

# 2023 Annual Report



## Growing in our Mission



STEVE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

McKenzie River Trust expanded visibly in 2023 by just about every measure. We protected 1,887 additional acres across 6 new sites. We undertook two impressive in-stream restoration projects with the beginning of the Siuslaw Estuary Restoration Project at Waite Ranch and the completion of the Floodplain Restoration Project at Finn Rock Reach. Our staff now

includes 20 full-time committed professionals. Our passionate and talented volunteers spent more than 4,000 hours in the field. And the number of McKenzie River Trust members and scale of generosity reached all-time highs.

Of course, those numbers are just an entryway into a colorful fabric of land, water, and community conservation that is the McKenzie River Trust. Our work stitches together ecosystems that have been disrupted. Gathering to explore and work on the land rekindles community spirit. And spending time in nature nourishes wonder, joy, and good health. The stories behind the numbers stay with us,

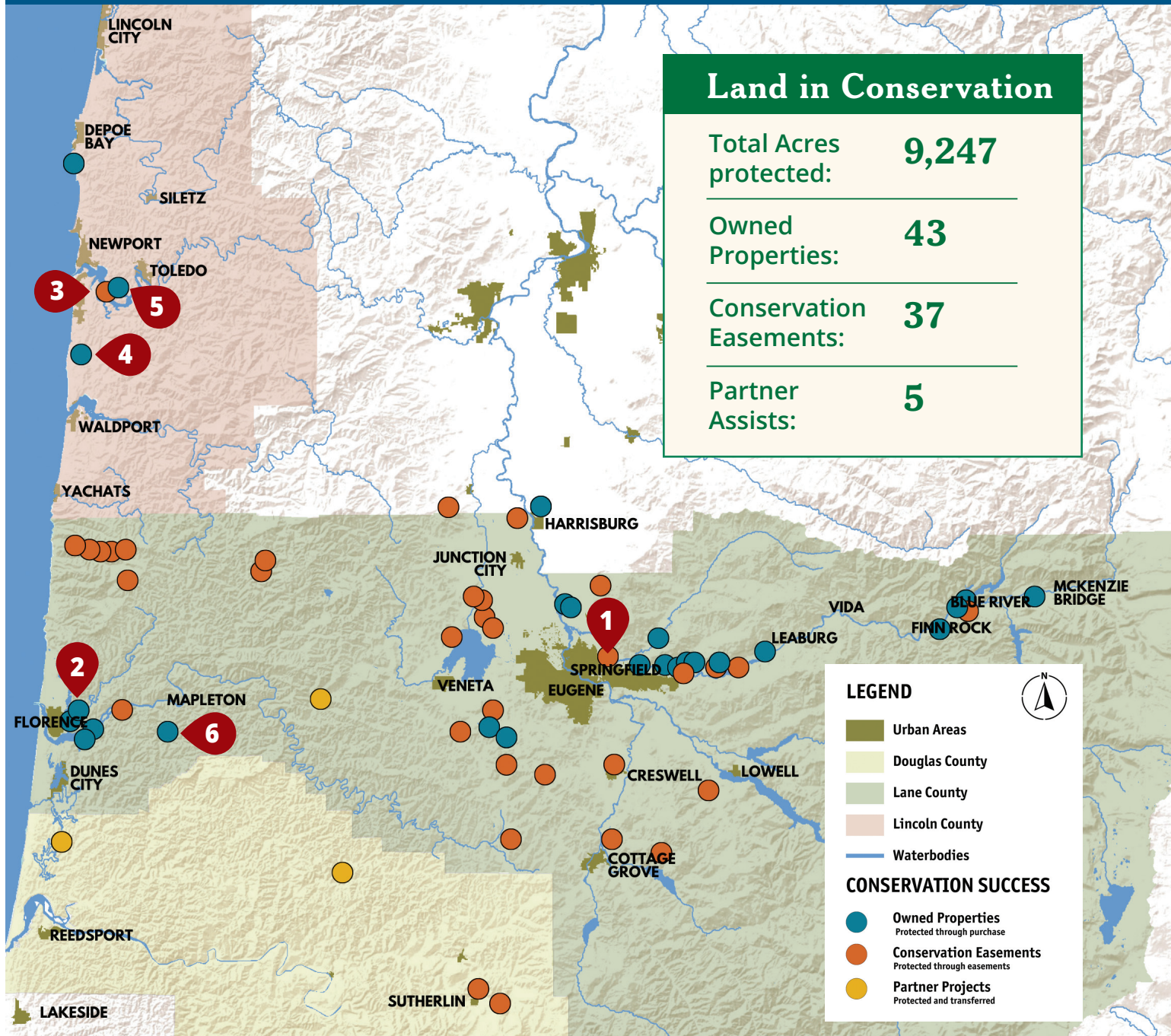
helping us anticipate and address surprises like floods, wildfires, broken-down equipment, and trees across roads. They also prime us for new opportunities.

