

## the ebbTIDE

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# Restoration Works

*A New Study Finds That Watershed Restoration Adds Millions to the Economy*

The Rosburg Gym was filled with people talking about the Grays River.

There were conservationists and loggers, dairy farmers property owners and politicians, as well as state and federal agency folks -- all with an interest in seeing the Grays River watershed set to right. At times it seemed that the *salmonistas* and agency folks -- including the Corps of Engineers, NMFS, US Fish and Wildlife and state fish and wildlife folks -- outnumbered us private citizens, but getting all the players in the same room was a key goal of our little River Summit.

We're a sparsely populated county with a sparse economy. We're a long drive from anywhere, so just getting people out here to stomp around requires a little arm-twisting.

Aside from its remoteness, I've always thought this watershed has had a lot going for it restoration wise. There are no dams on the river and no major towns anywhere along its course. Not a lot of pavement to worry about, nor a lot of pollution.

The vast majority of the watershed is in commercial timberland -- owned either by the state or by private companies. There's no old growth left -- save a patch that barely covers a square mile. So from a restoration standpoint, you are starting with a sort of blank slate.

I remember thinking of this potential years ago and thinking about our local economy as well. The Grays River watershed had provided generations of people a good living -- cutting down trees, sorting hauling logs, and fishing for the salmon that spawned in its cool clear waters.

Now that the wild salmon are threatened, or at least less plentiful, and that much of the high value timber has been hauled off, I remember wondering if there wasn't a way to create an economy based on putting the watershed back together. Anything we could do to make the watershed more productive -- in trees, fish and for farms -- would be an investment that would certainly pay us back economically.

Along the way, the restoration itself could provide some new jobs.

I remember a project organized by the now-defunct Willapa Alliance where logging roads were repaired or decommissioned -- greatly reducing the threat of landslides and silting in the salmon spawning streams below. The guys running the bulldozers and

trucks I talked with were happy for the work. So too were the salmon in the streams below I think.

Most folks still view restoration projects as perhaps a civic and environmental good, but not really much of an economic gain.

That might be about to change.

A study released this week by Forest Community Research this week found that restoration in Humboldt County, California brought in \$65 million between 1995 and 2002. That more -- in some cases more than double -- the economic impact of other natural resource industries in the county.

Entitled "Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Natural Resources Restoration System in Humboldt County, California," the report also found that restoration work created employment for 300 people -- the majority -- 240 -- working in the private sector, while 15 worked for the tribes and 45 worked for public agencies.

It makes sense if you think about it. We've dedicated millions of dollars over the years to salmon restoration. All that money is going somewhere. It's a wonder it took so long for someone to notice the impact this was having on a local economy.

The Clinton Administration had tried to spark something like this a decade ago -- the [Northwest Economic Adjustment Initiative](#) contained a so-called Jobs in the Woods provision that featured retraining displaced fishermen and loggers to do stream surveys and high quality restoration work.

The displaced workers got retrained to do stream surveys and to remove barriers to fish passage, and the Federal government kicked out millions of dollars for watershed restoration under the program. As one economist told me, the only problem was that -- being government contracts -- much of the initial work went to the lowest bidder contractors and immigrant laborers rather than retrained workers.

Still, the concept was sound even if the execution left something to be desired. Thousands of miles of streams surveys were conducted by the Jobs in the Woods project -- surveys that formed the foundation of much restoration work being conducted today.

Moreover, the Clinton initiatives created new networks of partnerships and cooperation which the report calls a "restoration system" of interconnections. Federal agencies learned to work with non-profit groups, and increased their partnerships with private land owners. These partnerships spawned innovative new standards of restoration and new means of funding. The environment that allowed such restoration systems to evolve may be the most lasting legacy of the Economic Adjustment Initiative.

Of course, not all jobs are either high paying or desirable. The tree planting part of reforestation for example is by all accounts backbreaking, seasonal and lacking in financial rewards. Other jobs however, seem to pay better.

All of this begs the question, however. Where does all this money come from?

Some of it comes from private firms doing mitigation and restoration work as required by state and federal law. Most probably comes through grants and public sector programs dedicated to restoration for restoration's sake. Such public funding can bring in a great stream of revenue, but can dry up quickly.

Yet, "as economic incentives are developed that help integrate restoration-related practices into dominant resource management regimes, then the uncertainty regarding public funding levels for restoration work and associated volatility of financial support will correspondingly diminish," according to the Humboldt report. "However, even when we view restoration as an independent sector, as this study has done, it is clear that restoration is here to stay."

There's plenty of need for more watershed work. The report suggests that another \$150 million needs to be invested to take care of all water quality and salmon habitat issues related just to county roads in Northern California.

A recent study by the Center for Environmental Economic Development found that decommissioning 186,000 miles of unused roads on Forest Service lands nationwide would cost \$93 million per year for 20 years and would generate more than 3,000 jobs annually.

"A dynamic restoration system has evolved in Humboldt County," the report states. "The complex and coordinated instauration infrastructure of this system includes government agencies, public and private lands managers, tribes and nonprofit and for profit restoration organizations, private contractors and consulting firms."

"This infrastructure is linked through a dense network of relationships. It's internal coherence stems in part from the common commitment to the goals of restoration -- to conserve and restore the habitat and aquatic and terrestrial species native to our places that once sustained and may once against sustain the human economies on the North Coast. The restoration system is not only here to stay, but ... in the foreseeable future, it is likely to continue to grow."