

# 2025 Annual Report



## Collective Care Transforms Communities

This past year, the challenges facing our lands and waters felt both urgent and complex. Changing weather patterns and ongoing drought continue to reshape river flows and habitats. A range of environmental and social pressures test the resilience of natural lands and local communities. Native plants and wildlife navigate shrinking, fragmented habitats, and, at times, the extent of these challenges can feel insurmountable.

And yet, this year also told a different story.

Across rivers, wetlands, oak woodlands, and floodplains, people came together

with purpose and care. Partners shared expertise. Volunteers showed up in every season. Students stepped into the field and saw themselves as stewards. Donors invested in a future where clean water, thriving habitats, and connected communities are not aspirations, but realities we build together.

In the pages that follow, you'll see what collective effort makes possible: restored channels welcoming salmon home, forests growing more resilient with each planting season, young people discovering wonder in the outdoors, and community members finding meaning in tending the places that sustain us.

These stories reflect more than projects completed. They reflect relationships strengthened, knowledge shared, and hope put into motion.

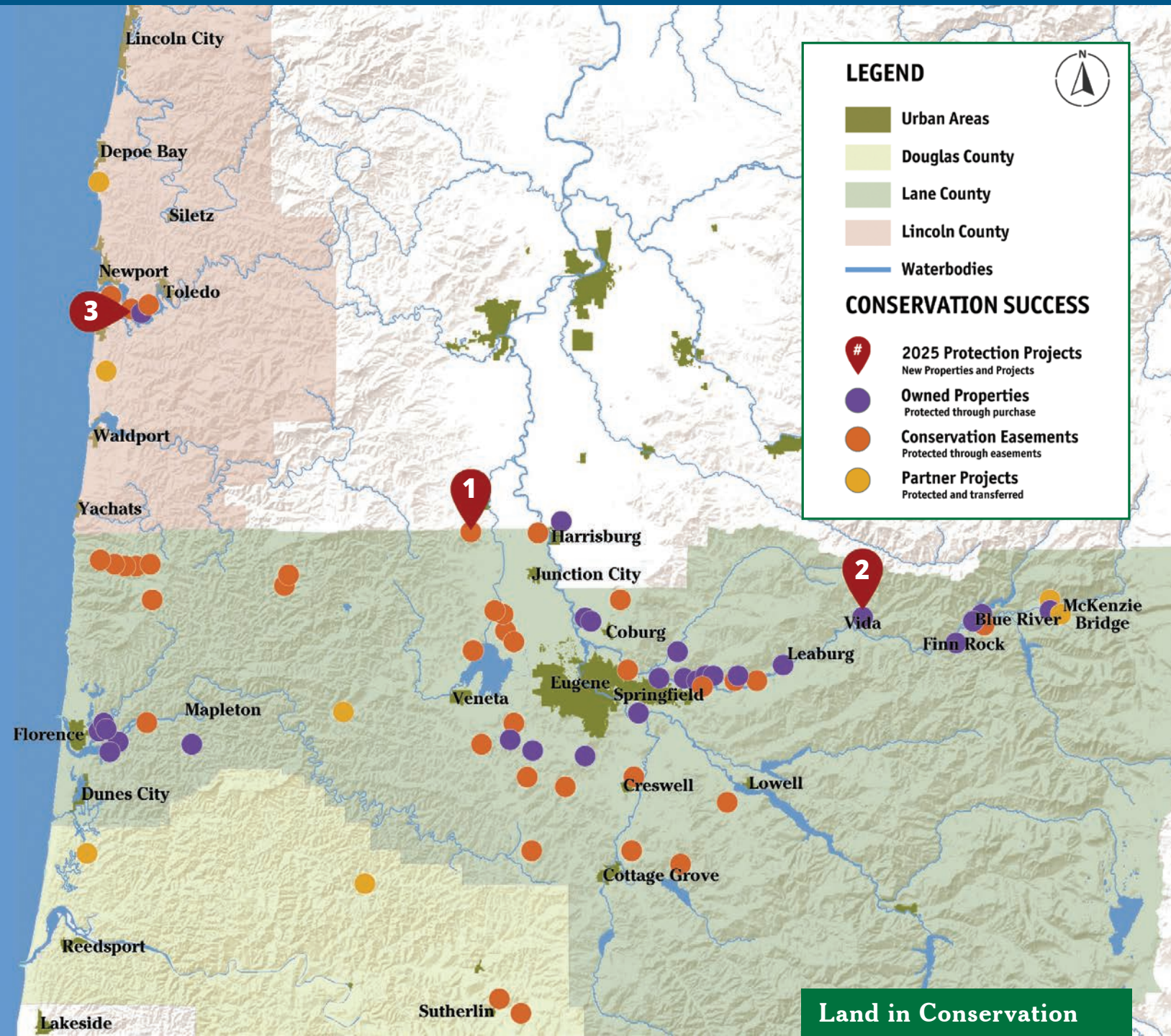
Healthy lands and waters do not happen by accident. They are the result of steady commitment, collaboration, and belief in what is possible. Even in uncertain times, this community continues to choose care over complacency, action over despair.

