



Lower Columbia  
Estuary  
Partnership  
Celebrating 30 years

# Year IN Review

**2024-2025 HIGHLIGHTS**

*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.

Environmental Educator Kristen Klever (bow) and Summer Paddle Leader Nicholas Houlemard (stern) lead a Big Canoe paddle with participants from the Blueprint Foundation.



# Letter from the Director

DEAR FRIEND OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER,

THE COLUMBIA RIVER IS A NATIONAL TREASURE.

And in 1995, Congress recognized its importance by designating the lower Columbia River as an Estuary of National Significance.

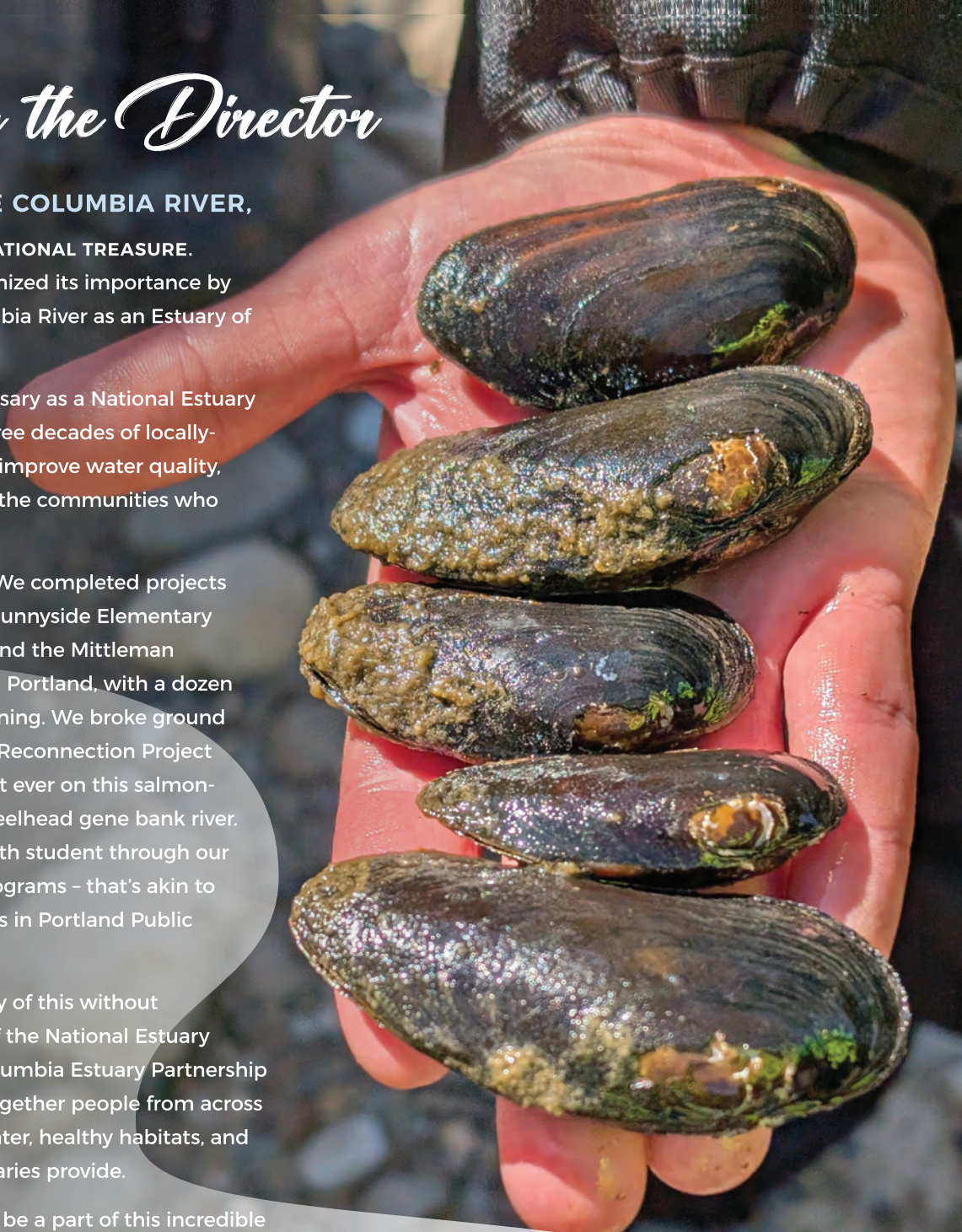
As we mark our 30th anniversary as a National Estuary Program, we reflect upon three decades of locally-driven, practical solutions to improve water quality, restore habitat, and support the communities who depend on this river.

