



## WASCO COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT FY 15/16 ANNUAL REPORT



Mission: to work cooperatively with others to promote and encourage conservation and wise use of natural resources

### About Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District

The first Conservation District in Wasco County was formed in 1942 with The Southern Wasco Soil Conservation District. Formation of Northern and Central Wasco Soil Conservation Districts soon followed. The three Districts consolidated and Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District was of-

ficially recognized on November 20, 1973.

Wasco County SWCD is overseen by an elected seven-member Board of Directors and their general powers, authorities, and governance come from ORS 568.550.

While over the years the scope of the Conservation District's responsibility has widened to include more urban

land, its mission has never changed. The District works cooperatively with landowners in both urban and rural settings, and with other agencies to restore watershed functions, improve farming practices, further conservation education goals, and to address natural resource concerns across all land uses.

### Message from the Manager

The Conservation District had a very productive year, with a strong focus on grant writing and seeking funding opportunities. A number of our staff members have honed their grant writing skills, which has paid off immensely.



18 grant applications were submitted for both new and ongoing projects, 14 of which were ultimately successful, obtaining \$1,825,544 for District and watershed council projects. In addition, Representative Huffman and the Mosier watershed council members were instrumental in securing \$1M for well repairs and remediation, bringing the total to over \$2.8M! The SWCD was able to renew OWEB and ODA funding for SWCD and Watershed Council

operations, OWEB and BPA funding for CREP technical assistance, and capacity funding from the Freshwater Trust for the 15mile FAST Coordinator. New project funding was obtained from OWRD for exploratory deep wells in Mosier, a 15Mile Managed Underground Storage Feasibility Study and a JFDIC ditch piping feasibility study. Funding was also secured from OWEB for the Forest Collaborative effort and from USFS for Mosier well assessments. At the close of the year, 4 grant applications were pending with OWEB, 3 of which were ultimately successful (JFDIC and 15mile feasibility studies, and a technical assistance grant for Bakeoven range inventory).

In addition, staff managed 9 ongoing grants and closed out 10 grants. The Mill Creek side channel project was implemented and the 15mile above-ground storage feasibility study reporting was

finalized. Ongoing projects include the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership; OWEB funded 15mile flow monitoring, Blackburn fire rehabilitation, and Mill Creek side channel effectiveness monitoring; and the RCPP project in White River watershed along with its 3 related OWEB grants and one USFS grant. Over the years, Wasco County SWCD has brought in over \$16M in grant funding to get conservation on the ground.

As the new District Manager, I couldn't be happier with the staff, directors and cooperating agencies who put forth so much effort to make the Wasco County SWCD an exceptional place. We have an incredible team that works hard to fulfill the SWCD mission, and I'm proud to be part of that team. This report is but a snapshot of some of the activities we have accomplished. I hope you enjoy reading it!

### Annual Work Plan

The Annual Work Plan is a vital part of District Operations. It guides management and staff throughout the year in achieving general and specific goals that Wasco County SWCD should be accomplishing each year. Wasco County SWCD's annual work plan was approved by our board July 1, 2015. The Five major program areas addressed in the annual work plan are: (1) Administration, (2) Information, Education, & Marketing, (3) General Conservation, (4) Oregon Plan Support, and (5) Watershed Programs.

### What's Inside

- Annual Work Plan Highlights
- Accomplishments
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- Staff Highlights
- Watershed Council Annual Report

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## Accomplishments and Highlights

### Administration

This program area covers all aspects of District administration. This includes Accounts Payable and Receivable, payroll and taxes, ensuring proper insurance is in place from liability, property, and vehicle, to benefits and worker's compensation.

This area also covers financial audits and statutory directed tasks, such as public meetings, advertising, and the District's Annual Meeting for the previous fiscal year.

WCSWCD successfully completed all administrative tasks assigned for the fiscal year.

At this year's Annual Meeting, Ron Graves, outgoing District Manager, was recognized for his 25 years of dedicated service to the District. Bill Hammel and incoming Manager Shilah Olson presented him with a commemorative plaque.



### Information & Marketing

This program area covers public information, outreach, and educational aspects of the District's mission.

District staff work with students whenever possible. Salmon Watch is an educational program sponsored by the World Salmon Council. Techs participate in teaching middle school children about salmon biology, riparian habitat, aquatic macroinvertebrates, and water quality.

The District also supplies educational material to area schools for National Stewardship Week which runs from the last Sunday in April to the first Sunday in May. Managed by Conservation Planner Karen Lamson, the program provided materials to 18 classrooms, totaling 450 students this year.