Growth alone can seem unwieldy. However, the evolution of McKenzie River Trust over the past 35 years has been deliberate, an expansion pursued from the ground up. The nature of our work is centered in the power of people coming together. We will continue to weave ourselves into this shared fabric, giving more time and attention to more conserved places and creating new stories of connection to land and water. Thank you for continuing to grow with us.



STEVE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

# Protecting Special Places Across Western Oregon



## VOLUNTEERING BY THE NUMBERS



**500**  
Volunteers

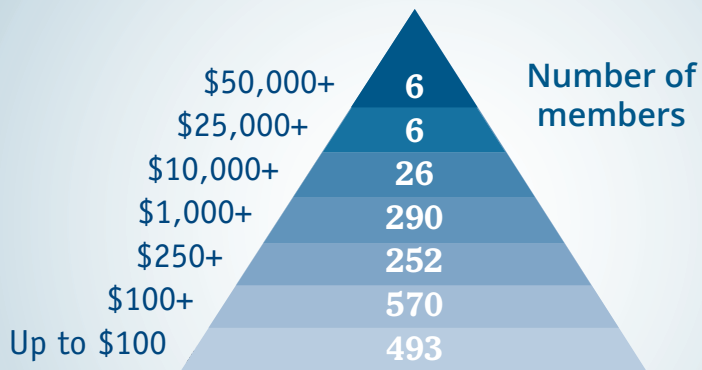


**4,150**  
Hours Worked



**88**  
Volunteer Projects

## COMMUNITY GIVING





STEVE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

### 1 Willamette Confluence, 1,305 acres

Transferred to McKenzie River Trust by The Nature Conservancy in January 2023, the Willamette Confluence property stretches from river to ridge along the Middle and Coast forks of the Willamette River. With several distinct habitat types on-site, the property provides a critical refuge for native plants and wildlife where wildlands brush against the urban landscape.



MARGARET TREDWELL

### 4 Deeming Partner Pass-Through, 44 acres

A patch of forest in Seal Rock, the Deeming property was protected as a pass-through project in 2023. McKenzie River Trust is working to donate the area to Oregon State Parks, increasing the size of nearby Brian Booth State Park. This transfer will increase management access for park staff who are working to increase fire resiliency for the park and adjacent community.



STEVE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

### 2 Estergard, 85 acres

Located a few miles upstream from the confluence of the North Fork and mainstem Siuslaw River, the Estergard property was donated to the Trust in 2023 and provides important habitat for native species, including Coho salmon, lamprey, and waterfowl.



TIM LAVIES

### 5 Boone Nute Slough, 315 acres

An abandoned oxbow on the Yaquina River estuary, Boone Nute Slough is comprised of climate-critical tidal wetlands. The site will be co-managed with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians until the area can be transferred back into Tribal ownership.



JODI LEMMER

### 3 Parker Slough Conservation Easement, 60 acres

Spanning much of the Parker Slough watershed, which feeds into the Yaquina Bay, the Parker Slough Conservation Easement boasts an 80 to 100-year-old coastal conifer forest. Originally established by the Central Coast Land Conservancy, the former land trust serving Lincoln County, the easement was transferred to McKenzie River Trust in 2023.