Together, we are restoring not only landscapes, but the assurance they hold. For today, and for generations to come.

An aerial photograph of a wide river winding through a dense, green forest. The river has a sandy bar in the middle. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. The forest appears to be a mix of deciduous and coniferous trees.

Looking upstream, forests cover Green Island (left of the river) following more than two decades of habitat restoration work.

# Protected Lands



## Land in Conservation

TOTAL ACRES PROTECTED: **11,358**

Owned Properties: **47**  
Acres: 5,635

Conservation Easements: **42**  
Acres: 5,395

Partner Projects: **8**  
Acres: 329

**In 2025, McKenzie River Trust utilized diverse funding sources for our projects.** Funding for the year included government and private grants, as well as generous donations from members like you. We also received significant support from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB).

Additionally, the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program, a program of OWEB, provided significant support for protecting Ferguson Creek through a working lands conservation easement. For a full financial report, our audited financial statements and 990 will be available online for review in June 2026.



Tammie and Trey Hagan walk their property near Monroe, OR.

Just outside Junction City, the Trust partnered with local farmers this spring to permanently protect 150 acres of

## 1 Ferguson Creek Conservation Easement, 150 acres

mixed farmland, forest, and natural habitat through a working lands conservation easement. It was the first easement funded through Oregon's Agricultural Heritage Program, which supports landowners who want to keep their land productive while also protecting soil, water, and wildlife.

"Keeping the land in its current state with a mix of wilderness and working lands feels important," said Trey Hagen, who grew up nearby. "I've seen farmland all

over the state divided into small parcels. Larger tracts like this are becoming rare, and this easement helps keep the land together so there will always be a future for local agriculture here."

The program, administered by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, helps ensure Oregon's agricultural landscapes stay whole and viable—supporting both food production and healthy ecosystems.



Gate Creek flows toward the community of Vida in the McKenzie River watershed.

In May, the Trust permanently protected 175 acres of former timberland along

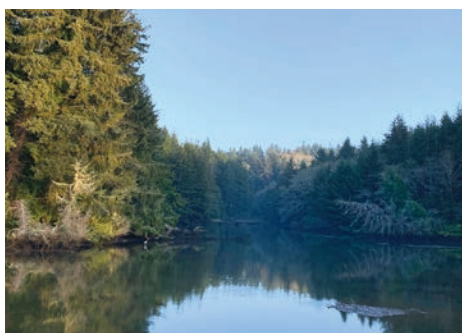
## 2 Gate Creek Purchase, 175 acres

Gate Creek, an area heavily burned during the 2020 Holiday Farm Fire. The land had long been owned by Weyerhaeuser, which worked with the Trust over several years to craft a deal that ensured its long-term care.

"This project came together through steady collaboration and a shared vision," said Sam Hillmann, the Trust's Land Protection Manager. "It shows what's possible when partners stay committed

to common goals, even when the path is complex."

Weyerhaeuser's Land Asset Manager Will Stroud agreed. "This project reflects the power of partnerships to achieve long-term conservation outcomes. Weyerhaeuser is proud to work with McKenzie River Trust to model cooperative conservation that balances ecological stewardship with the realities of working forest landscapes," he said.



The Yaquina estuary backwaters into Parker Slough, one of several areas protected by the Central Coast Land Conservancy and transferred to McKenzie River Trust.

Along the Yaquina River, where tidal wetlands meet steep spruce-covered hills, a quiet transition took place. This landscape, shaped by wind, fog, and

## 3 Central Coast Land Conservancy Easements, 160 acres

the steady pull of the Pacific, is home to salmon, shorebirds, and the communities that rely on a healthy estuary.

