

# North Fork Currents

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July—September 2011

## Inside this issue:

Watershed ( cont. )	2
Lunch & Learn	2
Wet & Wild	3
Juniper Invasion	3
About Us	4

"In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous."

~ Aristotle

## So What is a Watershed Anyway?

By Elaine Eisenbraun

**B**enjamin Bonneville, Enoch Steen, Sacagawea, David Douglas, Joe Meek.

Who were these people? Each was an adventurer, an explorer, seeking to answer questions and solve some of the problems of their day. They ventured into unknown territory simply wondering about what they were seeing and questioning how each plant, animal, or element interfaced with its surrounds.

I'm guessing you too have dreamed of pursuing a great wilderness adventure. So, why don't we set off on a trek together, right now, from the comfort of your chair? Let's go to the very peak of Dixie Butte.

It's early morning, in the depths of winter. You're facing west and the sun is rising behind you, warming your back – giving it that toasty feeling in contrast to the cold engulfing the rest of your body. So, stand there, bask in the rising sun and gaze across the landscape.

Before you, lies a broad valley; far below the river is steaming in warm disparity with the brisk air. To your right, runs the broken ridgeline of the Greenhorn Mountains reaching over 8000 feet at Vinegar Hill. Beyond is the Elkhorn Range and Mount Ireland. To the south, the Strawberry Mountains rise even higher and then fade to the west. What you are seeing is a long basin composed of forests, and meadows, tiny rivulets of creeks, great stone outcrops, and life. This is a watershed! And, as long as we are on an adventure let's explore it.

## Upcoming Events

**July 15** In-stream work period begins

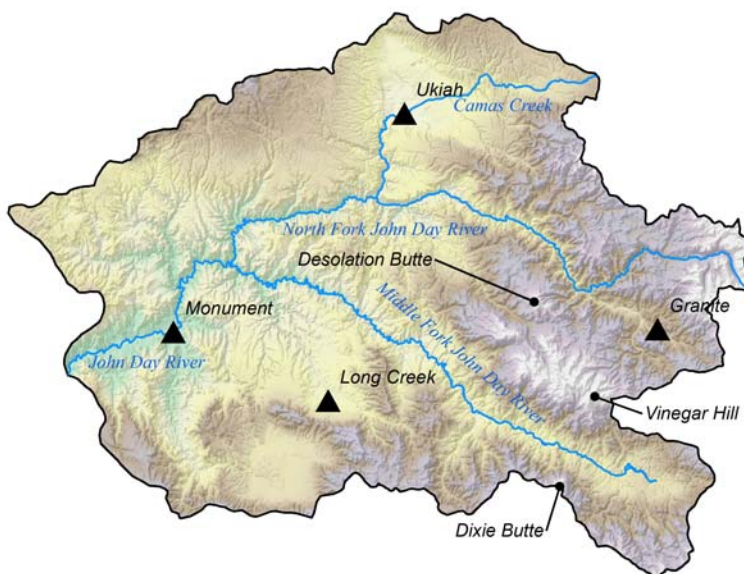
**July 19** NFJDWC meeting  
6pm at Long Creek Office

**July 19—21** Solwest Renewable Energy Fair

**Aug. 16** NFJDWC meeting  
6pm at Long Creek Office

**Sept. 20** NFJDWC meeting  
6pm at Long Creek Office

## North/Middle Fork John Day Watershed Boundary



The boundaries of a watershed are determined by the shape of the land surrounding it. But a watershed is more than land and water—it's also the plants, animals, people, industries and communities within its boundary.

Given that the early explorers traveled by self-propelled means, we'll do the same. Strap on your skis and extract yourself from that warm beam of sunshine. We're off to explore a watershed (and the good part is that it's all downhill from here).

The cold air is breezing across your bare face as you glide down the slope. A red tail hawk screams out overhead and your skis cross over elk tracks left in the snow – some of the wildlife that are part of the watershed. Skirting between the trees, we come upon an abandoned logging road – also a part of the watershed. Let's follow it along the hillside to the corral at the road junction. In late fall, cattle will be gathered here before heading home for the winter. They, too, are a part of the watershed, as are the riders who put them out in the spring, check on them throughout the summer and gather them again at the end of the grazing season.

(continued on page 2)

## What's a Watershed ? *(continued)*



Dixie Butte & the Middle Fork uplands. From mountain top to river valley, everything in our watershed is connected.

