Tualatin Riverkeepers

The Tualatin Riverkeepers (TRK) is a membership-based organization committed to connecting people to the river, raising awareness, and forming a unified voice for water-quality issues. For more than twenty years, TRK has helped preserve the natural environment of the 700-square-mile Tualatin River watershed through community outreach and education, public events, political advocacy, and hands-on restoration.

In 1989, a group of local citizens became worried that the quality of the Tualatin River was declining, as urban areas expanded and rural farmlands were lost. Kathy Clair, April Olbrich, and Rob Baur met informally to discuss the condition and health of the river and determined that the best way to raise local awareness was to get people out on the river in boats. They scheduled a Discovery Day event in 1990, which brought community members together to view the river from canoes and kayaks.

In 1993, TRK incorporated, secured nonprofit status, and formed a board of directors. The organization also applied for membership with Waterkeeper Alliance, an international group working to protect waterways from pollution. Sue Marshall began writing grants to support and expand the mission, and Bill Weismann was hired to help implement an organizational development plan. The first newsletter, *Green Heron Herald*, was sent to members in 1994.

TRK hosts community forums, leads field trips and paddling excursions, and lobbies for environmental resolutions. In working to protect and preserve the Tualatin River watershed, the organization partners work with state and national agencies and local planning commissions. As part of the Tualatin Basin Invasive Species Working Group, TRK works closely with other organizations to eradicate invasive plants.

With Ash Creek Forest Management, TRK has completed several major restoration projects. It has also worked with Metro to restore Munger Farm and Gotter Bottom properties, large floodplain sites that were formerly used for farming and livestock. TRK continues to monitor these areas and also partners with and loans tools to local habitat restoration groups.

Advocating for a healthy watershed has highlighted local concerns and issues. In July 2008, for example, TRK members reported a toxic blue-green algae outbreak in the Tualatin River. As a result, local agencies began to monitor the river more closely.

TRK maintains a fleet of canoes and kayaks, has installed river-mile signs on the Tualatin, and published a *Paddler's Guide*. The organization is leading the effort to increase the number of public access points to the river from Hillsboro to West Linn and operates a kayak/canoe rental facility at Cook Park in Tigard.

The Green Heron Awards, Dinner, and Auction is held each year to honor a community member or group for positive contributions to the watershed. TRK also hosts an annual Riverfront Music Festival, Nature Awareness field trips, a Waterfall Tour, and Summer Day Camps.

Written by Sue Manning

Further Reading:

Peter, Susan, Shirley Elwart, and Barbara Schaffner, eds. *Exploring the Tualatin River Basin: A Nature and Recreation Guide.* Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2002.

Stewart, Colleen. "Tualatin Riverkeepers push for improved access along lower Tualatin River." *Oregonian* Sept. 10, 2011.

Tualatin Riverkeepers. http://www.tualatinriverkeepers.org/.

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