

As The Season Changes, by Kate Ferschweiler, McKenzie Watershed Council

As the season changes from summer to fall, you can always count on a beautiful drive along the river to watch the leaves changing color. Another sure sign of fall is the spawning of the wild Chinook salmon, this perhaps is the most special event of all, and distinguishes the McKenzie from all other rivers in the Willamette basin.

As the last of the salmon spawn and die, a new generation and life cycle begins. In the spawning process the female and male make a nest for their eggs, this nest is called a redd. Over the next two to three months the eggs will develop and grow to become a baby salmon (fry). The redd holds 3000-5000 eggs, impact to the redd causes major egg loss (around 30%), some of these impacts are natural and some unnatural.

Natural impacts include drought, which lowers water levels exposing the redd or allows freezing in winter months. Flooding or extremely high fast flows can wash eggs out of the nest. Human caused impacts include walking or trampling over the redd and increased sediment in the water (erosion from dirt roads, construction or disturbance along the stream bank).

As watershed residents here are a few things you can do (over the next few months) to help prevent damage to a redd, and egg loss. Be extremely careful when walking on gravel beds, learn to identify redds, and keep off of them. If you know of a redd that can easily be trampled by others, post a warning sign to advise folks to be cautious (the ODFW office in Springfield have signs you can pick up for free). Prevent erosion runoff into side streams and the river. Prevent vegetation removal from banks and keep livestock from trampling the bank. With a little bit of effort, we can all help the salmon population recover and become better stewards of our beautiful watershed.