

Spring/Summer 2025

Siuslaw

WATERSHED COUNCIL NEWS

What's Happening in Your Watershed?

A Day in the Life of a Restoration Technician on the Siuslaw Watershed Council Field Crew

The day begins early, though not quite as early as it could. This is the perfect compromise for me, it gets me up for the peaceful and pretty early morning but doesn't exhaust waking up at the crack of dawn that should be saved for vacations, fishing trips, and other shenanigans. It's at the office at 7:30 with layered ready-to-get-dirty clothes and a warm beverage to rally my enthusiasm for a long physical day of work ahead. Though the week's tasks are generally planned out in advance, each day is its own adventure, shaped by shifting weather, the mechanical comedy of our tools (I'm still getting acquainted with our finicky earth drill), and in the conversation that hurries along the ten hours. Our projects are as varied as the terrain we work on, and the best weeks are those where every day brings a new challenge.

Some mornings are a quick shuffle: arrive, load the truck (and maybe the trailer), and hit the road. Others begin slower—planning, office chatter, and perhaps a second coffee. I tend to favor the slower start, though hard work is good for the soul and the community. The truck is a hub for music exchanges, podcast lessons, and strategy sessions—our space for bonding, brainstorming, and sometimes, lunch, which I am proud to admit I look forward to perhaps more than most. We tackle a wide range of tasks throughout the week, from planting on behalf of kind landowners, to wrestling with invasive blackberry thickets, to chasing salmon in their final days, or navigating the untamed wilderness on foot, where the nearest person is miles away. But no matter what the task, it's teamwork, love for the land, and the joy of fresh air that make the hardest jobs manageable.

We take turns driving, because everything is fair and balanced. I appreciate this greatly; somehow fairness in the “real” world feels too often overlooked, but essential for fostering both personal and professional growth. I don't mind driving or being the passenger, yet somehow after driving it is just a little bit harder to rally to step into the workplace. It reminds me of my childhood when I'd sleep snuggled up with my clothes for the next day so I could slip into them from the warmth of my bed in the morning. On the coldest days, I wish there was a grown-up trick like that to beat the chill.

Every task brings its own rhythm, a form of meditation in motion. Some days, it's the steady, repetitive motion of cutting willow stakes. During a particular set of February days, I logged around 30 hours of podcasts and even more music while the team worked towards cutting 3,000 stakes.





STAFF

Mizu Burruss
Project Manager
restoration@siuslaw.org

Britnee Church
Project Manager
britnee@siuslaw.org

Adam Cook
Restoration Technician
adam@siuslaw.org

Kat Gillies-Rector
Monitoring Coordinator
kat@siuslaw.org

Caleb Mentzer
Project Manager
projects@siuslaw.org

Tim Moffett
Executive Director
tim@siuslaw.org

Linda Poppenheimer
Financial Manager
financial@siuslaw.org

Elijah Yager
Project Manager
elijah@siuslaw.org

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More recently, Adam and I have spent time flagging road boundaries for fire breaks and for ecological diversity management within forest stands. During these days, I find solace in the natural sounds—the birds singing, the creek rushing in the background, the crackle of breaking sticks underfoot, a lot of hard breathing on my part, and the occasional distant call to Adam, who's working just out of sight. There's always time to listen to the earth, to learn, and to reflect, whether through music or the simple act of being present.

Lunch, as always, is a highlight. After a morning of physical labor, hunger strikes early—sometimes as soon as 10:30, even with a protein-packed breakfast. But I know that if I wait, the afternoon will be that much sweeter. And there's something undeniably satisfying about a simple field lunch, especially when shared with the crew. Recently, I've been hooked on rice crackers paired with pepper jelly and crunchy peanut butter, though there was a week of soup and another with leftover pizza. What I love most, however, is learning what everyone else has packed. I'm always eager to hear about their choices, to ask questions, and to dig deeper into what's on their plates. I'm pretty sure Adam pretends to hate this chore, but deep down, I think he enjoys the banter, especially on those rougher days when the lunch break is a small victory.

The drive home is usually quieter than the morning trip. The energy is different—there's a sense of reflection, a natural quiet that settles after a full day of work. It's always a treat when Eli or Britnee is in the truck with the crew; the conversation may not always liven the afternoon drive, but their presence brings a warmth that fills the space. Not to say that Adam's usual presence doesn't accomplish this feeling, but there must be an equation for excitement increasing with the number of passengers. Back at the office, we clean the truck, stow away the tools, and prepare for tomorrow's adventure. By the time we're done, the day feels complete, and I'm ready for a bit of rest before doing it all over again.

