We could not possibly accomplish all that we do without the help of our partners, funders, and stakeholders. This annual report is dedicated to those who help make so much possible. From implementing conservation practices, achieving more efficient farming practices, and all the ways we strive to make conservation a success in Wasco County, Thank You Partners!!

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA)
City of The Dalles
City of Dufur
City of Mosier
Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
GROUNDWORK Newsletter Sponsors
Network of Oregon Watershed Councils (NOWC)
North Central Livestock Association (NCLA)
Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD)
Oregon Conservation Education & Assistance Network (OCEAN)
Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA)
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)
Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF)
Oregon State University Wasco County Extension (OSU Extension)
Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD)
Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB)
Oregon Women for Agriculture (OWA)
Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO)
The Freshwater Trust (TFT)
US Forest Service (USFS)
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)
Wasco County
Wasco County Area Watershed Councils
Wy'East Resource Conservation & Development (Wy'East RC&D)
Wasco County Residents and Landowners
Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District
2225 River Rd. Ste. 3
The Dalles, OR 97058
541-296-6178 ext 3
www.wascoswcd.org

Economic Factors

The District’s permanent tax rate limit was approved November 2004 for $0.25/$1000 valuation which could raise up to approximately $550,000 annually in future years. However, the District hasn’t levied the full amount and has chosen instead to levy only that which was needed.

Projects are mostly grant funded and are reimbursement based, meaning work is completed and paid for ahead of reimbursement throughout the life of the project. At the close of the fiscal year, large grant reimbursements were outstanding for work in the White River Watershed and Mosier Groundwater project.

Through the efforts of the Mosier Watershed Council and legislative members, Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) approved $1 million for well repairs in the Mosier area beginning in the spring of 2017, which was contracted through the District. Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) funding is expected to decline slightly in future years as the Riparian Buffer workload continues to shift toward non-anadromous fish streams. However, this will be mostly offset by expiration of the early (1999 and after) 15-year contracts and a large contract renewal workload.

Building acquisition planning is currently in progress, with the SWCD considering several options. A growing workload, staffing, and space requirements makes this an important part of future growth. The current lease on the SWCD’s shared space with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will be up in 2021 and the District is looking at options to move or build a new building.

Directors

District Board of Directors - The Board has final oversight over the operation of the District. Members are frequently called upon to represent the board on tours, official events, and address issues. Some board members also serve on watershed councils and are members of the Watershed Council Coordination Board. Others also serve on statewide boards and committees.

Ken Bailey serves on the Soil and Water Conservation Committee, the Oregon Agriculture Heritage Committee, and the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts Board.

Norm Lyda retired from the board on Dec 31, 2018. He served for 27 years. Dufur resident, Shawn Sorenson, was appointed to fill Norm’s position on Jan 1, 2019.

NRCS and FSA Staff

Natural Resources Conservation Service - NRCS staff Frank Cochran-District Conservationist and Soil Technicians Misty Strayhorn, Clinton Whitten, and Garrett Duycx are part of a vital partnership in fulfilling the conservation mission in Wasco County.

This year saw Frank Cochran departing in August 2018 for a promotion close to his home state of Georgia, and Clinton Whitten on Sept 10, 2018, and the arrival of Dan Esposito, District Conservationist on Oct 1, 2018, and Katie Pierce, ODFW, as the NRCS/ODFW Farm Program Liaison.

Farm Service Agency - FSA staff are another invaluable partner in conservation at the Service Center. This year also saw quite a few staff changes. County Executive Director Lisa Bieln and Program Tech Martha Blair saw the departure of technicians Aimee Bell and Tiffany Davis who took positions elsewhere, and the arrival of Lauren Thalofer and Julia O’Hara-Kock.

Finances

Unaudited Cash Accounting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Fund/SF</th>
<th>Reserves</th>
<th>Mosier Projects</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beg Balance (adj) July 1, 2018</td>
<td>$561,469.03</td>
<td>$479,393.80</td>
<td>$10,192.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grants &amp; Contracts</td>
<td>$826,899.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income - Other</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$532,315.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transfers (out)</td>
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<td>($10,000.00)</td>
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<td>Total Income</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expenses-Mat &amp; Sv/Projects</td>
<td>$961,836.04</td>
<td></td>
<td>$532,315.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenses-Personnel</td>
<td>$5,087.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Expenses</td>
<td>$1,491,923.17</td>
<td>$156,499.44</td>
<td>$569,624.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Balance June 30, 2019

$767,488.33 $494,963.24 $47,500.56

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District Manager

Shilah Olson - The District Manager wears many hats - Budget Officer, Grant Writer, Contracting Officer, Financial and Personnel Manager, and general fire-put-outer - to name a few. Shilah keeps a staff of 8 on target and focused in addition to keeping 7 Directors informed and involved in District operations. Shilah ensures the District follows legislative mandates and legal requirements for the myriad of tasks the District is called upon to do. Such as writing a blanket contract for a Federal emergency EQIP project to apply herbicide to burned rangeland for the 2018 fires; overseeing the $1 million Mosier Remediation Project while closing out the $1 million Deep Well Project, along with managing several smaller, long term projects. In addition to continuous grant reporting, Shilah is very active in partnership and project coordination meetings, she represents the District on the Wy’East RC&D Council, and is often called upon to provide input on new state programs.

