

Immersive data collection, peer networks among key elements of effective watershed councils

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The Long Tom Watershed Council credits its success to a social infrastructure that brings scientific knowledge to restoration projects while engaging all affected landowners and stakeholders in the process. Here, landowners and others tour oak woodlands, a threatened habitat type in the watershed. Credit: Dana Dedrick, Long Tom Watershed Council

Community watershed councils can establish a social infrastructure that facilitates successful science-based management by participating in data collection and forming neighborhood peer networks, according to a study from the U.S. Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Research Station.

Findings of the study—which is featured in the January issue of *Science Findings*, a monthly publication of the station—can help watershed

councils increase the effectiveness of their work.

"Watershed councils are locally organized volunteer groups that bring together diverse arrays of citizens concerned with how their watersheds are managed, and they are tremendously powerful partners in large-scale land management," said Rebecca Flitcroft, research fisheries biologist with the station and the study's lead. "Until now, we haven't really known what makes some councils particularly successful in managing their lands."

To address this knowledge gap, Flitcroft collaborated with Oregon State University Professor Courtland Smith and studied the Long Tom Watershed Council, an active group based in Oregon's Willamette Valley that has generated baseline data and is involved in more than 50 restoration projects. Flitcroft has served as technical advisor to the leadership of the Long Tom—whose watershed encompasses 10 major subwatersheds managed for a wide range of purposes—and, in the study, identified aspects of the group and its processes that contribute to its productivity and success.

Among the study's findings:

- Use data collection as an outreach tool to not only acquire scientific information, but to simultaneously educate landowners and increase their awareness and knowledge.
- Establish trust by building a network of neighborhood peer leaders that have contact with the council.
- Create a culture that is informed by science and seeks to increase knowledge and awareness across the watershed by including all stakeholder groups and representatives from diverse land-use

sectors in watershed-scale restoration decisions.

- Engage scientists as equal participants—rather than authority figures—and allow them to serve as technical advisors.

"Considering the relative lack of available grant funding and the diversity of land management objectives in the Long Tom watershed, if the process can be successful there, we should be confident that it can be successful in other places as well," said Flitcroft.

More information: To read the January issue of *Science Findings* online, visit www.treesearch.fs.fed.us/pubs/37203

Provided by USDA Forest Service

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