BRENT ROSS

### 6 Sweet Creek Forest, 78 acres

Located along Sweet Creek, a major tributary to the Siuslaw River, Sweet Creek Forest was donated to the Trust by the Purvis Family in 2023. This special area includes over a mile of river frontage, lush riparian forests, and mature upland coastal conifer forests. Coastal Coho were documented spawning on the site this past fall.

# Nurturing Relationships Between People and Place

## A Legacy Lives On - Julie Whitmore



STEVE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

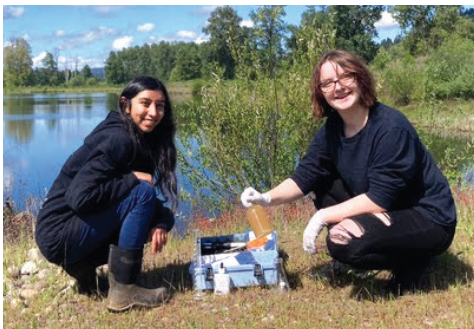
Julie Whitmore pauses for a photo during a volunteer work party at the Willamette Confluence property in summer 2022.

When Julie Whitmore arrived at her first Watershed Wednesday to volunteer, it was a confluence of a lifelong interest in environmental issues and a love of the outdoors. She was inspired by McKenzie River Trust's mission to return Green Island to a native landscape. She quickly became a regular volunteer, contributing to invasive species removal, native plantings, and other restoration activities.

In 2023, after Julie was diagnosed with brain cancer and underwent aggressive treatment, her one request was to do what made her most happy – spend time on the river at Green Island with her husband of over 40 years,

Jim Whitmore. The couple spent a beautiful, sunny day on the property and found solace on the land together. “Julie was always really aware of places where the world could be better and optimistic that it could be better. She was very interested in helping restoration efforts be successful,” commented Jim. After Julie’s passing, the Whitmore family encouraged friends and family to give to McKenzie River Trust in her memory, honoring Julie’s commitment to investing in the better world she knew was possible. Julie leaves a legacy of care and nourishment for the land that will be remembered in the hearts of her loved ones and on the landscapes and waters her hands touched.

## A Living Laboratory for Springfield Students



STEPHANIE LAWLESS

Students take water quality samples at the Willamette Confluence property as a part of the WELL Project.

Springfield School District students are growing their career readiness at the Willamette Confluence property. Partnering with the Springfield Utility Board’s WELL Project (Water and Energy Learning Lab), the property is a living laboratory for middle and high school students to grow. Through hands-on learning opportunities, students undertake environmental

monitoring projects, including surveying salmon-rearing streams, testing waterways for pollution, and analyzing data for local and regional agencies.

WELL Project Coordinator Stephanie Lawless shared that “the new partnership with McKenzie River Trust at the Willamette Confluence property has offered an outstanding experience for Springfield students to conduct long-term monitoring in a conservation area. With assistance from McKenzie River Trust and the Middle Fork Willamette Watershed Council, our program hosted more than 45 students to conduct multiple surveys in 10 different ponds and stream eddies since the spring of 2023.”

“In addition to having a 1,305-acre preserve for monitoring and learning, my students have had multiple chances to observe wildlife such as coyotes, bald

eagles, pond turtles, and great blue herons. Many students have never had opportunities to see this kind of wildness so up close. To witness nature in such an uninterrupted way gives considerable meaning to the data they collect.”

The program hosted more than 45 students to conduct multiple surveys in 10 different ponds and stream eddies since the spring of 2023.

Visiting the property throughout the school year, students will collect a robust data set of water quality metrics to analyze, map, and present to the Trust. “We hope to produce valuable information that can be used by the Trust in decision-making when addressing water quality and habitat concerns at this special place.”

# Sweet Creek Forest



BRENT ROSS

The Sweet Creek Forest property rises from the floodplain (bottom right) up to the top of a ridge (center) lined with Douglas Fir trees planted by Mat Purvis during the 1970s.

