



Lower Columbia
Estuary
Partnership

Year in Review

2021-2022 Highlights

Restoring ecosystems, growing
knowledge, and connecting
with communities to care
for the Columbia River.



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

THIS HAS TRULY BEEN A MONUMENTAL YEAR FOR THE ESTUARY PARTNERSHIP.

After nearly a decade of planning, the Steigerwald Reconnection Project is winding down. The project has been a resounding success, demonstrating how ambitious, large-scale restoration projects can also deliver on community goals like improved flood protection, greater recreation access, and good-paying local jobs. We owe a great deal of appreciation to the dozens of project partners who worked hard and believed in our mission to make this project happen.

As big as the Steigerwald Reconnection Project was, there was a lot more that we accomplished. After more than a year of creating virtual lessons and experiences, our Education Team was so excited to be back in person with students. There was still a lot of ingenuity that went into this school year. Creating new lessons and adapting old lessons to be taught outside allowed us to reach students safely.

Another huge milestone within our organization this year: we finalized our three-year Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plan and developed our three-year Strategic Direction, which lays out four overarching strategic initiatives: Engagement and Representation; Authentic Collaboration; Building Capacity; and Climate Resilience. These documents are now our guides, along with our Management Plan, as we work today and plan for the future.

We continue to advance our knowledge of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and promotion of First Foods. At Steigerwald, we focused on bringing back wapato by hand-harvesting and planting 30 pounds of wapato

seed and 2,000 bulbs. We also planted 14,000 pounds of other native plant seeds, many of which have traditional ecological values. These areas will hopefully be accessible to Tribal harvesters in the years to come. And ten staff members attended the Confluence Field School, which used storytelling by Tribal members to teach us about TEK, Tribal sovereignty, and more. It was a powerful and humbling experience. We are still early in our journey, but we are eager to listen and learn more.

Looking toward the coming year and beyond, we are grounding ourselves in our new values and mission to restore and care for the waters and ecosystems of the lower Columbia River and estuary. We have ambitious plans for the East Fork Lewis River, a critical salmon-bearing stream and wild steelhead gene bank, as well as a project that will clean up stormwater entering Baker Bay in Ilwaco, Washington. And Educators are planning another busy school year while also nurturing partnerships that help build the green workforce and connect diverse communities to their watershed.

We are so grateful for all the partners, funders, and individuals who make our work possible – and enjoyable! – and who work every day to make a difference for the lower Columbia River.

Thank you,



E. ELAINE PLACIDO, DPA

CONNECTING THE COMMUNITY TO THE COLUMBIA

Community members volunteer with us to plant and steward native trees and shrubs along streams and in floodplain habitat to help shade and cool streams, improve water quality, and create habitat for birds and other wildlife. Volunteers contributed time and energy at Sandy River Delta and Scappoose Veteran's Park in Oregon, and Burnt Bridge Creek, Hidden Glen Park, Salmon Creek, and Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Washington.

*2021-2022
Volunteer stats*

695 volunteers involved in planting trees, mulching, and other activities to support watershed health

16,175 trees planted by volunteers



BIG CANOE PADDLES

Paddling uniquely connects people to their river. Our two 29-foot, 12-passenger Big Canoes allow us to provide community groups, summer camps, and schools with a new on-water perspective. Participants learn water safety skills, get place-based education, and enjoy a fun, team-focused experience.

*2021-2022
Big Canoe stats*

571 people paddled our Big Canoes to learn about our rivers

Two Blueprint Foundation mentors were paid summer Recreation Leaders. Each gained experience with environmental education, recreational leadership, paddling, water safety, and other important work skills while also providing a peer mentor to members of the BIPOC community who paddled the Big Canoes with us.



CONNECTING KIDS TO THE COLUMBIA

Today's students are tomorrow's leaders. We give them a solid foundation of watershed science through classroom and schoolyard lessons and educational and service-focused field trips. While most students were back in their classrooms this past year, the ongoing impacts of the pandemic brought different opportunities to connect with students and teachers. New lessons created this year – Detritivores: Nature's Recyclers and Introduction to Watersheds: Walkable Floor Map – can take place indoors or outside in the schoolyard. We offer 18 distinct curriculum bins free for educator check out, and additional lessons are available for free on our website.



*2021-2022
School year stats:*

2,639 students received lessons and/or a field trip

8,759 trees and shrubs planted by students

17 truckloads of non-native plants removed by students



BUILDING THE GREEN WORKFORCE

In 2021-2022, four VetsWork interns worked with us. Each VetsWork member gained valuable experience with ecological restoration, monitoring, and education, and completed important field work such as stewarding native trees and shrubs, hand-harvesting wapato seed, and cutting invasive reed canarygrass. NOAA and the Mt. Adams Institute supported our work with VetsWork.



“A new world had been opened to me from a personal and professional standpoint. I am immersed in the many wonders the Pacific Northwest has to offer, from the breathtaking lushness of the forests to its many happy critters big and small. Every day I am in awe and am learning. I help children feel a sense of ease in nature while also respecting its beauty and importance. I help protect native plants and work to ensure their survival. I still have very much to learn but I am very excited by what lies ahead.”

ALEX APELIS
2022 VetsWork Technician

RESEARCH & MONITORING

We have a long-term monitoring program that tracks habitat conditions at numerous sites along the lower Columbia River. Monitoring sites include relatively undisturbed reference sites as well as recently restored areas that help us gauge the effectiveness of restoration actions.



One site we have monitored since 2013 is on the Wallooskee River floodplain in Youngs Bay. The site is owned and managed by the Cowlitz Indian Tribe and located in Clatsop County. The 200-acre tidal reconnection project was constructed in 2017 and restored tidal flooding to the site. Our monitoring work showed that the site shifted dramatically from an agricultural field to a functioning tidal wetland in just three years after the restoration.

