

## Interview

# Bill McMillan, Clark-Skamania Flyfishers Club

*Settlement of a Clean Water Act lawsuit brought by NELC attorneys against a Columbia River polluter, the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA), helped fund a project to study impacts to the Columbia and its tributaries. The Clark-Skamania Flyfishers Club conducted research in cooperation with Washington state agencies and the U.S. Forest Service.*

**The National Environmental Law Center: Why is this research important?**

**Bill McMillan:** The Clark-Skamania Flyfishers' (CSF) primary interest has been to maintain the pristine nature of the upper Siouxi Creek watershed within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. In 1902 a major forest fire burned the area. Since that time there has not been any significant logging in the watershed, and the area is designed as a "Roadless Area."

However, the Forest Service is now developing plans for the upper Siouxi watershed which may include roads and timber harvest. While the CSF is opposed to these activities, an agreement was made between the Forest Service and our group to collect baseline data from which changes in the watershed could be monitored. Whatever the eventual management decision may be for the watershed, this data will be critical if we are to know what the real effects are due to those land-use decisions.

These studies will then aid us in monitoring changes in water quality and aquatic resources on two tributaries of the North Fork Lewis River due to forest service activities.

So you can see there was important work to be done, and the questions were who was going to do the work, and where would funding come from.

The Forest Service recognized the benefits of cooperative projects with the public and other agencies. So CSF took on the project of creating a data base for both Siouxi Creek and neighboring Canyon Creek—an extensively logged North Fork Lewis River tributary used for comparative purposes. CSF found funding through NELC and other sources.

**NELC: How did the funds from the ALCOA settlement help your project?**

**BM:** The ALCOA penalty payment was targeted for a genetic analysis of the rainbow trout populations in both creeks. This test is important in determining if wild stream-bred trout breed with hatchery-reared trout released into the same habitat. It's also a way of measuring genetic diversity within a watershed's wild trout population. Without this type of data, unique wild fish populations can be lost without anyone ever knowing it.

**NELC: What did you find from your research?**



(photo: Arthur Ericsson)

**BM:** The real benefits from this research won't be fully realized until we have future years of data to draw from.

However, we did find that the wild trout populations in both Siouxi and Canyon creeks have had no significant in-breeding with hatchery trout. In addition, at least three distinct wild rainbow trout populations were found in specific areas of the Siouxi watershed, and one of these populations has a genetically unique marker that has not been found in previous samples taken from other Columbia River tributaries.

CSF is providing a sufficient base to help effectively evaluate land-use decisions for the Siouxi watershed. We hope to stimulate a process for land-use planning driven on a cumulative effects analysis, and how that will impact each major river basin. This research gives us a solid direction for the future. ♦

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The Clark-Skamania Flyfishers Club is a citizens' group whose mission is to protect wild trout in their natural habitat. For more information contact them directly at: P.O. Box 644, Vancouver, WA 98666, (206) 837-3792.