

# Methow Valley News

## Online

## Twisp River land, easement acquisitions awarded state, federal salmon money

By Joyce Campbell

Endangered fish species in the Twisp River Valley will be getting a \$1.2 million boost from state and federal tax dollars.

The state Salmon Recovery Funding Board has awarded grants for three projects in Okanogan County, all in the Twisp River drainage.

"These grants will not only help protect and restore our land and water, but will help stimulate our economy," said Gov. Chris Gregoire in a news release announcing the grants on Dec. 12. More than \$19.8 million was awarded to organizations in 28 counties.

"I'm pleased that the money is bringing us closer to the goal of getting these fish off the endangered species list," said Bud Hover, Okanogan County commissioner and one of five voting members of the state Salmon Recovery Funding Board. He was also pleased that the money would serve to help people in the county during these economic times.

The Methow Conservancy will receive more than \$896,000 to buy five conservation easements on 156.4 acres along the Twisp River, directly protecting a total of 1.9 miles of riverfront and 108 acres of floodplain from development. The easements will protect riverbanks that otherwise would be highly likely to be cleared for river access and residential development.

The organization will contribute up to \$184,150 of value from a donated conservation easement.

The proposed conservation easements are located from four to 11 miles up the Twisp River, and some are contiguous to properties with existing conservation easements, said Jason Paulsen, executive director of the Methow Conservancy. He said the project was ranked successfully because the properties provide good riparian habitat for fish, including side channels or wetlands important to the biological function of the river itself.

Landowners voluntarily enter the conservation program, which ensures a partnership "forever into the future," said Paulsen. Landowners retain ownership of the properties, with the conservancy organization purchasing the development rights on a portion of the land.

A \$257,814 grant to the Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation will be used to purchase four parcels on the Twisp River about a mile above the confluence with the Methow River. The 14-acre purchase on the north side of the river will complement the foundation's 24-acre restoration site directly across the river.

"It's important that the river meander, and expose the channel to new gravel and create spawning areas," said foundation executive director Chris Johnson. The Twisp River habitat supports spring Chinook salmon, steelhead and bull trout, fish listed under the Endangered Species Act. Roads and dikes have isolated the river from its floodplain.

The organization's crews will replant native species to stabilize about two-tenths miles of riverbank and diversify the plant community. The foundation will contribute \$224,000 to the project in cash donations and grants.

The foundation will also receive more than \$59,000 to replace the culvert at the Poorman Creek Cutoff Road. The culvert is a barrier to juvenile fish at most flows and to adults at high and low flows, according to Johnson. It is the last barrier to fish passage in the Twisp River drainage.

Crews will replace the culvert and install a small rock weir at a nearby irrigation diversion. The Poorman Creek culvert project will restore year-round access to five miles of spawning and rearing habitat. The foundation will contribute \$65,000 to the project in grant money and in donations of labor and materials.

Since 2000, the board has awarded more than \$345 million in grants for 1,115 projects.

Recent state funding cuts have substantially decreased project money, said Hover. He will be encouraging the legislature to make sure that money from the state is at least enough to meet matching federal dollars.

"We've expended tremendous resources, and we don't want them to drop the ball and lose everything we've invested," said Hover. Planning and top-notch staff people are in place, said Hover, and he wants to follow through to completion.

Information about the Salmon Recovery Funding Board is available online at [www.rco.wa.gov](http://www.rco.wa.gov).

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