

TREASURED LANDSCAPES, UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES

A Tale of Two Rivers

**Stewardship and Restoration on Whychus Creek and the Metolius River
Deschutes National Forest, Oregon**

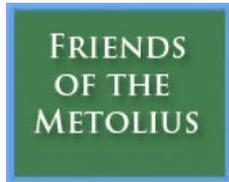
**2009-2014
Preliminary Site Report**



Painting by Patty Gifford

Patty
Gifford
2012

Partners



Supporters

Roundhouse Foundation, Smart Family Foundation, Jubitz Family Foundation, NFWF – Oregon Governor’s Fund for the Environment, Samuel S Johnson Foundation, Rose E. Tucker Charitable Trust, Collins Foundation, Oregon Community Foundation, Bella Vista Foundation, Remington Foundation, Forest Service, North Face Explore Fund, Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show, REI, Bend Broadband, Moda Health, Cycle Oregon, Dick’s Sporting Goods, Three Creeks Brewing, Columbia Sportswear, Ray’s

Deschutes Stewardship Fund: FivePine Lodge, Cascade Vacation Rentals, Black Butte Ranch, Metolius River Lodges, Lake Creek Lodge, Best Western Ponderosa Lodge, Hoodoo Recreation, Sun Country Tours (see page 17).

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Treasured Landscapes, Unforgettable Experiences • • •

The National Forest Foundation (NFF) launched the *Treasured Landscapes, Unforgettable Experiences* conservation campaign to address critical forest and watershed restoration needs across millions of acres nationwide – focusing on iconic places that resonate with the American public. Our goals are to:

- Raise awareness about America’s public lands and our unique National Forest System – and reconnect our people to these great places.
- Generate expanded media attention, public interest, and partnerships in the *Treasured Landscapes* campaign.
- Grow a strong base of supporters to ensure successful restoration projects at a suite of 14 or more campaign sites across the nation.

The Deschutes National Forest, Sisters Ranger District located in central Oregon is a designated *Treasured Landscapes* campaign site.



Site Overview • • •

A Tale of Two Rivers

Located in central Oregon, the Deschutes National Forest is a quintessential example of the stunning evergreen landscapes that define the Pacific Northwest. Whychus Creek and the Metolius River – both designated Wild and Scenic Rivers – wind their way through the dramatic valleys of this forest through roaring rapids and cascading waterfalls.

Whychus Creek has been shaped by the steep, untamed terrain it traverses during its 6,000-vertical-foot journey from its alpine headwaters to Lake Billy Chinook. Unfortunately the rugged beauty and ecological importance of the Whychus were widely overlooked for many years. Agricultural irrigation had appropriated so much of the Whychus’ water that, until recently, the creek ran dry during summer months.

More than 30,000 people visit the spring-fed headwaters of the Metolius River annually, with that number growing every year.

On the other hand, the world famous Metolius River is a true icon. Fly fishermen come from all corners of the globe to challenge its crystal clear waters. More than 30,000 people visit the spring-fed headwaters of this treasured river annually, with that number growing every year. But that love and use comes at a cost – in the form of trampled vegetation, streambank erosion and increased sedimentation in the river.

Historically, these waters contained some of the best fish habitat in the entire region. Whychus Creek contained half of the total spawning habitat for steelhead trout in the Upper Deschutes basin, while the Metolius River supported one of two sockeye salmon runs in Oregon and served as a major Chinook spawning and rearing river. Unfortunately, years of significant impacts such as overuse by anglers on the Metolius and lack of water in the Whychus have reduced fish numbers and habitat quality in both waterways.

Ecosystems in Decline

The ecosystems of the Whychus Creek and Metolius River region are under stress. In recent years, recreational pressures have been on the rise in the region. User-created trails now criss-cross the landscape. Paths along the rivers' banks have damaged riparian vegetation, promoted the spread of invasive weeds, and increased the rate of erosion and sedimentation. As the extra sediment enters streams and rivers, the quality of fish pools and spawning habitat decline.

Low stream flows in the mid-section of the Whychus Creek caused by irrigation diversions in summer months drive up stream temperatures to lethal levels for fish. The lack of summer water causes many other direct and indirect effects to the stream and its habitat including loss of riparian vegetation, stream bank instability, and erosion.

