

Monroe and Long Tom Watershed Council: considering options

By E. Lee

Tribune News

Long Tom Watershed Council hosted a well-attended public meeting at Monroe Community Library on Thursday, June 8. The gathering focused on several topics related to the watershed council's ongoing project to identify opportunities for improvements all along the lower portion of the Long Tom River. This is the third public meeting to consider ways to improve habitat and watershed quality in the river, including its passage through Monroe and over the dam, or drop structure, here.

The watershed council project, funded through grants and private donations, coincides with strategic planning by the Army Corps of Engineers and the City of Monroe. The Army Corps manages the Long Tom River with Fern Ridge Dam for flood control. The City of Monroe is planning revitalization efforts that include considering the poten-

tial opportunities that the Long Tom River provides. With these three organizations working together and soliciting public input, all options are being considered and opportunities are being recognized for coordinating and collaboration.

Two presentations at the June 8 public meeting gave attendees background information and the opportunity to ask questions about the significance of the Long Tom for native fish and the opportunities that exist to improve watershed quality.

The first presentation featured award-winning OSU educator, Stan Gregory, a fisheries biologist. He described the many species of important native fish, including Juvenile Chinook Salmon and Cutthroat Trout, that rely on tributaries of the Willamette River such as the Long Tom River.

Gregory noted that the Long Tom River is an important tributary of the Willamette Basin and plays a vital role in the life histories of na-



Cameron Bishop of the Army Corps of Engineers, Cindy Canter from the Monroe City Council, and Dave Claborn of Monroe Public Works discuss options for improvements along the Long Tom River in Monroe.

tive fish. Because the Long Tom is a lowland river, during winter flooding it provides a refuge for fish, especially juvenile fish which move

into its slow moving tributaries and channels. For example, Juvenile Chinook Salmon that are spawned in the McKenzie basin move out

into the Willamette as they mature. During winter, these immature fish

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escape intense flood currents in the Willamette by taking refuge in shallow eddies along the edge of the Long Tom River.

Gregory described nineteen native fish species that rely on the Long Tom River for at least part of their life cycle. He noted that the options for Long Tom River improvements being considered by the community are important to the fish and other aquatic life. These improvements include efforts to make use of the past history of the river.

Historically, the Long Tom meandered in a winding path toward the Willamette River. In the 1940's the Army Corp straightened the river, cutting off 13 miles of channel segments. Most of these historic channel segments are on private farmland and can be identified using aerial photography.

Reconnecting these channels to the main stem of the river is known to have a beneficial impact on flood control, fish, and watershed quali-

ty. The watershed council's project goal is to identify sites along the lower Long Tom where reconnecting the channel to the main stem would have no negative impact for the land owner, and then to work with land owners to identify specific opportunities and willing partners. Two of those historic channels occur near the Monroe City Park and involve the Monroe drop structure.

Denise Hoffert, a local consultant, was also on hand to contribute information about related watershed projects on similar streams in the Willamette Basin and their impact when complete. Hoffert noted that the presence of the drop structure, or dam, in Monroe is known to be a barrier to the movement of fish and sediments at a key location that is close to the Willamette River.

Hoffert described projects that she managed in other communities such as Brownsville that decided to remove drop structures in the river. In each case, the community deci-

sion to remove the dam was made after thorough consideration with help from their Calapooia Watershed Council, and then the watershed council moved on to help fund engineering research at the three site to identify specific goals and requirements. This was followed by the actual work, which again, the watershed partnered with the community to obtain funding and support.

The goal of the Long Tom Watershed Council's current project is to identify locations all along the lower Long Tom River where landowners would be willing to partner with the council to reconnect old river channels to the main stem of the river. Simultaneously, the goal of the Army Corps is to identify and prioritize maintenance opportunities along the Long Tom including the drop structure in Monroe, and the goal of the City of Monroe is to consider options for the river that may impact revitalization efforts.

Because of the collaboration between the Long Tom Watershed Council, Army Corps of Engineers, City of Monroe, other agencies and landowners that was evident at the June 8 meeting, each of the potential opportunities along the river will receive unique consideration and many opportunities for public input. Any projects that develop from this scoping effort will also receive continuing support from multiple sources.

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