



RIPARIAN VEGETATION

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's riparian area includes grasses, forbes, shrubs, trees, and other vegetation growing along the streambank and toward the upland environment. A healthy riparian area includes vegetative components that effectively filter stormwater pollutants (shrubs, forbes, and grass-like plants), stabilize stream banks to reduce sediment inputs (shrubs and trees), provide shade to minimize the warming of water during summer months (trees), and provide cover and foraging habitat for fish and wildlife (the whole plant community). The riparian forest is important to maintain good water quality and stream integrity, provide wildlife habitat, and slow overland flow of water into the stream during rainstorms. Furthermore, Bear Creek's riparian area is a community asset that people of all ages visit to observe aquatic and terrestrial wildlife.

GOALS

- Design projects that increase public safety and reduce fire risk along the Bear Creek Greenway
- Enhance and establish native riparian vegetation with an emphasis on allowing natural regeneration with acknowledgment that planting may be needed in certain conditions or situations
- Improve riparian habitat to benefit water quality and native aquatic and terrestrial wildlife
- Continue using integrated pest management and other best management practices to remove and control invasive species
- Create enhanced community stewardship and education opportunities for community members and local businesses
- Develop and implement a monitoring plan to track and share progress with stakeholders and the public

ACTIONS

- Identify locations along the Bear Creek corridor where native plant rehabilitation is needed and develop projects that meet the multiple goals outlined above
- Implement projects that improve access to the riparian area for ongoing vegetation management, public safety, and recreation
- Develop cross-sector partnerships to leverage limited available resources

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.

