

# Building bridges for clean water

By BEN MYERS  
Of the News

"Your waterways are your grand connectors. They flow through all your activities on the landscape," said Long Tom Watershed Council coordinator Dana Erickson.

Erickson was speaking in literal terms. Like blood vessels, streams are part of an interconnected tributary system called a watershed. Those tributaries flow into a main artery — in this case, the Long Tom River. If one vessel, or creek, is unhealthy the rest of the system suffers.

But if problems belong to everyone, so do solutions. Erickson's "grand connector theory" applies equally to the Long Tom Watershed Council, which promotes collective stewardship of the Long Tom River and its watershed.

The Long Tom River originates in the foothills of the Coast Range and flows toward the Fern Ridge Reservoir. It passes through forests, urban areas and large farms. The watershed encompasses three main sub-watershed areas, which include Veneta, Monroe and Eugene.

The council collects water quality data at 18 public and access-granted private sites throughout the watershed. It shares data with landowners and conducts volunteer-based restoration

projects. Most are intended to improve wildlife habitat, fish passage and water quality.

The council's work began in 1998, but its conception was an evolutionary process. Veneta planning commission member Jim Bruvold recalls informal gatherings of Veneta residents in the mid-1990s to discuss their concerns.

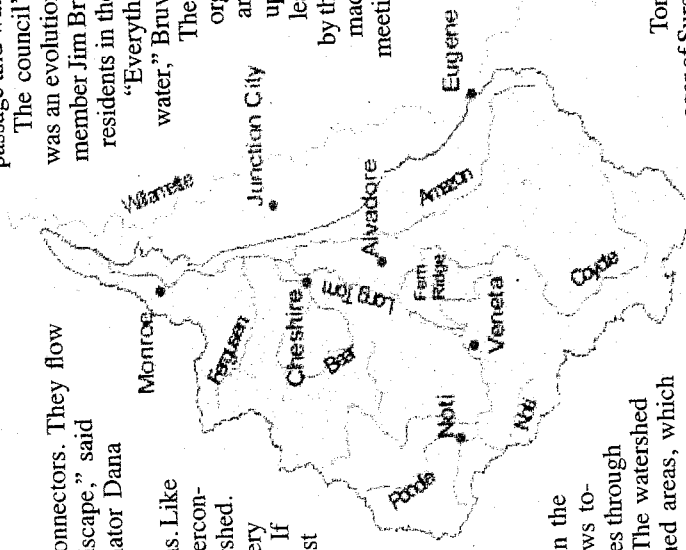
"Everything we considered important was tied to water," Bruvold said.

The watershed council began as a volunteer-run organization. Today, three paid staff members are overseen by a steering committee made up of landowners, educators and community leaders. Committee membership is represented by the three major sub-watersheds. Decisions are made by consensus only, even when it brings meetings to a halt.

"The message from the start was neighbors talking to neighbors about water," Bruvold said.

It remains so today. Restoration projects are possible only to the extent that landowners agree to grant access. They are less inclined to do so if they feel their livelihoods threatened by regulations.

Tom Hunton, a Junction City farmer and manager of SureCrop Farm Services, said in the past, farmers have been apprehensive of state-employed biologists.



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"Five or six years ago, if you asked the average landowner to let somebody from Fish and Wildlife or the Bureau of Land Management on your place, they'd say no," Hunton said.

However, Hunton sees the council as a bridge between farmers and government resources. He said the council has helped farmers realize that biologists "aren't out there to put a fence around your place and say you can't farm it again."

"Our monitoring program is meant to emphasize collectively how humans are affecting water quality," said Cindy Thieman, projects and monitoring coordinator for the council.

The council reaches out to landowners through its watershed enhancement program. The purpose of the program is to share water quality data with individual landowners in the privacy of their homes.

"If you call a public meeting and say, 'I'm going to tell you what to do about all the problems in your creek,' they're just going to fight. If they invite you into their home, it's a totally different attitude," Gary's not the jerk from the agency. Gary can help," Erickson said.

"Gary" is Gary Gallovich, a former biologist from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. The council introduced Gallovich to a group of landowners near Fer-

guson Creek in 2002. Some areas of the stream showed signs of erosion, high levels of *E. coli* bacteria and high temperatures, which can be lethal for trout.

Gallovich looked at each property and made suggestions that took landowner needs into account. It was a prime example of the council building trust by empathizing with landowner needs.

"They all had a stake in Ferguson Creek, so a lot of the discussion was about the landowners themselves," Gallovich said.

It started with a single landowner who agreed to host a meeting with other landowners in the area — neighbors talking to neighbors about water.

Gallovich, who has since moved into an administrative role at ODFW, recalled the council's role as facilitator.