Planners

Planners get the nuts and bolts of the projects on the ground. Working with clients to help them find ways to solve their resource problems, writing conservation plans, performing site visits, helping each other with tasks, attending to general office maintenance issues, and whatever else comes up. Besides their conservation tasks, attending to general office maintenance issues, plans, performing site visits, helping each other with resource problems, writing conservation ground. Working with clients to help them find ways to solve their resource problems, besides planning, Scott is very interested in getting a handle on the weed problems in the county. Scott is assigned to the Bakeoven Watershed Council.

Tatiana Taylor spent the year attending NRCS Planner training and organizing the FAST Program for cross-training staff. Just as she achieved her Planner stamp, Talatin SWCD swept her away and her last day was April 25, 2019.

Program and Support Staff

Denise Stetson, Fast Coordinator. Denise is also new, her first day was May 1, 2019, taking over Tatiana’s duties. Denise was employed as a seasonal worker in 2014 and helped then Watershed Coordinator Kate to get FAST up and running. Denise has a strong background in monitoring and is assisting in setting up monitoring programs.

Abbie Forrest, Watershed Coordinator. Besides overseeing the functioning of 5 watershed councils, Abbie also coordinates the Lower Deschutes Small Grant Team (as well as manages the grants), and the District Cost Share Program. She also assists the Manager with grant writing, research, and project oversight.

Tammy Tripp, Office Administrator. Besides bookkeeping, payroll, taking board minutes, and receptionist duties, Tammy also writes the newsletter, policies, and articles for the local paper; plans events, speaks at local garden clubs, compiles and writes the annual report, and is the webmaster for the district’s website.

Scott Sui is new to the District, he came on board on February 2, 2019. Scott took over management of the District Tree Sale. Scott has also taken over the E. coli sampling tasks. Besides planning, Scott is very interested in getting a handle on the weed problems in the county. Scott is assigned to the Bakeoven Watershed Council.

Our History

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 followed in 1947. The three districts consolidated and the Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District was officially recognized on November 20, 1973. Our FY 17/18 Annual Report contains a 75th year retrospective on all four of the Conservation Districts and the people who made so much possible for the betterment of the lands in Wasco County.

Over the years the scope of the Conservation District’s responsibility has widened to include more urban land, but its mission has never changed. The District works cooperatively with landowners in both urban and rural settings in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), as well as with other agencies to restore watershed functions, improve farming practices, further conservation education goals, and to address natural resource concerns across all land uses.
Work is continuing on the massive irrigation efficiency project started in 2015 through NRCS’s Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). District Planner, Josh Thompson, has overseen this project since inception. He is working with landowners, water rights holders and tenants to upgrade their irrigation practices to more efficient equipment. Other aspects to this project include the Highline Ditch Project, the 3mile Joint Fish Screen Project, and several dam removals. At the end of the 2018-2019 fiscal year, 80% of the project was completed.

The Highline ditch elimination project is currently in the construction phase. Most of the pipeline for the project is in place. Completion of the pipeline is contingent on completing the dam removal project. The Threemile Joint Fish Screen was the priority project next in line as part of the RCPP, but those involved decided to forego the project. It was removed from the planned deliverables at the end of fiscal year.

The council also continued its support of the Wasco County Forest Collaborative Group. The Collaborative Group has been focusing on fuels reduction and drafting an environmental assessment which will cover the effects of the proposed treatments.

Other methods to address resource concerns include installation of cross fencing for better pasture and range utilization, range restoration practices, as well as strategic livestock water developments.

The council has also emphasized the need to address the encroachment of juniper as well as the spread of invasives weed species.

Bob Krein was appointed Vice-Chair, January 2019. Scott Susi, Conservation Planner came on board in February 2019. He has teamed up with Planner Karen Lamson to help with resource inventory to put together a comprehensive conservation plan. This plan will outline a watershed-scale approach to address upland resource concerns. Many landowners have stated that the encroachment of juniper is of great concern as well as the spread of invasive weed species.
Fifteenmile Watershed Council

The 15Mile Watershed Council continues its efforts in restoring streamflows in the Fifteenmile Watershed and recover from the devastating effects of the 2018 Substation fire that burned over 78,000 acres; much of which was in the Fifteenmile Watershed.

The council continues to support and participate in the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership. Along with Mill Creek in The Dalles Watershed, results from the past monitoring season showed a promising decline in pesticide detections in the watershed. Fifteenmile has two sampling locations, one at the mouth at Seufert Falls (aka Cushing Falls) and one at Dufur City Park. DEQ has decided to scale back monitoring efforts in the upper portion of Fifteenmile as the low concentrations and number of minor detections aren’t of major concern.

The FAST Program (Fifteenmile Action to Stabilize Temperatures) is showing success as more irrigators enter the program. Under FAST, irrigators receive a payment to help cover some of the cost of crop loss that might occur should irrigation have to be shut down during high temperature/low water alerts.

