



Lower Columbia
Estuary
Partnership

*Year in
Review*

**2020-2021
PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS**

Dedicated to the Lower Columbia River
and its Communities

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

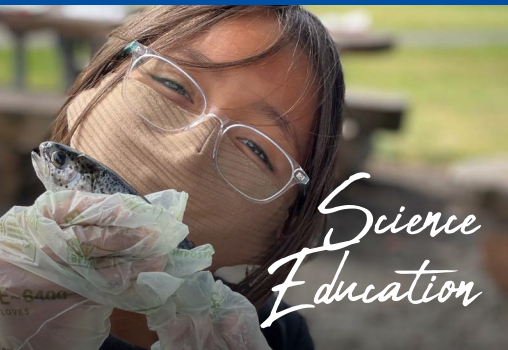
When I joined the Estuary Partnership in July 2020, I knew that the impacts of the pandemic were taking a toll on our organization and our community. But over the last year, through all the unpredictability and adversity, I've been inspired by the creativity, innovation, and overwhelming commitment to the estuary that has guided our work.

Members of our team worked with partners and contractors to keep progress on-schedule for the massive Steigerwald Reconnection Project, and made new progress at the unique Horsetail Creek Floodplain. Team members safely led 22 volunteer plantings and 26 paddling trips, and finally in the spring got to work in-person with students again, leading 4th & 5th graders in fish dissection activities outdoors. These personal

connections were precious this year, but most of the school year was remote and Educators also created watershed-specific maps and virtual field trips to get students and families outside. Our Monitoring Team spent long hours in the field surveying habitat conditions to ensure we keep learning about how the river is changing across time. *Change* was the theme of our [State of the Estuary Report](#), a look at five indicators of river health over the past five years. Despite some gains, there are many investments needed to restore the Columbia to health.

Our Restoration Team is not only identifying and planning new projects to improve habitat in the estuary, they are also working to address critical issues like the lack of cold-water refuge for migrating salmon, which is becoming more imperative as our

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES TO THE COLUMBIA



Paddling on the water provides unique opportunities for learning and connecting with the river and each other.

One partner, [The Blueprint Foundation](#), uses mentorship to connect Black urban youth to learning opportunities they usually do not get to access. One cohort, Grounding Waters, specifically introduces students to careers in environmental science and stewardship. Over four paddles with the Estuary Partnership, mentees and mentors used our two Big Canoes to survey marine debris on a highly industrial stretch of the Willamette River. The canoeing experience was a first for most mentees, and introduced them to on-water recreation, water safety, and scientific monitoring.

THIS YEAR:

- 394 people paddled our Big Canoes to learn about our rivers.

Experiencing the River



The pandemic made the great inequities in education even more clear. Students struggled to learn and teachers struggled to connect their students to critical subjects like science during distance learning that stretched most of the school year. But luckily, science is all around us, and our Educators were dedicated to creating pathways to learning for students throughout the region.

THIS YEAR:

- 20 virtual lessons created.
- Estimated 3,916 students accessed online curricula.
- 2,400 science kits created and distributed.
- 782 students dissected a trout, outdoors and in person.
- 76 high school students participated in hands-on stewardship.

Stewardship



Volunteer tree plantings proved to be a worthwhile, safe, and much appreciated outdoor opportunity during the pandemic. Planting streamside trees creates habitat for birds and wildlife, and provides shade to cool stream temperatures. Volunteers planted trees and shrubs along Burnt Bridge Creek, Salmon Creek, Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Fox Creek, and the Sandy River Delta, and worked to remove ivy along Minthorne Creek to prepare it for native plantings.

THIS YEAR:

- 424 volunteers planted 12,472 trees, mulched, and removed non-native ivy.
- 3 VetsWork interns gained paid work experience.

climate warms. Our organization has also spent the year honing strategies to advance diversity, equity and inclusion internally and in our work, and we have begun to challenge our restoration work with the principles of traditional ecological knowledge.

None of our progress would have been possible without the support of our funders who gave us the flexibility to tackle projects in ways that were safe for staff, volunteers, and the community. Lastly, we thank each of you for all the ways you care for the Columbia River and support our work. This last year we've all truly been in this together, and we thank you!

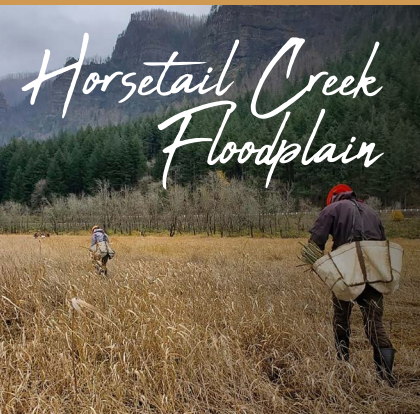
E. ELAINE PLACIDO

E. Elaine Placido



RESTORING THE RIVER

1213 acres restored by partners and the Estuary Partnership



Horsetail Creek Floodplain

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area's towering cliffs leave little floodplain habitat, but these areas are critical for juvenile and migrating salmon. Horsetail Creek's 190 acres provide 31% of all the lower Gorge floodplain habitat that is currently accessible. Since 2013, the Estuary Partnership has worked with the US Forest Service to restore the floodplain's hydrology and habitat. This year, crews planted 72,000 trees and shrubs. This followed work in spring 2020 to fell trees—many of which were burned during the Eagle Creek Fire—into the floodplain to slow flows during high water events, improve the connection between the creek and floodplain, and create pockets of habitat. A [storymap](#) also shares more about the important restoration work at this area.



Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge

The [Steigerwald Reconnection Project](#) finished its second year of construction and entered its third and final year. When complete in spring 2022, the project will see 965 acres of habitat restored and the Columbia River with unobstructed connection to Gibbons Creek and its floodplain in the Refuge for the first time in generations.

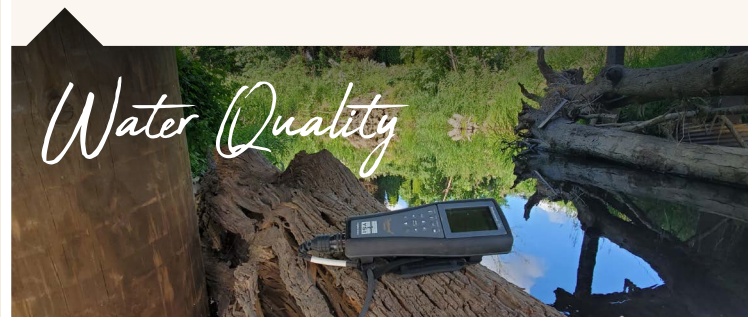
THIS YEAR:

- Crews restored the Gibbons Creek channel north of State Route 14.
- WSDOT raised SR14 to the 500-year flood level.
- Construction of east and west setback levees is well underway, and crews began to bring down the current levee in May 2021.
- Volunteers and contractors replanted 17 acres with native vegetation.

Scientists completed a fourth year of water quality monitoring within four watersheds in Columbia County, in partnership with Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. [The results](#) highlighted issues in the watersheds, including elevated stream temperatures and high levels of E. coli bacteria during the summer and early fall. These results could lead to focused studies and future restoration in these watersheds.

ALSO THIS YEAR:

- 2 stormwater bioswales completed: at Sitton School in North Portland and ClackaCraft Drift Boats in Milwaukie.



Water Quality

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THE ESTUARY PARTNERSHIP IS
A 501(C)3 NON-PROFIT CORPORATION.

Who We Are

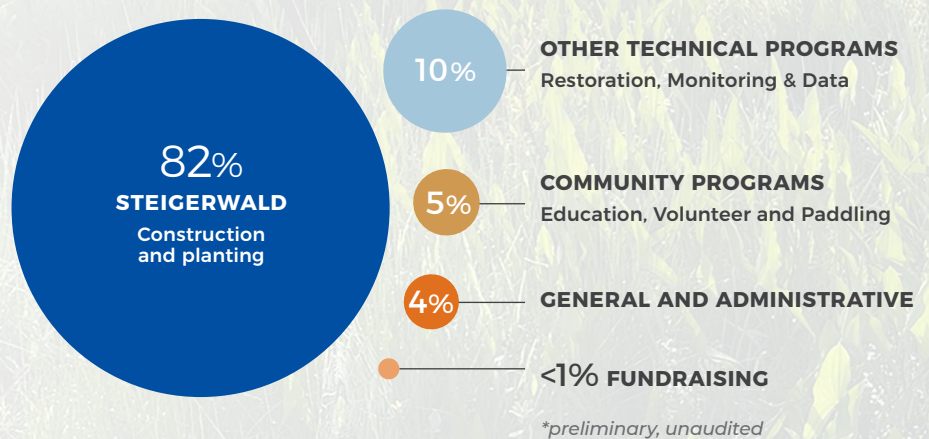
THE LOWER COLUMBIA ESTUARY PARTNERSHIP is a non-profit and a National Estuary Program tasked with protecting and preserving the lower Columbia River, stretching from the Pacific Ocean upstream to Bonneville Dam. This 146-mile stretch of the Columbia includes 28 cities, 9 counties and 45 school districts within the states of Washington and Oregon. This area also is the historic and traditional homelands of numerous Indigenous tribes and nations who continue to steward the river today. Today, the region is home to more than 2.5 million people.

As one of 28 estuaries of national significance, the Columbia River estuary helps to feed our nation, keep our economy flowing strong, and nourish vibrant communities and abundant wildlife. In 1995, the States of Oregon and Washington and the US EPA established the Estuary Partnership to tackle issues facing the lower river and estuary. Since then, we have been dedicated to research, regional coordination, and developing on-the-ground projects to improve water quality and habitat.

Our staff and board are scientists, educators, farmers, conservationists, government representatives, business owners, restoration practitioners, and recreationalists all dedicated to the Columbia River. We are supported by dozens of agencies, businesses, and private foundations, and hundreds of individuals.

In 2020-2021, we raised more than \$26 for every \$1 from the federal National Estuary Program. A large proportion of this reflects the massive restoration efforts at Steigerwald and the investments of many partners in that work. Those funds are all invested in the regional economy by contracting with local firms and providers.

WHERE 2021 FUNDS WENT



DONATED VOLUNTEER & IN-KIND INVESTMENTS

	Hours	Value
Professional Services	850	\$49,640
Board members	590.5	\$35,430
Scientists and Technical Experts	404	\$24,240
Student Service Learning	342	\$5,130
Parent and Teacher Volunteers	40.5	\$792
Planting and Community Volunteers	1784	\$39,248
Other Goods and Services	20	\$2,525
TOTAL	4031	\$157,005