

INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION



Bear Creek, the most urbanized watershed in southern Oregon, is lined by dense colonies of invasive plants with sparse areas of native vegetation; it experiences chronic water quality issues such as low summer flows, high summer water temperatures, and high nutrient and bacteria loads. These conditions negatively impact native fish and wildlife, and create safety issues for users of the 25-mile long Bear Creek Greenway, and increase the risk of fire. In the face of these conditions, Rogue Valley organizations, municipalities, and advocacy groups remain committed to increasing the ecological and recreational value of Bear Creek and its riparian corridor.

Bear Creek traverses the cities from Ashland to Central Point (combined population: 134,000) and interacts with major infrastructure for many miles. Interstate 5 (including an elevated viaduct) travels through the center of the Rogue Valley, and The Bear Creek Greenway trail system also parallels the creek for 20 miles, threading through 11 parks and parking areas on city- and county-managed lands. Nearly all of the area's infrastructure follows Bear Creek's floodplain including main sewer and water lines. Protection and management of the infrastructure elements located within the Bear Creek floodplain are essential to sustaining area transportation and commerce. By addressing priority actions, we can avoid the cost of infrastructure failure and improve floodplain functions.

GOALS

- Design and implement strategies that provide ecosystem services and promote natural stream and floodplain processes while protecting key infrastructure elements
- Locate, assess, and prioritize infrastructure improvement needs that relate to ecosystem function and recreation in the Bear Creek corridor
- Protect key infrastructure elements such as bridge abutments, culverts, roads, trails, municipal sewer, water, gas and power lines, and recreation facilities

ACTIONS

- Perform analyses to identify and prioritize infrastructure protection needs that may result from current and improved natural stream processes
- Utilize instream habitat improvement and floodplain reconnection projects to reduce stream velocity while redirecting the stream away from sensitive infrastructure
- Work with stakeholders and land managers along the Bear Creek corridor to identify, prioritize, and develop stormwater treatment at storm drain outfalls and road drainages
- Provide technical and material assistance with design, permitting, and implementation of projects that aim to protect municipal sewer, water, gas, and electric infrastructure where it intersects with the Bear Creek floodplain

BEAR CREEK RESTORATION INITIATIVE (BCRI)

In 2018, in response to a large number of fires along Bear Creek, several organizations started a partnership to improve conditions in and along the creek. These groups developed the Bear Creek Restoration Initiative (BCRI) to assess current conditions and envision a desired future outcome by considering ecological, recreational, social, and public safety (including fire) goals. In 2020, the BCRI released their ten priority sites for restoration and started to develop and implement several of those efforts.

The devastating Alameda and Table Rock fires of September 2020 created additional pressure to address community, social, and natural landscape concerns along Bear Creek. The BCRI is intent on working with the public sector, social service organizations, and restoration practitioners to increase public and community safety, combat invasive species, increase water quality, improve fish and wildlife habitat, and encourage the establishment of native plants along Bear Creek.

