



Photo by Stefanie Hoffman

Steve Wisnovsky, Oregon Country Fair site manager, leads a group on a tour of the Long Tom River.

## Watershed celebrates restorations

By STEFANIE HOFFMAN

### Of the News

VENETA — Once again, the Oregon Country Fair grounds were the site of appreciation for the environment.

But instead of the 30,000 fairgoers that usually occupy the grounds in July, the visitors last Sunday consisted of about 40 landowners, farmers, volunteers, and committee members of the Long Tom Watershed Council at its annual celebration.

"It's to honor our accomplishments and look toward the future," said Dana Erickson, council coordinator.

Kicked off by a band and an informal awards ceremony, the event recognized and rewarded all of the time and hard work that the council members and volunteers put in during the past year on numerous watershed restoration projects.

"It brings the members of the community together to share and talk about what connects us," said Ryan Collay, council steering committee member.

The event culminated in two watershed tours of the Long Tom and the Indian Creek rivers, which were given simultaneously and led by

volunteers. During the tours, guides gave a historical-overview of the rivers, and how erosion, flooding and the natural flow of the water are constantly affecting the surrounding geography.

The Long Tom River, for example, has moved about 30 feet in 15 years, explained Steve Wisnovsky, OCF site manager. Over time, the river has slowly encroached on the fairgrounds, he said, and within a few years, fair volunteers will have to relocate paths and remove booth areas.

In an attempt to reroute the river, volunteers planted numerous plants and built up the riverbank, "but it's just a stopgap — a band aid," Wisnovsky said.

The Long Tom Watershed Council ultimately aims to resolve these and other kinds of watershed issues through active volunteerism by community members who collaborate to work on projects that maintain and improve watershed quality and enhance fish and wildlife habitat.

Volunteers have worked on projects like building fences between ranch land and rivers, surveying landscape, reintroducing plant species into their native habitat and testing water quality for pollutants.

"We do it all through local vol-

unteers and community action," Erickson said.

The council also serves to educate the community about their own watershed, and provides them with the tools and resources to be able to make improvements to it on their own.

"Ultimately our goal is to get people to change their behavior to improve water quality," Collay said.

By its own definition, the council includes about 90,000 people living within the 410-square-mile Long Tom Watershed — landowners, community members, farmers, business owners — anyone who has a stake in the quality of the water.

The watershed includes a large area of Eugene, Veneta, Crow, Lorane, Monroe and even the edge of Junction City.

"You don't have to become a member, you are a member," said Collay. "Our goal is to help the people get information and help them feel connected."

The council holds general committee meetings, open to the public, that are held on the last Tuesday of every month. There are no elections or membership dues.

"We sort of assume that everyone who affects the watershed, cares about the watershed."