

College Awarded \$25,000 for China Creek Enhancement

Expanded: College Plans to Extend Kiser Natural Outdoor Learning Laboratory

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The ongoing effort to enhance China Creek through the Centralia College campus received a boost this week when the college was awarded a \$25,000 environmental grant.

Centralia College received the \$25,000 grant from the Rose Foundation, a California-based advocacy group committed to protecting the environment.

"We applied for this grant to remove the invasive vegetation and plant more of the trees that are needed to shade that creek," Steve Ward, vice president of finance and administration, said.

"We are just expanding the work we have done."

The college already improved a section of China Creek, known as the Kiser Natural Outdoor Learning Laboratory, about two years ago. The KNOLL is used by the science faculty and students to study geology, environmental studies and botany, according to the college.

Funds from the Rose Foundation grant will enhance the creek downstream from the KNOLL. Invasive species such as blackberries and canary plants will be removed and native species and trees will be planted to restore the banks to a natural habitat.

The grant money will be dispersed over two years.

Centralia College is working with the Centralia Stream Team and Friends of China Creek to grow the salmon population throughout the entire creek. Salmon have started to spawn in the urban waterway over the past three years.

Kim Ashmore, Centralia street and stormwater manager and Centralia Stream Team founder, said the city and college are working in a joint effort to restore China Creek.

"Eventually we will get more and more salmon up the creek," Ashmore said. "We are going to get it back to a pristine creek running through downtown Centralia."

Ward said the China Creek restoration is part of the college's larger plan to improve the campus.

The college is in the process of purchasing property on both sides of China Creek to build a parking lot and walking corridor.

“The nicer we make that area, it enhances the livable of the community of Centralia,” Ward said.

“We need to make what we own attractive and functional.”

Enhancing the nearly 1,000 feet of China Creek through campus is a larger part of the college’s future plans, Ward said.

Centralia College President James Walton said in a news release he has high expectations that educational opportunities along with salmon habitat will increase around the creek.

“It is very gratifying to see salmon return to a creek in the heart of Centralia,” Walton said.