Every day working with the Siuslaw Watershed Council has been an opportunity to learn, to connect, and to give back to the land that sustains us.



As a seasonal worker, these moments of community and growth are invaluable. In this job, I've found a space where mentorship, friendship, and shared wisdom abound—whether it's learning about mechanical tools, mastering planting techniques, or simply sharing life lessons. But it's not just the work I've come to treasure, it's the people—coworkers who fill every role from mentor to comic relief, from logical thinker to recipe sharer. The joy of a great job lies in these connections, the moments when you can lend a hand, share a laugh, or offer support when needed. And just as rewarding is the opportunity to give back, the beautiful opportunity to reciprocate these in the design of your own strengths.

There's something truly special about being part of a group that feels like family—a group that teaches you just as much as you teach them, where generosity and camaraderie are as common. This job has not only allowed me to grow as a professional, but it's reminded me of the small-town values I left behind after college: community, kindness, and a shared commitment to something greater than ourselves.

Contributed by Amelia Heitz, Seasonal Restoration Technician

SWC's YOUTH SUMMER PROGRAMMING NEEDS YOUR HELP!

Each year the Siuslaw Watershed Council provides free experiential summer programming in the form of Watershed Camp for youth throughout western Lane County.

These workshops teach about local and global ecological processes and environmental issues, help build a sense of stewardship and place with local youth, and connect students with natural resource professionals to increase preparedness and awareness regarding careers in conservation. They also provide relevant and engaging outdoor education to students in the rural Siuslaw area during a time when many local students have few options for organized educational activities.

In 2024 SWC hosted 50 4th-8th grade students in a week-long day camp, and nine high school students in a three-day overnight camp, with plans to increase the number accommodated in 2025.

It costs SWC approximately \$454 per attendee to host camp. Keeping camp free is important to us. We believe that every child deserves a chance to experience the outdoors and engage in continual summer learning regardless of economic position. While we receive grant funding, it is not enough to fully offset our costs. You can make a difference today by donating to SWC's camp fund to provide for the ongoing operation of our free summer programming and help spark a student's lifelong passion for nature.

Donate on our website at Siuslaw.org/donate or by check addressed to: Siuslaw Watershed Council, PO Box 422, Mapleton OR 97453

Be sure to note in the comments that your donation is for SWC's summer programming! We thank you for your support.



Thank you to our 2025 funders: Western Lane Community Foundation, National Forest Foundation, Chambers Family Foundation, and Patagonia

Estuary Cleanup Recap



This April, the Siuslaw Watershed Council and McKenzie River Trust teamed up for the third annual Siuslaw estuary cleanup, gathering volunteers to tackle garbage on a 40-acre section of Wilbur Island. While our estuary is cleaner than some, it still receives its fair share of garbage. Any trash that finds its way into the creeks and streams further up the watershed will eventually make its way downriver. Once it reaches the tidally-influenced estuary it is supplemented by garbage washing in from the ocean, carried on the incoming tide to deposit itself on floodplains when the water recedes. Car tires, Styrofoam, and hard plastics are the most frequently found debris, all of which degrade but do not decompose, permeating our water, our soil, and by extent our food.

Volunteers gathered at low tide on a blustery Saturday afternoon to cross the river via boat from the Siuslaw Marina, which lies just downriver of the Cushman rail bridge. Four volunteer boat captains shuttled participants to the island in waves, and kept their boats on hand to carry back the trash that would be the spoils of the operation.

In twos and threes, we fanned out to cover the island. Some groups stayed along the steep muddy bank, ranging up and down the shoreline, while others forayed inland to the low-lying estuary floodplain. There was plenty to find; large amounts of trash are deposited by strong winter tides and river flows, hard edges and angles of anthropogenic waste jutting incongruously from the organic shapes of tule, salt grass, and driftwood.

By the end of the day, multiple boatloads of trash had been shuttled back to the awaiting roll-off dumpster, donated by County Transfer & Recycling. We were tired but proud of a job well done, rewarded by the immediate visible difference in the area we had cleared. There will be plenty more trash to gather in coming days, but every piece we remove now makes the river that is so vital to our community cleaner, healthier, and stronger.



Appended is a list of some of the more novel finds of the day:

- Two large wheels with tires, weighing over 200 lbs. each
- One rubber duck
- Two small fiberglass watercraft in unsalvageable condition
- One duck decoy
- One plastic cooler
- One aluminum watercraft (returned to owner)
- Several rubber shoe soles
- One lobster-shaped beach toy
- One vintage Coca-Cola sign

Contributed by Elijah Yager, 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.