Karen also manages the Poster Contest. Participants create posters based upon the current year's National Stewardship theme.



This year's theme is "We All Need Trees" This poster, rendered by MacKenzie Olson, placed first in the 4th thru 6th grade category. Her poster, along with other grade category winners, will go on to compete at the state level. Winners will then go on to compete nationally at the National Association of Conservation District's Annual Conference in February 2017.

The District participates in the yearly Wasco Co. Fair held at the Tygh Valley Fairgrounds by sponsoring a booth featuring displays for the District, NRCS and FSA.



This year's Cooperators of the Year were Noah Williams and John Byers of Byers Orchard. Both were selected as the State Cooperator of the Year at the District's State Association meeting.



The District continues to work with the OSU Integrated Pest Protection Center developing outreach to farmers in Wasco County about biological pest control. District and NRCS staff are also contributing authors to the award winning OSU publications Living on the Land. Soil Health was published in October 2015 featuring NRCS Soil Conservationist Garrett Duyck's work. Staff has begun work on the next publication featuring Pollinators.

Ryan Bessette serves as the Coordinator for the Wasco Co. Forest Collaborative. He helps with workshops, meetings, and information dissemination as well as represents the District's interest as an active member.

The District, in partnership with NRCS, OSU Extension, FSA, and Wy'East RC&D, hosted 6 Neighborhood Meetings around the County. Topics included Farm Bill, general updates as well as conservation and funding opportunities.



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## Accomplishments and Highlights

The District publishes a newsletter with information relevant to meetings, funding opportunities, watershed council activities, and educational articles 6 times a year. The District's website is an important tool for making relevant projects, results, studies, and services available to the public. It also hosts partner pages for NRCS, FSA, the WC Forest Collaborative, for each of the Watershed Councils as well as the Coordinating Board. The Office Administrator publishes articles in the local newspaper 6 times a year on a variety of topics that range from riparian buffers, water quality, gardening, and ongoing projects throughout the county.

The District had a booth at the Mosier Farmer's Market to promote water conservation in the home and garden.

Tours are an important educational tool to show producers, partners and grantors what's being done or what needs to be done.

The Annual Crop Tour, hosted by OSU Extension and co-sponsored by the District is an important opportunity for local farmers to get out and see and hear about what new things their neighbors are doing. This year's tour featured a demonstration by NuCulture, a local company making organic cashew spreads, Williams Ranch and cover crop/grazing demo, Scouring Rush Management, and an ATI demo of a Pulse Variable Sprayer System. The tour concluded with a Customer Appreciation Day luncheon hosted by ATI.



Annual Crop Tour

The District hosted a tour of Bakeoven, Juniper Flat, 15Mile, and Mosier Watersheds to give OWEB reviewers an opportunity to see project areas for which grants have been submitted.



Irrigated cropland - 15Mile Watershed

The District helps fund local small conservation and education programs that typically fall outside of the specifications of bigger funders. The District has been a co-supporter of the Col Wright SECRETS outdoor education program through the District Cost-Share Program.



Class out on a SECRETS field trip.

### General Conservation

This program area covers general conservation activities the District is involved with throughout the year, including rental of conservation equipment, the District Cost Share Program that supports small conservation projects, Farm Bill Support to NRCS and FSA, irrigation projects, monitoring, nursery maintenance and upkeep, the Feral Pig Program, and the Annual Tree Sale.

Also covered under this program area are ongoing and new projects throughout Wasco County.

Staff assisted partners with a variety of conservation related activities and participated in numerous meetings of interest.



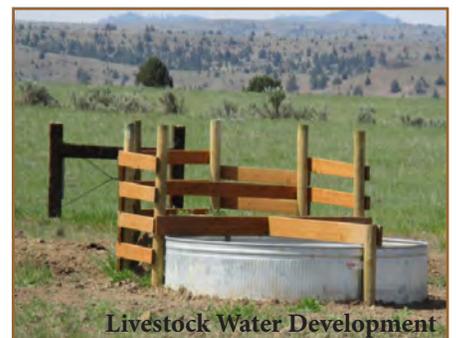
Range Inventory

to the SWCD and Watershed Councils.

District techs helped facilitate an OWEB study on the effectiveness of CREP. Technicians also provided assistance to NRCS for CRP and CREP re-enrollments, EQIP Forest Health signups, and developed emergency grazing plans for CRP participants in the summer of 2015.

