

Teen is a big part of McDonald Creek project

BY BRIONNA FRIEDRICH
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Salmon may soon be fighting their way back up McDonald Creek in Elma for the first time in years thanks to the efforts of the Chehalis Basin Partnership, Mark Reed Hospital and one dedicated Elma teen.

The 20 pairs of coho salmon planted in the creek this fall have made 13 nests, or redds, found so far, 15-year-old Jarred Figlar-Barnes reported. The fish were donated by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, and while he hopes to do one more plant next year, it may be the last one — last year's plants should be coming home after that.

"We'll be quite excited. It's already exciting with the fish we already planted, so having the native ones come back will be pretty awesome," Figlar-Barnes said.

The teen's quest to restore the creek started more than a year ago when he noticed the heavily blocked creek and started asking around about its history. He said he rode his bike around, took photos and made a plan.

"I thought it was awesome to see a kid that young take an interest," said Janel Spaulding of the Chehalis Basin Project. "It gives me hope and it gives everyone else hope."

Last year, Figlar-Barnes was awarded a \$15,000 grant to further his goal. The team retrofitted the dam below Marion Road and planted more than 750 trees.

In the process of checking for nests, the team has discovered other creek life which bode well for the future of the creek, including cutthroat trout, freshwater mussels, and brook lamprey,



Jarred Figlar-Barnes

which suggest a healthy ecosystem and good water quality.

Spaulding said she has seen the already precocious teen grow throughout the project.

"He's been to a couple meetings we had to give presentations. I remember the very first one he was all nervous, he walks into a room full of adults. ... (Now) he's given presentations to the county commissioners. He's really grown a lot."

Figlar-Barnes said his work was just a natural outgrowth of his love of the

environment and also an interest in fish.

"I do like fish. I like eating them but I also like helping them out," he said with a laugh.

Spaulding said she plans on sticking with Figlar-Barnes until the creek is restored, or he's graduated, which he has set as his goal for finishing the restoration.

"That's a lofty goal but we'll see what we can get done," she said. "Time will tell when we see fish coming back. That will be a good day when that happens."