

# National Park Looks to Complete Colewort Creek Restoration

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*Colewort Creek flows across the South Clatsop Slough toward the Lewis and Clark River at high tide Tuesday. While the northern end of the slough has been restored to tidal wetlands, the slightly elevated southern end, foreground right, more closely resembles the pastureland the area was more recently used for.*

For the National Park Services' restoration of the Colewort Creek watershed at the South Clatsop Slough near Warrenton, there's a tale of two sides of the same property. One side is pastureland, covered by matted juncus grass and elk droppings, while the other is a marshy expanse of native sedges and salmon tributaries.

Over the summer, the Park Service plans to finally wrap up a project that will revitalize all 44-acres of the tidal wetlands, 15 years after the project was first identified and five years after its first phase was completed.

First, however, the project's partners - including Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, on whose property the land sits, and the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce - have to shore up funding for the work and have the permitting approved by regulators.

CREST will submit the project's permit applications to the Oregon Department of State Lands and the Army Corps of Engineers next week.

Work on the second and more challenging phase of the project promises to restore the remaining acres of degraded estuary habitat by aligning them with the north side of the property, which the first phase already restored. Currently, the remaining acres sit about three feet higher than the north side, the result of dredge spoils being deposited onto the land.

"It's a big difference," said Chris Clatterbuck, chief of resource management for the historical park, referencing the three-foot differential.

The end result of the project will be the addition of 3,500 feet of additional tidal channels, essentially lowering the south side of the property.

Because of the current difference in elevation, the land remains bone dry even during high tides. Work planned for the property will carve channels into it, extending out from the Lewis and Clark River, which will allow Colewort Creek to wash through it.



*Madeline Dalton, the habitat restoration project manager with Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce, and Chris Clatterbuck, chief of resource management with the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, describe Phase 2 of the Colewort Creek restoration effort on the South Clatsop Slough. Work is expected to begin on the project in the summer and would further restore tidal channels and bring back native species.*



*Old fencing still stands in the South Clatsop Slough restoration area Tuesday. The fencing is a reminder that the area had long been used as pastureland before the removal of a tidegate allowed water from the Lewis and Clark River to flow in and revert to a historical tidal wetland.*

Native plant species of the variety that the Corps of Discovery encountered more than 200 years ago will also be planted, and woody debris will be placed in water ways to become salmon habitat.

The first phase of the project was completed in 2007 and replaced 60 feet of tide gate on the property's north side with a 40-foot bridge. This work uncorked the river and allowed it to wash over the land more naturally, supplying juvenile salmon with habitat and native plant species with an area to grow, Clatterbuck said.

So far, it's worked, project partners say.

"It's allowed tidal influences to come back to the property," Clatterbuck said.

After the first phase was completed in 2007, the number of salmon species found in the river jumped from two to five, including Chum, which was thought to no longer exist in the Lewis and Clark River System. The numbers of Coho and Chinook have also significantly increased, according to the Park Service.

"That number of salmon exploded after the bridge was put in," said Carla Cole, natural resources project manager for Lewis and Clark National Park. "The north side has done well, but there's room for improvement."

Madeline Dalton, habitat restoration project manager for CREST, said the number of returning salmon was a sign that the next phase would also be a success.

Project partners were particularly pleased by the returning number of Chum, Dalton said.

"The only known stocks of Chum are up in Washington," she said, "so finding juveniles means some of the adult spawners have to be coming back here."

Though project partners have high hopes for the project, there are questions about how they will pay for it. The expected cost of the project is between \$400,000 and \$550,000.

The Park Service has identified some funding options, including grants from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and the Bonneville Power Administration.

Those grants are crucial, as the BPA salmon recovery grant will represent the majority of the project's funding, Dalton said.



*During high tide Tuesday, water fills the northern section of the South Clatsop Slough. The southern section of the slough sits mostly dry and has not yet been restored to tidal wetlands.*

Once funding is in place, the project's partners will hire a contractor. Portland-based Vigil-Agrimis Engineering has already begun working on the project's conceptual designs.

For Clatterbuck, in his role with a national park that emphasizes nature and history, he said he believes the project will also benefit people as much as it will salmon and the environment.

When people use the walking path near the area in the future, Clatterbuck said, they'll see something that looks extremely similar to how it appeared when Lewis and Clark decided to settle down.

"Returning the area to wetland conditions informs visitors as to why the Corp of Discovery chose this for Fort Clatsop in the first place," Clatterbuck said.