Technicians also provided seeding recommendations to ODOT for Maupin roadside project, collaborated with the USFS on the 2 Chiefs Initiative funding application, assisted ODFW with salmonid migration monitoring and conducted Rangeland Inventory and Rangeland Health Evaluation for Imperial Stock Ranch.

The OWEB Small Grant Program is another tool used to address conservation projects too small for grants intended for larger projects. Overseen by Abbie Forrest, the Wasco County Watershed Coordinator, the program awarded Small Grant Projects for water developments, juniper treatment, grazing, culverts, and bridges to eliminate stream crossings.



Livestock Water Development

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## Accomplishments and Highlights

### Oregon Plan Support

Through Capacity Grant Funding from the Oregon Lottery, the District is able to focus efforts on water quality and general technical assistance to the community. These efforts include creating conservation plans, supporting and implementing Local Management Area Water Quality Plans, and supporting the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Water Quality Strategic Implementation Area Program (SIA). The District assisted ODA by helping to provide outreach, technical and financial assistance to landowners in the Mill Creek and Threemile SIAs.

Eightmile Creek was selected by ODA and the District as a Focus Area to implement water quality projects.

Key to implementing the Oregon Plan is the Local Advisory Council made up of stakeholders throughout Wasco County.

The District also partnered with DEQ to conduct stream sediment surveys and conducted PSP (Pesticide Stewardship Partnership) water quality sampling.

Technicians also investigated flows in the losing reach of Fifteenmile through field measurements in partnership with OWRD.

The District Cost Share and the OWEB Small Grant Programs are important tools to assist producers in implementing small conservation projects that fall outside the purview of traditional funding sources. Accomplishments under these programs are critical in addressing water quality by addressing



Direct seed cropland/cherries

uplands vulnerabilities, updating cropping practices and restoring vegetation. This biennium projects include: the conversion of 369 acres to no-till bringing over 96% of the county's wheat cropland converted, virtually eliminating erosion from those lands. Other projects include cross-fencing, juniper control and range restoration projects to improve range vegetation, livestock management capabilities, and reduce erosion.

Installation of bridges eliminated stream crossings, areas favored by spawning salmon due to the gravelly base.



Bridge

Through the programs the District funded precision ag projects including GPS, autosteer and auto boom control that offers significant reduction in chemical, fuel, and seed inputs. Over 40 conservation practices benefitting water quality were completed.

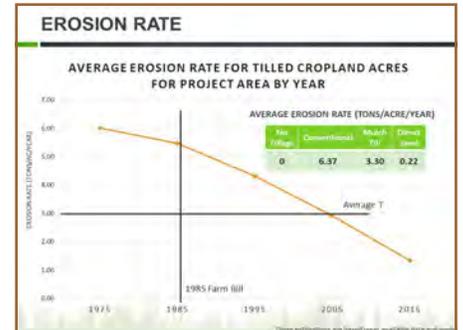
Other projects include reforestation stump grinding / mulching, weed control projects and irrigation system efficiency upgrades.



Irrigation Upgrade

This year District planners completed 43 conservation plans, both new and renewals covering over 8,000 acres.

The District Cost Share Program helped fund aerial IR mapping on 2500 acres of cropland and water quality mea-



surements on the lower Deschutes River. Approximately 100 water samples were taken for E. coli analysis this biennium.

The District continues work with City of The Dalles on Gov't Flats Fire restoration to address steep slope erosion in The Dalles main watershed.

Garrett Duyck, NRCS, completed a soil erosion analysis for the Lower Deschutes Ag Water Quality Management Area based on historic cropping systems. The management area includes 333,115 acres of cropland and comprises nearly all of Wasco County, minus a small portion in the southeast corner that drains to the John Day River, and the west half of Sherman County. Garrett's results show that soil erosion has decreased by 85% and that an estimated 36.2 million tons of soil erosion has been prevented since 1975 due to changes in farming practices and adoption of conservation technology.

He ran the same analysis for the Fifteenmile Watershed and found that soil erosion has decreased by 96%, preventing an estimated 11.6 million tons of soil erosion across 81,130 acres since 1975.

No-till practices increase water infiltration, boost soil organic matter, reduce erosion, and improve the release of soil nutrients for plants.

Currently, 96 percent of agricultural land in Wasco County is farmed through conservation tillage practices, such as no-till drilling and direct seeding.