Since its construction in 1965, the Pelton Round Butte Dam has blocked Chinook and sockeye migrations to both waterways. Fortunately the dam was recently relicensed, and a new fish passage has been constructed. With passage to and from spawning grounds restored, young salmon fry have been slowly reintroduced into the river over the last few years, but they will only thrive if the once high-quality habitat these ribbons of blue provided is restored.

In addition to increased recreational use, low stream flows, dams, and other issues facing these watersheds, forest fires of unprecedented size have further stressed these ecosystems. Decades of fire suppression and logging have produced dense second growth forests that are vulnerable to severe fire, insects, and disease. Studies have shown that climate shifts are producing larger forest fires in the Deschutes region than ever before – the largest fire occurred within the last decade and burned a total of 90,000 acres. Severe fires cause



Filtered through volcanic rock and captured by trees, the Metolius River is one of the last strongholds for the threatened bull trout in the Pacific Northwest.

widespread tree mortality, but also directly affect fisheries and recreational assets – sediment enters fish habitat, denuded riparian zones exacerbate temperature concerns, and displaced recreationalists concentrated use in non-burned areas, adding to management challenges.

Restoring a Treasured Landscape

While the problems facing Whychus Creek and Metolius River were clear, the solutions needed to restore them were not. Working collaboratively with the Forest Service and local partners, the NFF developed specific goals for the restoration of the Whychus and Metolius watersheds and the surrounding forests and then worked with a diverse group of partners and supporters to accomplish these mutually-developed goals. We improved recreational trails to accommodate the increasing number of annual visitors.

We worked with agricultural interests to restore a healthy portion of Whychus Creek’s historic flows, while maintaining a vibrant agricultural industry in the region. Both watersheds benefit from reduced erosion, increased native riparian vegetation and enhanced fish spawning habitat through the elimination of user-created trails and riparian planting efforts. We also thinned the surrounding forests, reducing the threat of severe wildfire and enhancing native habitat for birds and other wildlife.

In bringing the Whychus Creek and Metolius River ecosystems to a healthy state, the NFF has benefitted central Oregon’s wildlife, local communities, and the thousands of people who visit each year in search of nature’s inspiration.

