

Within Your Reach

A publication of the Johnson Creek Watershed Council

reach: a) a portion of a stream or river b) an extent, esp. of knowledge or comprehension

Fire Leads to Chemical Spill in Johnson Creek

By Christine Hurst, Outreach and Program Coordinator

On March 15 a four-alarm fire began at Thermo Fluids, an oil recycling facility in southeast Portland off Foster Rd. The fire not only destroyed the building but led to a chemical spill in the creek. The building that burned contained a large waste oil-water separator that became overfilled during the fire suppression efforts. As firefighters fought the blaze, liquids from the site ran into the area's drainage ditch.



The March 17 Department of Environmental Quality news release stated, "Current estimates of materials released from the facility during the fire have been updated to 6,000 gallons of oil and 750 gallons of acidic material from water treatment chemicals." Attempts were made to

contain the chemicals by installing a berm and then placing vacuum pumps to suck the liquid out of the ditch. Absorbent booms were also placed in the creek, below the site, to contain oil that spilled over.

Despite all the efforts, some of the chemicals still made their way into Johnson Creek and flowed downstream. The chemicals raised the creek's acidity enough to kill fish. As a result, not only were thousands of fish killed, but 1 duck and 2 beavers were found dead along the streambank. For several days after the fire, shoreline cleanup assess-

Watershed Wide Event draws over 400 volunteers!



Volunteers headed out to 12 different sites, including this one at Eastmoreland Golf Course, to help plant trees, remove invasive plants, and learn about creek stewardship. Turn to page 4 to read all about it!

ment teams surveyed Johnson Creek from SE 101st to the confluence with the Willamette River. U.S. Fish and Wildlife reported that of the fish species the assessment teams collected, the majority were minnow species, a small percentage were Lamprey and Suckers, and 5 Salmonids were found.

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Assessing the Damage: Teams inspect the creek after the spill



Christine Hurst scans the creek

by Becky Tate, Communications and Events Coordinator

Early this spring I found myself chest-deep in Johnson Creek. In response to the fire and spill at 101st and Foster, a Data Collection and Assessment Team was formed and I joined on, eager to be of help. For three days after the fire at Freeway Land Co., I went out with two teammates to walk a section, or *reach*, of the creek. We were looking for any damage from

the fire and subsequent oil and chemical spill.

My team walked from the McLoughlin Blvd overpass to Mill Park on Linwood Ave. Though I did see plenty of evidence of damage from both the spill and from years of human impact, I also found confirmation that Johnson Creek is still a cherished and valuable natural resource.

Fish. We saw and collected many dead
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What's in Season:

Springtime in the aquatic world of Johnson Creek

by Jeff Uebel, JCWC Board Chair

I stopped outside the house to view the huge full moon rising above Mt Hood last night- and heard magic in the air! The unmistakable sound of spring- a symphony of **tree frogs** floated on the cool, clear air coming from the marshy pools in Gresham Woods. The frogs are courting, preparing to lay their eggs- March through May is a time of emergence, birth and migration in/along the stream. Throughout the length of Johnson Creek and its smallest tributaries, a host of different creatures travel and reproduce under the stream surface.

In the lower reaches of the largest streams, eggs buried in gravel riffles by **coho** and **chinook salmon** last fall, hatched during cold mid-winter flows. They are now inch-long larval fish wriggling slowly up through crevices between the rocks, then quickly seek the safety of shallow, placid pools along the creek margins to feed and rear.

Nearby, in deep swift "glides" in the mainstream, large dark twin shadows undulate side by side, hanging under the cover of a fallen tree or overhanging shrub: 8 pound **steelhead trout** have returned to spawn from ocean-wide ramblings on the currents of the North Pacific. They move to a patch of fist-sized gravel downstream of a deep pool, and the female slowly digs a depression by rolling on her side and flailing the gravel with her tail. When the depression

is a couple feet in diameter, she lies in the hole and releases some of her 2000 eggs- the male immediately follows and covers her eggs with milt. She moves upstream and begins digging again, covering her eggs while repeating the cycle of excavation and egg laying several more times. The young will quickly hatch, emerging by June-July to join the coho fry along the stream margins.