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## Accomplishments and Highlights

### Watershed Programs

There are 5 active watershed councils in Wasco County covering the major watershed areas. Collectively named the Wasco County Area Watershed Councils, it is made up of The Bakeoven/Buck Hollow and the White River Watershed Councils that cover south county, the Fifteemile Watershed Council that covers the central area; and The Dalles Area, and Mosier Watershed Councils that cover north county. The councils are overseen by a Coordinating Board made up of members from all the watersheds who set priorities for District assistance in funding and staff time, and report accomplishments to OWEB under the Capacity Grant.

The District provides technical support, grant application services, financial sponsorship, and assists in implementing conservation projects of concern for the councils. To this end, each council was assigned a District Planner who is responsible for helping the Watershed Coordinator in carrying out council conservation goals.

Details concerning overall council activities for the year are covered in the insert developed by the Watershed Coordinator, Abbie Forrest.

### Bakeoven/Buck Hollow Watersheds



Bakeoven Rangeland

Conservation Planner Karen Lamson was successful in assisting the Bakeoven/Buck Hollow Watershed Council in its application for a Technical Assistance grant from OWEB.

The grant will assist landowners in the Bakeoven Watershed to inventory and assess landscape conditions, and identify and prioritize projects in the

watershed that will provide the most benefit for overall watershed health.

### Fifteemile Watershed

In 15Mile alone the widespread conversion to direct seed technology has saved an estimated 11.6 million tons of soil across 81,130 acres since 1975.



Historical erosion on tilled ground-15Mile

Based upon recent analysis conducted by Garrett Duyck, NRCS Soil Conservationist, the majority of cropland surrounding 15Mile Creek as well as cropland throughout the county are no longer losing soil, but building it instead.



15Mile - cropland and orchards

The 15Mile Watershed hosts important agricultural lands growing a variety of commodities such as wheat, oats, orchards, hay and livestock. 15Mile Creek is also 303d listed due to water quality and temperature issues. This led to a concerted effort by the District to focus its efforts on addressing riparian areas along the creek. Currently, over 91% of the perennial reaches in Fifteemile Creek are protected with riparian buffers that provide shade, protection from adjacent land uses, improve water quality, bank stabilization and habitat.

The Fifteemile Action Plan to Stabilize Temperatures (FAST) project has played a key roll in helping irrigators. Since 2013, irrigators along 15Mile Creek have voluntarily left over 11.88

cfs instream. Nate Woodard, under the 15Mile FAST program, continues to outreach and speak to groups around the county promoting the program. He administered 17 FAST contracts and 11 instream leases this year.

The 15Mile Watershed has been subject to numerous restoration, outreach, monitoring, studies and other projects. Most recently, approval has been gained for the Fifteemile Underground Storage Feasibility Study funded by OWRD, OWEB, and the District.

The SWCD assisted ODA with the process of extending unappropriated water rights reservations for ag lands along 15mile, 8mile, Larch, and Mosier Creeks in Wasco County.

### White River Watershed



As part of RCPP project, the Lindell Diversion and Ditch Removal Project is 90% completed. 9,200 feet of buried PVC pipe was installed. This replaces above ground mainline and two pivots replaced a combination of hand line and big gun application systems.

The Rock Creek District improvement Company installed 3600' of 8" HDPE pipe to convert 64,00 feet of open canal to a closed on demand system that saves around 279 gallons of water per minute. The irrigation district and SWCD worked with ODFW to install 2,000 feet of 2" HDPE pipe as part of a wetland mitigation plan that will sustain 4 artificial wetlands created by ditch leaks. This mitigation eliminated 3 miles of open ditch that served a 25 acre irrigated wildlife field.

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### The Dalles Area Watershed

The Mill Creek Side-Channel Project, which reconnected a historic side channel to provide slow water refuge for aquatic species, was completed on time and on budget. District and NRCS staff completed the project by planting trees and shrubs.



### FY 15/16 Financial Report

The District uses cash accounting for its day to day operations. Contained within General Fund the District designates a Special Fund category it uses to obligate funds for special projects, this includes Mosier Groundwater, Feral Pigs, District Cost Share, and Irrigation Ditches. Reserve Funds include Building and Vehicle funds.

