

LUCKIAMUTE WATERSHED COUNCIL EARNS NATIONAL KUDOS

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The Luckiamute Watershed Council recently has been recognized by three national groups that are praising its restoration and conservation work in Polk and Benton counties. The Public Lands Foundation is applauding the council's cooperative efforts on Bureau of Land Management land in Kings Valley, and the Bonneville Environmental Fund and the Meyer Memorial Trust this month are encouraging council plans to create a Model Watershed project in the Upper Luckiamute – which includes the Kings Valley and Pedee areas.

The beautiful Upper Luckiamute River area is an important habitat for steelhead, trout and salmon, and rare land-based species, including Fender's Blue butterfly, but it is also a productive forestry and agricultural region. Balancing the needs of residents and commerce with wildlife is the specialty of watershed councils. Luckiamute's volunteer members represent private, commercial and environmental interests.

The Public Lands Foundation, a non-profit organization made up largely of BLM retirees, has chosen the council for the Landscape Stewardship Award. The award honors the work of private citizens "to advance and sustain community-based stewardship on landscapes that include, in whole or in part, public lands administered by BLM," according to Scott Snedaker, BLM fisheries biologist from the Mary's Peak Resource Area. In 2008-2009, the council worked closely with Snedaker, the BLM and private landowners to improve the roads, culverts and stream health of Maxfield Creek, providing access to commercial forestry operations while improving salmon and wildlife habitat in the Kings Valley area. The Public Lands Foundation will present the award at a public event Nov. 18, at the Salem BLM office.

The Maxfield Creek project is an example of the type of projects that may continue in the Upper Luckiamute region if the Willamette Model Watershed project is fully funded next year. The Luckiamute Watershed Council was one of just four other councils in the Willamette Basin given the green light, and a planning grant, to fully prepare and propose a 10-year Model Watershed project. If the program is fully funded, Bonneville Environmental Fund and Meyer Memorial Trust funds would support watershed improvement projects and follow-up in the Kings Valley and Pedee areas of Polk and Benton counties – the upper reaches of the Luckiamute River.

"It is such a thrill, an honor, to be recognized by the prestigious Bonneville Environmental Foundation and the Meyer Memorial Trust," said Nicole Duplaix, coordinator of the watershed council. "If our final proposal is selected next April we will receive funding for ten years to implement it -- as many restoration and long-term monitoring projects are very expensive this is welcome news indeed!"