



Marys River Watershed Council News

Please Note: the MRWC January 2007 meeting is cancelled.

Our next Council meeting will be Wednesday, February 7th – 7pm – Philomath City Hall.

Council Meeting of December 6, 2006

Northwestern Pond Turtles

Dave Vesely of Pacific Wildlife Research was our evening's speaker. Dave gave a fascinating slide presentation about Northwestern Pond Turtles in the Willamette Valley. Historically, before drainage ditches and dams were in place, much of the Valley was a wetland. Since the 1800's, when ditching and tiling began, nearly 70% of the wetlands have been lost. In the 1960's flood control and changing channel morphology further reduced seasonal wetlands and the slow water that turtles prefer.



photo credit: www.middle-fork.org

The NW Pond Turtles are a species of concern for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, they are listed as endangered in Washington State and are considered a "sensitive species" in Oregon. The population size is estimated at 1500-2400 individuals, a mere 2% of estimates of the 1800's, and most of where they do exist now is on private lands. Therefore, the future of this species depends on private landowners' interest and commitment.

Dave proceeded to detail the natural history of the species. They can live for half a century. It is possible to determine males from females by coloration on the throat - females with darker markings than males. At eight to ten years of age, females begin laying eggs (3-13 eggs) each year from the end of May through early July. Although most nest sites are close to the surface, they are certainly hard to detect. Nestlings hatch after a 90-100 day incubation period, but generally in Oregon they remain in the nest until spring when they emerge. Nests are usually within 1/2 km from a pond, usually above the flood plain, in fine-textured soils, with full sun exposure. Dave described the many predators on eggs and juveniles, including terrestrial carnivores, bullfrogs, and bass; and other sources of mortality (road-kills, illegal collection).

ODFW has identified NW pond turtles as a focal species in their new conservation strategy, enlisting the aid of watershed councils and private landowners. Marys River as well as McKenzie Watershed Councils and the Greenberry Irrigation District have conservation efforts targeting this species. Some of the efforts being undertaken include 1) captive rearing (at the Oregon Zoo) for release in Washington; 2) placement of basking platforms for turtles; 3) nesting site surveys, with the aid of turtle tracking dogs; 4) radio-telemetry to determine nesting sites (with the Marys Council, Dan Rosenberg of OSU and Philomath High Ecology students).

Dave graciously answered many questions from the audience.

Steering Committee Report Janine Salwasser, Co-Chair, invited anyone interested in the Steering Committee meetings, but unable to attend, to be added to the email list for Steering Committee communications - contact coordinator@mrwc.net.

Coordinator Report Sandra Coveny, Council Coordinator reported: 1) the TMDL's for the Willamette River were announced at the end of September; 2) Ecotrust will map and prioritize restoration opportunities throughout the watershed. 3) the USFS Stewardship Partnership project is moving along - anyone interested in attending is welcome - contact Sandra for details and meeting schedule at coordinator@mrwc.net.

Outreach Report Karen Fleck Harding, outreach coordinator, reported that 5 fish traps are now in the water. Please contact Karen if you are interested in volunteering to check fish traps. outreach@mrwc.net.

Russ Anderson and Wendy Hudson did an OWEB site visit to Cardwell Hill pond sites, Newton Creek Wetlands, and Powell Creek culverts on December 5th.

Oregon Small Woodlands Association

— Congratulations to Ken Faulk, landowner in Cardwell Hills, selected as Tree Farmer of the Year! OSWA will have a symposium with tours that include Cardwell Hills & Blakesley Creek projects on April 26-28, 2007. See www.oswa.org