



Restoration on Woods Creek Summer 2011 NEXUS

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Bringing the Woods Back to Woods Creek

By Ryan Williams, SCD Habitat Specialist

Along the West Fork of Woods Creek, northeast of Monroe, two landowners and two organizations worked together this Spring to create an environmentally-friendly mixture of pasture and native trees and shrubs.

Lynn Logan and Joel Selling, next door neighbors with similar environmental goals, worked with Snohomish Conservation District and Snohomish County's Surface Water Management Division on a joint project. They planted 4,100 trees and shrubs and installed fencing to protect 1,400 feet of bank along one side of Woods Creek. This protects the creek from livestock damage, establishes shade for salmon and other aquatic life, provides food for insects and wildlife and prevents animal wastes from polluting Woods Creek.



Lynn Logan has owned her ten-acre parcel, an historic dairy, for 19 years. During this time she has worked to establish trees and shrubs along her bank to improve the stream for native fish and wildlife. Recently, with the addition of grazing cattle to the property, she began looking for help to protect her trees and exclude her livestock from the creek.

Joel Selling and his wife Nancy Truitt Pierce have owned their four-acre piece of land for 16 years. They began working with Snohomish Conservation District and Snohomish County Surface Water Management to improve their streamside area and limit erosion the first year they moved in. Over the years, Joel and Nancy have dug out one acre of invasive blackberries and planted native trees and shrubs along both sides of Woods Creek.

In 2009, Snohomish County's Surface Water Management Division had completed a habitat assessment of the Woods Creek Basin, identifying the best locations for streamside enhancement efforts. Joel's and Lynn's property were both on the list and they were very interested in participating. The District had funding available through a grant from the Washington Department of Ecology Centennial Clean Water Fund. In the late summer of 2010, the District, the County and several landowners met to discuss restoration opportunities along Woods Creek.

It was obvious that some livestock had access to the creek and that essential vegetation was lacking all along the creek banks. Everyone agreed that a fence was needed at least 35 feet back from the creek banks (50 feet back in some areas), and that the creek banks needed to regain their thick cloak of native trees and shrubs. In total, two and a half acres of streamside buffer would be planted and 1,500 feet of fencing installed to keep livestock at bay. The on-the-ground work began in February 2011. The District contracted with EarthCorps (an Americorps-supported non-profit group) to remove invasive blackberries along the creek. EarthCorps crews consist of international and American members who work together to complete environmental service projects.

Snohomish County was also able to provide their Washington Conservation Corps crew to plant the trees and shrubs provided by the County's nursery, as well as trees and shrubs purchased through the District's annual plant sale. The District contracted with a private fence company to install a four-wire fence with a hot-wire offset to keep cattle and horses out of the plant buffer zone and away from the fragile creek banks.

To make it more interesting, Mother Nature decided to throw some obstacles in our way. During initial discussions with the landowners, we agreed to start this project after the risk of flooding on Woods Creek was over. When planting new trees, we try to avoid disturbances such as floods, which can easily carry off new plants. We waited until March to plant and later discovered that Mother Nature had pushed Spring back until May.



In late March, after most plants were already in the ground for a week, a flood flowed through the newly-installed buffer area. During this flood and the high water that preceded it, a few intrepid beavers realized that some of these new plants were tasty and felled about a dozen cedar trees. This caused us to reconsider our plant protection strategy, so we installed special fencing at low points along the creek to prevent beaver from taking more trees.

If you own property along a creek and are interested in planting native plants and fencing your livestock away from the water, contact Ryan Williams at 425-335-5634, ext. 116 or rwilliams@snohomishcd.org.

Captions:

Photo 1: Blue plastic tubes help to protect young bark from rodents and sun scald.

Photo 2: Late Spring flooding brought new challenges.