

# Tribe, Land Trust Break Ground on Ohop Creek Restoration Project

by Steven Wyble [swyble@yelmonline.com](mailto:swyble@yelmonline.com) | Posted: Thursday, July 17, 2014 4:41 pm

The Nisqually Indian Tribe, Nisqually Land Trust and South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group broke ground on 1.5 miles of restored salmon habitat on Ohop Creek on Saturday.

Ohop Creek, near Eatonville, is a vital tributary to the Nisqually River, according to a press release from the land trust. The Ohop River flows into the Nisqually River about 15 miles southeast of Yelm.

Ohop Creek was ditched by settlers about 130 years ago for dairy production, said Joe Kane, executive director of the Nisqually Land Trust.

“They channeled all the water into a straight ditch, drained the valley, but then one by one they went out of business and as they did, we began to buy up farms with the idea that over time we’d be able to get a big enough ... section to restore the original creek,” Kane said.

The land trust bought the land for the next phase of the project in 2012.

“It’s the last piece to be able to connect this next phase of restoration with the natural, unchanneled streamline,” Kane said.

The restoration of Ohop Creek will include digging an entirely new creek and adding features such as logjams and deep pools to provide new habitat for salmon.

Restoration of the creek began in 2009 with the repair of a one-mile channel just upstream of the new site. Early results of the restoration include increased use by salmon and the return of wildlife species such as elk that had not been seen in the valley for decades, according to the press release.

When the project is completed, it will restore six and a half miles of salmon habitat, said David Troutt, natural resources director for the Nisqually Indian Tribe.

The project will be the largest in the state with this most recent addition of restored habitat, which will end up restoring about two and a half miles of habitat, he said.

The project is critical for increasing the number of Chinook, steelhead and pink salmon, Troutt said.



## Ohop Creek Groundbreaking

A boy shovels dirt during a groundbreaking ceremony for the Ohop Creek restoration project on Saturday.

“Our steelhead spawning runs are down to I think about 400 adult fish, in that range, so every foot’s critical,” Kane said.

JW Foster, a Yelm city councilor and board president of the Nisqually Land Trust, attended the groundbreaking ceremony on Saturday.

“The thing that’s remarkable to me is that 100 or so years ago, people came into this valley with the intent of expanding and creating community and they did it the best way they knew how, in some cases using federal money and grants to help them do these projects like ditch the creek over the side,” he said. “And then 100 years later we’re using some of these same funding sources to deconstruct what they did. And their legacy was a thriving community and our legacy will be the valley returned to its natural state so the community can enjoy it. ... That’s what I love about this project. That, and the fact that the salmon have already ventured up into this stream. They’ve been waiting.”

Foster said the general membership and the members on the ground, who take on projects such as planting native vegetation for restoration projects, are important parts of overall restoration efforts.

“We couldn’t get it done without everybody’s \$5 or \$10 here and there, and the families that come out and plant the trees,” he said.

The land trust is always looking for new volunteers, he said.

The restoration work is fun for families, he said. He said that’s how his own family first got involved with the land trust. His kids helped plant trees on state Route 7 five years ago, and when his kids drive by now, they’re proud to see the fruit of their labor.

The land trust offers a series of free nature walks this summer, he added.

“(They’re) a great way to connect with the property that we’ve restored already,” he said.