As you push off from the corral, again gliding through the forest, the trees begin to thin out and fir trees give way to pines. The watershed is changing its face. Here, the interactions between water, plant, snow, soil, and animal are somewhat different than they were on the peak. There is a rivulet to your right. Let's follow it to where it joins a larger stream and eventually becomes Little Butte Creek. Listen to the churning of the water over icy stones. This intersection, like the many creek branches all through the valley, plays a vital role in the complex activity of the watershed. All up and down the basin streams like this are carrying nutrients leached from the soil, flooding their banks in the spring and depositing those same nutrients in the valley floor.

But, we have a long way to ski today, and as we continue downstream we leave the trees behind. Once again we are warmed by the sun as it begins to melt the new fallen snow. Stop. Did you hear that splash in the stream? The melting snow has eroded a chunk of dirt and rock from that steep face on the other bank. The gravel will lay here in the stream, but the finer soil will be following us down to the river. No time to waste, we need to make it to the Middle Fork before the snow melts any more. What, your skis are sticking a bit? Well, what's an adventure without a little struggle anyway?

Onward, and at last you reach the confluence of the creek with the Middle Fork of the John Day. Look back at your ski tracks. They have just

traced the path of a watershed from ridgeline down to a common body of water. You have seen the complexity of this system. The geology, the soil, the plants, the animals, the industry, all contribute to this cycle of interaction. From mountain top to river valley, everything is connected in a watershed.

And, one last question before we get into the car, drive to town, and have a hot cup of coffee at the café (all parts of the watershed). I've often wondered: Where does the word "watershed" come from? Is it a place where the water is shed off the hill, or is it a little house that holds the water? I'll leave that one up to you.

For now, we've had our adventure like the explorers of old. We've queried our experiences and perhaps solved some curiosities. We've seen the watershed from top to bottom and inside and out.

Every day at NFJDWC, we seek to answer questions and solve problems. We strive to understand the watershed as a complex interface of environment, industry and home-place. We hope you'll join us in wondering and in solving problems, and particularly in enjoying the uniqueness of this watershed we all share.



Elaine Eisenbraun is the new NFJDWC executive director. In addition to building on our natural resource work and landowner collaborations, she hopes to expand our education and outreach efforts.



NFJDWC staff and Long Creek students make antennae after learning insects have them, but bugs don't.

### LUNCH, LEARN AND LAUGH

Did you know that all bugs are insects, but not all insects are bugs? Well, the Long Creek "Lunch and Learn" bunch does, and not only that, they can tell the difference between the two. There's lots to learn in the NFJDWC backyard when we host "Lunch and Learn" as part of the Oregon Summer Meal Program. Educational fun and games help keep kids active, while teaching them about the watershed in which they live.

Join us Wednesdays at noon. It's free for kids under 18 and just \$2 for adults. Call ahead and we'll be sure to have a sack lunch waiting for you.



"Bug Dude" Dr. Jamin Eisenbach, entomology professor at Eastern Michigan University and summer Middle Fork resident, shows the Lunch and Learn bunch how to identify various insects.

## Wet and Wild



Rafters on the Middle Fork enjoy the unusually high summer flow.

It was water, water everywhere on May 16 when the Middle Fork broke an 81-year record at the Ritter gauge with a reading of 5,630 cubic feet per second. That same day the North Fork gauge near Monument topped out at 28,500 cubic feet, and at Spray the main stem reached 31,700 cubic feet.

A section of Forest Road 10 washed out at the confluence of Bruin Creek and Desolation Creek, when a plugged culvert created a whirlpool effect and undermined the road. The Middle Fork spilled over County Road 20 in several places, although the road remained open, while the Kimberly-Long Creek Highway was temporarily closed due to high water.

Jeff Neal from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) is normally busy with redd surveys this time of year, but has done a lot of rescheduling, as all of ODFW's screw fish traps have required repair. The Clyde Holiday state park was flooded all the way up to the teepees. I run there often and had wet running shoes for a week.

Most rivers are still above normal for this time of year. The property damage and agricultural interruptions have presented problems for many landowners. Still, it's been exciting to witness these record flows and see such an abundance of vegetation. On my drives to and from work the grass grows taller each day in fields that were under water a month ago. It'll be a good year for hay, and a great year for cattle, deer and elk to get nice and fat by the fall.