Participants have 2 Options - Option 1 is full commitment agreement to completely curtail their irrigation use if an alert is issued; and Option 2 where no commitment agreement to completely curtail their irrigation use if an alert is issued; and Option 2 where no commitment agreement to completely curtail their irrigation use if an alert is issued; one at Dufur City Park. DEQ has decided to scale back monitoring efforts in the upper portion of Fifteenmile as the low concentrations and number of minor detections aren’t of major concern.

The council decided to move forward with the project and hopes to seek funding for a pilot project in the coming months during OWEB’s and OWRD’s Spring Grant cycles.

In the 2018 irrigation season The first alert was issued on July 23rd and the second alert was triggered on August 8th, with the threat declining by August 9th.

CSI Water Solutions was contracted to investigate the feasibility of a Managed Underground Storage Facility along Fifteenmile Creek. The conclusions from that study showed there were no fatal flaws in the potential of a subsurface storage facility.

The concept would involve storing water during higher flow periods and returning the stored water directly back to the creek during low flow periods. There have been 25 test pits, 3 alluvial aquifer test wells, 6 cylinder infiltrometer tests and laboratory physical/hydraulic test completed. Through these tests, locations for a potential pilot project have been narrowed down to 3 potential sites.

The council decided to move forward with the project and hopes to seek funding for a pilot project in the coming months during OWEB’s and OWRD’s Spring Grant cycles.

Manager’s Message

FY 18/19 was a busy year for the Conservation District, with many challenges, opportunities and changes. The year started with a bang – literally – as lightning sparked large wildfires that consumed wide swaths of the county. Additional human-caused fires soon followed and before we knew it well over 200,000 acres had burned.

Our staff and partners were kept busy throughout the summer and fall responding to the emergency conditions and seeking funding to address all the resources concerns that come about post-fire. USDA NRCS and FSA were able to secure significant emergency funding for herbicide spraying to address weed infestations, seeding to prevent erosion, repairs to the hundreds of miles of fence that burned, and removal of dead trees and reforestation activities in the timbered parts of the county. OWEB’s board also approved emergency funds to support our staff time addressing the fires.

I personally was affected by the South Valley Fire, which started on August 1, 2018 approximately 3 miles north of my home. By that afternoon, heavy winds had begun to push the fire in an erratic path to the south and east. We were soon placed on level 3 evacuation and the Oregon Department of Forestry and local farmers and ranchers were quick to spring into action.

I am eternally grateful for all the people who worked tirelessly to save my home and those of my neighbors. I also give credit to the forest health management work that we had been able to complete with support from ODF and NRCS. The project had involved thinning, pruning and slash abatement in the forested areas on my property. This significantly reduced the fuel load and helped curb the devastating effects of the fire. I strongly encourage landowners to reach out to the SWCD, NRCS and ODF for assistance with managing their property to be as fire-wise as possible, as wildfire is a reality that we face every summer in the arid west.

While the 2018 wildfires posed challenges and setbacks, they also highlighted the strength and resiliency of our community. I am moved when I think about how folks stepped up and supported one another and worked for a positive outcome. We have seen this type of determination and dedication to the local communities through our partners in the local Watershed Councils. In Mosier, residents have come together and worked tirelessly to address the ongoing groundwater declines. FY18/19 was a big year for the “Mosier Million well repaired and replacement program and saw ongoing efforts to secure additional funding for both well repairs and the construction of a second deep well to remove the second largest irrigator from the damaged aquifers. There are similar community-wide efforts in the Fifteenmile watershed to address low stream flows and high summer temperatures; in the White River watershed to address water quantity issues; and in the Bakeoven watershed to assess range conditions to move forward on large-scale watershed improvements. We at the District are very proud of our partnership with the area Watershed Councils. It is the work of the local landowners and our strong partnerships that make our district so successful.

Our success is also due in large part to our staff and that of our core partners with USDA. We said goodbye to several individuals and welcomed new players to the team this year; District Fast Coordinator Tatiana Taylor, NRCS District Conservationist Frank Cochran and NRCS Soil Technician Clinton Whittem, FSA Technicians Amy Bell and Tiffany Davis all moved on to greener pastures. They will be greatly missed, and their individual contributions can never be replaced. We also welcomed new talent into the fold: District FAST Coordinator Denise Stetson, District Planner Scott Sui, NRCS District Conservationist Dan Esposito, and FSA Technicians Blair and Lauren Thalhofer. We are excited to have them on board and add their strengths and experience to the team as we continue to work together for the betterment of Wasco County.
FY 18/19 Goals and Objectives

About the Annual Work Plan

The Annual Work Plan is a living document that guides performance goals and objectives for the upcoming year and beyond.

Similar to a company’s business plan, it encompasses a number of tasks within key categories to help monitor progress throughout the year.

Goal categories are Administration, Information and Marketing, Oregon Plan, General Conservation, Watersheds, and Watershed Council Support.

Administration

Administration includes Financial Management, Human Resources, and District Operations which also encompass statutory requirements. Besides the monthly public meetings with the Board of Directors, public presentation of the Annual Report and Audit for the past fiscal year at the Annual Meeting are all statutory requirements for a conservation District.

