

Fall 2023

SIUSLAW

WATERSHED COUNCIL NEWS

What's Happening in Your Watershed?

Commemorating Johnny Sundstrom: A Voice for the Siuslaw



Since Johnny Sundstrom died on August 10th, the Siuslaw Watershed Council has been mourning the loss of more than just a cherished elder statesman. His vision was a vital force for restoration efforts; for decades Johnny stood at the center of the local conservationist network that he played such a key role in organizing. Known for his ability to build bridges and connect unlikely allies, Johnny was integral in defining the ethos at the center of the Council's work.

He respected all forms of life in the watershed, from old growth trees and spotted owls to loggers and farmers, and his pragmatism and integrity could bring even the most distrustful stakeholders to the table. Though he had long ceded most of his conservation responsibilities to younger generations, his continued presence at meetings and events was a quiet reminder of his belief that conservation must be undertaken with the knowledge of what is at stake—that we have everything to lose, and everything to gain.

Johnny first got involved in local conservation after years spent dedicating himself to the home front. At Rock Creek Ranch, the remote Upriver property he and his land partners bought in 1976, he practiced intentional land management while raising a family. His greatest mentor during this time was the land itself, and he was eager to hone his vision by learning what it had to teach him.

One of his yearly highlights was watching the salmon runs from the creek that ran through his property.

He loved to observe them at home in their habitat—"fighting, breeding, dying, coming home—all that's fascinating," he explained in a Siuslaw Watershed Council video. So when salmon populations started to decline, Johnny noticed right away. Knowing that losing the salmon would be catastrophic for the forest he lived in, he and his neighbors sought for ways to effectively advocate for their ecosystem.

But in his entry into conservation he set himself apart from the entrenched battle being waged throughout the 80's between environmentalists and the logging industry. He may have set out to protect the deep woods that were his refuge, but he could also see how environmentalists alienated locals they needed as allies.



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His children went to school in Mapleton alongside the children of loggers, and as a rancher his approach to land management was far more practical than utopian. The folly of pitting the needs of the economy and the environment against one another was obvious to him. In his mind the question was how to align seemingly separate interests until the relationship between economy and environment became symbiotic.

It also didn't hurt that before he settled in the Siuslaw Watershed, Johnny had spent the 1960's acquiring a formidable track record of political conflict with the U.S. government. He saw no appeal in increasing federal environmental restrictions to the detriment of locals. Instead, he wanted to find creative solutions which made sense to the community, that they could execute themselves. As Johnny explained it, "The whole thing about collaboration is that if it's done right, nobody gets everything they want but everybody gets something. And it's got to be based on mutual benefit. Maybe not for this project, maybe not even for this year. But over time it has to pay off in some way for everyone."

Johnny was as rooted in his community as it is possible for one person to be. But he was also a visionary whose impact spanned continents and crossed oceans. The walls of his home were lined with bookshelves—he read everything from Russian literature to the classic Westerns of Louis L'Amour. Johnny had always been a thinker. He was the rare individual whose eye for detail could also take in the bigger picture, and his conservation work was informed by deep contemplation. One of his favorite topics was the way place shaped the human experience, or as he succinctly put it, "people at home in a place."

When the success of his conservation efforts made him a fixture at watershed restoration conferences all over the world, he was able to see this principle at work in the farthest flung locations. Everywhere he went, he looked for the place in the people and the people in the place, and what he found was a home nearly every place he went. His loss may be most deeply felt by members of his immediate community, but they are joined in mourning by his adopted family from the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming, his friends among Maasai herders in Kenya, and fellow conservationists as far afield as Australia and Northern Russia.



The years since his son Shiloh died in a 2015 hit and run were likely the hardest of Johnny's life. The two were incredibly close. Shiloh had shared his father's conservationist vision and taken it in new directions, and they understood each other in a way that appeared effortless. Shiloh's death cut his father's will to live to the quick. But even in the face of such incalculable loss, Johnny never lost sight of the bigger picture. He continued to tend to the conservationist network he had worked so hard to build, drew his community in even closer, and urged the next generations to take their place in the struggle for a better world.



In spite of everything, he remained a person at home in a place. Most evenings found Johnny sitting on his weathered porch at Rock Creek Ranch, watching the sunlight slowly disappear from the forested mountain ridge that served as his horizon line. From there, he loved to observe the comings and goings of his farm, from a scurrying flock of sheep to his daughter and granddaughter ambling hand-in-hand down the road. He relished the slow moments that let him listen to the land.