Cutthroat trout, both resident and sea-run forms, are also migrating upstream to spawn high in headwater reaches of the stream. Careful watching at small falls (at log jams, culverts or cascades) in the spring-time can be rewarded by the surprising leaping performance of an 8-12" fish. Spawning behavior is the same as their larger "cousins", the steelhead, although cutthroat prefer smaller gravel and dig smaller redds (nests).

The high, warm flood flows following late spring rainstorms trigger migration urges for the young fish as well. Coho salmon, steelhead and sea-run cutthroat trout spend 1 to 3 years in the stream, growing to about 6" long, before migrating downstream to the Willamette and on to the mouth of the Columbia. The trip takes just a few days. (Chinook emigrate to the ocean as larval fish soon after emergence.) Upon entering the ocean, the coho head south along the Oregon coast, the Chinook head north along the Washington/British Columbia coastline, steelhead head far offshore, while most cutthroat stay near the Columbia River plume. (They all will return using a number of different senses, but heavily relying on their memory of the unique smell of their birthplace.)

Spring is spawning time for a very different aquatic creature. **Pacific lamprey**, our two-foot long, jawless, sea-going "eel",



Beaver live all along Johnson Creek

hold in the stream throughout the winter awaiting warm spring flows, which trigger nesting behavior similar to steelhead. They bury 10,000-100,000 eggs in their nests. Young larval lampreys drift to muddy sections of the creek to filter feed and rear for 4-6 years before migrating downstream to the ocean on high spring flows.

Warming water temperatures begin to trigger emergence and egg laying by a host of aquatic insects like the well known **may-**



A lamprey found near I205

flies, caddis, stoneflies, as well as the unloved **mosquito, midges** and **blackflies**. All are incredibly important for their function as the main food item for a wide variety of **fish, frogs, toads, salamanders/newts**, and even birds such as the "**dipper**". Most of these and other aquatic animals, including mammals (**otters, mink, muskrat, beaver, nutria**) and waterfowl (**herons, ducks**) are busy raising their young as spring turns to summer. It is a wonderful time to visit the creek. Sitting quietly and watching carefully at your favorite "wild spot" near the stream can yield an amazing variety of wildlife observations, giving real insight into the Johnson Creek ecosystem- and it can be a great thing to share with family and friends.



A great blue heron at Reed College

Stories from the 'Shed:

Randi Leuthold looks back at Johnson Creek

by Michelle Bussard, Executive Director

Looking back 65 some-odd years, Randi Leuthold (then, Raanes), eyes sparkled with laughter and disbelief as she wondered aloud, "How stupid could we have been to be standing on that bridge in a storm wondering if a log coming down would hit?" The bridge she refers to was the Wichita wooden bridge that crossed Johnson Creek near where Wichita Farm Supplies operates today. The trembling and resounding thud of debris on the bridge as storm water curled over the wooden planks made for the great afternoon fun. Perhaps bested



only by catching crawdads with girl friends and setting bonfires on the beaches of Johnson Creek to cook their catch in stashed tin cans; that is, until Mother Raanes decided the crawdads were best cooked at home. Randi swears they tasted better cooked in creek water down at the edges of the creek.

Randi recalls Johnson Creek as a place of limitless, safe fun and lifelong learning. After school and on weekends in-season her father would take her out to see the salmon jumping the falls at what is now Tideman Johnson Park, and tell her "don't be messing with those little



Leach Botanical Garden

fish," referring to the fingerlings. On other occasions, her mother sent her on the streetcar line all the way downtown and across the river to bring home fish for dinner. It "was the most beautiful ride, you were up high through Ardenwald and the

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Assessing the Damage: Teams inspect the creek after the spill

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fish. In the gravel on the sides of the creek we found one to two-inch dace and red-scale shiners and lamprey. In the middle of the creek at the slower-moving spots we found suckers, up to two feet long, drifting along the bottom. Floating in a log jamb under a bridge we found a cutthroat trout.

I'm happy to report that we also saw many living fish, from tiny minnows to larger fish, possibly salmon. The sudden drop in Ph that had killed so many fish is now flushed out and the creek is once again able to support fish. The accident affected only the bottom third of Johnson Creek in the main stem, so any fish living above the accident site, or in tributaries, remain unaffected by the spill.

Wildlife. We saw lots of ducks and signs of racoons and beaver. We found one dead beaver, perhaps one or two years old. It probably died from preening oil off its

coat.