Unaudited Cash Accounting	General Fund	Reserves
Beg Balance July 1, 2015	\$345,110.07	\$292,148.70
Income	\$1,047,126.29	\$5,962.76
GF Transfers	(\$10,000)	\$10,000
Expenses	\$906,066.80	\$54,391.75
<b>Balance June 30, 2016</b>	<b>\$476,168.27</b>	<b>\$253,719.71</b>

### Mosier Watershed

The Mosier Groundwater Project is of continuing concern for the District. During the FY 15/16 year, GSI completed 28 desktop assessments and 5 field assessments, complete with schematic well diagrams describing well construction, field assessment info, and well replacement or repair cost estimates. At the close of the FY, they had 3 more field assessments lined up for summer 2016 and were working with MWC to conduct outreach to additional well owners.

Rep Huffman and the MWC members were instrumental in securing \$1M for well repairs and remediation. SWCD is developing an agreement with the State of Oregon to administer the funds, which will be available in spring of 2017.

### Wasco County SWCD Board of Directors

Wasco County SWCD is overseen by an elected seven-member Board of Directors made up of 5 Zone and two At-Large position.

- Bill Hammel, Chairman - At-Large
- Norm Lyda, Vice-Chair - Zone 2
- Stan Shephard, Sec/Treas - Zone 4
- Charlie Ernst, Director - Zone 3
- Mel Omeg, Director - Zone 1
- Bob Krein, Director - Zone 5
- Phil Kaser, Director - At-Large

Associate Directors: Pat Davis, Bryce Molesworth, Gary Wade, Bruce Lumper  
Emeritus: Dick Overman, Dan Carver

Wasco Co. SWCD had 7 full time, 1 part-time, and 1 temporary employee in FY 15/16.

- Shilah Olson, District Manager
- Tammy Tripp, Office Admin
- Abbie Forrest, Watershed Coord
- Ryan Bessette, Cons Planner Tech
- Josh Thompson, Cons Planner Tech
- Karen Lamson, Cons Planner Tech
- Nathan Woodard, FAST Coord
- Ron Graves, Project Manager
- Emily Bailey, Seasonal Hire

NRCS had 3 staff members - Beau Sorenson, District Conservationist; Garrett Duyck and Clinton Whitten Soil Conservationists.

Beau Sorenson left the Service Center mid-year to take up a position in South Carolina.

### Staff Highlights

Shilah Olson was officially recognized as the District Manager on July 1, 2015.

Ron Graves stayed on as Project Manager to complete various projects and provide guidance during the transition.

Emily Bailey was hired as a Seasonal Temp. Emily needed intern experience as part of her college requirements. She took over the E.coli testing through the summer and assisted techs with a variety of projects.

Ryan Bessette took over coordinating the Wasco County Forest Collaborative Group. Part of his duties include setting up the meetings and workshops.

NRCS began the FY with 3 staff members - Beau Sorenson, District Conservationist; Garrett Duyck and Clinton Whitten. Beau Sorenson accepted a position with NRCS in South Carolina and moved in November 2015. As of the end of the FY, the District Conservationist position was still vacant. Wasco SWCD commends Garrett and Clinton for all of

their hard work and accomplishments in the absence of a regular supervisor.



# Wasco County Watershed Councils Annual Report FY 15/16

## Wasco County Watershed Council Coordinating Board

The Coordinating Board met 4 times over the course of the last year. The board spent a lot of time discussing the structure and roles of the board. The last year was dedicated to updating their by-laws and meeting rules, developing a prioritization process for the Action Plan, and working on an update to their Annual Work Plan.

### Coordinating Board Members:

Mosier - Kris McNall & Bryce Molesworth  
The Dalles - Ken Bailey and Bruce Lumper  
Fifteenmile - Bill Hammel and Phil Kaser  
White River - Pat Davis and Herb Snodgrass  
Bakeoven/Buck Hollow - Bob Krein



## Mosier Watershed Council

The Mosier Watershed Council held 5 watershed council meetings. They started a surface water committee to address noxious weeds, plant acorns, and discuss the UPRR project and

restoration opportunities.

The State legislature approved \$1,000,000 to be used for well repair and replacement. In addition to the “Mosier Million”, the council was also able to put into place “Special Well Construction Standards” that now require drillers to work closely with OWRD on site location, well depth, and well construction.

The council has been focused on working with OWRD, GSI and the SWCD to prioritize and assess wells, starting in zone 1. The council has worked together to inform the public and get as many well owners to participate in the program as possible. They have also worked with local watershed council members and OWRD to explore deeper sources of groundwater. The project was awarded funding through OWRD, and is expected to start work soon.

The council has also been very interested in the monitoring and restoration efforts that are and will continue to take place due to the train derailment in June. There was an emergency meeting called to inform the council on the details and environmental damage of the derailment, to discuss restoration plans, and to outline how groundwater pollutants will be monitored into the future.

