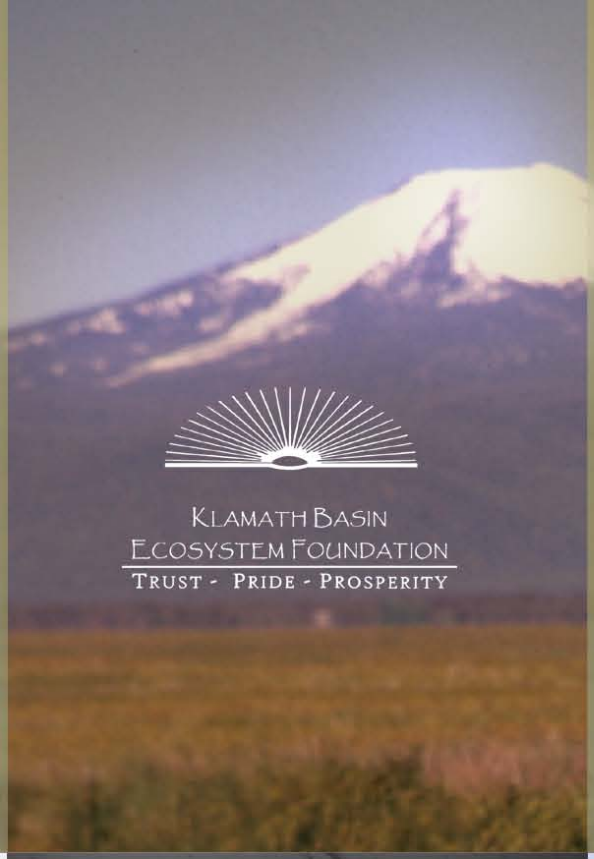
FINAL

Upper Williamson River Watershed Assessment

Prepared for the
Klamath Basin Ecosystem Foundation
Upper Williamson River Catchment Group

in cooperation with the
Upper Klamath Basin Working Group and
the Klamath Watershed Council



Klamath Basin Ecosystem Foundation
Trust - Pride - Prosperity

David Evans and Associates Inc.

June 2005

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Prepared by

David Evans and Associates, Inc.

2100 SW River Parkway

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CONTRIBUTORS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This watershed assessment is the work of a community. To all those who live, work and play in the upper Williamson, and to all who have had a hand in putting this document together, our sincerest thanks. You should thank yourselves, too, because this document is, after all, yours.

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PREFACE

Despite our best attempts at objectivity, the stories we tell always have a point and a purpose. If they didn't there would be no reason to tell them. This Watershed Assessment is one of those stories, and while it is meant to be the truth, it is also meant to be a tool. The job we are trying to do with this tool is twofold.

On the one hand we are trying to understand, as best we can, how the specific, particular natural systems we depend on function (and what happens when they don't). This includes trying to understand, with as much emotional detachment as we can muster, all of the various, and oftentimes conflicting, assertions people have made with regard to the functioning of these systems.

But at the same time that we are trying to get a handle on how these systems work, we are also trying to invite, and advance, a new kind of conversation within our communities. These conversations happen in particular places, with real people facing each other right there in the landscapes they love. When they work, these conversations harness the energy we sometimes squander on strife, and redirect it toward getting things fixed. When these conversations work, we find a way to stop pushing against each other and start pushing together in the same direction, at least long enough to get a problem solved.

One of these goals is relatively technical, and the other is more social and cultural. So often we try, with lots of help from experts and specialists, to segregate our attempts to understand technical issues from our attempts to understand social and cultural issues. But in recent decades many have come to understand that we simply can't understand one without the other. We've come to understand that even with healthy, sincere, and dedicated local communities we can do serious damage to natural systems if we don't know how they work. And, on the other hand, a flawless technical understanding of the functioning of natural systems is largely useless without the deep – and usually quite non-technical – commitment of the folks who live and work within particular landscapes.

There is little doubt that the natural systems of the upper Williamson River watershed would function differently were it not for the influence of human activities. Native American activities appear to have influenced the functioning of those systems in various ways for millennia, and the arrival of industrial technologies in the late nineteenth century had rather more dramatic and sustained effects. Depending on what one may believe to be important, one could argue one way or the other whether those effects have been negative or positive.

It is a primary premise of this document that determinations with respect to the positive or negative impacts of human actions – whether geared toward resource use or habitat restoration – should be made with reference to specific sites and systems. At the same time, the part these specific sites play in the functioning of larger scale systems – sub-basins, watersheds, or even ecoregions – must also be given due consideration.

The natural systems of the upper Williamson are infinitely complex, and constantly changing. Likewise, the culture and communities of the upper Williamson are infinitely complex and ever-changing. When we acknowledge that these two complex systems are inextricably intertwined with each other, it becomes clear that "understanding" is a relative term, and that "fixing things" is not something we do once and then we're done with it. The goal is not some form of ecological "perfection." Our goal is to keep our communities healthy while respecting, openly and honestly, the water, the land, and the other lives we depend on. Our challenge is to hone the skills we possess for working with the land, and to learn the hard lessons that come from working against it. The challenge we face, in short, is to find a way to live that will *last.*

This document is only a success if it helps to make that happen.

--- Mike Connelly, Executive Director, Klamath Basin Ecosystem Foundation