



UPPER DESCHUTES
WATERSHED COUNCIL

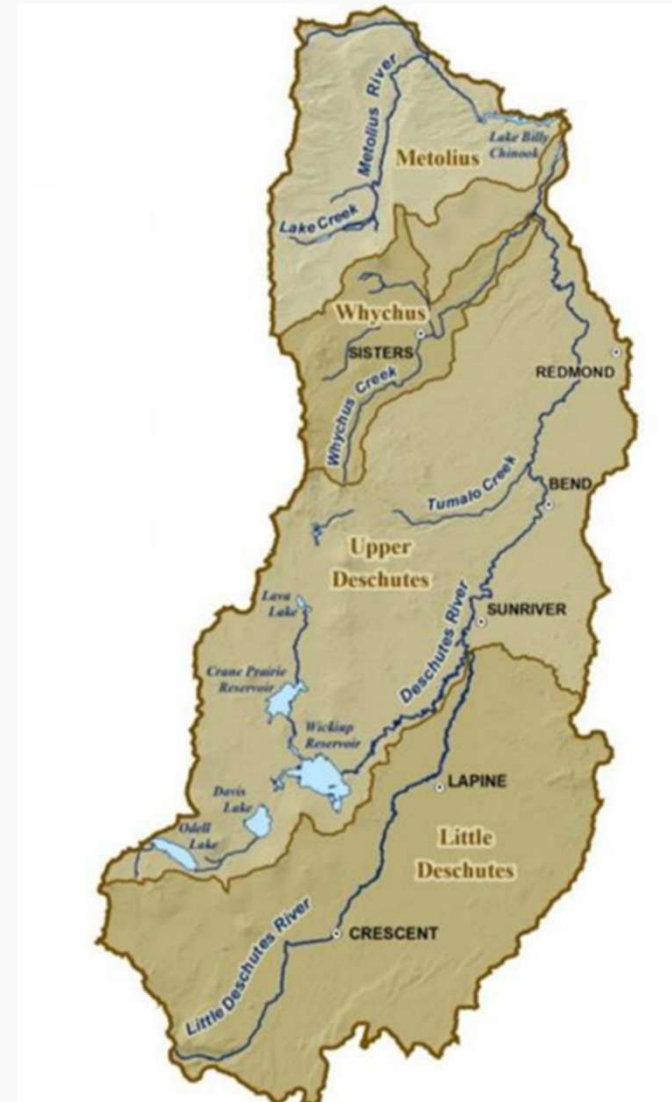


Upper Deschutes Watershed Council

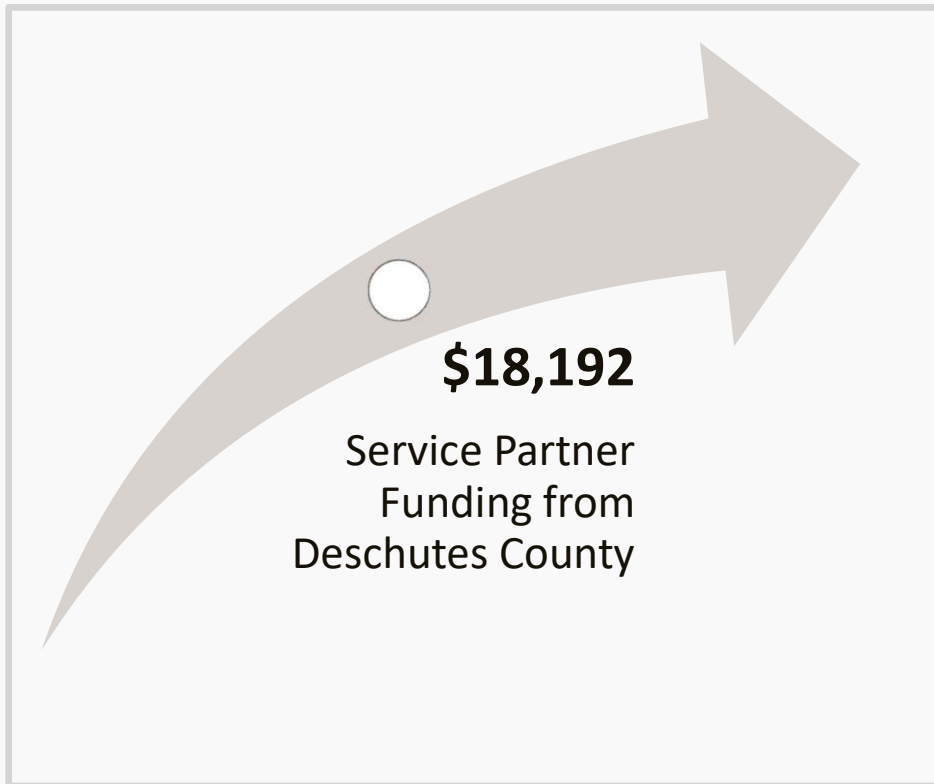
Kris Knight, Executive Director
June 3, 2026

What is a Watershed Council?

