Fairview Creek Headwaters

by Shelley Matthews

YEAR 5

in Southwest Community Park in Gresham, located on the north side of Powell Blvd., between 182nd and Birdsdale Aves.

BEFORE

Drainage ditches quickly routed water off of site and riparian area was dominated by reed canary grass

AFTER

Drainage ditches were replaced with a meandering channel to enhance the wetland, and native trees and shrubs were planted to diversity vegetation at the site.

The project site is a 17-acre wetland at the headwaters of Fairview Creek, within part of a 37-acre parcel purchased by the City of Gresham in 1990 and managed as Southwest Community Park. The property was formerly used as farmland, primarily for livestock grazing, and much of the wetland consisted of invasive reed canary grass. In 1993, as part of the initial efforts to restore the park to a more natural state, two lateral drainage ditches running across the wetlands were reconstructed into a slower moving meandering channel. The project goal was to continue efforts to restore and enhance the degraded wetland and diversify wildlife habitat by reestablishing a more diverse native plant community throughout the wetland.

The project was designed to compliment previous plantings and is resulting in the re-creation of a tree canopy composed of black cottonwood, alder, and other native trees and shrubs along both sides of the 1,500-foot meandering channel. During the initial planting, volunteers and EnviroCorps members planted trees, installed beaver guards, and placed Kraft mulching squares around plants to limit competition by reed canary grass as trees established themselves.

On May 2, 1997, the City of Gresham sponsored a "Wild Wetlands Celebration" to celebrate Oregon Watershed Month, to thank the Centennial School District students for their contribution to the project, and to conduct additional restoration activities that included improving amphibian habitat, establishing vegetation transects, maintaining vegetation, identifying native plants, monitoring water levels, and photomonitoring.

Ongoing monitoring and maintenance was key to the project's success. EnviroCorp's crews watered plants, mulched, pruned, and controlled reed canary grass during the summers of 1996 and 1997. Lynch Meadows Elementary School students continued to monitor and maintain the plantings in coordination with the city of Gresham; they studied specific monitoring areas and photomonitoring points established at the Wild Wetlands Celebration. In addition, City of Gresham staff periodically monitored the site and a departmental volunteer program was used to monitor and maintain efforts at the headwaters when needed.

Future plans for this site include interpretive trails with boardwalks and viewing areas which will assist in bringing more of the public close to the resource and will help to increase their appreciation of this "wetland oasis" and its environmental importance.

Benefits

- Restored and enhanced 17 acres of wetland and increased and diversified wildlife habitat.
- Planted over 800 native trees that created shade, promoted groundwater infiltration and helped eradicate reed canary grass, lower water temperatures, and improve water quality.
- Installed large woody debris to create additional amphibian and reptile habitat.
- Decreased invasive grass cover by 30%.
- Observed over 30 species of birds and mammals.
- Increased public awareness of the importance of wetlands, native plants, and urban water and the value of preserving these resources.

Budget

Total Proposed – $13,500
Total Actual – $20,776
Metro/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant award – $6,000
Grant Dollars Spent - $6,000

Helpful Hints – what worked, what didn't

- Establish lots of partners; teachers and students are especially valuable resources.
- Adequately address watering; it's very important during the plant establishment period.
- Find candidates for monitoring and maintenance at the beginning of the project, before the plants are in the ground.
- Plant early successional trees (e.g., red alder), and then fill in with understory species.
- Provide one crew leader for every five children volunteering.
- Volunteers appreciate "real jobs" like developing planting plans and coordinating planting logistics, but keep an eye on their progress and set definite dates for drafts to be submitted.
- To prepare for planting day, breakdown the project site into smaller sections with defined team leaders; the more team leaders in each section the better. Clearly mark and flag plants and planting locations using color codes. Use nametags with color dots to match volunteers up with team leaders and planting sections.
- Do not plant in the floodway in fall; wait until spring to ensure adequate root growth that will hold plants in place during high water.
- Remove reed canary grass from within a foot of new plantings so they do not get girdled by mice, and put mulch around the plants to help slow some growth of the invasive grass.
- If mice do become a problem, put rodent guards around the base of the plantings; aluminum foil can work as a cost-effective quick fix in an emergency.
- For temperature water quality limited streams, focus planting on south side.
- Invite the media. Planting events are great photo opportunities.

Partners

Centennial School District
City of Gresham
East Multnomah Soil and Water conservation District
EnviroCorps
Fairview Creek Watershed Conservation Group
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Neighborhood Green Corps

Contact

Amy Cortese, City of Gresham, Department of Environmental Services, (503) 669-2657

Timeline and Tasks

November 1995	Metro / USFWS grant awarded
November 1995 – April 1996	EnviroCorps internship (planting plan)
April 27, 1996	Planted
May – September 1996	Maintained and watered plants
September – October 1996	Established maintenance program with Centennial SD
November 1996 - March 1997	In-class presentations
October 1996 – May 1997	Maintained and monitored site
March 1997	EnviroCorps staked willows
May 2, 1997	"Wild Wetlands Celebration"
July – October 1997	Maintained and watered plants