

## Stories of Hope

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For this hope themed edition of *Treeline*, we wanted to hear from our community about the things that have brought them hope in this time of uncertainty that we are collectively living through. The responses that we received were so full of light, connection, and yes, hope, and we are so excited to share them with you. If you missed this wave of submissions but would like to share a story with us, please reach out to Kayla at [kseaforth@b-e-f.org](mailto:kseaforth@b-e-f.org)

### **Brook Thompson, Restoration Engineer & Ph.D. Student, Yurok Tribe & UC Santa Cruz**

When I started my civil engineering degree in 2014, there were no jobs for me at the Yurok Tribe where I am a

citizen. There were no other engineers I even knew existed who were Yurok. I was told that working on rivers as an engineer was unlikely and that I would most likely end up designing sewer pipelines or working in a wastewater

treatment plant if I wanted a graduate degree in environmental engineering and water resources. However, just this last year three engineers graduated including myself who now work for the fisheries department, and at least another who works in construction. Three of four of us are women which is very rare in engineering. I now have a job where I get to work to restore river and stream health on my traditional homelands, a goal I did not think was possible as a kid. It fills me with hope that there will be even more opportunity in the future for youth and women of color who want to contribute to the engineering field and work towards better habitats for all.

### **Christine Buhl, Forest Entomologist, Oregon Department of Forestry**

If we can change our expectations of what the landscape looks like in terms of what tree species we expect to see and where, then we will fare better in adapting to this changing climate and even encourage a healthier and more resilient ecosystem by planting more sustainably rather than trying to force a system to fit into a macro and microclimate that has changed.

Three major pressures on our forest ecosystems are a changing climate that causes drought stress, unnaturally intensive wildfire, and opportunistic insect pest infestation. Luckily, we can use the silvicultural tools to prevent each of these scenarios if we target enhancement of the health of the tree and the stand. Healthy trees are resilient trees.



Photo Credit: Palouse Conservation District



**Bill Blake, Executive Director  
Skagit Conservation District**

I started my first water quality sampling in 1988 with youthful enthusiasm to help keep our water clean and environment healthy. My role has grown from there over the years to guide staff in providing technical assistance to land managers from urban to rural in how they can reduce their impact on our natural resources. It has been frustrating at times, while also important to recognize we have come a long way instituting smart standards that give people something to strive for. Most rewarding the last couple of years is working and making friends with my Y and Z generation cohorts. They share that same youthful enthusiasm and motivation to take on the challenges ahead without pause, and do whatever it takes to assure we have healthy and abundant natural resources for future generations to live, work and play in the community they call home.

**Robyn Darbyshire, Regional  
Silviculturist, Forest Service**

For me, it is the work that I do with new(er) employees — it is great to see the influx of new foresters and forestry technicians and the skills and ideas that they bring.

**Marc Gauthier, Forest  
Practices Coordinator, Upper  
Columbia United Tribes**

I am passing along a poem I wrote as part of the work I am doing for the “salmonids in your watershed” curriculum we are developing. This question made me immediately think about salmon:

**Perseverance**

*You are so strong, yet your days are not long,  
Your minds seem simple, yet you overcome  
every obstacle.  
Birth, life, journey, struggle, home,  
He makes it home,  
She makes it home,  
They dance the night away,  
And do it over again the next day.  
Ensuring, exhausting, creating,  
Letting go,  
Following the flow,  
Downstream.  
Laying the foundation for those yet to know,  
Their role in the circle.  
So much to learn from,  
It's miraculous, what you have overcome!  
You should be more revered,  
You Persevered!*

**Adam Cares, Stevens County  
VSP Coordinator**

Our local floodplain stakeholder group holds evening meetings in a musty gymnasium to discuss floodplain restoration projects. The group consists of hardworking people from our agricultural and tribal communities, and staff members who are decades deep in this work. It should be noted that this is not a group that is prone to false optimism. They are a practical bunch, thrifty with time and resources, ever wary of false promises and “flash in the pan” programs. But, these people are hopeful that they can improve the river and the landscape where they live. If they were not hopeful, they would not spend their evening in a musty gymnasium, month after month. I remain hopeful because they do.

**Lindsay McClary, Restoration  
Ecologist, Confederated  
Tribes of Grand Ronde**

I work on conservation, protection, and restoration of Tribal lands that were ceded to the federal government but recently re-acquired through a conservation program. It's fulfilling to make habitat improvements on lands with such historic connections to



Photo Credit: Clallam Conservation District



place and to return Tribal practices to landscapes which have been absent of indigenous influence for far too long. This coming fall, we have a cultural burn planned for one site that was historically maintained through Kalapuyan fire practices. I'm anxious to return traditional fire management to an oak landscape which depends upon it.

**Brandon McWilliams,  
LEAD Co-Director, Western  
Washington University**

In this field, it's the simple things that get me up in the morning. Kneeling in moist, fragrant soil, feeling it crumble between my fingers as I place a sapling in the ground; seeing the new buds pop as vibrant green awakes from the winter; the pleasant ache after a long day. These are the foundation. What keeps me going, though, is community. Recently, I have had the good fortune to work with a wide swath of people, from toddlers in rain suits to hardened weed warriors, with leathered hands and scars to prove it. Their energy is infectious. Seeing the way people show up to be in community with the land, but then find community in each other is wonderful. Hearing the

excited babble from a new volunteer, and knowing that they will be back, likely with a few friends in tow, reminds me that this work not only changes the physical landscape, but also changes the mental landscape of everyone involved. That excitement, that spark, and the warmth of a community that forms around doing simple acts is what gives me hope. I can't wait to see who I will meet next.

**Erin Halcomb, Stewardship  
Coordinator**

Twenty years ago, as a young woman contractor with a saw and a drip torch I was met most often by a question like, "Do your parents know you're doing this?" I'd smile and say, "Yes." My joys today are in seeing so many women in the field — from laborers to top leadership — and in returning to sites where I once worked. In southern Oregon, I worked to thin fir trees from one property, intermittently, for many years. Later, when I had the opportunity to walk back through I traversed a slope full of leggy saplings; all natural regen, all with the soft, blue hue and the five-needled packets of a species that had been formally high-graded: Sugar pine.

**George Kral, PhD, Co-Owner,  
Scholls Valley Native Nursery**

There is tremendous hope in diversity. In spite of everything we have done to tame and homogenize the life around us, diversity persists and will continue to persist. The solutions to most of our environmental problems are in this diversity of life forms and processes that are right in front of us. These have been hanging in, waiting for us to get our act together, to stop trying to be masters and start being partners.

**Toby Query, Natural Resource  
Ecologist, City of Portland  
Bureau of Environmental  
Services**

I am hopeful in my work at Shwah kuk wetland which is a co-designed project between the City of Portland, the PSU Indigenous Nations Studies program, and Indigenous community members. "Healing the land, healing the people" (Judy Bluehorse Skelton) is possible with intention, time, flexibility, and humility rooted in land justice.



*Western red cedar seedlings.  
Photo Credit: Clallam Conservation District*