~ Erik Rook

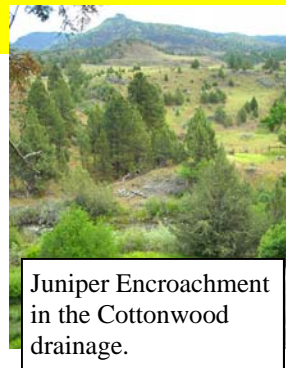


Erik Rook is Monitoring / GIS Specialist for the NFJDWC, but we haven't seen much of him since the weather changed and he's able to get out in the field.

## Juniper Invasion

It's estimated that juniper has spread 10-fold in eastern Oregon since the mid-1800's. Most of us have probably seen photographs of the John Day Valley in the early days before the hills were covered in juniper. But you don't have to go back that far to see how serious the problem has become.

While moving cattle a few weeks ago I was struck by how dramatically the landscape I rode through had been changed by juniper. In just the last 20 years the trees have grown so thick and dense there are now vast areas where



Juniper Encroachment in the Cottonwood drainage.

nothing but juniper grows. No grass, no shrubs, nothing for cattle, deer or elk to eat. There is only dry, eroded soil, already turning to dust even in a year as wet as this one.

Soil erosion, reduced forage, less water, altered plant and wildlife habitat, and increased fire hazard are all reasons why so many landowners come to the NFJDWC for help with juniper removal. It's an enormous job and grant money is tight. More and more of our funders want us to take a "landscape-scale" approach, involving multiple landowners and multiple agencies over a large geographical area.

Sharing resources and working across property boundaries can have a broader impact on the overall juniper problem, but this approach is not always possible. So as we work to build partnerships and develop funding for landscape-scale juniper removal, we also look for ways to help individual landowners with individual projects. We currently have a small amount of funding available to do just that. Contact us to talk about how we may be able to help with your juniper problem.

~ Patti Hudson



Outreach Coordinator, Patti Hudson, wants landowners to know the NFJDWC is here to help.

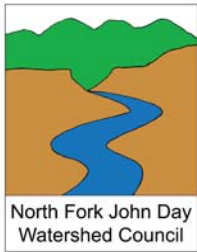
## Thanks to Our Partners

Because of their help, two irrigation projects completed last year are now using their new systems.

The Cole/Engle Irrigation Efficiency Project on Cottonwood Creek and the Neal Push-up Dam Removal Project on the North Fork John Day River were both funded by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. Other funders and partners included the landowners, NRCS, ODFW and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

## Wish List

As a private nonprofit, the NFJDWC relies on grant funding to carry out our work. Most of these monies go directly to on-the-ground projects that help area landowners better utilize their properties, while also safeguarding the waters and wildlife of our watershed. Very little of this funding goes to cover our own operational costs. Your gifts, whether cash or other items, are tax deductible and much appreciated. Here are a couple things on our wish list right now:  
Fireproof Safe  
Bookshelves



691 HWY 395 N  
PO Box 444  
Long Creek, Oregon 97856

Page 4

## *North Fork Currents*

July—September 2011

### About the North Fork John Day Watershed Council

The North Fork John Day Watershed Council was formed by local citizens in 1995 and incorporated as a non-profit 501(c)3 organization in 2006. Our mission is to plan, fund and implement programs that protect the health of our watershed, honor tribal treaty rights and provide long-term stability for the individuals and communities that rely on the watershed's natural resources. Through restoration, monitoring and outreach, we seek to foster an understanding that upland and riparian habitat improvement, weed management and other conservation efforts are vital to the social and economic fabric of the area.

Projects sponsored by the Council include, but are not limited to, upland watering system developments; irrigation diversion and efficiency projects; riparian improvements; removal of fish passage barriers; water quality monitoring; noxious weed control; educational outreach and technical assistance.

#### STAFF

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#### MEETINGS

NFJDWC meetings are open to the public and held the third Tuesday of every month at 6pm.

Contact us for agendas and exact locations.

#### BOARD

**Rick Henslee**, President, Long Creek

**Thom Bruce**, Vice President, Kimberly

**John Zakrajsek** Secretary/Treasurer, CTUIR

**Steph Charette**, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon

**Mark Rietmann**, Morrow County

**Reiba Smith**, Long Creek

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