The world Johnny left behind will remember him for the thousand things he did and was—a storyteller, forest dweller, rancher, conservationist, thespian, revolutionary, man of letters, rainforest cowboy, and living bridge between all sorts of people with nothing in common other than having the good fortune to be in his fold. If the thought of filling his shoes feels daunting to those of us charged with continuing his legacy, that's as it should be. There is no replacing a man with the character and gravitas of Johnny Sundstrom. The best we can do is to hold his vision close, carry on the work, and try everything we can think of to make him proud.

Written by Holly Devon for the Siuslaw Watershed Council

Photo of Johnny on page 1 by Morgan Heim, additional photos by Kate Harnedy

Leadership Update

The Siuslaw Watershed Council Board of Directors is happy to announce that we have selected a new Executive Director to replace Rosemary Pazdral. Tim Moffett will be stepping into the role on October 30th. Tim has been working at the SWC for two years as our Education and Outreach Project Manager. During this time, he has significantly expanded the SWC's education program, hosting hundreds of local children on environmental programs each year and increasing the size of our Watershed Camp. Tim is a natural leader, reliable, collaborative, and committed to the SWC's mission. Prior to joining the SWC staff, he served as a volunteer for a number of years. Before coming to the Siuslaw watershed seven years ago, Tim worked in the northeastern US managing conservation preserves for a small land trust. He holds a BA in Geography from Indiana University, and recently completed the Master Naturalist program at Oregon State University.

Through his work with the Council, as well as his extracurricular responsibilities, Tim is greatly involved in the Siuslaw watershed community. He serves on the board of the Western Lane Community Foundation and he is a captain for the Mapleton Fire Department volunteer crew. In his time off, Tim enjoys gardening, stewarding his riparian restoration project, and going on adventures with his family—around the world and in his own backyard. In Tim's words, "I look forward to participating in impactful habitat restoration projects throughout the watershed. I would like to thank Rosemary for building and guiding a team who have great appreciation for each other and the entire Siuslaw Community. And I thank you, the volunteer, logger, rancher, teacher, and neighbor, for your continued support in bringing the salmon back."



Native Plant Distribution 2024

Whoa, I can't believe it's about that time again! We are already approaching our 25th annual Native Plant Distribution (NPD)! I am very pleased to say that the Siuslaw Watershed Council will once again offer free native plants for planting in the Siuslaw and Coastal Lakes watersheds. This is a free program for anyone who has a stream running through their property or who lives along one of the coastal lakes in our service area. Native plants planted in riparian areas have many benefits—they help reduce invasive species, improve bank stability, and provide habitat to salmon and other wildlife, to name just a few.

The NPD program is open to all streamside and lakeside landowners and is a great start to restoring your riparian property or continuation of what you have already completed over the years. If you are unsure about the flora on your property, or need guidance on what to order, feel free to call our office at 541-268-3044 or email nativeplants@siuslaw.org to request assistance from SWC's restoration technicians.

Here is our anticipated 2024 plant list (some species may not be available):

Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*)

Grand fir (*Abies grandis*)

Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)

Western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*)

Western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*)

Incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*)

Shore Pine (*Pinus contorta*)

Black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*)

Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*)

Bigleaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*)

Cascara (*Rhamnus purshiana*)

Pacific crabapple (*Malus fusca*)

Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*)

Blue elderberry (*Sambucus caerulea*)

Red elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*)

Vine maple (*Acer circinatum*)

Twinberry honeysuckle (*Lonicera involucrata*)

Coast black gooseberry (*Ribes divaricatum*)

Nootka rose (*Rosa nutkana*)

Mock Orange (*Philadelphus lewisii*)

Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*)

Oval-leaved viburnum (*Viburnum ellipticum*)

Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*)

Douglas spirea (*Spiraea douglasii*)

Red flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*)

Redosier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*)

Pacific ninebark (*Physocarpus capitatus*)

Willow (*Salix* spp.)

Oregon Iris (*Iris tenax*)

Common camas (*Camassia quamash*)

Coastal strawberry (*Fragaria chiloensis*)



Before, with non-native plants



After clearing and planting with native plants



Two years after planting with native plants

Important Dates:

- November 24th: Plant ordering opens
- January 28th: Plant ordering closes
- February 2nd: Volunteer prep day for plant orders
- February 3rd: Distribution day



The council is also seeking volunteers for this event. It's a great way for community members to get involved and make a positive impact. If you are interested, you can use the contact information above to sign up.

As always, we want to offer a special thanks to our funders: Cascade Pacific Resource Conservation & Development, Promise the Pod, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, and our private donors. To those who are interested in supporting this program through donations, you can do so by scanning the provided QR code. Your contributions will undoubtedly help ensure the continued success of the Native Plant Distribution program and contribute to conservation efforts in the Siuslaw Watershed. Thank you for your support!



