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## Rainier Elementary School Students help restore Muck Creek

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For more than 30 years, Joint Base Lewis-McChord Fish and Wildlife has worked with the Nisqually Tribe and local volunteers on habitat restoration at Muck Creek. For the last two years, students from Rainier Elementary School, on JBLM, have been helping.

On a drizzly January morning, eager students jumped off the bus to tromp down a muddy dirt path to the creek. Students gathered around Nisqually River Education Project employees Sheila Wilson, program director, and Brandon Bywater, AmeriCorps member.

“Have a look around,” Wilson said. “Do you see your trees? Look how they’ve grown.”

The fifth graders, who had been part of the restoration work in 2016, were excited to see the growth of their willow plantings.

Amber Marten, JBLM Fish and Wildlife biologist, and Wilson worked together to bring students out to work on the prairie. Two fifth grade classes participated.

Before coming out to do the work, students received an in-class presentation about what, how and why they would be doing the plantings.

They collaborated on a grant through the Trout and Salmon Foundation to bring students from Rainier Elementary School to assist with a Willow and Pacific ninebark planting at Coyote Bridge in Training Area 6 for the past two years.

“The grant money was used to transport the students and purchase plants to expand on the existing plantings at Coyote Bridge which supports steelhead habitat restoration,” Marten said. “In total, we have planted 500 willow stakes in 2016; 130, 1-gallon potted willow plants and 100 Pacific ninebark plugs in 2017.”

Additional funding came from an Environmental Literacy Grant through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association.

These trees will shade out the invasive Reed canarygrass; prevent or reduce further soil erosion and water pollution; improve salmon habitat by providing shade to lower water temperature, providing branches and logs for salmon hiding places and providing food and habitat; and act as carbon sinks to alleviate climate change.

Salmon are important to the economic, social, cultural and aesthetic values of the people of the Nisqually River watershed. Winter steelhead were at one time abundant and a significant component of the Nisqually ecosystem that provided an important winter fishery for sport and tribal fishers.

Run size estimates dropped substantially in the early 1990s and remain low. Muck Creek and its tributaries together comprise more than 43 miles of potential steelhead stream habitat.

The lower 14 miles of Muck Creek (with the exception of 1.1 mile stretch in vicinity of the City of Roy) flows through JBLM.

This particular stretch of Muck Creek is currently choked with Reed canarygrass, a Class C noxious weed that threatens natural wetlands.



Directorate of Public Works  
Amber Marten, bottom right, JBLM Fish and Wildlife biologist, and Sheila Wilson, Nisqually River Foundation education director, demonstrate planting a ninebark plant at Muck Creek Nov. 16.



More information  
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Amber Marten  
JBLM Fish and Wildlife biologist

It out-competes most native species and provides little wildlife habitat value while overtaking the gravelly bottom where the salmon would typically spawn.

The 250 plugs planted by the students in one morning helps JBLM Fish and Wildlife biologists with restoration of Muck Creek and educates and raises awareness among children and parents on the installation of the reality of keeping the habitat fish friendly.

There is a lot of work that goes into restoring habitat, and the students at Rainier Elementary are ready and willing volunteers.

For more information or to keep up to date with JBLM Environmental, visit [SustainableJBLM/Facebook](#) page.

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