

# Grant to help fish in Warner Basin

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Lake County Examiner

With \$300,000 from Open Rivers Legacy Fund secure by the Western Trout Initiative, the Lake County Umbrella Watershed Council (LCUWC) is working with its partners on a large \$5.86 million project to improve fish connectivity and habitat fragmentation in two major creeks in the Warner Valley basin.

Brandi Neider, project manager and stream and riparian coordinator, said that the money from the Western Trout Initiative is part of a larger project. The project began in 2019 when the Warner Basin Aquatic Habitat Partnership (WBAHP) was awarded a six-year grant from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB). OWEB is a granting organization that receives money from lottery sales and then distributes it for projects across the state. Project partners include the Lakeview Soil and Conservation District, Adel Water Improvement District, Bureau of Land Manage-

ment, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Desert Fish Habitat Partnership, and River Design Group.

Neider said that the goal of the project — which the \$300,000 will be used for — is to enhance connectivity for the native fish living in the Warner Basin — a species of fish federally listed as “threatened” that is only located in the Warner Basin. Other native fish that are not threatened species but make their home in the basin will also see improvements, including the Warner Lakes Redband Trout.

Neider described the basin as a closed basin that at times in the past has gone dry, even though streams that feed the lakes in the basin retain some of their water. Tributary streams to the Warner Basin were modified in the early 1900’s to improved agricultural production. With the introduction of farming and ranching, diversions were built by farmers and ranchers. This cut off the Warner Sucker from easily going upstream for refuge during drought years and dur-

ing times of spawning.

Neider described the Warner Sucker as a poor jumper compared to other fish such as the salmon, and said they are unable to get past the diversions easily in their current configuration. Under the grant program the WBAHP are working on making diversions work better on both Deep Creek and Honey Creek. Water will still be available for ranchers and farmers, but there will be a way for the fish to get past them.

Completion of fish passage at the Adel Town Diversion wrapped up last December while implementation of fish passage is currently taking place on two diversions this fall. Design work and construction will continue on Deep Creek as three more diversions will be addressed in the next couple years. On Deep Creek they are planning on only working up to the falls on Deep Creek, as the Warner Sucker is unable to get beyond the naturally formed waterfall.

Under the program fish ladders, rock ramp/roughened channel fishways, and an Ober-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Construction work on the west channel at the Starveout diversion in the Warner Valley. This is part of the work to help the Warner Sucker and the Warner Lake Redband Trout.

meyer weir will be built. Neider said that it all depends on the condition of the diversion, and what the options are to make it easier for the fish and practical for the water users. Alternatives are explored and decisions are made with AWID concerns and objectives addressed.

“This work is only possible through strong partnerships and working relationships where fish passage and irrigation improve-

ments can co-exist,” said Neider.

As fish passage is completed at each diversion, monitoring the effectiveness of the project will continue with the goal of providing data necessary to recover the populations of the Warner sucker and Warner Lakes redband trout — which were once widely distributed and abundant in the Warner Basin.

For more information call 541-219-0493.

