

EARTH

A weekly dive into the forces, and people, impacting and preserving the natural world

Ten Mile Creek gets some overdue TLC

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Ten Mile Creek near Copper Mountain is somewhat featureless. Its channels are straight. The banks are dotted with lodgepole pine and few other species.

However, humans have impacted this area, along the east side of Highway 91, for about 150 years.

Over time, mining, timber harvest, development, railroads and highway construction have altered the course of the creek, narrowing its floodplain and creating widespread deposits of sediment.

"In a different condition, there would have been richer soil, wetland species, willows, shrubs and sedges," said Justin Anderson, U.S. Forest Service hydrologist.

A restoration project began this week to re-create more natural conditions in the stream and along its banks. Heavy machinery is moving into the area, digging into the earth, carving out new channels for the waterway.

When finished, the landscape will look more like it did before historic mining and development.

David Blauch, vice president and senior ecologist with Ecological Resource Consultants Inc., is in charge of the work at the site.

"The first step is to go through and cut the channel and get everything formed," Blauch said.

The contractors will create 3,200 feet of new stream channel and incorporate pockets of wetlands, improving habitat for fish and other wildlife.

Blauch said his crew works hard to create features that would occur naturally in the environment, incorporating the proper widths and slopes, and creating meandering streams and variety along the channel.

Once the creek is rerouted, the riparian area around it will be replanted with native flora. Most



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Ten Mile Creek restoration will relocate the stream away from Highway 9 and remove direct runoff from the road.

of this work will be completed in spring 2014.

The project is also designed to reduce the amount of runoff that makes its way into the stream from the highway, and to improve soil conditions for native plants to take root.

"Aesthetically, it's going to be a much prettier site as we are able to establish the native vegetation in areas that are now disturbed," Anderson said. "It can improve

fishing and wildlife viewing as we achieve the environmental benefits; there will be other recreational benefits to it."

The director of the Blue River Watershed Group, Steve Swanson, is one of many stakeholders who have worked to move the project forward. The restoration effort is slated to cost about \$450,000 and is being funded by a variety of public and private contributions, as well as grant funds, he said.

"We've got about a dozen public, private, corporate, federal, state and local stakeholders who are all on board," Swanson said. "Without the list of partners and stakeholders, nothing would happen here."

The creek restoration effort is being done in conjunction with another project led by Summit County's Open Space and Trails Department. That project will divert and expand the recreation

path along the creek.

"I believe these projects are really going to complement each other," Swanson said.

The Forest Service's Anderson said although the impacts to the land might not be obvious to the naked eye, the area wasn't living up to its potential.

"We have a good project with strong justification because there is a huge amount of room for improvement," he said.