Water Quality. We didn't see very much oil sheen, which was good. Most of the oil was caught at the site of the spill, and the oil that did run into the creek seemed to have moved on past our reach.

Human Impact. As we walked along we encountered a lot of trash in the creek, some old, some more recent. The main impact we saw was the Works Progress Administration (WPA) work. Built in the 1930s in an attempt to control flooding, these walls and channelizations still remain in many portions of Johnson Creek. Where the walls were still intact, the creek lacked the complexity and diversity of wildlife of other areas where the walls have broken down over time. The WPA walls cause the creek to be deeper and move much faster, and provides no refuge for fish or wildlife.

Neighbors. One of the most encouraging things I found was the amazing con-

cern that watershed residents have for their creek. As we walked along people would come out of their houses to see what we were doing. They all expressed their deepest concern for the health of the creek and asked detailed questions about the spill and the potential impact it could have. Some shared stories of growing up along the creek and seeing it change over time.

Meeting these people and hearing their stories, it struck me that although Johnson Creek has faced numerous human impacts over the past 150 years, it continues to support an array of wildlife while providing a natural refuge for people. Due to the efforts of concerned citizens, governments, and environmental groups, the creek is in better condition now than it was 20 years ago. And with so much momentum for protection and restoration, it will surely only get better.

Johnson Creek Watershed Wide Event 2004: Hundreds turn out to restore the creek and learn savvy s



This year's Watershed Wide Event drew record **crowds of over 400 participants!** With 10 restoration work parties and 2 workshops going on, Saturday offered plenty for volunteers of all ages and abilities.

The settings of the sites chosen for this year's event reflect the incredible diversity of the Johnson Creek Watershed. Restoration work took place all along the creek, from near its confluence with the Willamette to its tributaries in Pleasant Valley. Some sites were in highly visible urban settings, while others took place in tucked-away wildlife refuges.

Hard-working volunteers accomplished a variety restoration work that will be beneficial to the creek for years to come. Altogether they planted 2120 trees and shrubs, removed over 3000 gallons of blackberries and ivy, and cleared out 12 bags of garbage. Thank you volunteers for dedicating your time and hard work!



Facts for WWE 2004

Volunteers: over 400

Restoration Work Sites: 10

Workshops: 2

Trees and Shrubs planted:
2120

Invasive Plants Removed:
3000 gallons

Garbage Removed: 12 bags

Attendance at the Two Parties: 150 people

Partner Organizations and Agencies: 19

Donors and Sponsors: 12



At the entrance to Beggar's Tick Wetland Area sits a pile of removed blackberry (left, top). Volunteers remove ivy from the site (left, middle), and haul it away on a tarp (left, bottom). Throughout the day 20 tarp-fuls of invasive plants were removed and over 100 wetland shrubs and grasses were planted at that one site!

A volunteer plants trees and others put in trees at East... (top). Johnson Creek stew... composting with worms at... (bottom). JCWC Chairm... thanks volunteers at Mitc... while three boys take a br... Trees planting at Greshar... Nearly 20 community par... crew leaders, plants, and

Stewardship!



at Powell Butte (left), while
moreland Golf Course
ards learn about
Leach Botanical Garden
an Jeff Uebel greets and
hell Creek (top, right),
eak from the Friends of
n Woods (far top right).
rtners, such as Friends of
sible by supplying expertise,
tools.



Why have a Watershed Wide Event?

All the individual neighborhoods along Johnson Creek are a part of a larger community: the Johnson Creek Watershed. Residents of this community know that they all live both up and down stream of other members of the watershed. They also know that in order to bring back the once-abundant salmon population and increase wildlife habitat and green spaces for people, Johnson Creek must be restored as a whole. By coming together on this day in February, watershed residents can support restoration in their own neighborhood as well as contribute to the greater vision of a healthy Johnson Creek.

Partnering for Success

To bring together such an amazing force of volunteers to these beautiful sites, the JCWC partnered with nearly 20 organizations and agencies from throughout the Metro area.

And of course all the work of the Council is supported by generous sponsors and donors. PGE and Stormwater Management sponsored the event this year, providing for all the essentials that make the day possible. And wonderful treats for our volunteers were donated by 10 different companies. Thank you to all who contributed to this amazing day!