When Mat Purvis moved to Oregon in the early 1970s, he was excited to spend more time outdoors. Growing up in urban Atlanta, Mat was accustomed to camping, hiking, and fishing but had always dreamed of owning a wilderness property. As a young physician with spare time, Mat leapt at an opportunity to pursue his dream when a colleague offered to sell him a tract of forest on Sweet Creek.

Through the early seasons of his tenure, Mat would take advantage of weekends and slow days to plant Douglas Fir in Oregon's Coast Range. Previous owners had clear-cut the property and only riparian hardwoods and a few rogue firs remained. With his enduring southern accent, Mat shares that his greatest days were spent planting trees on the property. "I had only been in Eugene for a few years, and being on the land was a

great way to identify with Oregon and the natural resources found here." Slipping and sliding on scree, Mat fought his way uphill weekend after weekend, replanting hundreds of trees.

As Mat's family grew, the property provided a special destination for summer camping, fishing, and swimming. When recalling his time spent along the creek, Mat chuckles as he admits he remembers fishing but can't remember ever catching a fish. As the decades passed, the young forest on Sweet Creek's ridges grew, and Mat's medical practice grew, too. Visits to the property became fewer, and he focused more on enjoying the natural world and the benefits of the early days he spent planting the hillsides.

After 45 years of caring for the land, it became time for Mat and his family

to make decisions about the property's future. "We explored many options and decided that donating it back to the natural world had the most meaning. Rather than selling the property for a profit, I was able to work with the Trust to achieve my goal of preserving this wild place for nature." In December 2023, the Purvis family completed the donation of Sweet Creek Forest to the Trust.

Since his first forays up the bald slopes of Sweet Creek, Mat's forest has grown into 50-foot timber stands. Each fall, Coho salmon make their way up the creek to spawn, and deer, bear, and elk find food and shelter in the recovering landscape. Along with his fir trees, Mat's legacy will continue to grow for decades to come.

# Restoring Land, Water, and Community

## Restoring Connections



STEVE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

The Finn Rock Reach Floodplain Restoration Project reconnected more than 80 acres of valley bottom land to the McKenzie River.

With the purchase of Green Island in 2003, our work shifted from a primary focus on protecting land to working collaboratively to restore protected lands for fish, wildlife, and people. In the 20 years following this shift, our team and partners have implemented dozens of projects that have supported clean drinking water, removed barriers to encourage rivers and streams to move freely, reforested thousands of acres of land, addressed invasive species encroachment, and encouraged the return of many threatened and endangered plants and animals.

The word “restore” means to return something to a former condition, place, or position. In recent years, our expression of restoration work has deepened through increasing collaboration with local Tribes and Indigenous-led organizations. Our commitment to expanding the impacts of restoration projects is reflected in our efforts with the Willamette Valley Fire Collaboration, which is building capacity and funding for Indigenous leadership in implementing ecological (prescribed) fire. It is reflected in our collaborative work with the

Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians, who are leading restoration work at Waite Ranch in the Siuslaw River estuary – restoring Indigenous people, knowledge, and language to the landscape. It is reflected in our partnership work with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, with whom we have partnered to protect cherished places like Cape Foulweather and Boone Nute Slough, which are both poised for a return to Tribal management and ownership.

In 2023, two decades after our organization’s initial investments in becoming a restoration organization, we had a year filled with inspiring and impactful projects. From the completion of the Finn Rock Reach Floodplain Restoration Project to breaking ground on the Siuslaw Estuary Restoration Project at Waite Ranch, our investments today continue to address the most pressing environmental concerns while also honoring opportunities for growth and evolution in how we achieve our mission.



ELIZABETH GOWARD

### Floodplain Restoration Project – Finn Rock Reach

In August 2023, partners celebrated the completion of the Finn Rock Reach Floodplain Restoration Project. This multi-year effort returned significant valley bottom land back to the McKenzie River. Implemented by the Trust and US Forest Service, with support from the McKenzie Watershed Council, EWEB, and others, this project builds on a network of restoration projects in the basin. These projects take a process-based approach, acting like a large flood to help “reset” the

floodplain. This reset immediately benefits threatened Spring Chinook salmon, Pacific lamprey, bull trout, and northwestern pond turtles, among other native plants and animals. Facilitating the river’s return to its historic floodplain provides much-needed space for water to spread and slow. Projects like this build climate resiliency and support natural processes as increasingly frequent storms pulse above average water into a basin already impacted by wildfire.