- A watershed council is a community-based, voluntary, non-regulatory group working in local communities on collaborative projects
- More than 50 watershed councils in Oregon, and a unique model created by the state of Oregon and initiated by local governments
- We will celebrate our 30th anniversary in 2027 and Deschutes County was instrumental in helping start our watershed council.



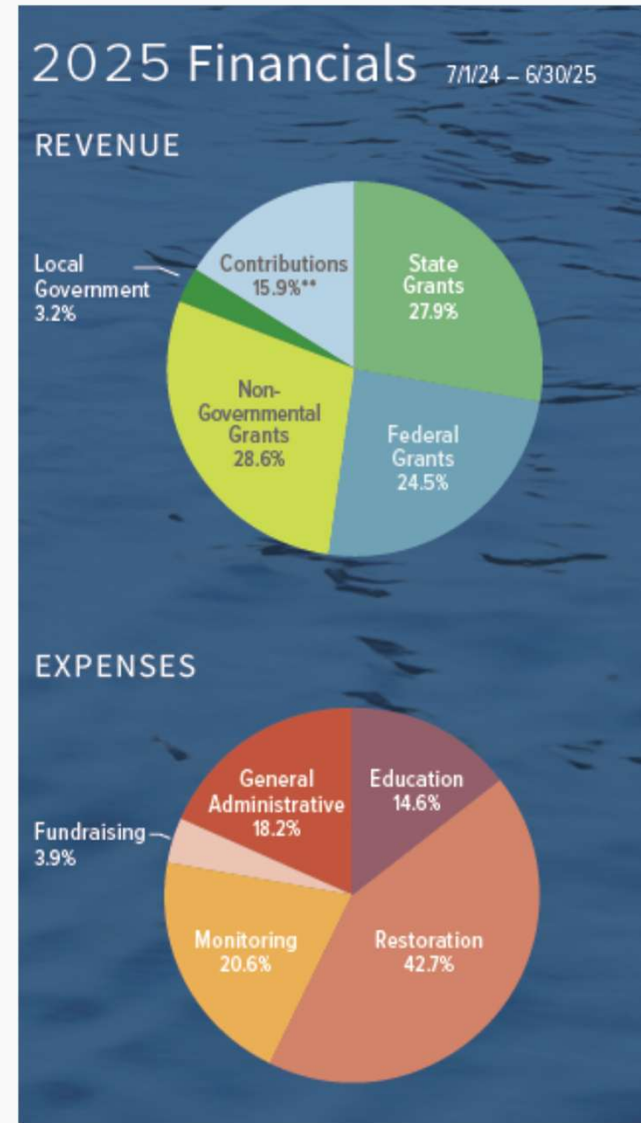
Service Partner Funding



- UDWC leverages these dollars to bring federal, state and private funding to Central Oregon
- Total revenue for FY25 ending June 30, 2025 was \$1,235,885

Funding

- UDWC funding comes from a mix of public and private sources
- Federal, state and local government grants but also private foundations and individual and business supporters



Board of Directors

- Bill Anthony (President) U.S. Forest Service (retired)
- Beth Bailey Portland General Electric
- Cris Converse (Sec./Treas.) Pine Meadow Ranch (former owner)
- Michael Fisher Central Oregon Community College (retired)
- Jason Gritzner U.S. Forest Service
- Will Groves Deschutes County Planning Department
- Kelley Hamby Former irrigation district operations manager
- Jen Hobson-Hinsley Marketing/Public Relations
- Lisa Keown Educator
- Smita Mehta Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
- David Pilz Water and Natural Resources Consultant
- Sunny Simpkins (VP) National Assoc of Flood and Stormwater Agencies

Mission

- **Mission:** we seek to protect and restore the two-million-acre Upper Deschutes watershed through collaborative projects in **habitat restoration, watershed education and long-term monitoring**