Annual Meeting: Historically, the Annual Meeting has been a way to reconnect with local constituents in an informal setting, provide training and information, and also an opportunity to lend recognition to outstanding conservation minded agricultural producers.

This year two families were honored who have made conservation part of their day-to-day operations. In 2018 the Sandoz Family Farm and the Ashbrook Family Farm were recognized for their ongoing efforts to find ways to conserve water through irrigation efficiency, address water quality issues, and implement conservation practices throughout their operations.

The Sandoz Family Farm, made up of Ted, Mike, Linda, Chuck, and Mary, plus spouses, was recognized as a Century Farm. Their family have their roots in the early beginnings of The Dalles. Which is why conservation is so important to them as a means to leave a thriving operation to the next generation. Riparian buffers along Mill Creek and control/diversion of live- stock runoff both play an important roll in addressing water quality concerns. Mulching farm debris back into the soil ensures soil quality and prevents depletion of critical nutrients, while grazing management practices keep the pastures producing and better able to absorb and filter nutrients.

The Ashbrook Family also has deep roots in the Du- fur community. Stan, and his daughter Deanna, split the responsibilities of the operation, with Deanna taking over the livestock and Stan looking after the crops. As an irrigator on 15 Mile Creek, Stan works to ensure his irrigation operation is as efficient as possible. Working closely with Wy’East RC&D, Stan has implemented irrigation control throughout his operation that includes

Mosier Watershed Council

Groundwater level declines in the Mosier Valley are a priority concern for the Council. Work continued this year on replacing commingling wells in priority Area Zone 1. This phase of the project was nick-named “Mosier Million” after the funding set aside by the legislature for it.

By the end of the fiscal year, a total of 8 wells were drilled, 11 wells replaced, 1 well repaired, and the drillers were working on the 12th replacement. It was anticipated that should the last two wells come in under budget the remaining funds might be enough to complete two additional wells. At the conclusion of the Mosier Million project there will be 13 total wells replaced in the Priority Area Zone 1.

The surface water subcommittee kept the council informed about efforts to restore the area impacted by the 2017 train derailment. DEQ is still monitoring groundwater contamination from the event.

DEQ’s Bob Schwarz provided updates on contamination levels and the operation of the biopurifying system. The system was pulled in March and DEQ began testing their 11 monitoring wells for any increase in contaminants. There appeared to be no rebound in contaminant concentrations, no detections were at levels harmful to humans or animals.

The Dalles Watershed Council

The Dalles Watershed Council’s main focus has been on water quality related issues using different monitoring tools and partnerships to achieve their objectives.

Since 2009, Mill Creek has been consistently sampled for E.coli bacterial contamination, showing that concentrations and detections tend to fluctuate year to year. Over the course of 2018-2019, there were over 60 samples collected at 6 different locations. Through this process, focus has been narrowed to the Skyline Tributary which is located at the edge of the city limits. Concentrations in this tributary regularly exceed water quality limits for recreational use while further upstream sampling shows lower E.coli concentrations and detection frequency.

The council is also involved in the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership (PSP) since 2011-12. Over 130 insecticides, herbicides and fungicides are analyzed along with their breakdown products. For the 2018 sampling season, there were 15 sampling events from late March through mid-July and two events in September. The results showed a significant decrease in pesticide detections, with the lowest numbers since the program start.

DEQ considers the progress The Dalles and Wasco County has made with this effort a success story that can be shared across the state.

Kevin Masterson, DEQ, reports annually and shares the results from the previous sampling season with the Council. This last fiscal year was the most successful year to date.

Council members volunteered to help out with the District’s first annual one-day tree sale event. The event was successful and it was also a great opportunity for the council members to mingle with members of the community.
Wasco County Area Watershed Councils

Watershed Councils are an important partner for the work the District does in the county. Typically, the councils main focus is the “big picture”, identifying resource concerns that can affect the whole community within a particular watershed rather than with individual landowners. There are five watershed councils in Wasco County. South County has two councils: Bakeoven/Buck Hollow and Mosier Councils, Ryan Besette - The Dalles, Josh Thompson - White River, Scott Susi was assigned to the Bakeoven/Buck Hollow, Council in late 2019, and District Manager Shilah Olson assists Watershed Coordinator Abbie Forrest and FAST Coordinator Tatiana Taylor with the 15Mile Watershed. Tatiana Taylor resigned and took up a position with the Tualatin SWCD in late April 2019. In May 2019, Denise Stetson took over as the FAST Coordinator.

The Coordinating Board

The Coordinating Board acts as an overarching umbrella council to support the individual watershed councils in the County. Regularly scheduled meetings are held to address requirements set forth by OWEB - such as reviewing and updating the council Work Plan, by-laws, operating procedures, conducting Chair elections and council evaluations. These quarterly meetings are also a chance for members to share happenings from their respective councils and weigh in on projects that may need additional support or guidance.

Watershed Councils are funded through an OWEB Watershed Council Capacity Grant. This year, the grant was submitted to OWEB and there were concerns about how the operation of the councils worked with the SWCD to implement projects. OWEB invited the Coordinating Board to discuss the prioritization process of council driven projects as well as an opportunity to share how these projects are executed.