STEVE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY



### Swale Reconnection Project – Green Island

The celebration of “living rivers” continued on Green Island in 2023 with the completion of a large swale reconnection project. Implemented by Haley Construction Company, this project builds on two decades of investments by reestablishing historic connections between the Willamette River and the McKenzie River channel. Two swales now weave across the south part of the island, providing space

for seasonal pulses of floodwaters. Restoring access between a river and its floodplain triggers a cascade of benefits for plants, animals, and people. At Green Island, those benefits are already emerging as new plantings put out their first shoots, beavers colonize swale edges, and birds and bugs begin to find new and improved habitats along the water’s edge.

WHITNEY RANDALL



### Oak and Prairie Restoration Project – Coyote Spencer Wetlands

Restoration work continued along Coyote and Spencer Creeks through a 10-year plan co-developed with our partners at the Long Tom Watershed Council. During the summer, workers thinned overgrown swamp forests to allow native oaks the space they need to thrive. Brush was removed from prairies to support the recovery of rare native plant communities found on this site. Maintaining oak savanna and prairie habitats is critical for species conservation and ecological reinvigoration. One of the most

threatened habitats in the Willamette Valley, less than 3% of historic oak savanna and less than 7% of oak woodlands remain. Rare species are projected to continue declining unless restoration action is taken. Over the coming years, we will continue working in partnership to care for this special area through thinning, returning ecological (prescribed) fire to the landscape, and planting and tending these critical remnant oak and prairie habitats.

BRENT ROSS



### Siuslaw Estuary Restoration Project – Waite Ranch

In June 2023, partners broke ground on the Siuslaw Estuary Restoration Project. More than 10 years in the making, this project will improve salmon and shorebird habitat, contribute to regional climate resilience, and provide a place for local Tribal citizens and families to celebrate and promote Indigenous culture on their ancestral lands. Led by the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower

Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians, the project aims to promote natural processes and cultural connections and will include a landing area for traditional canoes, a need identified by Tribal youth who were consulted on the project design. This project will continue through the seasons ahead, with the reconnection of the Siuslaw River to the site anticipated in fall 2025.

Restoration projects are usually short-term actions, but the work of land trusts is forever. Our stewardship team works throughout the seasons to provide ongoing care for these projects and more than 9,000 acres of land across western Oregon.



ANYAH PRESTON



We have a new address!

**Eugene Office**  
725 W 1st Ave  
Eugene, OR 97402

**Newport Office**  
914 SW Coast Hwy  
Newport, OR 97365

**Mailing Address**  
PO Box 1451  
Eugene OR 97440

**541-345-2799**  
[mrt@mckenzieriver.org](mailto:mrt@mckenzieriver.org)  
[www.mckenzieriver.org](http://www.mckenzieriver.org)



# UPSTREAM

Conversations between People and Rivers

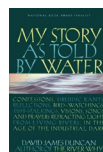
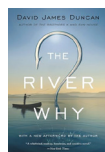
## AN EVENING WITH NOVELIST DAVID JAMES DUNCAN



CHRIS LATRAY

Join author and river advocate David James Duncan (*The River Why*, *The Brothers K*, *My Story as Told by Water*) and McKenzie River Trust for an inspiring and thoughtful conversation about the relationships between people and the natural world around us.

Duncan will reflect on ideas from recent works, including his 2023 novel *Sun House*, which explores the American search for meaning and love, and a forthcoming collaborative book of essays, *Going to See*, inspired by Barry Lopez.



**APRIL 17, 7:30PM**  
**THE SHEDD INSTITUTE, EUGENE**



**\$15 Adults / \$10 students**  
Tickets available through  
the Shedd Institute.

*This program includes ASL interpretation. Additionally, The Shedd uses hearing loops throughout the building as their assistive listening system for patrons with hearing loss.*