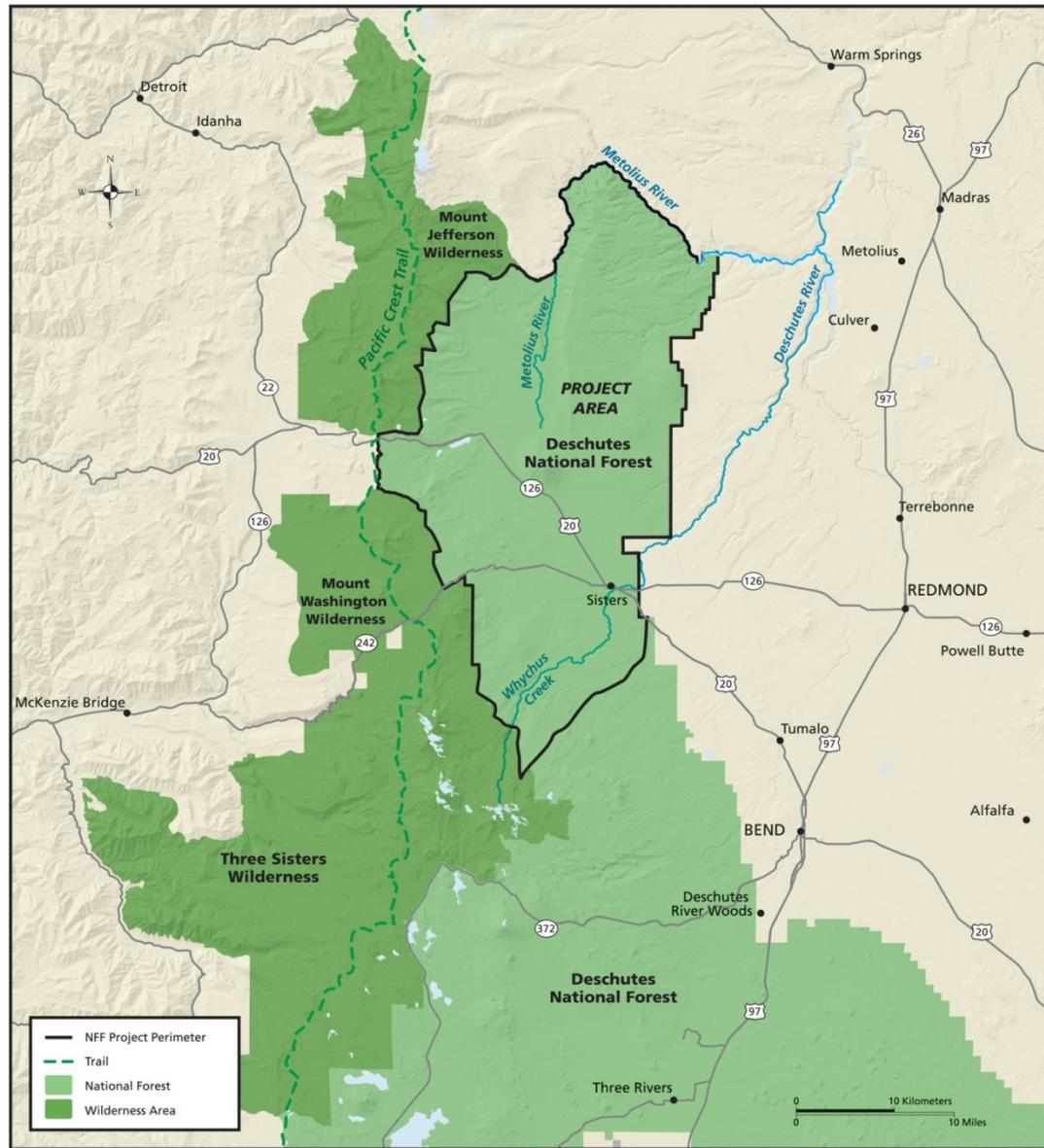
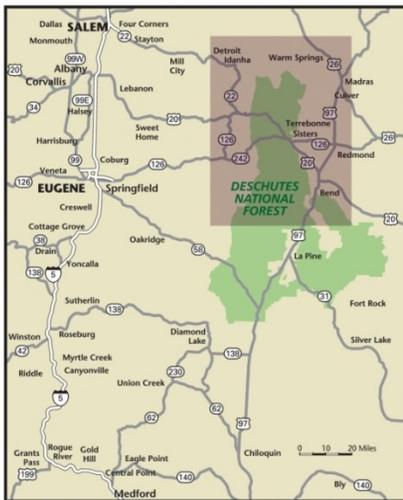


Location Map • • •



Treasured Landscapes, Unforgettable Experiences

DESCHUTES NATIONAL FOREST



Restoration in Practice • • •

The NFF worked closely with the Sisters community, local conservation organizations, and the Forest Service to **nurture a truly collaborative approach** to revitalizing the Whychus Creek and Metolius River region. These partnerships set the foundation for our effective restoration efforts and created a **robust group of local stakeholders** to ensure the long-term sustainability of these rivers. To connect the diverse partner groups and support collaboration, we helped form a local community coordinating council made up of area stakeholders. The coordinating council partners include the Deschutes Land Trust, Friends of the Metolius, Upper Deschutes Watershed Council, Trout Unlimited, Sisters Trails Alliance, the Forest Service, and the Deschutes River Conservancy.

With a **solid foundation of community interests and a realistic set of mutually-developed goals**, the NFF began the long task of fundraising for project implementation. Fundraising is challenging and our community partners proved invaluable to our efforts. Whether collaborating on grant proposals, opening doors to new funders, or developing creative partnerships, the local community and the Forest Service provided critical support in achieving the fundraising goals outlined by the group. Once funds began to accumulate, we initiated various on-the-ground restoration projects.

Here too, our focus **on building local capacity and a lasting constituency of supporters** were keys to our success. By providing grants to local conservation organizations and local contractors, we invested in the local community, built the skills and knowledge of local groups, and supported the regional economy.

Project Accomplishments

Our collaborative efforts resulted in a set of four high-level project goals:

1. Recreation Enhancement and Restoration
2. Upland Ecosystem Restoration
3. Watershed Restoration
4. Engaging the Community and Increasing Public Awareness

Together with our partners, we implemented projects that accomplished each of these goals.