## The Dalles Area Watershed Council



The Dalles Watershed Council held 5 watershed council meetings and one summer celebration. The council was focused on the completion of the Mill Creek Side-Channel project. The project was completed Fall of 2015 and the plantings and reseeding was completed in the Spring of 2016. The side channel project has hosted numerous tours with different agencies very interested in the success of the side channel. The council also received presentations and annual reports on the data collection regarding the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership from ODA and DEQ, E. coli monitoring, ODFW fish counts in Mill Creek as well as Lamprey monitoring efforts of the Confederate Tribes of Warm Springs. The council has also been interested and kept up to speed on the Mill Creek Trail and Greenway efforts. The council spent a day planting the Creekview property with native plants to help stabilize the eroding hillside and along the creek for additional shading. Urban Conservation Planning has also started taking shape with Nate Woodard leading the charge to develop an education and outreach program for urban Creekside landowners.



## Fifteenmile Watershed Council

The Fifteenmile Watershed Council held 5 council meetings. The council had another successful year of the FAST program. The 2015 irrigation season was one of the hottest on record with two alerts being issued lasting a total of 16 days. Although stream temperatures reached 76 degrees, there were no reported

fish kills. The first alert extended from June 24 to July 8. The participation of landowners in the FAST program kept 3.00 cfs instream during that time period.

While the council has continued interest in the FAST program they have also focused on water storage. After the completion of the above ground storage feasibility study, which found a reservoir to be very expensive with residual unknowns, the council has been working towards an alternative. They have received presentations from OWRD, USGS, and GSI about the potential for subsurface storage. The council's goals have been to gain knowledge on the geology, hydrology and water availability of a subsurface storage facility. The council applied to OWRD for \$150,000 and OWEB \$50,000 for the managed underground storage feasibility study, both of which were awarded funding.

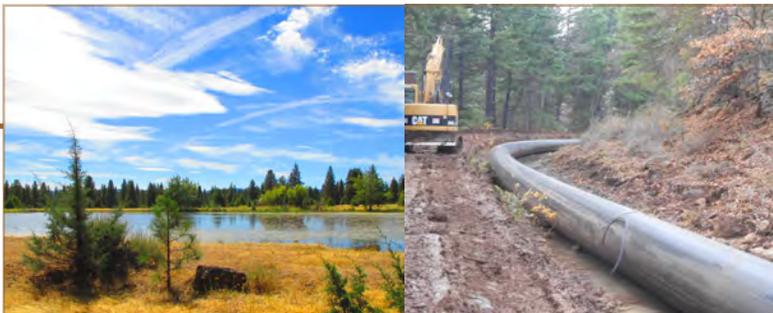
The SWCD also worked with ODA on extending the Fifteenmile Creek Subbasin Reservations that were approved in June. The council received the 2015 data results from DEQ on the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership, along with Monitoring updates from ODA and the annual steelhead update from ODFW.

## Bakeoven/Buck Hollow Watershed Council



The council held 2 joint meetings this fiscal year with the White River Watershed Council. The first joint meeting with the White River council was followed by the local neighborhood meeting in Maupin. The councils received updates from NRCS on Conservation Programs, FSA with Farm Bill updates, OSU, SWCD and Wy'East RC&D updates.

The Bakeoven / Buck Hollow Watershed Council discussed resource concerns and range management needs, which resulted in working with the SWCD and NRCS to pursue funding opportunities. The council submitted an application for a technical assistance grant that will be used to inventory and assess upland conditions in the Bakeoven watershed as a basis for a Resource Management Plan, which will be used by the watershed council and the District to prioritize and seek funding for restoration projects.



## White River Watershed Council

The White River Council held 2 watershed council meetings in conjunction with the Bakeoven/Buck Hollow Watershed Council.

White River watershed council members and landowners have been busy working with the SWCD and NRCS on the Regional Conservation Partnership

Program (RCPP). This project includes: The removal of six fish passage barriers to increase fish habitat access; Improve irrigation efficiency to save 7,300 acre feet of water annually; Restore flows in 21.9 miles of stream; and other identified activities to increase water quality, improve irrigation efficiency, and improve fish habitat in this critical area.

The first phase of the Rock Creek Piping project was completed with the inclusion of additional side piping to maintain wetlands and water sources for wildlife that were created in areas fed by the leaking irrigation ditch.