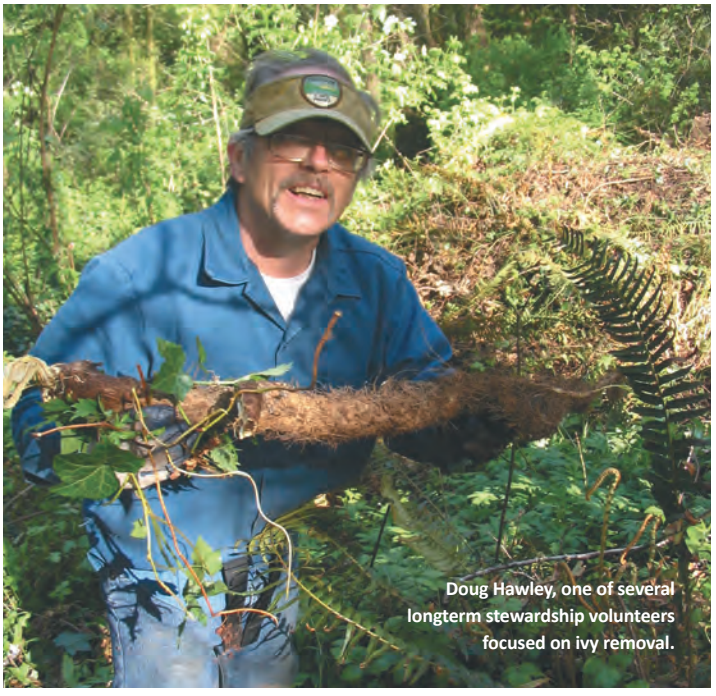
RESTORING BALANCE TO THE LAND

By Nanda Ramos, Restoration Program Coordinator

At Friends of Tryon Creek, we find ourselves on the cusp of an exciting new phase for the park. This phase seeks to reintegrate Indigenous voices and values into our land management practices. Ecologically and programmatically, we are in a period of transition, with new Restoration and Green Workforce Programs, new staff members, a recent strategic plan, and Indigenous leadership on board. Our vision is clear – we aim to restore balance to the land. A foundational aspect of this vision is the cultivation of a reciprocal relationship with the environment, with a focus on creating a healthy and sustainable ecosystem for future generations. We are dedicated to serving our diverse community, including park users, the youth who join us for field trips and camps, as well as our neighbors. We want Tryon Creek to be a place where people can establish or rekindle their connection to the land, and build upon the amazing restoration efforts that our volunteers and staff have been doing for years.

As we move forward, we are thrilled to announce the resurgence of our Land Tending Days. These events aim to engage both new and returning volunteers in essential restoration work. Our primary focus this year will be on fuel reduction efforts, starting with tackling the pervasive issue of tree ivy. Ivy, a non-native plant when left unmanaged, can have negative health impacts on trees. Ivy forms heavy vines that climb up the trees, with all the extra weight it makes the tree more susceptible to disease and more likely to fall over. When vegetation like ivy vines accumulates, they can also become "ladder fuels", which would allow a fire to quickly move from a ground fire into the treetops, creating a crown fire. We remove this vegetation (fuel) so that if a non-planned wildfire burns, it is less severe and can be more easily managed. Additionally, we plan to intensify our planting initiatives and enhance the maintenance of our existing planting sites. Our overarching goal is for community members to foster a deep connection to the land, emphasizing reciprocity and intentionality in all our endeavors.



Doug Hawley, one of several longterm stewardship volunteers focused on ivy removal.

Over the summer PSU student volunteers maintain forest health by removing tree ivy.

As part of our ongoing efforts, we are actively working on the implementation of a Cultural Restoration Plan through Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is a commonly used term to denote the wisdom, beliefs, value systems, and customs found within Indigenous communities, specifically in connection to their environment. For numerous Indigenous groups, TEK is considered a dynamic and integral part of their daily lives, influencing how they interact with and perceive the natural world. It is often described as a "way of life" that embodies their active and holistic relationship with the environment. Our vision for this plan is to adopt

an integrated approach, leading with Traditional Ecological Knowledge supported by Western Science to provide a comprehensive framework to guide our restoration practices. Part of our recently revised strategic plan objectives involves revitalizing Indigenous culture, particularly through the reintroduction of beneficial fire practices to the landscape. For countless generations, Indigenous communities throughout North America have applied controlled, low-intensity fires as a traditional practice. These fires have been instrumental in the removal of deceased plant matter, fallen leaves, as well as small trees and branches. These deliberate burns serve a multifaceted purpose. Firstly, they effectively diminish the accumulation of combustible materials within the forest undergrowth, acting as a natural fire prevention measure. Additionally, these controlled fires play a crucial role in eradicating pests and undesirable weeds, clearing areas to effectively hunt, facilitating the germination of edible plant seeds, enhancing the quality of water for salmon populations, and rejuvenating the growth of plants essential for basket weaving.

