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# News Release



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## Crims Island Environmental Restoration Project Makes Progress

Portland, Ore.— Ninety-four acres of tidal marsh and channels and 115 acres of forest on the lower Columbia River’s Crims Island are being restored to provide better habitat for young salmon, a group of government agencies and conservation groups announced today.

The three-year, \$3.7 million project – officially known as the Crims Island Section 536 Environmental Restoration Project – was made possible thanks to a joint effort by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), American Rivers, and the Columbia Land Trust.

Actual construction work at Crims Island began in late August 2004 but was cut short due to heavy rains on the construction site. Construction resumed in July 2005 with the excavation of two feet of soil from a reed canary grass-dominated marsh to restore daily inundation and allow for development of a native emergent marsh plant community.

Adjacent upland habitat, currently used for cattle pasture, will be used as a placement site for material excavated from the reed canary grass-dominated marsh. Once construction for the tidal marsh is completed, the upland area will be converted to native riparian forest habitat through planting and natural seeding.

The tidal marsh restoration will provide juvenile rearing and foraging habitat for fall chinook, chum and coho salmon. Other salmonids, including Snake River sockeye, steelhead and coastal cutthroat trout will benefit from restored linkages in the Columbia River’s estuarine food web. The project also will provide habitat for other wildlife, including waterfowl, bald eagles, Columbian white-tailed deer, and migratory songbirds.

Crims Island, 48 miles downriver from Portland in Columbia County, Ore., is a unit of the Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the Columbian white-tailed deer, which is administered by FWS.

“Without any one of the primary partners, this project wouldn’t be possible,” said Doug Putman, the Corps’ project manager for the effort. “An exciting thing to note about this project is the success of collaborative efforts with disparate organizations. It shows what we can do when we all develop common goals and get behind something constructive,” he said.

“This project lays the ground work for future restoration projects,” Putman said.

This project will guide tidal marsh restoration elsewhere in the lower river, said Charles Stenvall of FWS.

“We have never tried anything of this size and scope before, so the information we gain at Crims Island will influence the design of future restoration projects on other refuge islands,” he said.

“If we want future generations to enjoy abundant wild salmon and steelhead runs in the Columbia River, we must focus on restoring habitat,” said David Moryc of American Rivers. “This collaborative effort is an excellent model and we hope to see more science-based habitat restoration occurring across the lower Columbia estuary,” he said.

The federal-private partnership began in August 2003 when the Vancouver-based Columbia Land Trust acquired 451 acres on Crims Island with funding assistance from BPA.

The Land Trust stepped in and purchased an option to acquire the property one day before it was slated to be sold at auction.

"A private donor gave us the \$10,000 option money which gave us the time to work with the other partners to raise the full purchase price," said Glenn Lamb, executive director of Columbia Land Trust.

“This private donor, and the private landowner's willingness to work with the Land Trust have made this entire project possible,” he said.

The Land Trust then donated the property to FWS to manage as part of the Julia Butler Hansen National Wildlife Refuge for the Columbian white-tailed deer. The Corps is providing the federal funding to complete the restoration on the property in partnership with the FWS. American Rivers helped secure the authority and federal funding for the work.

“This project is a good blending of federal agencies cooperating with each other and private partners on a project where we can bring about significant habitat restoration for a number of species all at one time,” said Cathy Tortorici, Columbia River Estuary Coordinator for National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration’s Fisheries Division. (NOAA Fisheries issues the biological opinions that guide restoration efforts of the BPA, USFWS and the Corps in the lower Columbia related to changes in the system brought about by hydropower and Corps activities).

The authority for the restoration study was obtained through section 536 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000.

In the President’s fiscal year 2005 budget, the Section 536 Program was funded for continuation with \$4 million. The primary purpose of the program was to carry out ecosystem restoration projects necessary to protect, monitor and restore fish and wildlife habitat based on recommendations made by the Lower Columbia River Estuary Program.

The Columbia River estuary provides refuge, food and habitat for juvenile salmon as they make their transition from freshwater to saltwater. Scientists agree that restoration of the Columbia River estuary is needed to help recover healthy sustainable wild salmon stocks.

Historically the Columbia River produced more wild salmon than any river system in the world. Today less than one percent of that number return to their natal waters and 12 species of Columbia and Snake River salmon are currently listed under the Endangered Species Act. The Columbia River estuary has lost over 70 percent of its historical habitat (50 percent since 1950) primarily due to construction of agricultural levees in floodplain habitat and to floodplain development (the estuary is home to a growing population of over two

Local communities from Portland, Ore., and Vancouver, Wash., downriver through Brownsmead, Ore., and Grays River, Wash., all the way to Astoria, Ore., are involved in restoration projects to improve water quality and aid salmon and wildlife.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.