Recreation Enhancement and Restoration



Lake Creek Trail: A new four-mile trail was built to connect Suttle Lake and the Metolius River at Camp Sherman. The trail provides a safe route that avoids Highway 20 traffic. With help from determined volunteers, 28 new trail signs were installed in the area, including the new Lake Creek Trail sign. The new guiding signage improves the recreational experience for visitors and locals alike.



Metolius River Rehab: Two miles of heavily utilized trails along the Metolius River were restored with partner Trout Unlimited. The project work included using rock placements to define the main Metolius River Trail and create hardened access to the river's edge in popular locations. This reduces erosion into the river by eliminating opportunities for people to scramble down the steep bank into the river at key fishing spots. Volunteers planted riverside vegetation and placed wood on the banks to discourage recreationists and anglers from making new trails. The four newly designated fishing access points reduce impacts on fish and wildlife by reducing erosion into the river.



Whychus Creek Trails: Two Heart of Oregon Corps "Youth Conservation Corps" crews accomplished a variety of work projects in preparation for the future trail work—eliminating user-created trails, pulling noxious weeds, clearing trash, and removing old fencing.

Additionally, youth crews from the Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council closed user-created roads and trails in the Lower Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River corridor, restored cultural sites (graffiti removal), and constructed 4.5 miles of the new Whychus Trail. The crews also completed a new permanent 1.1 mile loop trail, which leads to the new Whychus Overlook site.

Whychus Overlook: A contracting company built the new Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant viewing platform overlooking the Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River area. (See Project Spotlight page 11)



Black Butte Restoration: Northwest Youth Corps helped reroute the popular Black Butte Trail to reduce impacts to this subalpine site. The Friends of the Metolius restored and reopened the lower historic lookout trail providing three miles of new hiking opportunity while road reconstruction improved trail access and safety.

Upland Ecosystem Restoration



Flymon Stewardship Project: Thinning and invasive plant control restored wildlife habitat east of the Metolius River. Thinning trees to reduce stand density opened up forest stands, diversified shrub and forb components, enhanced wildlife habitat, and reduced the risk of stand-replacing wildfire.

Watershed Restoration



Camp Polk Preserve: An ambitious collaborative restoration project on Deschutes Land Trust property engineered 1.7 miles of new stream channel to restore steelhead and wildlife habitat in Whychus Creek. Over 100,000 native plants were planted and allowed to grow for one and a half years before the stream was directed into the new channel to ensure adequate shade and bank stability. This provides a key connection for steelhead trout to reach upper portions of Whychus Creek on public lands in the Upper Deschutes River watershed. The multimillion dollar project was directed by the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council, and funded by Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), the Pelton Round Butte Fund, Deschutes River Conservancy, Forest Service, NFF, and others.



Three Sisters Irrigation Dam: Myriad partners completed construction work and planting on this complex two million dollar stream restoration partnership project. Together we removed the most significant fish barrier on Whychus Creek, rebuilt the stream channel, and reconnected the stream to over 1,500 feet of floodplain. More than 50,000 native plants were installed. The project was directed by the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council, and funded by OWEB, the Pelton Round Butte Fund, Deschutes River Conservancy, Three Sisters Irrigation District, Forest Service, and NFF.



Instream Water Conservation: Working with agricultural water users, we implemented a water conservation irrigation piping project on Hurtle Ditch, which helped return water to Whychus Creek where it's needed for healthy fish habitat restoration.



Invasive Plant Control: With volunteers, local groups, and youth crews, we removed invasive plants along Whychus Creek and the Metolius River to protect and restore native plant communities.

Project Spotlight: Whychus Overlook • • •

The Whychus Overlook project, our last on-the-ground project for the campaign, responds to the growing public interest in Whychus Creek and the draw this area has for recreationists of all kinds.

The Whychus Creek watershed is a part of central Oregon's history and natural identity. The location of the Whychus Overlook is one of the most visited locations in the Whychus Creek watershed, and we wanted to help preserve it while creating a safe and engaging natural space in Oregon for all to cherish.

