



RESEEDING

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, 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.

The Almeda fire offered a chance to “reset” the native vegetation along ~10 miles along of Greenway. With nearly all vegetation eliminated, the urgent need was to stabilize the soils along the bare streambanks before native species restoration could begin. BCRI consulted with plant ecologists to develop a seed mix intended to do both. Nevertheless, observers of the Greenway in summer 2021 would not at first glance have spotted many native plants coming up in the thick green blanket of non-native barley and clover.

Why Seed Barley and Clover?

The mix that was used on the Greenway post-fire contained a high number of native grass and wildflower seeds; however, the most visible plants in 2021 were crimson clover and a sterile variety of barley (both non-native plants). Barley grows quickly, stabilizing soil and outcompeting many invasive plants whose seeds were biding their time to recolonize post-fire. By June 2021, this bright green grass was abundant and visible in the riparian zone. By fall, its hearty seeds provided food for wildlife in the crucial disturbance recovery period. Because this variety of barley is an annual plant, some seeds will germinate in the coming seasons, but eventually, this plant is expected to fade from the ecosystem.

Meanwhile, the non-native crimson clover offered forage for pollinators, while “fixing” crucial nitrogen in the soil for future plants. Native hairgrass, fescue, Oregon sunshine, yarrow and farewell-to-spring could be found in summer coming up amongst the tall barley. These plants grow more slowly than the barley and clover, but will persist and spread over coming years.

What's Next?

Over time, a successful restoration project should result in dozens of native species growing together as a plant community. BCRI works with the land managers along Bear Creek to use ecologically minded approaches to restoring native vegetation. Local plant and seed producers are scaling up to make more native, locally adapted plant materials available at a lower cost for future planting and seeding projects.

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 Almeda 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.