Since 2021, McKenzie River Trust staff have worked along the Yaquina and across the mid-coast to ensure these special places endure. In fall 2025, staff made progress on a multi-year effort to transition several protected properties from the all-volunteer Central Coast Land Conservancy into the care of McKenzie River Trust. A third property was added to the growing network of lands protected from Newport to Toledo.

This transition reflects the strength of the land trust community in safeguarding special places across time.

Fran Recht, a longtime leader with Central Coast Land Conservancy, shared, "For small, all-volunteer land trusts like ours, partnerships and resource sharing are essential. By passing these lands to McKenzie River Trust's care, we are ensuring that the protections we worked so hard for will live on, supported by a larger network of staff, resources, and community."

# Learning on the Land



EMMA GARNER

Students from Sheldon High School's Forestry and Natural Resources CTE class learn on the land to boost career readiness.

This year, learning was brought to life thanks to the Middle Fork Willamette Watershed Council's Regional Education Program. At Green Island and the Willamette Confluence, students from several districts explored native plants and wildlife through hands-on activities that aim to build

bridges between classroom learning and the natural world.

The Willamette Confluence property has been one of many host sites to these educational programs since the Trust acquired it in 2023. "This site is such an incredible place for career-connected learning," explained Emma Garner, Education Program Manager for the Watershed Council. "With accessible roads, diverse habitats, and multiple water types for data collection, the property offers rich opportunities for observation and discovery."

This year, WATERS (Watershed Action Teams for Education, Restoration, and Stewardship) programming expanded to include a focused senior project in which Sheldon High School students monitored water temperatures

along the Middle Fork Willamette River as it flows through the Willamette Confluence property. Younger students got the chance to revisit fall Salmon Watch lesson content closer to home through a new collaboration with Eugene 4J elementary schools called the Willamette Wonder and Wander program. This program utilizes outdoor spaces to reinforce classroom learning.

In total, the Regional Education Program led more than a dozen field trips for over 150 students on lands protected by McKenzie River Trust, strengthening the next generation's connection to land and water. From wildlife walks to water quality monitoring and fish sampling, protected places offered space for critical connections between classroom learning and real-world careers.

## A Membership Milestone



SHONIB TAREEN

A Hermit thrush rests on winter branches at Green Island.

Thanks to the generosity of our members, foundations, and business supporters, McKenzie River Trust reached a historic milestone in 2025, raising over \$2,000,000 in unrestricted donations.

These unrestricted gifts do more than keep the lights on. They allow us to be nimble and responsive to rapidly emerging needs and opportunities in our community. In 2025, unrestricted gifts enabled our team to accomplish incredible things,

including participating in prescribed fire partnerships, implementing restoration efforts at Quartz Creek, conducting title reviews and appraisals for new conservation opportunities, and investing in long-term planning.

As federal and state funding landscapes continue to shift unpredictably, we're so grateful to our members who provide the foundational support needed to sustain our work and ensure we can put financial resources where they are needed most.

### EVENTS

 **32** Public Tours & Events

 **35** Partner Events

 **2,037** Participants

### VOLUNTEERS

 **342** Volunteer Events

 **785** Unique Volunteers

 **5,464** Hours Worked



STEVE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

# Giving it Back to the Land



STEVE SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

Denny Ellis pauses for a photo while trimming blackberries at Green Island during our weekly Watershed Wednesday volunteer program.

Since 2019, retired specialty cabinetmaker Denny Ellis has been “giving it back to the land” through regular volunteer work with McKenzie River Trust. “I built my career on hardwoods,” Denny explained, “I see volunteering with McKenzie River Trust as my way of thanking the land.”

On weekdays, you can find Denny out on Green Island working to build a better habitat through planting and caring for the young riparian forest. On the second Saturday of each month, he helps welcome visitors as a Green Island Ambassador during Living River Exploration days.

When asked about his volunteer journey, Denny shared, “I enjoy connecting with my fellow volunteers and visitors to Green Island who appreciate and help protect this dynamic place for future generations. I’m in my seventh year now, and I have met a lot of great people and learned so much about our local ecosystems.”

Volunteers like Denny have transformed what is possible when caring for our local lands and waters. From helping to remove invasive species to monitoring conservation lands and welcoming more people to join us on the land and in the community, volunteers turn their care into action across the seasons.

# Beaver Week Makes a Splash



BRENT ROSS

Beaver Week participants survey for beavers at the Willamette Confluence in June.

