

Water Quality and Roads: The Reservation's North Parcel

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Grant funded Watershed-Based Road Improvement Project on the North Parcel should reduce erosion and improve fish habitat within First Creek.

When the Tribe purchased the lands making up the Empire Reservation from Lone Rock Timber Company, they inherited 26.1 miles of unimproved roads; these roads border and impact water quality within First, Second, Fourth and Tarheel Creek; tributaries of the Coos watershed.

Since 1997 the Tribe has worked to improve the roads on the Reservation's South Parcel; however; there has been little road improvement activity on the Reservation's North Parcel; until now. With the help of an Environmental Protection Agency, Clean Water Act grant; submitted by LRES staff; the Tribe is utilizing an in-house work crew to repair deteriorating roads on the remote North Parcel of the Reservation.

Previous logging activities removed vegetation, disturbed soils, built roads, and altered drainages, thereby causing heavy erosion and impacts to water and habitat quality. A Non-Point Source Assessment completed for the Reservation in September 2001, found that fine-dominated substrate conditions are prevalent in all basin streams on the Reservation.

Sediment laden runoff into the Tribe's streams has negatively impacted fisheries habitats. Excessive sediment covers potential spawning gravel and reduces "desirable" habitat frequency. Tribal assessments found that "no endemic salmonids" with the exception of cutthroat trout exists within these streams (First, Second and Fourth Creek). This is in spite of information that these species once occurred historically.

This past June tribal work crews began construction on the Wisconsin Extension Road which will connect the North Parcel to the rest of the Reservation's road network. The objectives of the Watershed-based Road Improvement Project are to complete road improvement work on approximately 2.5 miles of unimproved roads and skid trails within First and Second Creek drainages. This improvement work, along with a culvert placement component in First Creek should protect water quality within the First Creek watershed.

The end results are the replacement of unimproved roads with gravel-surfaced roads with appropriate drainage and slope structures and the ripping and seeding of primitive skid roads. Completing the project will provide significant protection from NPS sediment pollutants reaching First and Second creeks. Not only that, but the road improvements and culvert placement improves access to the 250 acre North parcel of the Empire Reservation and improves the Tribe's ability to monitor and protect its' natural resources.