

Ethnobotany for the Year 14,008.

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The patchwork of seasonal ponds, small upland prairies and oak savannah patches we know now as the West Eugene Wetlands exists in the context of over 12,000 years of occupation by the Tsanchiifin band of the Kalapuya Indians. We know this from the stories handed down through the generations as stories to elders still living in the area, and from the material culture they left behind such as the 8,500 year old camas ovens at the Cheatem archaeological site along the Long Tom River. Unfortunately the details of the day to day lives of the ancient Kalapuya may be mostly lost in the wake of the cultural devastation that followed contact and displacement by Euro-American settlers. Nonetheless, by pulling together disparate sources of information we continue to gain important insights into the role the indigenous habitants played in shaping the wetland ecosystem over hundreds of human generations living on the land, experimenting with the use of resources, and practicing various types of management such as the use of fire to optimize environmental conditions for their needs. Understanding this past anthropogenic history must be an essential component for today's managers, scientists, and stakeholders to inform what goals to set for restoration of the wetland ecosystem. Said another way, the native plant and animal species of the wetlands are likely adapted to a landscape shaped by the human beings that lived in the area for many thousands of years, after the arrival of Indian people to the area over 12,000 years but before Euro-American populations moved into the area.



As a part of this learning process of this past, and healing old wounds, both cultural and ecological, the West Eugene Wetlands began a project to reunite American Indians still living in the region with the lands under restoration. This model effort is known as the West Eugene Wetlands Ethnobotany Project and is intended to create opportunities to learn from Native American elders about the land, provide the space for tribal members and the general public to reintroduce traditional anthropogenic activities such as the

harvesting and processing of traditional resources in situ, and much, much more as the project expands in upcoming years. The Ethnobotany Project is supported financially and in-kind by WREN, the BLM and the other Wetland partners, regional tribes, and the Institute for Culture and Ecology.

Along with two years of strategic planning and coordination with regional tribes a number of activities have taken place and others are in the works. For example, several of the wetland units have been renamed to traditional Kalapuya names by elder Esther Stutzman. Several site visits have occurred with members of the Confederated Tribes of the Grande Ronde and members of other tribes. Dharmika Hensel worked with youth from the Grande Ronde lifeways class at TNC's Willow Creek unit to learn traditional plant identification. For the wetlands annual bike day event this spring Teena Jeffers of the Grande Ronde coordinated and staffed a booth to provide educational materials about culturally important plants occurring in the area. In June Teena along with Greg Archuletta, Jon Chantell and other tribal people organized a day at the wetlands that brought together regional Indian elders and youth to share stories, demonstrate traditional plant uses, and discuss their longterm vision for involvement with the wetlands. The next day the wetlands hosted a public ethnobotanical learning event featuring elders Esther Stutzman of the Siletz and Agness Baker Pilgram (i.e, Grandma Aggie) of the Takelma, world renowned author and McArthur Genius Award recipient Gary Nabhan, and elder and chair of the Indigenous Peoples' Restoration Network, Dennis Martinez. The event was attended by over 100 people at the Red House, and future site of the environmental education center under development. That same afternoon Mr. Martinez shared insights on indigenous perspectives on Oak restoration in a site visit with wetland managers and scientists.



Mark your calendars! Coming up this September 6 from 10:00am to 4:00pm at the Red House will be our next ethnobotany event. Esther Stutzman is organizing a day of activities for all ages of the general public that includes story telling, basket making demonstrations and other hands-on activities, a display and discussion of the building of the traditional Kalapuya canoe, and more. The event is free and open to the public.

The reemergence of traditional ethnobotanical activities at the West Eugene Wetlands is an important step forward in the restoration of the area to a healthy ecosystem based on an understanding of the culture that shaped the area for more than 12,000 years. Understanding this past in the restoration activities being undertaken today will help create a system that will be dynamic, adaptive, and able to persist for another 12,000 years. Isn't it great to know your descendents will still be enjoying butterflies, camas, and making baskets in 14,008!!!