Farewell Amelia and Welcome Kat!

It is a season of farewells and new meetings here at Siuslaw Watershed Council. Amelia Heitz, who has worked with us in her capacity with the Forest Service and more recently as a seasonal restoration technician, said goodbye at the end of April to move on to new adventures. We will miss you, Amelia, and wish you all the best in your future endeavors!

Kat Gillies-Rector has joined the Siuslaw Watershed Council as our new Monitoring Coordinator!

Kat grew up in Corvallis, Oregon. She obtained her BS in Fish and Wildlife Management from Oregon State University and MS in Fisheries Resources from the University of Idaho. After grad school Kat spent six years as a fisheries biologist for Idaho Fish and Game before moving back to Oregon to work in the coastal watersheds she grew up recreating and working in. We are excited to welcome Kat and look forward to working with her in the coming years!



NEWTS VS SALAMANDERS

Taxonomy

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Amphibia

Order: Caudata (Salamanders)

Suborder: Salamandroidea

Family: Salamandridae

(True Salamanders, Newts, European Salamanders) 145 species in 22 genera

Newts - Subfamily: Pleurodelinae

- Rougher skin in terrestrial phase
- Generally they have more distinctive sexual dimorphism and a more complex aquatic courtship
- Generally have webbed feet and wider flatter tails especially when in aquatic form

Salamanders - Subfamilies: Salamandrinae, Salamandrinae

- Slimy skin in comparison
- More defined digits, and longer, more rounded tails

AmphibiaWeb: Information on amphibian biology and conservation. "Salamandridae."

Local Siuslaw Salamandridae Photo Examples

Below: near West Fork in Deadwood; Pacific giant salamander (*Dicamptodon tenebrosus*), which is the largest terrestrial salamander in North America



Commonalities & Characteristics

- Diet of various insects, small mammals, and insect larvae
- Biphasic or triphasic life cycle
 - larvae are fully aquatic
 - may metamorphose into terrestrial juveniles and/or adults
 - some species return to aquatic form as adults, either seasonally for breeding or permanently
- Males court females and fertilization is internal
- Many possess highly toxic secretions from poison glands in their skin
- Respiration is accomplished both through the skin (cutaneous respiration) and with lungs

Right: Long-toed salamander (*Ambystoma macrodactylum*), which is named as such for the display of a long toe on their hind legs; Photo taken in Deadwood



Left: Male Rough-skinned Newt (*Taricha granulosa*); Photo was captured near Tahkenitch Lake in the month of March, meaning that this individual has returned to an aquatic lifestyle for the breeding season

Contributed by Amelia Heitz, Seasonal Restoration Technician

Native Plant Distribution Recap



The Siuslaw Watershed Council (SWC) celebrated another successful Native Plant Distribution, marking its 26th consecutive year. We made a strategic change by moving the distribution to a later date in February, a shift that was made to better accommodate the nurseries we use. The adjustment proved to be beneficial, and it's likely we'll continue with this timing in the future. We were particularly thankful for the smooth conditions this year, avoiding the ice storm challenges we faced during last year's event.

This year, SWC purchased and harvested a total of 10,255 trees, shrubs, and forbs, with 9,332 being ordered by participants. Leftover plants were given away at our Mapleton site during distribution as additions to landowners' orders. We will continue to give away the remaining plants, or they will be planted at various project sites within the Siuslaw Watershed.

We had 101 Participants this year, about 20 fewer than last year. Of these, 77.5% were returning landowners and 22.5% were new to the program. Over 30 volunteers, including board members, came to assist in assembling orders on Friday the 14th and distributing orders on Saturday the 15th. It's always neat to see people who have marked this date in their annual calendar and make it out rain or shine!

A special thanks goes to Eatwell Organic Noodle for providing free catering—YUM! And what a generous contribution! Many more thanks are due to our hardworking staff, dedicated board members, volunteers, and our funders, including the USFS Coast Range Stewardship Fund, Roseburg Forest Products, Three Rivers Foundation, Oregon Wildlife Foundation, the City of Florence, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, and our private donors. This program wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for our donors. We are deeply grateful for your support!

Contributed by Britnee Church, Project Manager





P.O. Box 422 • Mapleton, Oregon, 97453
541-268-3044 • www.siuslaw.org • outreach@siuslaw.org

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Photo from Estuary Cleanup Recap, Pages 4-5