Fire on the Landscape

Across the western United States, fear of fire prevails, largely due to the deeply ingrained misconception popularized by the U.S. Forest Service's Smokey the Bear mantra: "Only you can prevent forest fires." Smokey Bear's message has long been etched in the minds of many, teaching that all forest fires are inherently bad and should be extinguished. However, it's important to distinguish between various types of fires. The kind of fire that engulfs almost all plant life and homes in its path is known as a high-severity or catastrophic fire, one that often demands days or even weeks of efforts to control. This narrow perspective on fire has overshadowed the rich history and cultural significance of "good fire" — the art and practice of cultural burning.

Fire suppression policies have led to the neglect of cultural burning practices, which historically played a crucial role in maintaining ecosystem health. The consequences of these policies extend to Indigenous communities' access to and the health of traditional foods and resources. It's vital to recognize that the practice of fire suppression is relatively recent in the United States, whereas Indigenous peoples have utilized fire for resource management for millennia, and our local forest ecosystems are adapted to low-intensity fire such as cultural burning and prescribed burning.

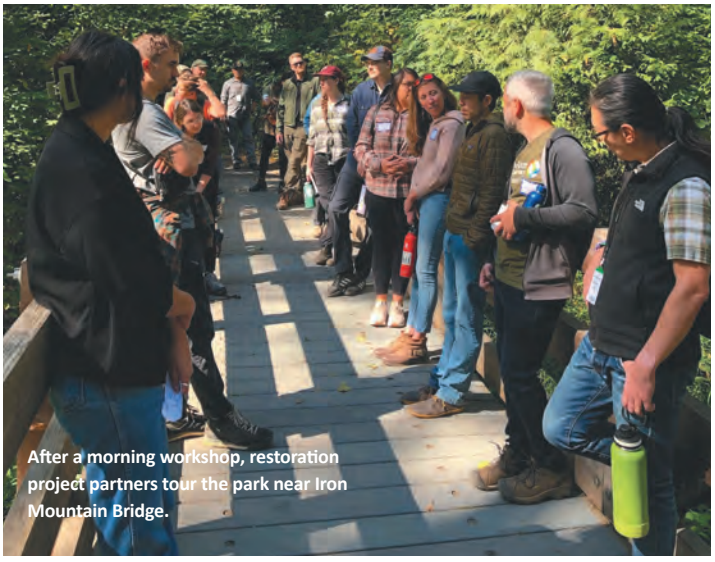
Our staff have been embarking on their own journey to deepen their understanding of Cultural Restoration through various resources and training. Nanda had the chance to attend a Cultural Fire Training with Tribal EcoRestoration Alliance, which provided valuable insights into implementing cultural fire. This training session was designed to impart knowledge about Good Fire from an ecocultural perspective. Additionally, Dr. Frank Lake, USFS Research Ecologist in the Fire and Fuels Program of the Pacific Southwest Research Station and member of the Karuk tribe, who works to integrate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) with western science materials for natural resource

In early October Friends staff observed a prescribed fire near Eugene.

management, facilitated a tour of Tryon Creek State Natural Area alongside Greg Archuleta, member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, and Joe Scott, member of the Conferdated Tribes of Siletz Indians, to share the potential restoration techniques and the cultural uses of plants.

Staff also had the privilege of observing a prescribed fire on The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Willow Creek preserve located on Kalapuya land. This collaborative effort between The Nature Conservancy and the Ecostudies Institute's Willamette Valley Fire Collaborative, aimed to restore a meadow habitat for Kincaid's lupine and Fender's blue butterflies. This inspiring project exemplifies the power of collaboration in achieving shared conservation goals.

As we continue in our journey, we value the contributions of our partners and community members, seeing everyone playing a vital role in our restoration vision. As we embark on these exciting initiatives, we look forward to your continued support and involvement in our Restoration Program. Together, we can make a lasting impact on the health and vitality of Tryon Creek and its surrounding community.



After a morning workshop, restoration project partners tour the park near Iron Mountain Bridge.