This past year has been big. We completed projects to improve water quality at Sunnyside Elementary School in North Clackamas and the Mittleman Jewish Community Center in Portland, with a dozen more school projects in planning. We broke ground on the East Fork Lewis River Reconnection Project – the largest restoration effort ever on this salmon-bearing, undammed, wild steelhead gene bank river. And we reached our 100,000th student through our environmental education programs – that’s akin to serving all 4th grade students in Portland Public Schools for 29 years!

We could not accomplish any of this without partnerships. The strength of the National Estuary Program – and the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership – lies in our ability to bring together people from across all walks to support clean water, healthy habitats, and the vital economies our estuaries provide.

It’s truly a privilege for me to be a part of this incredible 30-year history. I also want to thank you for being a key part of our story. Whether you are a volunteer, donor, community partner, or other supporter, you are a valuable part of our achievements.

As we celebrate three decades of progress, we’re also looking ahead. We are planning, collaborating, and building the foundation for the next 30 years—guided by science, informed by our communities, and committed to the health of the Columbia River.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding five freshwater mussels. The mussels are dark, elongated, and have a glossy, iridescent sheen. They are held in the palm of the hand, which is positioned against a blurred background of more mussels and rocks. The lighting highlights the texture of the mussels' shells and the skin of the hand.

*E. Elaine Placido*

**E. ELAINE PLACIDO, DPA | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

The Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and a National Estuary Program. The National Estuary Program was authorized in 1987 by amendments to the Clean Water Act that created place-based, collaborative programs to support our nation’s most critical estuaries. The Columbia River estuary is one of 28 “estuaries of national significance” across the United States. Estuaries are critical ecosystems that feed us, drive our economy, nourish abundant fish and wildlife, and provide a home to vibrant river and coastal communities. The States of Oregon and

Washington and the US EPA established the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership in 1995 to address the numerous issues facing the river, from habitat loss to toxic contamination to sea level rise.





## Improving Water Quality

We completed a multi-year effort to improve water quality in Baker Bay. In partnership with the City of Ilwaco and Port of Ilwaco, we installed stormwater features in the Port's large parking lot and adjacent Howerton Avenue. **This \$2.47 million green infrastructure project captures and treats runoff from three acres of impervious surface, successfully removing heavy metals, sediment, and other pollutants before it flows into the bay.** It also increased green space and planted trees to create shade and enhance the aesthetics of this popular waterfront area. Previously, stormwater from the lot flowed directly into the bay completely untreated.



## Studies for Salmon SW WA FISH PASSAGE

Over the past two years, we inventoried culverts, tide gates, and other barriers to fish passage across Southwest Washington to identify where habitat can be opened to salmon, and what barriers are the highest priority for removal. **This study resulted in an online map and decision-making tool to help agencies and restoration partners identify projects for removal or retrofit that will maximize benefits for endangered salmon.** This work was accomplished with the support of Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office and the Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board.



## Groundbreaking Restoration

We broke ground on the East Fork Lewis River Reconnection Project, which will restore a 3-mile stretch of the river, including an area that was degraded from when it flooded into abandoned gravel mining pits nearly three decades ago. **This \$23.5 million project will reconnect the river to its floodplain, create new side channels, fill the abandoned pits, and recreate a more natural, braided channel like the river was historically.** The results will reduce erosion and flood risk for nearby property owners, improve and expand habitat for juvenile salmon, lamprey, and freshwater mussels, and improve recreation along this popular, free-flowing river. Construction will wrap up in fall 2026.



Abandoned gravel mines are filled during construction



## Stewarding our Streams

Fox Creek flows through the heart of Rainier. The Friends of Fox Creek have been active for decades in restoring the creek – advocating for the removal of undersized culverts to daylight the river and hosting hands-on work parties to improve habitat. **Since 2019, the Estuary Partnership has worked alongside the Friends and other community volunteers to restore native vegetation and control invasive species like reed canarygrass along this stretch of the creek.** Thanks to the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and the City of Rainier for supporting this community-led restoration work.