The NFF and the Forest Service aimed to highlight this historical place with a permanent, ADA compliant overlook to engage citizens in caring for and enjoying their treasured public lands.

The project's completion brings the Whychus Creek ecosystems to a healthy state, while benefitting central Oregon's wildlife, local communities, and the thousands of people who visit these public lands each year in search of nature's inspiration.

The Whychus Overlook provides a place where the majority of people who visit the Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River area can learn about its values and enjoy the spectacular mountains and forests that surround this special creek, while perched safely above it all on a dry plateau.



Engaging the Community and Increasing Public Awareness • • •

The NFF emphasizes public engagement in all of its projects. From forming a unique partnership with the local Chamber of Commerce to organizing nine *Friends of the Forest*® Day volunteer events, locals participated in hands-on restoration work, helping to protect and revive these treasured landscapes so that future generations can enjoy these spectacular central Oregon watersheds. Beyond the on-the-ground restoration work with volunteers, the NFF and local partners engaged central Oregon audiences from the quilting, arts, and cycling communities (among others) to learn about and participate in activities promoting and supporting the campaign work.

Sisters Volunteer Bank

The Sisters Volunteer Bank began in January of 2010 as a special program resulting from the innovative partnership between the Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce, the NFF, and the Forest Service. Tasked with a mission to foster communication and collaboration amongst the three partners and other local nonprofits, the Sisters Volunteer Bank increased volunteerism and stewardship of National Forest lands, and improved civic engagement in the Sisters area and Deschutes National Forest. The Sisters Volunteer Bank created a more cohesive community and an enhanced community spirit nourished by active and engaged volunteers and collaborations.

Through the actions of the Sisters Volunteer Bank, the NFF raised public awareness around the *Treasured Landscapes* site campaign work. From 2010 to 2013, the NFF engaged over 800 volunteers in stewardship, restoration, and engagements events in the Whychus Creek and Metolius River watersheds and surrounding community of Sisters.



Friends of the Forest Days

The NFF's signature *Friends of the Forest Day* volunteer program, offered a way for the public to get involved and learn about their local *Treasured Landscapes, Unforgettable Experiences* site on the Deschutes National Forest. Volunteers lent a hand to meaningful conservation projects that contributed to the overall health of their backyard forests and waters. Local nonprofit organizations such as Trout Unlimited, Upper Deschutes Watershed Council, Wolfree, and the Friends of the Metolius partnered with the NFF to lead volunteer groups which restored our shared public lands. Nine *Friends of the Forest Days* took place between 2009 and 2013.

Through these volunteer engagement activities the following restoration and on-the-ground project were completed:

- 11 miles of trail improved, restored or naturalized
- 12 acres treated for invasive plants
- 2,850 trees and native shrubs planted
- 3 acres of native seed planted
- 31 acres of riparian and other habitat areas restored from damage or overuse
- 11 campsites obliterated and site restored
- Over 3,800 pounds of trash collected



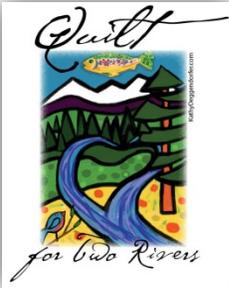
Reaching New Audiences

In addition to engaging hundreds of volunteers in on-the-ground restoration projects, the NFF worked with non-traditional partners to increase awareness and involve artists, recreationists, brewers, and quilters in the conservation and restoration of these incredible places.



Plein Air Paint Out: Beginning in July 2009, dozens of artists converged on the spectacular scenery of the Deschutes National Forest to participate in the annual plein air "Paint Out." By providing a venue for artists to come together and celebrate the beauty of the area and the Deschutes National Forest, we not only furthered interest in plein air painting, but also drew attention to the National Forest and surrounding private conservation lands, which provide inspiration, recreation, and respite for so many.

Painting by Jerry Dame



Two Rivers, Three Sisters: The NFF partnered with the Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show organization to engage and educate local fiber artists in the restoration work in the Whychus Creek watershed. Twenty-one local fiber artists completed a forty-foot-long quilt – each quilt panel a personal interpretation of Whychus Creek. The *Two Rivers, Three Sisters* quilt has recently been purchased and funds have been donated to the NFF for the Whychus Creek Overlook project. This exhibit was displayed at the Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show in July, 2013 and then traveled to quilt shows in Portland, OR, Tacoma, WA and Japan! The quilt exhibit was accompanied with an educational program that includes information about the NFF and the *Treasured Landscapes* campaign. The *Two Rivers, Three Sisters* quilt now resides in its permanent home in the City of Sisters, City Hall building.



