

Surveying for Salmon in the Grande Ronde Basin

[water flowing]

[music]

Nick Patricca: It's pretty impressive when you see an adult chinook swim by and all of a sudden there's a fish taking up your entire field of view.

[music]

Megan Venetianer: I am currently working with the SCA as a Columbia Habitat Monitoring Intern.

[music]

Nick: The main goal is to see how the salmon habitat is changing over time, the numbers of fish in the area, and to see if there's anything we can do to better protect the salmonids.

Ted Sedell: The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's component of the CHaMP program, which is the Columbia Habitat Monitoring Program, has been sponsored by the Bonneville Power Administration. They are looking at the effect on inland fishes. So we can see what it looks like at low flows, we can look at it at high flows, and how the habitat changes with those different flow regimes.

Jeff McLaughlin: The interns we're working with here were funded through a Reclamation youth employment grant that brings non-federal partners together with qualified students to make this kind of work possible. Reclamation gets great benefit from the CHaMP program and the interns and the data collection. It allows us to analyze all that data, working with those folks, to provide the right kind of habitat in the right place in the river to benefit the fish to the greatest degree.

[water flowing]

Megan: Got it!

[music]

Nick: So we've been out here at the different streams and rivers doing habitat surveys and trying to detect the changes going on in the streambed morphology.

Ted: They are mapping the stream. They'll take that data back to the office and in the GIS environment create a three-dimensional image of the site that they've been working on, and that's actually really one of the neat "gee whiz" moments in our surveying because it gives you a three-dimensional representation where before the old stick and tape method was only a transect base.

Megan: I feel like I've definitely learned a lot. When we go back into the office to process and use GIS, I think that's one of the more important things I've learned, because it's a really useful skill that I know a lot of people are looking for.

Ted: This is not normal office work. And I think the more they work outside, the less they want to be in the office.

[camera submerged under water]

The glamor in fish work is actually doing the snorkel surveys.

Megan: I mean, we have gone out snorkeling a few times, and it's great. It's fun!

Nick: That is to get a rough estimate of how many fish are living in the stream at that year. It's not snorkeling like most people would think, you know, diving with flippers. You're kind of army crawling just with a face mask on.

Megan: What do you have over there?

[radio sounds]

Ted: We were looking for someone who is good at data collection, attention to detail, and that they're hardy and can work outside all day.

Nick: It was a good step in the right direction with fisheries science. It's a good way to get your first taste of what some real field work is like.

Megan: Just being able to spend a summer outdoors, in a beautiful place, doing research that not a lot of people ever get to do, that I think will really make a difference to salmon restoration projects.

[music]