



Ellsworth Creek Restoration

New Fish Passage Opportunities in a Willapa Bay Tributary



The Ellsworth Creek Fish Passage Improvement Project is a collaborative effort between The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other partners.

Native Fish Benefit While Road Failure Risks, Sediment Impacts Are Reduced

The Ellsworth Creek Fish Passage Improvement project eliminated one of the last remaining fish passage barriers within the Ellsworth Creek Watershed. This new pathway opened up in southwest Washington in The Nature Conservancy's Ellsworth Creek Preserve adjacent to the the Service's Willapa National Wildlife Refuge and Willapa Bay.

The project re-opened approximately six-tenths of mile of habitat for spawning and rearing of native fish such as chum and coho salmon, coastal cutthroat trout, and Western brook lamprey. Partners removed over 30,000 cubic yards of fill and the only outfall barrier identified in the Ellsworth Creek Watershed: an undersized culvert. This culvert blocked both up- and downstream passage at the base of a small sub-watershed which has its confluence in the tidal estuary of Ellsworth Creek. The restoration effort should

reduce road failure risks and sediment impacts to the watershed.

Supporting Landscape-Level Restoration

The Nature Conservancy manages the 8,000-acre Ellsworth Creek Preserve using a landscape-based forest management strategy. This project is a continuation of an ongoing effort by The Nature Conservancy to reduce impacts from forest roads. The basic elements of this larger effort include:

- Decommissioning high-risk or unnecessary roads adjacent to streams
- Realigning road networks to safer, ridge-top positions, and
- Upgrading remaining roads to minimize hydrological connection between roads and streams.



The Ellsworth Creek project also complements other restoration efforts in the Willapa Bay Watershed. The Nature Conservancy collaborated with Willapa National Wildlife Refuge to remove fish

This culvert formerly blocked passage for native fish on Ellsworth Creek, a South Willapa Bay tributary. Credit: Miranda Plumb/USFWS



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passage barriers and high risk forest roads from their adjacent ownerships in the South Willapa Bay. Also, since 2003, they have successfully implemented over nine miles of road decommissioning together.



Upstream view of Ellsworth Creek during restoration. The culvert and over 30,000 pounds of fill were removed; logs were placed to improve in-stream habitat. Credit: Tom Kollash

An active partner, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides technical assistance and project funding to support acquisition, planning, and restoration and recovery efforts in South Willapa Bay. The Service has invested more than \$300,000 in restoration efforts in the watershed through various programs including Jobs in the Woods, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, and the National Fish Passage Program.

Improving Species Resiliency in a Changing Climate

The Ellsworth Creek project restores natural flow patterns and sediment transport, allowing finer sediments downstream while improving spawning conditions. Coho salmon and coastal cutthroat trout that depend upon Ellsworth Creek directly benefit.

The culvert and fill removal also reopens access to the Willapa Bay estuary for juvenile fish. This creates broadly improved rearing conditions for coho salmon, Pacific lamprey, coastal cutthroat trout and resident species.

The project also provides benefits that will increase the resilience of this coastal habitat to projected climate change impacts. By improving fish passage in this reach, the project increased habitat connectivity and secured transitional habitat that will be available as sea level rises.



Pacific lamprey are a native species that directly benefit from Ellsworth Creek Improvement Project habitat improvements and re-opened fish passage. Credit: Freshwaters Illustrated

A Multi-Party Effort

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, the Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board, and the Willapa Bay Regional Fisheries Enhancement Group worked together to support the Ellsworth Creek project. Their partnership provided the project with financial and technical assistance.