Wasco County Area Watershed Councils FY 18/19 Annual Report

This is an excerpt of the Watershed Councils FY 18/19 Annual Report completed by Watershed Coordinator Abbie Forrest. Councils play a key role in identifying issues that may have wide ranging impacts in their respective watersheds. This is a snapshot of council support and/or involvement in many of the ongoing projects in Wasco County. The full report can be found at www.wascowatersheds.org.

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Conservation Planner Karen Lamon assists the Bakeoven/Buck Hollow and Mosier Councils, Ryan Besette - The Dalles, Josh Thompson - White River, Scott Susi was assigned to the Bakeoven/Buck Hollow, Council in late 2019, and District Manager Shilah Olson assists Watershed Coordinator Abbie Forrest and FAST Coordinator Tatiana Taylor with the 15Mile Watershed. Tatiana Taylor resigned and took up a position with the Tualatin SWCD in late April 2019. In May 2019, Denise Stetson took over as the FAST Coordinator.

Representatives from Wasco County Watershed Councils shared stories of successful watershed projects and how the partnership between the councils, SWCD, and agencies works. The interview was well received by the OWEB review team and the Wasco County Area Watershed Councils were awarded full funding. The review process was a great end to the fiscal year. It was a chance for the councils to reflect on the work that they are doing and the jump into the next year with even stronger partnerships and support.

Continuity of services. However, this does not preclude staff members from working on other projects or with individual landowners throughout the county.

Training - Keeping staff trained and kept up-to-date on current regulatory changes throughout the industry - from conservation to human resources is also of concern. This is made easier by the Oregon Conservation Partnership. The Partnership was formed by the Oregon Conservation Education & Assistance Network (OCEAN), the Network of Oregon Watershed Councils (NOWC), the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT), and the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD). Together they offer a once a year training opportunity through an event called CONNECT that features a myraid of topics from conservation to administrative training. CONNECT ensures conservation professionals throughout Oregon have a venue through which to stay abreast of changing trends, laws, and regulations. This training is supported by the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

There is a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes in any conservation district. Monthly board meetings are key in keeping the District Board of Directors informed of staff progress, activities, projects, and finances. Following legal compliance frameworks for large project contracts is complicated and time-consuming. Establishing a legal budget under Oregon Budget law is also complex and extends over a period of several months. Projects have to be closely monitored, reports written, expenses justified and documented. Projects require ongoing coordination and communication with staff, partnering agencies, landowners, and contractors. Human Resource policies also need to be kept current and new ones written to remain in compliance with ever-changing laws.

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Partnership Award - This year at CONNECT, NRCS staff from Sherman and Wasco Counties awarded Partnership Awards to their respective District partners for their assistance in addressing the fire emergency brought on by the 2018 fires which swept through both counties.

Wasco and Sherman SWCDs “provided exemplary partnership to NRCS to provide outreach, contracting and field support for post-fire recovery activities in Wasco and Sherman counties, coordinating the contracting of seed and scheduled aerial seeding applications with participating landowners in a timely manner."

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Information and Marketing

Information - communication and outreach to the community is a critical component to District operations. The District publishes a newsletter, the GROUNDWORK six times a year, conservation related articles in The Dalles Chronicle, Annual Neighborhood Meetings throughout the county, operates a district website, has a Facebook presence, sponsors and organizes workshops, and sponsorship of ag organization events, such as the Annual OSU Crop Tour and NCLA Annual Bull Tour.

Marketing - Participating in community events provides an opportunity for our constituents to meet staff and become familiar with our services. This year District Planners Josh Thompson and Scott Susi participated in a 4-H event with 7th and 8th graders for a Farm to Table class in Wamic. Urban kids had an opportunity to experience how a farm operated, wrangling cows, learning about crop production, and other farming skills. Scott also taught a 4-H class of 4-6th graders about pollinators and bird identification.

Outreach - Planner Karen Lamson oversees outreach for the National Annual Stewardship Week and Poster Contest Program. Themed conservation material, targeted for different age groups, is provided free of charge to teachers who request it, in Maupin, Dufur, and The Dalles Schools. A Poster Contest is simultaneously held based on the current Stewardship theme. This year’s theme was “Life in the Soil” Dig Deeper. Karen also gave a presentation for a Living With Fire Community Forum on fire sponsored by Friends of the Gorge.

Office Administrator Tammy Tripp created displays for the Annual Meeting, Cherry Tour, and Wasco Co. Fair, and spoke on pollinators, pesticides, and soil quality at a local garden club.

Tatiana Taylor gave several presentations to the 15 Mile Watershed Council, District Board of Directors, and County Commissioners on the progress of the FAST program.

Staff briefed Representative Greg Smith on needs and concerns following the 2018 fire season at a forum hosted by Wy’East RC&D. The SWCD also hosted a meeting with Representative Greg Walden as a follow up to the June 2018 Washington DC meeting. Conservation programs and needs, Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery (PCS-RF) Funding was discussed and the Representative was briefed on the 2018 wildfire impacts to Wasco County.


