

ODOT Wetlands Comes Full Circle

With the planting of some 40-thousand steelhead fry, an ODOT “wetlands bank” is starting to pay off.

It’s the dividend of a process that began two winters ago north of Prineville.

In the cold winter of 1997 workers started moving the first dirt to carve a new pond next to the Crooked River for fish, ducks, birds and small mammals to eventually call home.

Since it’s sometimes necessary to take away that kind of natural habitat to build a highway, ODOT’s biologists thought this would be a great way to create a place where Crooked River water could fill a pond and create a new wetlands where none used to be...banking it against the need to cover such a pond elsewhere.

Then last Fall, ODOT and it’s contractor were back out at the wetlands....digging once again to open the dry land to river water, fill it and give plants a place to live.

With the dirt, water and plants in place, it became time for fish to move in.

And that’s what happened on a sunny Spring day in May.

PGE drove a truck full of steelhead trout to the wetlands bank alongside the Crooked River. This was to be their new home, in and around the wetlands with its nutrients and shelter. For the next year or so, that’s where they will grow. Eventually the fish will make their way to sea and then hopefully, return to their now-native waters.

This was nearly full reestablishment of the cycle of life that used to exist here, until some 40 years ago.

This was the payoff for ODOT’s Allison Cowee, who nurtured this wetlands from theory to reality. “I felt kind of a rush, seeing these fish back after 40 years”, Cowee said. “To me,” she added, “this is kind of incredible.”

Alongside Cowee helping to plant the baby steelhead, ODOT’s Cidney Howard said, “I think it’s a historic event. I think there’s lots of people who didn’t think they’d see this in their lifetime”.



This is by no means the end of the road for these many fish.

Ahead of them lay serious obstacles on their journey to the sea and back .

Only a few may actually make it the whole way...out and back to the home that ODOT made possible