

SANDY POST

SERVING SANDY, BORING AND THE MOUNTAIN VILLAGES • ONLINE AT WWW.SANDYPOST.COM • WEDNESDAY, JULY 29, 2009

Changing channels

Restoration work on Salmon River side channels continues this summer

By Garth Gulbord
staff writer

Somewhere in the woods around Welches, a spider lurks, slowly moving its way through the trees, picking up massive logs and digging into the earth. But this is no product of science fiction or mutant biology; this is a spider hoe, a machine similar to a backhoe and used for a variety of construction and landscaping projects.

The spider hoe on the mountain is operated by Eric Auck, owner of Boring's All Terrain Excavating, and he's helping restore salmon habitat to the Salmon River that was eliminated more than 40 years ago.

Following a flood in 1964, dikes were constructed and side channels were blocked on the Salmon

River to make a more streamlined river and reduce flood potential.

"It definitely had the effect of keeping the river in the channel," said Russ Plaeger, coordinator of the Sandy River Basin Watershed Council, which is participating in the project.

Unfortunately, Plaeger noted, by blocking of the side channels, habitat for salmon was eliminated.

Wood is good

Large woody material, including logs and large limbs, falls into rivers and helps direct water energy, protecting banks from erosion and keeping side channels open. Those side channels provide cool, slower water for juvenile salmon.

With the addition of the dikes to the Salmon River, the faster water sent large woody material downstream and choked off salmon habitat.

Last fall, approximately 375 pieces of western red cedar and Douglas fir were brought into the area by helicopter to be used in re-



staff photo by GARTH GULBORD

A spider hoe positions a log in a side channel of the Salmon River to help create more fish habitat.

activating side channels on the river. The side channels, found on public and private lands, include one at The Resort at The Mountain.

"That's a big boost of large wood in a short amount of time, which is what we need," said Mark McCollister, Oregon Trout Wild Fish program director for Fresh Water Trust.

This summer, Auck is in the process of adjusting the wood and mimicking what happens when logs naturally find their way into the river ecosystem. Last year, McCollister reported, one side channel that had no water flow since 1964 was reactivated, and within a couple weeks, fish moved in.

"We've seen that pattern a lot, as

soon as that habitat becomes available, it gets occupied, especially by the juveniles," Plaeger said.

On the road to recovery

Plaeger noted the Salmon River and Sandy River basin are recognized as "key places" for the recovery of federally listed species of fish, including salmon. In light of that, restoration work has focused on areas with populations in good shape to help speed the recovery.

Private individuals around the mountain have also been supportive in the efforts.

"Many, many people up here really care about the river," Plaeger said. "They're interested in what goes on and ways they can help. It's great; you couldn't ask for any more than that."

"We're very optimistic that the plans we've developed will be good for fish and good for land owners as well," McCollister added.

While the project will require maintenance from time to time, it likely will not be able to match the historic conditions on the river due to current land use and the amount of development. But the improvements have already won over one former fisherman who may return to the woods to see the fruits of his current labor.

"I think it's getting better, and maybe one of these days I will fish," Auck said. "Mother Nature put (side channels) in there for a reason."