Ride for Two Rivers: The Ride for Two Rivers cycling event began in 2010 as a fun and active way to get the word out about the campaign, bring people to the remarkable community of Sisters, and to raise money for the restoration work on Whychus Creek and the Metolius River. Cyclists pedaled their way through the stunning landscapes of Oregon’s Cascade Mountains, while supporting the conservation and stewardship of two astounding mountain rivers. Now in its fifth year, the Ride for Two Rivers has been officially adopted by the Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce as an annual event.



Three Creeks Brewing: In support of the NFF’s efforts, Three Creeks Brewing has officially named a beer “Restoration Pale Ale” in honor of our work. The NFF developed a beer label which features an image of the two local rivers.

Lessons Learned • • •

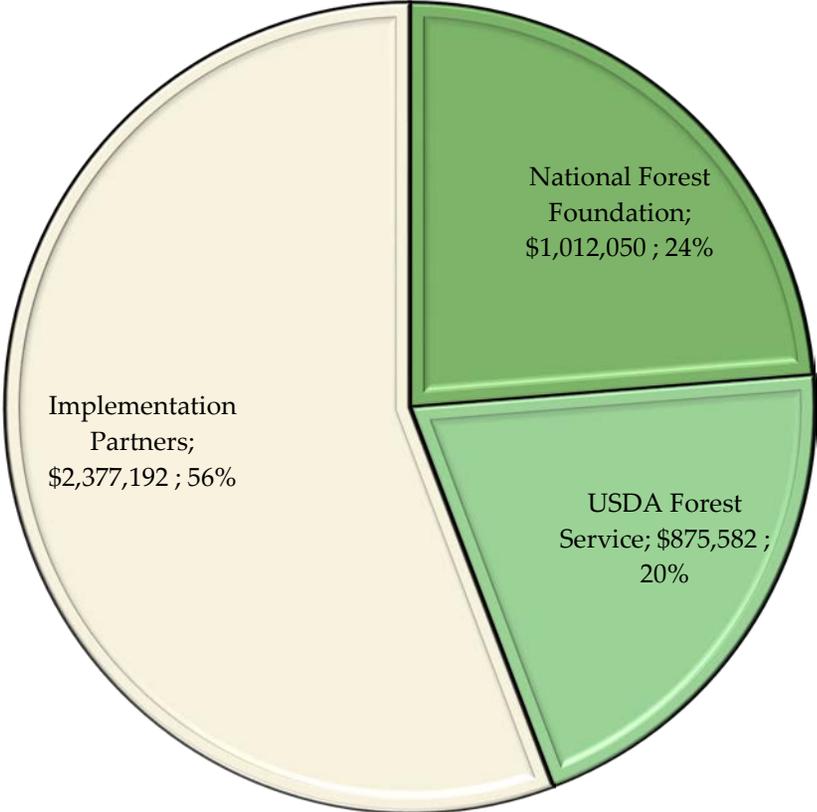
The ability to achieve large-scale restoration goals by involving diverse groups in the *Treasured Landscapes* project proved to be one of the most valuable lessons learned through our work in this corner of Oregon. By engaging the surrounding Sisters community and its unique qualities and attributes as a way for us to reach new audiences, partners, and earn support, we were able to not simply complete our restoration goals, but to build a strong foundation of diverse partners who will remain engaged in the protection and stewardship of this area for decades to come. These partnerships have also created annual events that help support the economy of this region. Engaging these local audiences and their values and interests also opened the door for non-traditional sources of funding such as arts foundations, breweries, and cycling organizations.

Another valuable lesson learned was through NFF's investments in local organizations. The investments not only increased their capacity to implement on-the-ground restoration projects on the campaign site but also allowed the groups to increase their work on other projects with the Forest Service in the region due to their increased experience and improved relationships.