In June, we celebrated our first-ever Beaver Week with free community Exploration Nights at the Willamette

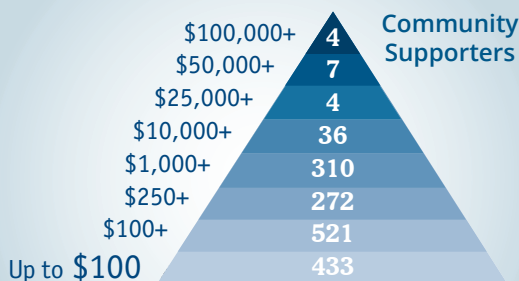
Confluence, led by Events & Outreach Manager Holly McRae. The programs filled almost as soon as they were announced, a joyful reminder of how eager our community is to gather around wildlife and the shared work of conservation.

Each evening began with a deep dive into beaver biology, behavior, and ecological importance, exploring how these remarkable animals shape the landscapes around us. Then we headed out to restored gravel ponds, scanning the trails for fresh signs of activity before settling down as daylight softened into twilight.

With binoculars raised and voices hushed, guests watched an active beaver lodge and waited. The air grew still. Then — a ripple, a glide, a sudden splash of a tail — and the quiet shoreline filled with smiles and whispered excitement. In those simple moments, curiosity turned to connection.

To join us for a Beaver Tour and discover more ways to connect with the land, keep an eye on our online Events Calendar for upcoming programs.

## COMMUNITY GIVING



## IN MEMORIAM

Every year, estate gifts from members and friends who have passed on fuel the work of McKenzie River Trust. Motivated by their care for place and community, these individuals embody what it means to take responsibility for our collective well-being and the health of our lands and waters. In 2025, McKenzie River Trust received

over \$1,142,000 from five individual estates, a transformational amount that is supporting land stewardship, empowering conservation work, and sustaining our operations. We are honored and grateful to these dear friends and to all of our Confluence Legacy Club members who invest their care and legacy into this work.

# Tribal-led Restoration Efforts Return Ancient Fish to the Long Tom Watershed

## CRITTER SPOTLIGHT



## Why We Love Lamprey

Lamprey are ancient fish, with a lineage more than 450 million years old. Pacific lamprey are native to the Pacific Northwest and play a vital role in river ecosystems. As larvae, they spend years living in river sediments, filtering nutrients and helping keep rivers clean. As adults, they migrate to and from the ocean, returning to spawn in upper watersheds where they transport important marine nutrients that nourish the forest. One of the oldest and least changed species on the planet, lamprey preserve an ancient link between land and sea.

ALEJANDRO MEJIA



BRYAN ANDRESEN

Staff from the Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indians relocate Pacific lamprey into the upper Long Tom River watershed as a part of a multi-state effort to restore lamprey abundance in the greater Columbia River watershed.

In late June, Pacific lamprey were released into the upper Long Tom River, marking the first time these ancient fish had swum in this part of the watershed in nearly 100 years.

Fisheries staff from the Nez Perce Tribe and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation carried out the release. They harvested adult spawning fish at Willamette Falls, collected DNA samples, and then released them into the Long Tom River.

This effort is part of a decades-long lamprey restoration initiative led by the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish

Commission, which unites the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes.

Pacific lamprey hold deep cultural meaning for Tribes throughout the Pacific Northwest. “I grew up fishing for lamprey. I grew up eating lamprey,” shared Sage Hatch (Siletz), an educator with the Traditional Ecological Inquiry Program (TEIP), who participated in the release at Coyote Spencer Wetlands. “Lamprey have always been part of my life and culture.”

Coyote Spencer Wetlands is a 225-acre conservation site where Coyote and Spencer Creeks meet, owned by McKenzie River Trust and co-managed with the Long Tom Watershed Council and TEIP. It was one of two Long Tom River locations where lamprey were released. The site also serves as an outdoor classroom for Native youth and their families, who take part in restoration rooted in Indigenous Knowledge, including cultural burns and tending first foods.

If lamprey successfully reproduce in the Long Tom, their offspring could begin migrating to the ocean around 2030, with some returning as adults by 2034. Ongoing monitoring and DNA sampling will help track their progress and guide future recovery efforts across the Upper Willamette Watershed.



SAM SLATER

## Caring for Land Throughout the Seasons

Protecting land through purchase is not the end of our conservation work, but the beginning. Throughout the seasons, our dedicated team of Land Stewards is busy on the ground, ensuring that our commitments to healthy, vibrant habitats endure and thrive well into the future. Through

ongoing care, including invasive species management, implementing ecological fire, monitoring habitat health, and managing restoration projects from rivers to ridgelines, this incredible team ensures that conservation lands are not only protected but also cared for today and for generations to come.