Crop Tour - With the retirement of OSU Extension Agent Brian Tuck on December 31, 2018, the Conservation District stepped up to sponsor this year’s Crop Tour in partnership with NRCS Soil Conservationist Garrett Duyck. 45 people braved the cold, wind, and threatening rain, to drink coffee, eat donuts, and see what’s new in agriculture. Garrett put together an interesting.

Projects & Programs

Mosler Ground Water Project - continued

This first well, while over 900’ deep has a static water level of 350’. Monitoring equipment supplied through Wy’East RC&D’s Irrigation Efficiency program, allows for close scrutiny of the wells performance and irrigation scheduling. OWRD has continual access to the performance data.

Already, between the Well Repair and Replace Project and the Deep Well Project, incoming data suggests that these measures have had a positive effect on the community aquifers. The District is pleased that it has been able to assist the Mosier Watershed Council and the people of Mosier to address this issue that has plagued the community for so long.

At the close of the fiscal year, the SWCD had applied to OWRD for additional funding to complete the second deep well.

White River RCPP

The White River Watershed RCPP Project - is a multi-funded project between OWBR, NRCS, and landowners to address a number of irrigation water issues in the White River Watershed.

The installation of pivots, micro-irrigation, fish passage barriers, irrigation efficiency, and irrigation ditch piping projects were planned. This fiscal year pivots were installed and the long process of transferring water rights was undertaken.

Due to a change in the applicant’s priorities, a ditch piping project for the Round Prairie and Rock Creek Irrigation Districts was withdrawn from the RCPP Project resulting in 1.2 million in grant funds being turned back to the funders. This portion of the project would have installed a joint operated fish friendly diversion and fish screen in addition to 20,000 ft of pipe. It would have saved up to 3.5 cfs of water loss and dedicated 1 cfs instream for water rights on 3 Mile Creek.
Projects & Programs

Mosier Ground Water Project - continued

well water commingling. This was causing wells in the upper reaches of the watershed to go dry. Since then the wells in the watershed have been monitored and the worst commingling wells were identified and prioritized.

The Mosier Groundwater Project is actually a series of projects - one consists of a contract with GSI Water Solutions Inc. to continue to monitor, evaluate, and prioritize commingling wells in the hopes that one day a way could be found to address those issues and recharge the affected aquifers.

As wells continued to dry up deeper in the watershed and if something wasn’t done, even the City faced an uncertain future. Through dogged persistence, the Mosier Watershed Council was able to petition and receive one million dollars from the legislature towards the Mosier Watershed. The funds would be distributed from the Oregon Water Resources Department.

The District contracted with M&M Well Drillers and under close consultation with OWRD staff and Planner Josh Thompson providing District oversight. Fifteen wells were designated as high priority and by the end of the fiscal year 13 wells were repaired or replaced. A couple more were at various stages of preparation.

Contractor GSI continued to evaluate, identify, and prioritize more wells, through desktop analysis, that are possibly commingling should there be future funding to repair them.

Mosier Deep Well Project - Another facet is the Deep Well Project. This project was started in late 2017 and part of it was completed in spring of 2018 with grant funding through OWRD and landowner contributions. The idea was to take the two largest commercial irrigators off the residential and City aquifers that would allow for faster groundwater recovery. The project would drill beyond those aquifers and into an untapped source.

Person Pump and Well was contracted to drill the well. The plan was to drill both wells at a cost of 1,225,013 with 75% funding from OWRD and the remainder from the two commercial orchardists. However, the first well drilled experienced significant unforeseen conditions. The drill team encountered an extremely high pressure (495 psi) aquifer that took 4 months to bring under control at substantial cost.

There were other unforeseen problems as well. Going deep in this type of geology was fraught with unforeseen conditions. The drill team encountered an extremely high pressure (495 psi) aquifer that took 4 months to bring under control at substantial cost. The farmer would not hold until another grant could be obtained.

Information and Marketing - continued

program that included looking at the current Winter Wheat Trials on the Miller Ranch, Value-Added Markets for wheat and other crops, cover cropping, and Wildfire Prevention Strategies.

Jill Clapperton, PhD of Rhizoterra Inc discussed nutrient density in crops and how cover cropping could increase the nutrient content of wheat and other crops. Louisa Evers, BLM Fire Specialist retired, discussed fuel management practices for wildfire prevention. Kathy Hunter, Rural Development District, Wy’East RC&D, and WorldOregon to organize renewable energy conservation presentation to professionals visiting from Africa as part of the International Visitor Program.

Local Working Group - The District sponsored the NRCS Local Working Group meeting. Local producers and agencies are invited to provide their input on where they see the biggest resource concerns and challenges are. Their input helps guide future funding and technical assistance.

Projects and Programs

The 2018 wildfire season in Wasco County was one of the most extreme fire seasons in living memory. Four large fires and numerous small fires burned over 200,000 acres in Wasco County. Several other smaller fires also impacted the area.

In late June 2018 over 100,000 acres were burned in South County in what was called the Boxcar/Jack Knife Canyon Fires. These lightning caused fires destroyed several landowners summer and winter pastures, fencing, and riparian vegetation. As the District was working with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and Farm Service agency to address this disaster, more fires began in North County and Central County.

