

CASE STUDY: CORRIDORS & CONNECTIONS AT VESPER MEADOW

High up in the Southern Cascade's "Dead Indian Plateau" lies Vesper Meadow, an upland wet meadow, on 323 acres of land east of Ashland, Oregon. Sheltered by a mixed conifer forest the meadow seeks ever-outward by design—serving as the headwaters for the Rogue River and feeding waters into the Klamath River as well. This is a place of connectivity.

The connections in this meadow weave together from past to present and they revolve around food—food for birds, for butterflies, and for people too. In a blink of time we can see the meadow: a thriving zone of biodiversity and habitat as well as a place of abundant food stores— in the form of a Camas Lily bulb gathering ground called Ti'nth (as noted by Latgawa elders); then land taken by white settlers for grazing cattle; and today an environmental nonprofit seeking back to the spirit of connectivity that this land is imbued with.

Today's Vesper Meadow is home to a restoration education program directed by Jeanine Moy that shares community powered restoration, biological monitoring, and the enhancement of habitat corridors onsite and in partnership with neighboring land managers.

Pockets of habitat and wild foods are being restored on site consisting of Camas Lily, Yampah, Elderberry and many native grasses and flowers. Reintroducing these plants means that a web of connections is repaired -- a web that has something in it for all animals involved (humans too!) Habitat corridors provide for everyone.

Community members are able to help restore habitat and monitor the imperiled Vesper Sparrow, and the endangered Mardon Skipper butterfly, as well as witness the return of elk, who visit again as cattle have been taken off the land.

In the spirit of reciprocity, the land provides. This year Vesper Meadow has begun making products in collaboration with the native plants that grow there. Elderberry

honey is their flagship value-added product, which demonstrates how native habitat corridors can also be pathways to economic sustenance.

This exchange between people and plants is understood to have long roots, and so, for the Vesper Meadow Education Program Director Jeanine Moy, it has been important to follow closely the lessons of the land and to reach outward—to weave webs of connection. Through partnership with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, various non-profit partners, local businesses, artists, scientists, and private landowners. The Vesper Meadow Education Program is part of a movement to rebuild habitat beyond lines of property, and to create a greater sense of connectivity for the human and other than human animals that live there.

Moy also shares that for private landowners and farmers anywhere, there are many small gestures that can be taken to re-tune to the commons. Non-Indigenous landowners can work with Native groups to support their self-determined goals, and possibly grow culturally relevant native food plants (as at Vesper Meadow with Yampah and Camas Lily) which will tend in turn to vulnerable wildlife communities in search of habitat. Creating these kinds of spaces, however small, in collaboration with neighboring property owners, can create a sprawling patchwork of passageways for the wildlife that need them.

The meadow is a starting place and the connections of corridors spill ever outward — like the rivers connecting this high meadow flood-plain to the sea.