## Restoration Realized

We finished a 12-year effort to improve habitat in the Horsetail Creek floodplain. This 190-acre area, situated between Interstate 84 and the Historic Columbia River Highway, provides one-third of all the floodplain habitat accessible to juvenile salmon in the lower Columbia Gorge. In partnership with the USFS Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, **we began our efforts in 2013, restoring fish passage and floodplain connectivity, and adding large wood and native vegetation in the western half of the site.** Additional work began in 2017 to improve the eastern half – adding large wood to increase habitat complexity, planting 93,000 native trees and shrubs, and adding two beaver dam analogs to attract these “ecosystem engineers” to improve site hydrology.

- Since 2000, 38,928 acres have been restored across the lower Columbia.



US Forest Service staff build a beaver dam analog.



## Canoeing in Community

We brought 118 people onto the Willamette River in North Portland to experience the joy of paddling in our Big Canoes, while they also learned about the unique challenges of cleanup and restoration efforts in the Portland Harbor Superfund site. These paddles, supported by a Portland Harbor Community Grant from the Portland Bureau of Environmental Services, reached communities and groups affected by the Superfund site in order to educate and engage them with the cleanup process. As part of this project, we partnered with Multnomah County Health to reach culturally-specific community health workers and teach them about safe fish consumption. This project also supported a river-centered education map in development by Art Nature Place.

- 2,075 students and community members paddled our Big Canoes.



## Engaging Students with Their Watershed

We continue to connect students with engaging outdoor science across our study area. In the final year of a 6-year project in partnership with Clackamas County Water Environment Services, **439 students in the North Clackamas School District received a series of lessons and a field trip to Meldrum Bar Park, where they participated in water quality testing, paddled our Big Canoes, and helped improve the site through enthusiastic removal of invasive blackberry.**

- Total of 3,226 students served across our region during the 2024-2025 school year
- This year, we reached our 100,000<sup>th</sup> student!



**THE LOWER COLUMBIA RIVER** stretches 146 river miles from its mouth at the Pacific Ocean upstream to Bonneville Dam. Over three million people live in the area. Our staff stay busy restoring rivers, helping schools and businesses develop stormwater solutions, inspiring students, engaging volunteers, and advancing scientific research.

Here are just a few highlights from our work this year.

Pacific Ocean





Restoration Ecologist Nick Lewis and VetsWork Intern Carl Cruz gather lamprey for relocation in preparation for the East Fork Lewis River Reconnection Project.

INVESTMENTS IN THE WATERS AND ECOSYSTEMS OF THE LOWER COLUMBIA RIVER IN 2024-2025

In 2024-2025, we raised \$15 for every \$1 from the US EPA National Estuary Program, leveraging \$11.1 million and creating 109 jobs. With the economic multiplier, that is a total impact of \$25.4 million across our region.

BASE FUNDERS

US Environmental Protection Agency • Washington State • Oregon State

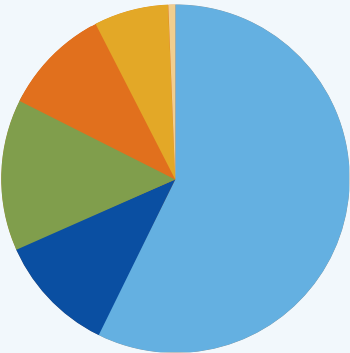
GRANTORS

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration • Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office • Washington Department of Ecology • Bonneville Power Administration • US Environmental Protection Agency • Washington Department of Transportation • Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board • Clark County • Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board • City of Portland Bureau of Environmental Services • Clackamas County Water Environment Services • National Fish and Wildlife Foundation • Gray Family Foundation • Rose Foundation Columbia River Fund / Columbia Riverkeeper • US Fish and Wildlife Service • East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District • Metro • City of Vancouver • Port of Vancouver USA • Oregon State Marine Board • One Tree Planted • Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District • Camas-Washougal Community Chest • Bonneville Environmental Foundation • US Forest Service • Portland General Electric • Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District • Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards • Columbia County • Lower Columbia Fish Enhancement Group

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WHERE 2024 FUNDS WENT



PROGRAMMING (92%)

- Habitat Restoration (61%)
- Community Programs (13%)
- Monitoring & Research (15%)
- Green Stormwater Infrastructure (11%)

ADMIN (7.5%)

FUNDRAISING (0.5%)

DONATED VOLUNTEER INVESTMENTS

Category	Hours	Value
Board Members	207	\$16,560
Professional Services	2,417	\$171,620
Student Service Learning	8,608	\$129,120
Parent & Teacher Volunteers	3,176	\$110,493
Planting & Community Volunteers	2,312	\$65,394
Other Goods & Services	45	\$11,826
TOTAL	16,765	\$505,013

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