

A Day to Come Together' in Centralia

Restoration Work: MLK Day Volunteers Plant Vegetation Along the Discovery Trail

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A little more than a dozen volunteers spent Martin Luther King, Jr. Day restoring a riparian habitat along the Discovery Trail and Chehalis River in Centralia.

“The message of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is it’s a day on rather than a day off,” said Kathy Jacobson. “It’s a day to come together as a community and give service.”

Clad in rubber boots and muddy work gloves, the volunteers dotted the riverside, digging holes and planting walking stick like stakes into the sodden earth beneath the bright January sky. The live tree stakes don’t need to come with roots to grow. Though unimpressive now, the ones that take hold will eventually grow into full trees.

“These are mostly willows and cottonwood this group is planting,” said Jan Robinson of the Chehalis River Basin Land Trust. “We have about 400 of them for today.”

The group was an amalgamation of members of the **Centralia College Outdoor Club**, the Chehalis River Basin Land Trust and members of the Educational Service District 113.

“Our club is all about the outdoors and we wanted to get closer to what the meaning of our group is,” said Amber Hort of the Outdoor Club.

Annette Peterson and her son, sixth-grader Cotter Peterson, were among the group.

“It’s fun to volunteer, and we love the outdoors,” Annette said. “His class also comes out here and has done water quality tests on the river.”

The holiday marked the beginning of a multi-day project that will bring in students from six schools in communities all along the Chehalis River Basin.

Thanks to funding from the Rose Foundation and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, from Tuesday through Thursday about 500 students will plant around 1,100 stakes and a variety of other riparian vegetation along the Discovery Trail.

Jacobson said that several years ago contractors sloped the shore and planted vegetation along this part of the river. Unfortunately, most of the plants didn't take hold.

Now officials hope the new plants will take root and have a combined effect of taking some of the energy out of the river's flow, providing shady, and thus cooler, water for fish habitat, reduce soil erosion and catch runoff from the neighboring farm fields which are being purchased by the city of Centralia, says Jacobson.

For the people working on the trail, it's an opportunity to embody the selflessness and community commitment of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"What's a better way to spend the holiday than community members and college and elementary students together for the environment?" she said.