

The Siuslaw River and Coastal Lakes Strategic Action Plan for Coho Recovery

A plan for coho recovery, based on a scientific approach to accelerate salmon recovery through protection of existing habitat and focused restoration of priority areas.

Coho Salmon: A Keystone Species



Photo Credit: Seth Mead, SWCD

A wide variety of other terrestrial and aquatic plants and animals rely on coho for their survival, making the abundance of coho salmon an indicator for overall resilience and health of the watershed.

Vital Natural Functions of Watersheds



Photo Credit: Seth Mead, SWCD

Natural processes (i.e. landslides, floods, large storm events, earthquakes etc.) support the creation of habitat favorable to coho survival. These natural processes support a healthy and dynamic ecosystem which many species throughout coastal Oregon are adapted to.

The Siuslaw Coho Partnership:

Local partners working to improve watershed health for fish and promote livable, economically resilient communities.

The Siuslaw River and Coastal Lakes once supported one of the largest wild coho runs along the Oregon coast. Over the last 150 years, habitat conditions have been severely degraded for this keystone species, leading to a steep decline of the population. Returns of hundreds of thousands of adult salmon per year in the late 1800's and early 1900's were reduced to less than a thousand per year by the late 1990's.

The Siuslaw Coho Partnership envisions a future where collaboration among local residents creates thriving communities that exist in balance with the region's highly productive Siuslaw River and Coastal Lakes Watersheds.

Our goal is to restore a complex range of habitat types that are vital to coho in locations across the watershed. In doing so, we'll reinvigorate the natural functions essential to supporting both coho and numerous other species.

Restoration projects will also support our communities, helping provide clean drinking water, reduced flood risk, nature-based recreation opportunities, and sustainable commercial fisheries. The restoration projects themselves will also contribute significantly to the local economy as groups hire local contractors.

Aligning Coho Recovery Efforts

Many groups have been working throughout the Siuslaw and Coastal Lakes watersheds for decades to restore salmon habitat. These groups are focusing on restoring the natural functions of a healthy and dynamic ecosystem that sustain suitable habitat for coho and many other terrestrial and aquatic species.

As we enter the third decade of restoration work throughout the region, there is an increased awareness of the challenges facing the coho population today, and a new need to better focus our efforts to restore the natural functions that are most important for sustaining coho habitat.

The Siuslaw River and Coastal Lakes Strategic Action Plan for Coho Recovery is one of three pilot Strategic Action Plans designed to create greater impact by aligning federal, state, and local coho recovery efforts on the Oregon Coast.

How We'll Approach the Challenge

To create the plan, the Partnership identified natural functions which need to be restored in the Siuslaw River and Coastal Lakes basins to enhance coho productivity. Restoration will be focused on six goals which help support these natural functions:

- Reconnect and protect floodplain and wetland habitats, which provide extremely productive rearing grounds and calmer water for young fish during high flows.
- Plant riparian species adjacent to streams in order to reduce stream temperatures by increasing shade and to ensure future large tree recruitment.
- Reconnect and protect tidal wetlands to promote the availability of estuarine habitats which are vital for coho to adapt from freshwater streams to the saltwater ocean.
- Upgrade road infrastructure and crossing of streams to improve fish passage and water quality, allowing fish to move freely to desired habitats when they need to.
- Add large trees to streams in order to increase stream complexity and restore connections to off-channel habitats.
- Protect standing timber within areas with good habitat conditions and natural functions. This timber may eventually fall into the stream, which adds more suitable coho habitat and encourages more complexity in the river.

The Partnership identified a list of specific restoration projects to pursue in collaboration with public and private landowners in the 15 priority Siuslaw and Coastal Lakes sub-watersheds. This list of projects will remain flexible over time and will be revisited and adjusted to continue to add projects.

Who is Involved?

Local Residents. Most importantly, the Siuslaw Coho Partnership is seeking input and partnership with local residents.

The Partnership wants to involve the local community in active restoration of coho habitat and the creation of a resilient landscape for future generations--recognizing the economic benefits of restoration and a healthy coho population.

The Oregon Coast Coho Business Plan Project Team. The team consists of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Marine Fisheries Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians, Siuslaw Soil and Water Conservation District, the Siuslaw Watershed Council, and the Wild Salmon Center.

The Local Siuslaw Coho Partnership Planning Group. In 2015, the Project Team selected the Siuslaw Coho Partnership as one of three pilots to begin locally-based Strategic Action Plans for parts of the Oregon Coast. The Siuslaw Strategic Action Plan will become part of the larger Oregon Coast Coho Business Plan.

Restoration Priority Focus Areas

In order to prioritize and focus conservation efforts and better quantify the benefits of restoration, the Siuslaw Coho Partnership identified 15 priority sub-watersheds throughout the region.

These sub-watersheds were chosen because of the amount of largely intact habitat, meaning that with additional investment in restoration projects there will be a more immediate return on investment than similar work done in more highly degraded systems. At least 80% of our restoration investments will be within these sub-watersheds in the future.

Once the sub-watersheds were identified, projects within the sub-watersheds were prioritized using several criteria that evaluated:

- 1) the relative importance of the location in which the project is to be implemented and;*
- 2) the relative importance/benefit of the project.*