Partnering Organizations:

- Ardenwald-Johnson Neighborhood Association
- Boy Scouts of America
- Brentwood-Darlington Neighborhood Association
- Brentwood-Darlington Community Center
- City of Gresham
- City of Portland
- City of Milwaukie
- Eastmoreland Golf Course
- Friends of Trees
- Master Recyclers
- Metro
- Naturescaping for Clean Rivers
- ODS
- Oregon Hunter's Association
- Pacificorp
- PGE
- Portland Parks and Recreation
- Reed College
- SOLV

Sponsors:



Portland General Electric



Donors:

- Bob's Red Mill
- Coffee Cat
- Coffee's On
- Costco
- Grand Central Baking
- Great Harvest
- Noah's Bagels
- Pappacinos
- QFC
- Safeway



Removing English ivy at Reed Canyon

JCWC Committees in Action: Join one today!

Land Use Committee

Do you have an interest in the in's and out's of our local land use planning? Do you ever wonder how or why a local housing or industrial development occurred? Do you ever wonder who provides the voice for the protection of our local natural resource? Or are you interested in how open spaces are created? If so, you should take part in our Land Use Committee. We are looking for motivated enthusiastic volunteers who want to assist with protecting the resources of the Johnson Creek Watershed.



Opportunities include reviewing land use permit applications, providing technical advice and support to land use advocates, and talking with community members about the land use process. Knowledge of local land use issues is appreciated but NOT required to get involved. Currently we are involved in the Springwater Concept Planning, Pleasant Valley Implementation Plan and Metro Goal 5 process. Come help put the new Watershed Action Plan into action!

Join us the 2nd Monday of each month, 6-8pm at Heidi's of Gresham to get involved.

"Our mission is to protect the resources of the Johnson Creek Watershed by promoting community involvement in regulatory and judicial processes affecting the Watershed."

Restoration Committee

Looking for motivated enthusiastic volunteers who will help **improve the health of water, fish and wildlife in Johnson Creek and the Watershed**. Opportunities abound throughout the 52 sq mi watershed in neighborhoods near you, even right in your own backyard - from downtown Milwaukie to Eastmoreland, Lents, Gresham, Pleasant Valley, Boring and Damascus. Come help put the new Watershed Action Plan into action, and bring back trout and salmon to your stream!

Learn by "doing"! Meet and work with neighbors to:

Plan and implement improvements - Fish passage, in-stream habitat, invasive removal, native species plantings.

Monitor stream health - Look for spawning salmon, sample stream insects or water quality.

Do you have a special skill or interest? The Restoration Committee needs volunteers with a background in: landscaping/revegetation, fisheries and fish habitat, hydrology, geology and other natural resource areas, and grantwriting.

Join us the 1st Tuesday each month, 6-8pm to get involved. The Restoration Committee meets at the Johnson Creek Watershed Council's offices at 8300 SE McLaughlin Blvd, or contact Jon Bowers, Committee Chair, (503) 232-8206, for further information.

"Our mission is to conduct, facilitate, coordinate and monitor restoration efforts to improve the health of the Johnson Creek Watershed."

Outreach Committee

Do you want to connect with watershed residents while working with an exciting and enthusiastic committee? The Outreach Committee is dedicated to **reaching out to the community to inspire and facilitate investment in the Johnson Creek Watershed**.

Are you a graphic designer, event planner, public speaker, writer/editor or a social butterfly? If so, we have a job for you! The Outreach Committee needs your help to plan upcoming events, create JCWC newsletters, develop current outreach materials, and to get more people involved in watershed activities.

The way to healthy watershed is through people. Join us on the 3rd Wednesday of every month, from 4-6pm. The Outreach Committee meets at the Johnson Creek Watershed Council office.



For more information please contact Committee Chair Maggie Skenderian at (503) 823-5334.

For more information visit www.jcwc.org or call the office at (503) 239-3932. Please call if you plan on attending a meeting, so we can give you the most up-to-date meeting information.

Sign up for renewable energy

An easy way to help salmon recovery

Customers of Portland General Electric have a special opportunity to support salmon recovery and help clean up the environment. With nearly 30,000 customers already participating, PGE's renewable power program is now #2 in the nation for number of renewable customers. PGE offers three different options to purchase renewable energy for your home. And for a limited time, Johnson Creek Watershed Council will receive \$10 for each household that signs up for one of these options if you mention JCWC!

