

Northwest Power Planning Council
851 SW 6th Avenue, Suite 1100
Portland, OR 97204

Kendra Phillips:

At the request of Karen Strohmeier, Cascade Pacific RC & D Coordinator, I write this letter in support of her proposed project 31012 entitled “Leveraging Conservation Easements for Fish and Wildlife in the Willamette Basin.” I strongly support the value of conservation easements for re-establishing valuable riparian and floodplain functions in the reach of the Willamette River between Harrisburg and Corvallis.

Recently, the Pacific Northwest Ecosystem Research Consortium has assembled information on the historical and current channels and forests of the Willamette River from Eugene to Portland. The Consortium has worked with local stakeholders to identify plausible future land management scenarios for the river and the basin over the next 50 years. Through these efforts, the Consortium identified the section of the Willamette River between Albany and Eugene as one of the more important areas for aquatic biodiversity.

This upper river section exhibits relatively complex, dynamic channels with some intact floodplains and forests. These conditions contribute greatly to aquatic and riparian habitats of the Willamette River. Side-channels and backwaters offer refuge to fish during flood events. Riparian forests provide organic matter to the river on which aquatic bugs feed and aquatic plants live. Riparian trees that fall into the river also provide structural complexity to the channels and floodplains, and habitats for aquatic species.

However, much of the historical complexity has been lost over the last century through human alterations such as channel control, flow modification, land conversion, and channel cutting through narrowed forest margins along the river. Our data indicate that fish richness and in-river wood density are greater in unaltered sections of the river (Figure 1, D and E, attached).

Private landowners in this portion of the river have developed a restoration plan in response to the Consortium’s findings, their need to protect valuable croplands adjacent to the river, and a desire to protect or improve salmon habitats adjacent to their lands. We have indicated to these landowners that they can achieve greater ecological benefits from riparian and floodplain restoration actions than other reaches because of the inherent dynamic channels and the extensive floodplain potential.

Offering permanent easements to landowners holding property adjacent to the river would enable long-term management of a meander corridor to allow the river to move laterally, re-establish some of its historic complexity, and rejuvenate floodplain functions critical for recruitment of native shrubs and trees, and for aquatic habitat.

I reviewed floodplain restoration projects in the Sacramento River and Sacramento Delta for CALFED. The practices and easements included in this proposal for "Leveraging Conservation Easements for Fish and Wildlife in the Willamette Basin" are consistent with the restoration efforts in the \$100 million restoration program in California. This is an excellent opportunity to protect and restore multiple resources in one of the critical habitats of the state of Oregon.

Sincerely,

Dr. Stan Gregory
Department of Fisheries & Wildlife
Oregon State University

Attachment

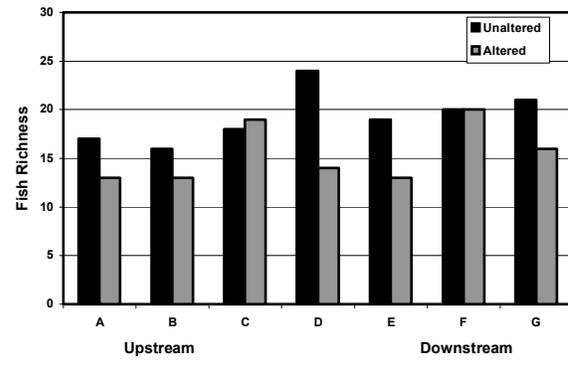
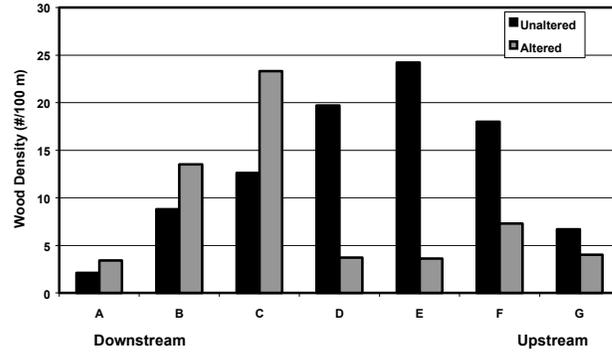


Figure 1. Comparisons of wood densities and fish richness in paired sites of intact floodplain forest and reaches converted to agriculture or residential use in the Willamette (preliminary data from Gregory, OSU).