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Oregon Chub Found On Green Island

Researchers on Green Island, the property owned by the McKenzie River Trust at the confluence of the McKenzie and Willamette Rivers, discovered Oregon chub in the old McKenzie River channel. Twelve adult fish were found in a limited trapping effort, raising hopes for a healthy population there. The presence of Oregon chub speaks to the overall health of the floodplain and the water quality of the site.

Oregon chub, a small minnow species that persists in slower moving, off-channel areas, are endemic to the Willamette River basin. Chub numbers have declined dramatically due to habitat loss from changes in seasonal flows because of dam construction, channelization, drainage of wetlands, and other human influences such as the introduction of non-native species like large and smallmouth bass, bluegill, and western mosquito-fish.

The Oregon chub was added to the Endangered Species List in 1993. The discovery of the Oregon chub adds it to a long list of both federal and state listed species found on Green Island, including spring Chinook salmon, western pond turtle, red-legged frog, bald eagle, and bull trout. The discovery along with the other listed species found at the island is a testament to the importance of Green Island from a biological perspective. The island complex provides a diversity of important habitats, including backwaters, oxbows, sloughs, and other off-channel sites that are critical areas for spawning and rearing of young.

The Trust is working to restore more of the active floodplain processes that contribute to this habitat diversity and productivity. Just this week, contractors began taking down 2,700 feet of earthen levees on the interior of the island. This will allow high river flows during winter to spread out over more of the island, creating more habitat for the migratory birds, wildlife, and fish, like the Oregon chub, that depend on these seasonal floods.

The Trust purchased Green Island in June 2003, after being approached by the family of Karen and Les Green, who were interested in seeing their farmland restored for fish and wildlife species. Many scientific assessments had highlighted the confluence area of the McKenzie and Willamette rivers for its current habitat values and restoration project potential. Seven of the 8 habitat types in the entire Willamette System are found in the 1,400 acre Green Island complex.

Since 1989, the McKenzie River Trust has dedicated itself to protecting special lands in Lane and Douglas Counties for their habitat, scenic and water quality values. The Trust has worked with private landowners to protect over 2,000 acres for this and future generations.

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