historically the road conveyed timber from the upper watershed to the mill at Klickitat before a half mile of the road washed out in the 1996 floods. In 2007, with funding from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, Columbia Land Trust purchased the road and began work to restore river processes to enhance fish habitat. Together with partner, Yakama Nation Fisheries Program, Columbia Land Trust implemented six phases of restoration work, culminating in 2017.

**Why restoration?** When the road was built, it was perched on fill imported to the floodplain, narrowing the river channel. Floodplains are the natural consequence of flowing water: as the water collects and flows downhill, the energy of the water moves sediments and wood, scouring channels and pools along the way. The fill placed in the floodplain to elevate the road had to be armored by riprap, or large boulders, to prevent erosion. Water that once circled into backwater channels, spilled around islands and down side channels, and pooled at the foot of bedrock walls flowed instead down a single straight, confined channel. Streams that historically flowed directly into the river were placed in culverts under the road, restricting fish movement, sediment and wood transport. Trees and shrubs that once lined the banks of the river struggled to grow in the large boulders and asphalt. The river had effectively been placed in a straight-jacket. This limited its ability to form habitat features important to salmon and steelhead, and the many other plants and wildlife that typically occupy and use a floodplain.

**The goal?** This was a process-based restoration project: We removed the road so the river could shape and change the floodplain, reforming important habitat features.

**What's been done and how does it look?**  
We removed approximately 233,000 tons of fill from the active floodplain of the river, planted more than 50,000 native plants, and recycled all the asphalt. A post-project analysis showed a 33% increase in gravel bars and islands, a 29% increase in side and backwater channels, and 31 acres of floodplain reconnected to the river. The changes looked like this:



The river is a dynamic, active system. A river attempts to find a balance between the energy in flowing water and the

sediments and rock it transports through its floodplain. This process is marked by change – changes in where channels form, what sediments and rocks are moved downstream, which banks remain stable and which become deformed. Erosion, when it occurs at the behest of the river in a natural setting, is a healthy process in an active floodplain. It is necessary for recruitment of spawning gravels, to form new channels and pools, and to recycle nutrients. You can expect to see active erosion in the project area, as well as deposition (formation of new gravel bars, islands, beaches, etc). We will be monitoring the corridor for such changes, capturing this dynamic, exciting journey with photography and aerial (LiDAR) imagery.

*The images to the right show the change following the removal of road fill across Dead Canyon at the north end of the project area. The image on the left, before restoration, shows the horseshoe-shaped fill and the washed-out railroad bridge that once carried trains across Dead Canyon Creek. The creek was forced under the bridge, scouring a pool at the base of the bridge that attracted fish in the spring and then dried up during summer, killing the fish. The image on the right, following restoration, shows the removal of the fill.*



#### **What about public access?**

The Land Trust has continued the tradition of allowing public access to this privately-owned corridor and remains dedicated to public access in the future. The public is welcome to enjoy all the traditional passive day uses of the corridor including walking, biking, hunting, fishing and boating. Camping and fires are not allowed on Columbia Land Trust property.

From the river, expect changes in channel locations, depths, currents, and obstacles from Dead Canyon downstream to the confluence of the Little Klickitat. This area is now a more dynamic river, which means conditions may change from day to day.

On land: The corridor is nested within a matrix of private and public lands, including WDFW's Klickitat Wildlife Area. For people enjoying the haul road on foot, it's important to remember if you leave the road, you are likely leaving Columbia Land Trust property. It is up to you to know where you are at all times and to request permission to use private land before you go. Please be cautious. Our

neighbors run cattle on the road in the spring and early summer. ***Always close gates behind you.***

Getting there: The site can be accessed from a gate near Twin Bridges on SR-142. The Haul Road parallels SR-142 from Wahkiakus Heights Road up to Twin Bridges. Turn onto the Haul Road from SR-142 just before the guard rail begins at Twin Bridges and continue a short distance upstream on the Haul Road to a locked gate. **Please do not block the gate.** The lower two miles of the road are paved, with four interpretive signs interspersed along the road shoulder. Two miles in, the pavement ends and a gravel road begins. After the gravel road rounds a bend in the river, there is a fifth interpretive sign where the road ends and the restoration area begins. The restored area extends eight miles upstream from this point.

The restoration area has an unmaintained, non-engineered, wildlife path through much of the corridor, except where water has been returned to channels in the footprint of the old road. The floodplain is a dynamic place, with new channels, fluctuating water levels, wood and sediment deposits, and naturally eroding banks. Visitors should be prepared for remote, wilderness conditions. Bikes are not recommended in the interior due to extensive obstacles.

Amenities: Please pack out any trash you bring in with you. There are no bathrooms at the site. The nearest bathrooms, supplies, food, and other services are in Klickitat, WA three miles south of the gate on SR-142. Cell reception onsite is extremely limited.

#### **When will the road be closed?**

The road is closed to all public entry during periods of high fire risk. This policy is consistent with past owners and is intended to protect public health and safety as well as the natural resources in this remote, difficult to access part of the watershed. For information about seasonal closures, please refer to the news feed on our website.

#### **What else is going on up there?**

Columbia Land Trust will continue to manage the corridor for habitat with our proven dedication to public access, safety and community. We voluntarily pay taxes on the property despite our exempt status, and will remain dedicated to all facets of property management, including noxious weed control. We will continue to work closely with neighbors and local community who have traditionally had access to the corridor as well as with staff of the Klickitat Wildlife Area through which the corridor passes. Enjoy your visit!