SEE THE RESULTS

estuarypartnership.org/wallooskee

In another ongoing project, we have collected monthly water quality data from several lower Columbia River and Scappoose Bay tributaries in Columbia County since 2017. In partnership with the Columbia County Soil and Water Conservation District, we monitor stream temperature, turbidity, E. coli, pH, and dissolved oxygen. Local leaders are using these data to understand issues facing the streams and take action to improve their water quality.

SEE THE RESULTS

estuarypartnership.org/columbiaco



RESTORING HABITAT

STEIGERWALD LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Washougal, Washington

On May 1, 2022, Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge reopened to the public after completion of the largest restoration project ever along the lower Columbia River. The \$32 million Steigerwald Reconnection Project restored habitat, increased flood protection for neighboring landowners, and reconnected Gibbons Creek and the lands of the refuge to the Columbia River for the first time in generations. Within weeks of the old levee being breached, scientists spotted salmon using the floodplain for the first time in nearly 60 years. And in June 2022, the restoration project had its first test as the Columbia River reached a 5-year flood stage and over 600 acres of the refuge were successfully inundated as intended, benefiting fish, birds, and plants at the site and downstream.

Since the reopening, people have flocked to the refuge to enjoy the new trails, see migrating birds, and experience the floodplain at work.

WOODARD CREEK

Skamania County, Washington

Woodard Creek is a salmon-bearing stream that has been affected by road development, wildfire, and timber harvest. The Upper Woodard Creek Restoration Project improved a stretch of the creek north of State Route 14 by adding large wood felled from nearby US Forest Service land and planting conifers in its riparian zone.



Impressive outcomes of this enormous and successful project include:

- **965 acres of floodplain reconnected** to the Columbia River
- **More than 100 acres of wetlands created**
- **250 acres of riparian habitat reforested**
- **510,000 trees and shrubs planted**
- **14,000 pounds of native seeds planted**
- **Add 19% increase in Columbia River floodplain habitat** between Bonneville Dam and the Willamette River
- **1.1 miles of new trail added**
- **160 acres added** to the Refuge through a Friends of the Columbia Gorge Land Trust property acquisition and transfer to the US Fish and Wildlife Service
- **1.6 miles of new setback levees constructed** to protect the Port of Camas-Washougal Industrial Park, the City of Washougal wastewater treatment plant, and private residents
- **50% larger parking lot**
- **\$40,000 in pumping costs saved** by the Port of Camas-Washougal annually on average
- **550 family-wage jobs generated**
- **\$75 million added to the local economy**

Partners
restored an
additional
3,289.5 acres
of habitat.



**1 mile of
creek restored**

**220 pieces of large wood
placed** by helicopter

**15 acres of habitat
reforested** with
native conifers

WHO WE ARE

OUR CORE VALUES

- **Mutual Benefit**
- **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**
- **Science and Stewardship**
- **The Courage to Change**

Our New Mission:

To restore and care for the waters and ecosystems of the lower Columbia River for current and future generations of fish, wildlife, and people.



The Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership is a nonprofit and a National Estuary Program, tasked with caring for the lower Columbia River and estuary. The lower Columbia River stretches 146 river miles from the mouth of the river upstream to Bonneville Dam and includes 28 communities, nine counties, and three million people in

Washington and Oregon. This area is the historic and traditional homeland of numerous Indigenous tribes and nations who continue to steward the river today.

Our staff and board are scientists, educators, farmers, conservationists, government representatives, business owners, restoration practitioners, and recreationalists dedicated to the lower Columbia River. We are supported by dozens of businesses, public and private grantmakers, and individuals.



THE NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

The National Estuary Program is a place-based program authorized under 1987 revisions to the Clean Water Act to create collaborative, locally-driven programs to address issues facing our nation's estuaries. The Columbia River estuary is one of 28 "estuaries of national significance" across the United States. These critical estuaries feed us, drive our economy, nourish abundant wildlife, and house vibrant communities. The States of Oregon and Washington and the US EPA established the Estuary Partnership in 1995 to tackle issues facing the lower

river through focused studies, regional coordination, and on-the-ground projects to improve water quality and habitat.

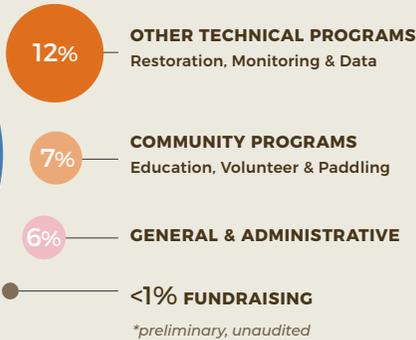
In 2021-2022, we raised \$17.80 for every \$1 from the federal US EPA National Estuary Program. A large proportion of this reflects investments of many partners in the massive restoration efforts at Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge, funds that go right back into the regional economy through contracts with local engineering, construction, and native plant establishment firms.

FINANCIALS

DONATED VOLUNTEER INVESTMENTS

	Hours	Value
Board Members	245	\$14,670
Scientists and Technical Experts	2,696	\$92,768
Student Service Learning	9,972	\$149,580
Parent and Teacher Volunteers	2,012	\$60,259
Planting and Community Volunteers	2,780	\$69,148
Other Goods and Services	-	\$8,625
TOTAL	17,705	\$395,050

WHERE 2021 FUNDS WENT*



In 2021-2022,
we raised **\$17.80**
for every **\$1** from the
US EPA National
Estuary Program.

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STEIGERWALD
RECONNECTION PROJECT