SCAN ME

Contributed by Britnee Church, Project Manager

Poetry Competition

Fall is here and what better way to spend the coming months of rain and cold than waxing poetic about your favorite watershed! With so many facets to the Siuslaw, from the wonders of the changing seasons to the plants, animals, and people that call it home, there certainly is no shortage of inspiration for your verses. Send us your best original poem, be it haiku, acrostic, or anything in between, for a chance to have your work featured in the next issue of the Siuslaw Watershed Council's newsletter.

Send submissions via email to outreach@siuslaw.org by December 1st to have your entry included in the competition. One contributor will have their poem highlighted in the next issue of our newsletter, published quarterly, and receive a swag bag of SWC merchandise!

If you need some inspiration (or just a poem to show up with your masterful command of rhyme schemes), attached is an example poem written by restoration technician Elijah Yager.

Example poem (Otherwise entitled January in the Siuslaw Watershed):

*Iron skies recede and for a moment amber glow casts down
Through barren branches stripped of leaves upon the marshy sodden ground
As fractal branching maple trees and golden stems of salmonberry
Pave the way from forest streams down to the river estuary
Then rain continues, constant, cold
And creatures in their wild holds
Look out over the dismal grey
That marks another winter's day*



Waite Ranch Restoration 2023 Season Update

The first phase of restoration work on the Waite Ranch Tidal Wetland Restoration Project is almost wrapped up for the season. It has been a very busy summer!

The project is restoring tidal influence on nearly 200 acres of former pasture in the Siuslaw estuary. Restoring tidal access to the site will allow for the development of a suite of tidal wetland habitats. Healthy estuaries provide critical habitat for juvenile salmon, other estuary-dependent native animals, and native vegetation. The Project's implementation is being led by the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians, with McKenzie River Trust and the Siuslaw Watershed Council as partners.



Work this year focused on preparing the interior of the site, which is currently protected from daily tidal inundation by a levee and tide gate system, for future regular tidal inundation. This included beginning to build a new levee that will protect OR-126 from post-restoration tidal influence and digging a new tidal channel system. This work involved moving a LOT of dirt with some BIG machines! The Project's primary contractor, Billeter Marine, hails from Coos Bay. Billeter sub-contracted with many local coastal contractors, providing a boost to the local economy.

The onset of wet fall weather is bringing the work season to a close, and efforts have shifted to preparing the site to overwinter and be ready to pick up work in summer 2024. In the next phase of work the levee along OR-126 will be completed, the new channel network will be dug, the existing levee between the site and the Siuslaw River will be breached, and the property will be planted with native estuarine vegetation. Natural tidal processes will continue the restoration of high-quality estuarine habitat, taking up where the excavators and dump trucks leave off.

Look for more information on the Waite Ranch project on McKenzie River Trust's website, or contact the SWC directly at watershed@siuslaw.org.

Contributed by Mizu Burruss, Project Manager



Siuslaw Watershed Council Mission Statement

SWC supports sound economic, social and environmental uses of natural and human resources in the Siuslaw River Basin. The Council encourages cooperation among public and private watershed entities to promote awareness and understanding of watershed functions by adopting and implementing a total watershed approach to natural resource management and production.

Blackberries: Native and Invasive

Whether you are baking them into pies, cooking up a mess-load of jam, or just eating them straight off the vine, blackberries are a quintessential summer favorite. Here's a look at the three most common species in our watershed.



Himalayan Blackberry

(*Rubus armeniacus*)

Status: Invasive

Leaves: Tri-foliate or five-foliate with smooth oval leaflets

Stems: Erect to sprawling

The most prolific and highly invasive, this shrub originates from Asia. It thrives in disturbed soil and can often be found along roadsides and hedgerows, often completely overtaking native vegetation.

Cut-Leaf or Evergreen Blackberry

(*Rubus laciniatus*)

Status: Invasive

Leaves: Five-foliate with deeply incised leaflets

Stems: Erect

Often thought to be native, this invasive plant is easy to identify. It tends to grow individually in semi-disturbed areas. While not as aggressive as its Himalayan cousin, it is still invasive and takes up an ecological niche long filled by indigenous species.

Trailing Blackberry

(*Rubus ursinus*)

Status: Native

Leaves: Tri-foliate with toothed leaflets

Stems: Sprawling/Trailing

The only native blackberry in Oregon. Its berries, while smaller than those of the Himalayan blackberry, tend to ripen earlier in the spring and are sweeter in flavor. The trailing blackberry was a known food source for local indigenous tribes.



Contributed by Wendy Short, Restoration Technician



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Fall 2023 Newsletter

Page 1-3

Remembering Johnny Sundstrom

Page 3

Leadership Update

Page 4-5

Native Plant Distribution 2024

Page 5

Poetry Competition

Page 6

Waite Ranch 2023 Season Update

Page 7

Blackberries: Native and Invasive