Lines tend to blur between the District and watershed council initiated projects because while the council initiates projects for their respective watersheds, it’s up to District staff to carry them out. The District acts as the fiscal sponsor for council initiated projects in addition to reporting and management.

The District began the fiscal year with a full plate of projects and a major fire season.

2018 Fire Season

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2018 Fire Season - Continued

The Substation Fire began just south of The Dalles below Celilo Substation just off Hwy 197. It quickly spread south east across the range and cropland. It was soon followed by the Long Hollow Fire when a combination caught fire, then the South Valley Fire, which started from an unknown source in a workshop west of Dufur. Tinder dry conditions, hot temperatures, and strong gusty winds soon brought these three fires together that quickly swept through the uncut grain and rangeland of the county. (See the map graphic below).

While District and NRCS staff assessed the damage, the state declared an emergency. This enabled federal emergency funds to be made available to help affected landowners.

Wasco County SWCD, Gilliam, and Sherman Counties obtained shared emergency technical assistance funding from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) to assist landowners with post-fire recovery conservation plans. NRCS approved 53 applications for fire assistance totaling 5.8 million dollars. Emergency Forest Restoration funds were also allocated to help those in the South Valley fire who lost timber.

Partnersing with affected landowners, the SWCD coordinated bulk purchase of herbicide and aerial spray services to treat burned acreage in late 2018 to prevent widespread weed infestation across the range and cropland. Individual landowner’s reimbursed the District for herbicide spraying were completed.

The District also entered into an intergovernmental agreement with ODFW for bulk purchase of herbicide and contracting for aerial application services. We weren’t able to complete the spraying due to delays for an environmental review which put us into bad weather, so it was rescheduled for fall of 2019.

At the close of the fiscal year, conversations were underway with the landowners who were interested in coordinated follow-up range seeding in the fall of 2019.

Emergency funding was made available through the Farm Service Agency for farmers to rebuild miles of burned fencing and assist with forage and livestock losses. Emergency Forest Restoration funds were also allocated to help those in the South Valley fire who lost timber.

The District also assisted OWEB with development of statewide effectiveness monitoring protocol and hosted Stream Visual Assessment Protocol (SVAP) training for CREP techs of eastern Oregon. The lack of a Riparian Buffers - The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is an invaluable tool in the conservation toolbox. Through this program riparian buffers are established along creeks and streams. Fencing keeps livestock out and denuded streambanks are replanted. This year 31 plans were completed on 1,426.63 acres protecting 45.87 miles of stream.

The District also assisted OWEB with development of statewide effectiveness monitoring protocol and partnered with USGS to conduct the first groundwater study in Mosier which concluded in 2009. The study identified that the intricate basalt geology allowed for ground storage approach was proving to be a more reasonable approach.

By the end of the fiscal year, GSI Water Solutions, contractor for the study, determined that the underground storage approach was proving to be a more reasonable and affordable option. It will be up to the council and stakeholders to determine the next steps. The District contracts, manages, and assists Wasco Coordinator Abbie Forrest with oversight. Both the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) and the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) have provided grant funds to support the project.

Mosier Groundwater Project

The Mosier Groundwater Project started in early 2000 just after the Mosier Watershed Council was formed. The project took off in 2004 when the District partnered with USGS to conduct the first groundwater study in Mosier which concluded in 2009. The study identified that the intricate basalt geology allowed for

Steelhead Monitoring on Mill Creek - Several years ago The Dalles Watershed Council supported a project to restore a section of Mill Creek that had been cut off from the main creek after the ‘96 floods. A follow up to that project was partnering with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife for monitoring steelhead in Mill Creek. This is the final year for that project. FAST Coordinator Taliana Taylor assisted ODFW in the capture and tagging process.

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Ag Water Quality continued

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Ag Water Quality continued

E.coli Sampling - Several years ago The Dales Watershed Council took on the task of E.coli sampling on Mill Creek. The project is currently being funded under the District’s Ag Water Quality grant. Testing was done throughout the summer by the FAST Coordinator, Tatiana Taylor. While levels of contamination has dropped since the discovery of the source of serious contamination, there is a stretch of Mill Creek that tests out higher than normal. That source has yet to be discovered.

Pesticide Stewardship Partnership (PSP) - There are three Creeks in Wasco County that are monitored for Pesticides: Threemile, Fifteenmile and Mill Creek, which has two sampling locations. DEQ partnered with the watershed council and the District to monitor streams identified as having elevated pesticide concentrations. Sampling started in 2010. Since then, levels continue to drop and in some areas have become barely detectable. District Planner Karen Lamson is currently responsible for testing and her time is covered under the District’s Ag Water Quality TA funding.

FAST - Fifteenmile Action to Stabilize Temperatures (FAST) program began in 2014 when the 15Mile Watershed Council partnered with The Freshwater Trust to address low stream flows and high temperatures in 15Mile Creek during the irrigation season. FAST pays landowners to leave their water in-stream instead of pumping when stream temperatures are predicted to be over the threshold that is deadly to steelhead.

An alert system is set up to send automated alerts to irrigators warning them when a stream temperature alert is in place. If the irrigators choose to turn off their irrigation during the alert, the FAST program offers compensation for the sacrifice of their crop, to help protect the endangered species.