"By the time I went out there to visit with those folks, it was clear they had a lot of trust in the council," Gallovich said. "It was unique that we had such a large group of people in such a small, localized area."

The council secured the necessary funding, dealt with permitting issues and recruited volunteer labor. Today, there are five ongoing projects on Ferguson Creek, which include the excavation and riparian planting of streamside terraces on the property of Allen and Wanda Bartlett.



Photo by Ben Myers

Jim Bruvold has worked with the council since its inception.

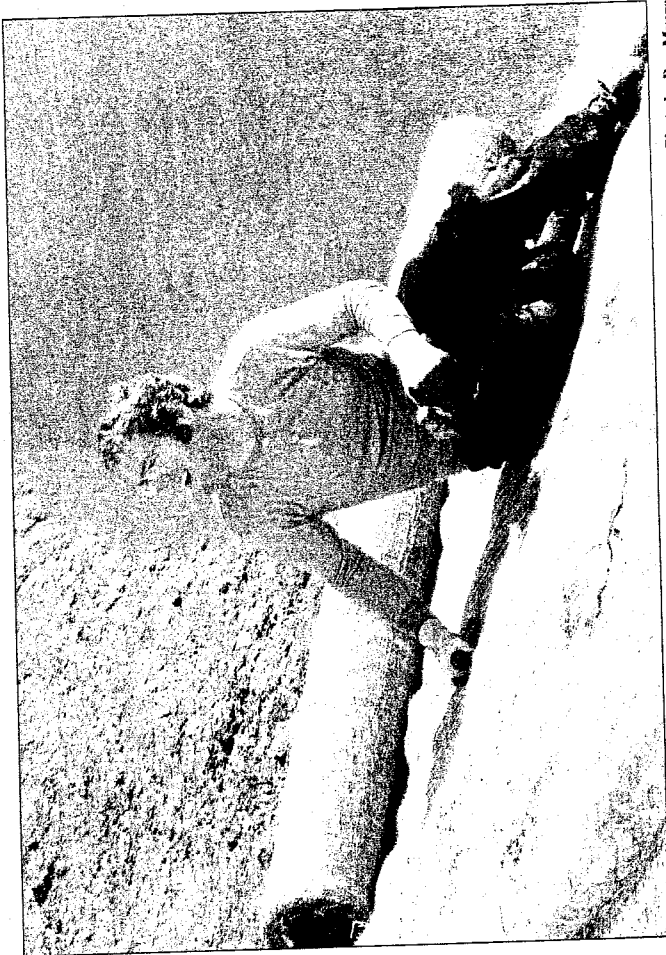


Photo by Ben Myers

Volunteer Chris Carlson takes a break from driving stakes into erosion fabric.

## Long Tom Watershed Facts

The Long Tom River and the surrounding watershed provide a multitude of benefits including: productive forest and farm lands, recreational opportunities, and habitat for cutthroat trout, blue heron, western pond turtle and many sensitive plants. Those seeking more information about the watershed and restoration projects can contact the Long Tom Watershed Council located at 751 South Danebo Ave. in Eugene, or call 683-6578, or visit [www.longtom.org](http://www.longtom.org).

Taking time to educate is fundamental to the council's mission.

"Let's go ahead and take the time so it continues through the generations," she said. "The idea is for this to be a natural thing that happens."

In the mean time, the council is learning about new threats, such as toxic and chemical pollutants. It will address these problems as it always has: through consensus among all stakeholders.

Erickson is adamant about staying small. The council can't maintain the personal relationships at the heart of its work if staff "assumes a life of its own," she said.

In fact, she looks forward to the day when the council is no longer necessary. The council is a vehicle for change, she said, helping people recognize that water quality is in the hands of the community.

"We wanted it, but we didn't go out searching for it. They came to us," Wanda said last Saturday, as she watched a group of volunteers spread erosion fabric across her newly terraced stream.

Thieman and assistant coordinator Jenna Garmon supervised the project. They expected eight volunteers and worried about a rainout, but they were pleasantly surprised when 13 people showed up on a sunny morning.

Most of the volunteers, dressed in layers and anticipating rain, had shed their jackets and sweaters by the time the work was completed three hours later.

Afterward, they sprawled on the muddy banks of the stream and feasted on a heaping plate of nachos courtesy of Wanda Bartlett. No one was in a rush to leave, even as rain clouds finally appeared.

The council's steering committee will become a board of directors when the council incorporates into a formal nonprofit organization later

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# WEST Lane NEWS

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—Jim Bruvold



Photo by Ben Myers

**Cindy Thieman demonstrates how to maneuver across the banks of Ferguson Creek without falling down.**