A great strength and reason for success on the Deschutes *Treasured Landscapes* site was the crucially important partnership with the Forest Service's Sisters Ranger District. Throughout the campaign effort, the Forest Service staff was engaged, supportive, and knowledgeable of the local community. They helped the NFF garner support from local volunteers and organizations to further our implementation goals. The NFF recognizes and credits the Forest Service's hard work and diligence over the past five years as instrumental to the successful completion of this *Treasured Landscapes* site.



Project Contributions • • •



*Preliminary Totals
2011-2016*

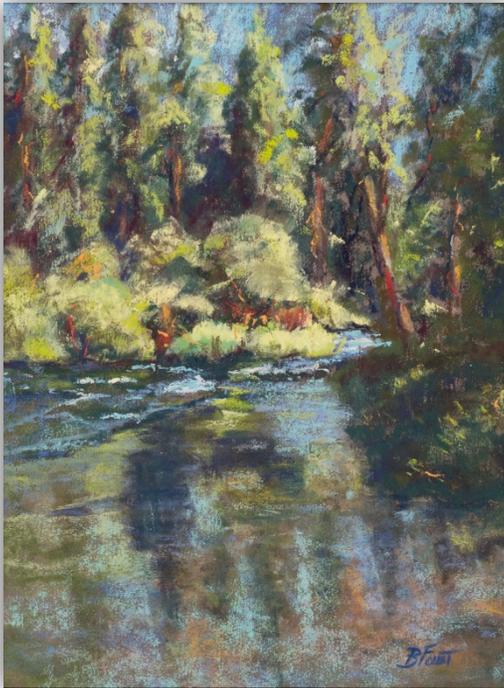
A Committed Community • • •

With the completion of the Whychus Overlook on the Deschutes National Forest, the NFF's efforts on this *Treasured Landscapes* site come to a close. However, restoration, stewardship, trail maintenance, community engagement events, and local organizations continue to thrive in this special Oregon landscape. The Forest Service will continue to work with dedicated local organizations and the community with ongoing stewardship and restoration of these central Oregon treasured lands.

- **Sisters Trails Alliance (STA):** The NFF has invested in the STA to work on several Whychus Creek Wild and Scenic River trail projects. The investments over the past few years have built STA's capacity as a local trails organization, and they are taking the role as the official stewards of the new Whychus Trails and Whychus Overlook site in partnership with the Sisters Ranger District.
- **Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce:** After the NFF helped to organize four successful Ride for Two Rivers cycling events, the Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce has become the primary organizer of this annual event. The proceeds from the 2014 event will continue to support on-the-ground work on the surrounding Deschutes National Forest and the influx of riders from around the Northwest continues to add significant value to the local economy.
- **Sisters High School:** 80 biology students supported the Whychus Creek watershed work by spending Earth Day 2012 planting native trees, grasses, and shrubs along the new Whychus Creek Trail. Volunteers from the local chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Sisters Trails Alliance led groups of high school students in the projects (the classes came out again for Earth Day 2013 for restoration work in the Metolius River watershed). Currently the overlook area is faced with vandalism and is known as a local "party spot". We hope that by engaging the local youth in restoration activities near the overlook site, we are developing a generation of future stewards who will care for the permanent overlook.
- **Deschutes Stewardship Fund program:** Local Sisters area businesses have been participating in NFF's stewardship fund program by offering their guests an opportunity to donate a dollar per night to support our work at the *Treasured Landscapes* site. These funds are matched by the NFF \$0.50 to the dollar and invested in local nonprofit organizations to complete restoration and sustainable recreational trail projects. These small donations have added up to significant results – program investments included: the Whychus Creek Trail project with Sisters Trails Alliance and a trail project on Black Butte with the Friends of the Metolius. The program will continue to provide a funding source for restoration and stewardship on the Deschutes National Forest.



“Being chosen as a *Treasured Landscape* site has turbocharged much needed restoration on our magnificent Wild and Scenic Rivers, Whychus and the Metolius. The National Forest Foundation campaign has provided focus, partnerships, funding, and leverage to allow us to accomplish more together in 4 years than we might have done in a decade alone. With creative community engagement, we have grown many stewards that will shape a new future for two rivers. ”



Painting by Beryl Foust Hovey

*Maret Pajutee
District Ecologist
Sisters Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest*

For More Information

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