

S. Fork Whipple Creek *by Shelley Matthews*

YEAR
6

In Clark County, Washington, just southeast of the corner of NW 21st Ave. and NW 149th St.

Once a splendid climax forest and hunting ground for the Chinook people, the south fork of Whipple Creek and its adjacent riparian zone suffered from land changes that lead to mass wasting, degraded banks that lacked surface vegetation, a badly eroded stream bed, siltation, and blocked spawning grounds. Locals reported that a good run of cutthroat trout used to spawn in the creek behind Alki Middle School during the 50s and 60s, but logging, railroads, unconstrained public access, and farming and agricultural practices had reduced the area to a mere semblance of its former grandeur.

The south fork of Whipple Creek currently runs through a suburban/rural area bounded by a public school complex buffer (Chinook Elementary, Alki Middle School, and Skyview High School) to the south and by expansive athletic fields and agricultural and residential areas to the north. The site is owned by the Vancouver School District and is designated as an outdoor “classroom” for K-12 students, a refuge for wildlife, and a place for public enjoyment, appreciation, and co-stewardship.

The Vancouver School District spearheaded this project to restore ¼ mile stretch of the south fork of Whipple Creek to its former natural state, to create habitat for all wildlife on the south fork, and to create a sense of stewardship among students and community members for their finite natural resources. A primary component of the plan was to plant several thousand native plants (red current, Western bleeding heart, Hooker’s fairy-bell, Dogwood, elderberry, honeysuckle, ocean spray, Oregon grape, Western red cedar, Western hemlock, Oregon ash, hazelnut, fern, etc.) within the Creek’s riparian zone. Barren areas were covered with forest duff to foster topsoil formation. In addition, the restoration team encouraged protection for sensitive areas by building natural barricades along the trail and posting signs. They also repaired vandalized bridges, installed bridges over new areas of high runoff, renovated trails, and sprayed signs on grates over street drains to help keep harmful chemicals out of Whipple Creek.

Benefits

- Restored the South Fork of Whipple Creek to its former natural state.
- Increased and enhanced habitat available to wildlife.
- The restored riparian zone acts as a buffer from the surrounding developed land, reduces erosion and sediment discharge into the stream, improves soil conditions, provides habitat for resident wildlife and cooler water temperatures and healthier stream habitat for fish.
- Provided students with the knowledge and skills necessary to take over as future stewards.
- Developed community awareness of and enlisted community support for the restoration of this local natural habitat.

Budget

Total Proposed – \$20,890

Total Actual – \$19,925 (estimate)

Metro/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant award – \$1,895

Grant Dollars Spent - \$930

Helpful Hints – what worked, what didn't

- Inform and train students so they know exactly what is expected of them. Teach them to protect steep slopes and other sensitive areas. The listening skills of middle schoolers tends to be inconsistent, so provide constant reminders to keep them on task in the field.
- Consider planting vegetation in February and March when students are anxious to get outdoors after a long winter in the classroom.
- Woody plant material did very well in the sunnier locations and herbaceous plant materials were successful along the riparian zone.

Partners

Alki Middle School

Boy Scouts

Clark County Public Works

Clark County Water Quality, Educational Department

Environmental Center

Friends of Whipple Creek

Nature Scaping, SW Washington

Skyview High School

Vancouver Audubon Society

Vancouver School District

Contact

Syrece McLean, Resource Coordinator, Vancouver Public Schools, (360) 737-4231

Timeline and Tasks

November 1996

Mapped and surveyed Whipple Creek

December 1996

Established a nursery of Douglas fir on site for future transplanting, tested water quality

1996-97 School Yr.

Tested water quality, evaluated fish and macroinvertebrate populations, picked up litter, improved trail conditions at reach 5-6 and 9-10 on Whipple Creek behind Alki Middle School, repaired vandalized bridges, installed bridges over new areas of high runoff, developed a new trail, built steps in steep trail areas, planted trees

1997-98 School Yr.

Tested water quality, mapped and surveyed restoration site, picked up litter, assessed macroinvertebrate and fish populations

Spring 1998

Planted native herbaceous species, covered a bare area with forest duff, designed and installed signs to remind the public to stay on trails and protect sensitive areas, reviewed street drains and sprayed grates to help keep harmful chemicals out of Whipple Creek. surveyed creek for accessibility by migrating fish, trained students to design informational watershed pamphlet for release to the public.