With the **Clean Wind**SM option, you can help support Northwest wind farms and encourage the development of new local resources by purchasing fixed units of new wind power. The **Green Source**SM option allows you to match all of your household's monthly electricity use with renewable sources: 50% new wind, 25% geothermal, and 25% low impact hydro-electric. Best of all, with the **Healthy Habitat**SM option you can purchase the same product as in Green Source, plus help

fund salmon habitat restoration projects here in Oregon! For pricing information on each of these options, please refer to the enrollment brochure included in our newsletter.

The support of customers who chose the Healthy Habitat option last year has already helped open up 45 miles of stream habitat for salmon in the PGE service territory, including watersheds ranging from Johnson Creek to Scappoose Bay to South Yamhill. Funds from this plan have helped replace culverts that were blocking fish passage, remove invasive weeds, and plant native trees and shrubs that help keep streams cool.

To sign up for any of the options, simply fill out the form in the enclosed brochure and mail it to: PGE Renewable Power, c/o Green Mountain Energy Company, 506 SW Sixth Avenue, Suite 501, Portland, OR 97204. Please be sure to write "JCWC" above your name on the form. That way, we'll make sure to receive the \$10 donation for your enrollment!

Spill on Johnson Creek

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Throughout the week we received many calls from people concerned about the stream. Thanks to all of you who called the office to give us a report, as it assisted us with collecting information about the repercussions of the incident. The events of the week provided the Council with a reminder of the extent to which people care about Johnson Creek.

What happens now? This incident has been a reminder of how delicate the environment really is. And yet we also witness the resilience of nature... with some assistance and care Johnson Creek can once again be a healthy network of streams. In the coming weeks JCWC will be meeting with DEQ and many other agencies to discuss restoration projects in the watershed. We truly have a precious natural resource flowing through Southeast Portland, one that is worthy and capable of being restored. Let's work together to bring back this once thriving ecosystem. We all have a role to play!

Randi Leuthold looks back at life along Johnson Creek

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creek down there, low, then across Oaks Bottom like you were on a lake."

The neighborhood around the Wichita and Stanley bridges where Randi grew up sported an array of enterprises, from the grape-producing, wine-making and mushroom-growing enterprise run by "old man Gabriel" to the Chinese truck-farms owned by Joe Fultz. And there was the dance hall which was briefly put into service as a Lutheran community church by Randi's mother, but unfortunately, its caretaker was making beer there and one of the beer-making containers sprung a leak

putting quite the damper on gatherings.

When WPA started its work on Johnson Creek, Randi's father knew "that was absolutely foolish," and predicted the end of Johnson Creek as they'd known it. Randi remembered how after that we "couldn't get down to the creek anymore...we had to slide down the slabs and that was pretty risky. Once you got down there though, there wasn't anything anymore." The beaches were gone, the crawdads and fish would follow. Although Randi raised her 3 children near Johnson Creek and enjoyed watching them walk the creek, collect pussy willows and listen to her stories, she now lives in Sandy. "I don't

know what it was about Johnson Creek, but we all loved it." That love is what draws her ever back, and over the last several years she's been active at Leach Botanical Gardens "where," she says, "it's like Johnson Creek used to be, the trees and dappled light on the water, the absolute quiet beauty of the place."



WPA workers channelizing the creek

Restoring Johnson Creek



A narrow ribbon of green and blue, Johnson Creek is one of the resources that makes the Portland area a wonderful place to live. The creek flows 26 miles from its headwaters near the Sandy River to its confluence with the Willamette River, passing through four cities and two counties along the way.

Water that once flowed clear and cold through dense forests and verdant wetlands now travels through neighborhoods, under freeways, and next to parking lots. Historic salmon and steelhead runs are threatened with extinction, and the creek suffers from pollution.



Fortunately, there is hope for one of our community's most important resources. The Johnson Creek Watershed Council works with local citizens, agencies, and organizations to protect and enhance Johnson Creek.

To get involved, call us at (503) 239-3932 or visit us on the web at www.jcwc.org. Look inside to find out more!



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