Importance of Restoration – Flat Fire, August 2025



Whychus Creek restoration and wildfire resilience

GUEST COLUMN

BY KRIS KNIGHT, NATASHA BELLIS
AND KATE FITZPATRICK

This past year intensive wildfires impacted Central Oregon. One area hit particularly hard was the Whychus Creek watershed. Whychus Creek starts on the east side of the Three Sisters mountains and flows through the community of Sisters before it joins the Deschutes River south of Lake Billy Chinook. The Alder Springs Fire burned more than 3,000 acres in June in the lower part of Whychus Creek and threatened communities in Crooked River Ranch. The Flat Fire burned more than 23,000 acres near Sisters in August and burned along 11 miles of Whychus Creek. Thankfully, because of the amazing response and heroic efforts of firefighters, no lives were lost and many homes and neighborhoods were saved from the fire. That said, five homes were destroyed and numer-

ous properties suffered great damage and our hearts go out to those who were impacted.

The fire impacted two properties along a six-mile stretch of Whychus Creek owned by the Deschutes Land Trust, known as Whychus Canyon Preserve and Rimrock Ranch. For more than a decade, a group of organizations including the Deschutes Land Trust, Deschutes River Conservancy and Upper Deschutes Watershed Council have been working together as the Deschutes Partnership to restore and protect Whychus Creek. This work has involved restoring streamflow to the creek, removing barriers to fish passage and migration, screening off irrigation diversions, protecting land from development and improving habitat to benefit the reintroduction of salmon and steelhead to the watershed. Between 2016 and 2023, the Partnership restored approximately three miles of Whychus Creek on Land Trust properties, reconnecting the creek to the floodplain and enabling



This shows part of the restored area of Whychus Creek. (Peter Cooper/Deschutes Land Trust)

natural processes to function across the bottom of the valley.

As our organizations start to assess the damage from the Flat Fire, we are seeing that the areas where we restored Whychus Creek to its adjacent floodplain were more resilient to the fire compared to areas that had not been restored. The three miles of restored floodplain is in many ways a ribbon of green through what is now

a sea of black and was likely an oasis for fish and wildlife during and after the fire. Drone images from above the canyon speak volumes – the un-restored areas were almost entirely burned by the Flat Fire while restored areas retained vegetation and in many ways were unscathed. Areas that had been dry pastures were restored with additional streamflow to become meandering stream channels

and wetland areas that served as fire breaks. This shows us how restored ecosystems can withstand impacts from wildfire and is an important reminder of the value restoration plays in making our rivers and streams more resilient to fire and climate change. We do expect that fine sediments from areas upstream or adjacent to these restored areas will wash down and impact the creek but our hope is the floodplain restoration will accommodate and buffer this disturbance.

While we do not mean to minimize the impacts to other properties from the Flat Fire, we hope there can be a hopeful message from Whychus Canyon Preserve and Rimrock Ranch that we can restore and protect our rivers and streams where needed to be more resilient and recover from impacts from wildfires.

■ *Kris Knight is executive director of the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council. Natasha Bellis is conservation director of the Deschutes Land Trust. Kate Fitzpatrick is executive director of the Deschutes River Conservancy.*

Flooding in December 2025





Fish returning and spawning in restored areas

What's Next? Start Working on Restoration after Flat Fire



Working to Design Fish Passage Projects



Seeking Funding for Central Oregon

- In July of 2026 will submit proposal to Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board for Partnership funding with Deschutes River Conservancy and Deschutes Land Trust to support Oregon Spotted Frog restoration in the Little Deschutes and Upper Deschutes watershed and funding for irrigation modernization work.



Education and Outreach

- UDWC continues to offer a K-12 education program to educate about water resources
- This is the 3rd year delivering a program for City of Bend focused on 5th Grade students
- Worked with schools in Sunriver, La Pine, Redmond, Camp Sherman, and Sisters this last year



Adult Education

- This past year UDWC partnered with COCC to offer two adult watershed education classes
- These classes are in the classroom and in the field. The 2026 classes focused on the Whychus Creek watershed and Upper Deschutes watershed



River Clean-up and Stewardship

- UDWC continues to host the annual Deschutes River Cleanup at multiple locations – happening on July 11th in 2026
- We also provide stewardship opportunities for businesses and organizations to volunteer to benefit our local rivers throughout the year



Learn More or Get Involved

- Visit our website to learn more:
www.restorethedeschutes.org
- Contact me or join our email list:
kknight@restorethedeschutes.org
- Follow us on Facebook or Instagram
- Participate in a project tour or event like the annual Deschutes River Cleanup
- Thank you to Deschutes County for your ongoing support through the Service Partner Program!

