

New Elk Creek hiking trail and conservation area being opened

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North Olympic Land Trust contributed photo: Carl Chastain of Pacific Coast Salmon Coalition and Lorrie Campbell, Stewardship Manager at North Olympic Land Trust admiring the new log bridge at the Elk Creek Conservation Area in Forks.

Unseasonable amounts of “Forks liquid sunshine” did little to stop the forward momentum at North Olympic Land Trust’s Elk Creek Conservation Area in the Calawah Basin just outside of Forks this winter. In early February, North Olympic Land Trust hired AmeriCorps Intern Brenda Campbell as the new Environmental Education Coordinator to oversee the development of the 255-acre Elk Creek Conservation Area for the purposes of environmental education and passive public recreation.

“I’m exciting to be working on this project, especially considering the history of community involvement and love for this special piece of land,” she said.

Campbell is referring to the transfer of ownership which began in the spring of 2002 when local neighbors interested in preserving the property for conservation, heard of a plan to clear cut the property by then landowners Rayonier Forest Resources and quickly sprung into action. A successful Salmon Recovery Funding Board grant application written by Becky Dickson allowed the **Wild Salmon Center** to purchase the property in 2004. In 2009, Wild Salmon Center deeded ownership of the Elk Creek property over to North Olympic Land Trust noting that the local non-profit organization would be better able to monitor and steward the land.

North Olympic Land Trust Stewardship Manager Lorrie Campbell expressed her enthusiasm for the project saying “We are so excited to be opening up one of our privately owned properties to

the public, where locals can literally step out of their backdoor and hike through one of the most beautiful, ecologically important parts of the Calawah watershed, enjoying all that makes Elk Creek such a special place.”

With the help of local volunteers and non-profit groups, North Olympic Land Trust looks to be on track for an early June public unveiling of the Elk Creek Conservation Area. The Pacific Coast Salmon Coalition has taken an active role in supporting the project, doing everything from site monitoring, working with Tom Mix of the Back Country Horseman on the construction of a 65-foot. pedestrian log bridge spanning Elk Creek, as well as supervising the Clearwater Corrections Center Work Crew as they roughed in 1,800 feet of new trail on the property. Most recently, local contractors have widened the parking area and created a trailhead.

Brenda states, “We have a long laundry list of projects to accomplish prior to the opening, but we have some very diligent local volunteers working with us to help us meet our deadline and the community support has been overwhelming to say the least.”

When asked what’s next on her to-do list for work at the Elk Creek Conservation Area, Brenda talked about the daunting task of having to block ATV activity on the property.

“We really want to work with the community on this issue, but unfortunately for ATV riders who have historically used the property, our Property Management Plan is focused on activities such as restoration, conservation, environmental education, and passive public recreation activities. We understand the community’s enthusiasm for riding, but hope that they will embrace our vision for Elk Creek as a place for people to go for a beautiful hike and student groups to learn in an outdoor classroom setting.”

North Olympic Land Trust plans to close the area to ATV access in the near future, helping to protect steelhead currently spawning in the creek, viable coho and chinook runs, as well as other sensitive riparian habitat.

Rain or shine, people are encouraged to get out on foot, bicycle, or horseback and see first hand what the hype is all about. Guided tours of the property will be offered to the public beginning in early June with the inaugural hike taking place at the Elk Creek Conservation Area Grand Opening event. Volunteers are still needed to complete ongoing projects before opening day so if you are interested in helping, contact Brenda Campbell at brenda@nolt.org for volunteer information. More information is available from the organization’s website, nolt.org or by calling their office at (360) 417-1815.

“If you are interested in volunteering please contact me so I can put you to work doing finish work on the trails, installing interpretive signs, constructing resting benches, or designating picnic areas! No matter your skill level, I’ve got something for you to do at Elk Creek!”