Funding for this program, to support the hiring of a FAST Coordinator, was originally made possible from grants through The Freshwater Trust from OWEB and BPA sources. The grant covered the FAST Coordinator’s project time during the irrigation season and The Freshwater Trust handled the contracts. This year, while most of the Coordinator’s time spent on FAST was covered by The Freshwater Trust, the District applied for and received an OWEB grant to cover irrigator’s contracts.

Tatiana Taylor was the FAST Coordinator and she had 19 FAST signups for the fiscal year - spanning two irrigation seasons. FAST irrigators also work with Robert Wallace, WyEast RC&D to install new tech for irrigation efficiency. Remote pump and soil moisture monitoring to reduce water use. Remote monitoring allows for pump shut down during FAST alerts and the whole operation can be monitored via cell phone. Tatiana left near the end of the fiscal year and Denise Stetson, who helped set up the original FAST program, was hired to replace her.

2018 Fire Season - Continued

Paul Measles from the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) discussed his interested in monitoring 5 sites on 15Mile Creek for erosion at the August 2018 board meeting. The Board was in support of the research, in light of the summer fires combined with winter snow and rain with no standing vegetation, erosion could be a major problem. Landowners were approached and approval for monitoring the selected sites was given. In May 2019, Paul expressed his surprise to the board as he reported there was very little erosion measured.

Just after the fires there was a sudden cloudburst in August that had many concerned about erosion. With steep hills denuded of vegetation their fears weren’t unfounded. While there was some damage, it wasn’t as devastating as it could have been. Chairman Bill Hammel shared a photo of his desilting basin installed at the mouth of a canyon over 21 years ago. He was very proud to say that even after all these years the basin functioned exactly as it was designed. It held the rushing waters and prevented them from sweeping dirt and debris over the road and into 15Mile Creek.

September also saw the District’s H.A. Miller Demonstration Nursery and some adjoining cropland burn. A burned vehicle on Hwy 197 was being towed when it started burning again adjacent to the nursery. Embers, propelled by gusting winds, landed in the dry nursery vegetation and quickly spread throughout the trees, jumping the road and into neighboring fields. The fire burned all the trees and shrubs, the pump house, pump, and irrigation system. The District was still involved with cost recovery by the end of the fiscal year.

Projects and Programs

At the end of the fiscal year the District had 15 active projects and 5 projects completed. Of the active projects, 5 were council initiated. The District also sponsors a cost share program to help landowners with small projects that don’t always qualify for larger granting agencies.

Some of the large projects are watershed based, meaning there is a benefit to the watershed at large, while others are individual projects within various watersheds that help to contribute to the whole. Still others are county wide - typically by way of technical assistance, a target focus on a resource such as water quality, or farming practices that address water and soil quality through technology and the reduction of chemical and fertilizer inputs.

District Cost Share Program

The District Cost Share (DCS) Program, coordinat by Abbie Forrest, is a District sponsored and funded program in Wasco County to address conservation projects that don’t always qualify for grants administered by large granting agencies. The DCS can also be used as a match for larger project grants to help reduce a landowner’s out of pocket costs. Small conservation projects are equally as important as larger projects as they help to address resource concerns across a large base.
District Cost Share Program - continued

During the fiscal year 17 District Cost Share (DCS) projects were approved. Practices included: Juniper thinning, mud and manure management, Precision Ag (GPS technology and advance spray systems), solar live-thinning, mud and manure management, Precision Ag projects were approved. Practices included: Juniper system stock well, orchard stump grinding for mulch, irrigation system upgrades, replace wildlife guzzler burned during fire, SECRETS program for Col. Wright School, Juniper Flat District Improvement Company (JFDIC) Water Management Plan, orchard irrigation system upgrades, irrigation ditch piping, spring development, forest management practices, and The Next Door Summer Youth Program.

Seventeen DCS projects from current year and previous fiscal year projects were also completed. These practices included: Eagle Scout Project to build 80 blue bird boxes and mount them on fence posts throughout 15Mile ag lands. Livestock wells, irrigation efficiency practices, and more.

Ag Water Quality

Water quality is one of the driving forces behind conservation. It is affected by many factors - from the uplands to the lowlands. Healthy range and pastureland in the uplands, vegetated streambanks, and grassy buffers around cropland all serve to protect waterways and improve water quality.

8Mile SIA - Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) created a program designating Strategic Implementation Areas (SIA) to focus resources in various watersheds across the state. Once an SIA is identified, ODA conducts targeted outreach and research in these areas to identify potential Ag Water quality issues. If a potential problem is identified within the SIA, ODA will make a referral to an SWCD to provide technical assistance and funding to improve management and reduce negative impacts. This year’s SIA was 8Mile Watershed.

Focus Areas - Another tool in the Ag Water Quality toolbox are focus areas. These are areas designated by the District to conduct landowner outreach and offer assistance and funding to pro-actively address possible water quality issues. These could be animal corrals placed too close to a waterway, barnyard runoff, lack of riparian vegetation, or livestock not fenced from an active waterway. Chenoweth Creek was designated as an active Focus Area this year.