# Restoring Tidal Wetlands at haich ikt'at'u



DAN KIRK

Restoration Project Manager, Nathan LeClear, measures water elevation, temperature, and salinity in the Siuslaw River to build baseline data that will help us measure the long-term impacts of restoration at haich ikt'at'u.

A multi-year habitat restoration project at haich ikt'at'u on the Siuslaw River estuary continued through the summer of 2025. The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians are leading the work to reconnect 200 acres of former tidal wetlands to the river. McKenzie River Trust,

which owns the land, and the Siuslaw Watershed Council are supporting efforts to restore salmon habitat and bring back the natural rhythm of tides and floodwaters.

“This is not only a partnership—it’s a relationship,” said Ashley Russell, the

Tribe’s Director of Natural Resources and Culture. “By braiding Indigenous Knowledge with Western science, we’re creating a strong project that can serve as an example for other watersheds and states. It shows what is possible when a community comes together to move restoration forward in a good way.”

Once complete, the restored wetland complex will provide critical habitat for salmon as they move between freshwater and the ocean. It will also help buffer nearby lands from flooding and sea-level rise.

“There are people who value land and open space in every community,” said Jodi Lemmer, Stewardship Program Manager for McKenzie River Trust. “Projects like this strengthen both the landscape and the connections between people who depend on it.”

---

## Quartz Creek Restoration



JOHN TRIMBLE

Restoration project managers relocate a giant Pacific salamander and some crayfish ahead of restoration activities on Quartz Creek.

Following a summer of steady work, Quartz Creek is flowing more freely. In 2025, local, state, and federal partners completed a restoration project that reconnected the creek to its historic floodplain and strengthened resilience for the McKenzie River watershed. The project was led by the McKenzie Watershed Council, with support

from Eugene Water & Electric Board (EWEB), the USDA Forest Service, McKenzie River Trust, and other partners.

From May-August, crews used excavators and other heavy equipment to recontour the creek bed, move soil to bring the area closer to its historic elevations, and anchor large logs in place to support in-stream habitat for fish and other wildlife. These actions slow water, create quiet places for fish, and give sediment a place to settle during high-water events. The result is a healthier, more dynamic creek where salmon, trout, lamprey, beavers, and other wildlife can thrive.

The lands surrounding Quartz Creek were heavily burned in the 2020 Holiday Farm Fire, leaving the area vulnerable to erosion and heavy runoff.

By helping the creek function more naturally, the project traps sediment before it reaches the McKenzie River. This enhances water clarity and reduces treatment needs at EWEB’s downstream Hayden Bridge Water Treatment Plant. As Susan Fricke, EWEB’s Water Resources and Quality Assurance Supervisor, shared, “This project helps restore the natural processes that maintain water quality.”

Quartz Creek is part of a larger effort to give the McKenzie River and its tributaries more room to move. In recent years, partners have restored more than 400 acres of floodplain between Finn Rock and the river’s headwaters. Together, these projects protect clean water, improve fish habitat, and help communities better withstand future floods and fires.



**Eugene Office**

725 W 1st Ave, Suite B  
Eugene, OR 97402

**Newport Office**

914 SW Coast Hwy.  
Newport, OR 97365

**Mailing Address**

PO Box 1451, Eugene, OR 97440

**541-345-2799**

**www.mckenzieriver.org**

*McKenzie River Trust is a member-supported organization. A gift of any size makes you a member. Learn more about our programs online or email us at [info@mckenzieriver.org](mailto:info@mckenzieriver.org).*



PRINTED ON 100% POST-CONSUMER RECYCLED PAPER

# UPSTREAM

Conversations between People and Rivers

AN EVENING WITH

**ROBERT MACFARLANE**

Join us for the fifth annual Upstream gathering with internationally acclaimed writer, scholar, and environmental advocate, Robert Macfarlane. This annual event invites accomplished creative thinkers and actors to guide us in considering what it means to be upstream in place and time in a community of people blessed with a wealth of flowing water. Author of the 2025 New York Times bestselling book, *Is a River Alive?*, Macfarlane invites us to reconsider rivers not as mere resources but rather life-forces; beings with deaths, lives, and even rights.

**JUNE 2nd, 7:30 PM  
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.



WILLIAM WATERWORTH