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## Restoration work planned for Mercer Creek in Ellensburg

NOAH WRIGHT staff writer

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The plan for restoration along a section of Mercer Creek in Ellensburg is to plant native trees and bushes in place of a derelict building to protect wildlife and raise water quality.

Contributed by Rebecca Wassell, Mid-Columbia Fisheries

The state Department of Ecology announced Monday that Kittitas County is one of six counties that will receive grant funding for environmental restoration.

According to a news release, the Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group is restoring a section of the Mercer Creek streambank.

Rebecca Wassell, Yakima Basin program director for Mid-Columbia Fisheries, said the organization "is a nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring wild salmonid populations."

Ecology spokesperson Dave Bennett said the \$49,992 in grant funding is coming from fines for oil spills, littering, improper waste management and other water quality issues.

Wassell said Ecology's goal is "to use the fines that come from a water quality violation, to improve water quality in other streams allows for a positive impact to come out of a situation that otherwise would just be negative."

The restoration will take place on a stretch of Mercer Creek along 10th Avenue in Ellensburg. The work is being done at the request of a resident.

"We often respond to requests from property owners for assistance with how they can improve water quality or fish habitat on their property," Wassell said. "In this case, the landowner purchased the property a couple of years ago and then was looking for ways in which that small section of the stream could serve as a demonstration of how urban creeks can protect water quality and habitat."

This restoration project also includes the removal of a building.

Property owner Mollie Edson said she initially bought the property intending to use the building.

"It was a charming little cottage right on the river. It actually was owned by the woman who started Gallery One, Eveleth Green," Edson said. "She and her husband lived in it, and it was a very artsy little cottage by the river, and when they moved, someone else bought it. I'm not sure exactly what happened to it in the ensuing years, but it did finally become vacant."

Edson said she watched for years as the cottage deteriorated and continually left cards hoping to buy the property. She eventually received a call two years ago telling her it was for sale.

But after buying the property, Edson realized the building was too far gone.

"I've had many contractors look at it, and it's beyond repair. So, that was a disappointment," Edson said.

Edson has since focused on restoring the property.

"And that's where Mid-Columbia Fisheries come in," she said.

Wassell said Mid-Columbia Fisheries plans to remove the building and "plant native trees and shrubs in the footprint of where the house was, so that the next time the creek is up, it'll be traveling through a riparian area made of vegetation rather than an old house."

Wassell said the plan is for the restoration to begin a year from now, and there will be minimal traffic impacts.

"It's a residential neighborhood on Mercer Creek," she said. "When construction debris is pulled off there will be a dump truck moving, and the construction company will have a flagger or make sure that drivers are safe and there's no conflict. I wouldn't expect it to be more than a day or two in duration."

Wassell said it will take a year to begin restoration because there are many things to do before work can start.

"There are many permits required to do work along the stream, and we first need to document if there's a historic value that has to be removed," Wassell said. "And if there is (historic value), how we make sure that we have recorded that so we don't lose the information."

Wassell said those interested in helping with restoration or volunteering with the nonprofit can visit the Mid-Columbia Fisheries website.

"We rely on the work of volunteers and are eager to invite others to help with restoration work," she said. "And if you're a landowner and you have a creek or a part of the river on your property, we'd be interested in talking with you about how you could be protecting that water and whether there might be restoration projects that could have a big impact on improving conditions for fish."

With rivers and creeks in the area being a home to salmon, Edson and Wassell said people should be conscious of what they can do to help the fish populations

"I think that all of the development that's been happening outside of our area has taken up a lot of the wetlands we used to have and that creek restoration in the city is very important," Edson said.

"We have this finite amount of land, and these houses are built right up to them. If anyone does have any property that they're able to spare at all for creek restoration, it's important that we do so just to be good neighbors."

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Noah Wright