



# Groundwork

## Groundwork Newsletter Special Edition

# 2023/2024

# ANNUAL REPORT

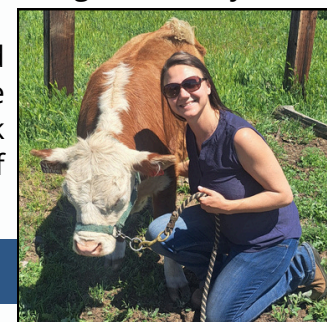
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### Message from the Manager

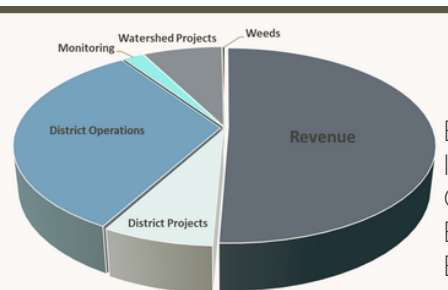
As I reflect on the past year at Wasco County SWCD, I can't help but feel incredibly proud of all that we have accomplished together! From implementing a range of grant-funded projects to forging strong partnerships and utilizing our tax base wisely, it's been a year full of growth and success. We have been able to bring to life numerous projects aimed at conserving our soil and water resources, improving our watersheds, responding to wildfire threats and impacts, controlling noxious and invasive weeds, creating habitat for native wildlife, helping make our local farms and ranches more sustainable, and more! We are committed to utilizing our tax base efficiently and effectively, ensuring that every dollar contributes to the betterment of our community.

I invite you to join us in celebrating our achievements and milestones through this report. As we look ahead to the future, we are excited about the projects and initiatives on the horizon. Thank you for being a part of our journey. Here's to another year of success and growth at the SWCD!



### FINANCIAL REPORT

The District uses cash accounting for its day to day operations. Fund accounts include the General Fund and 2 Reserve Funds: The Building Reserve Fund and the Vehicle Reserve Fund. The District has a permanent tax rate limit approved November 2004 for \$0.25/\$1,000 valuation, which raised \$799,361.14 in the 2023-2024 fiscal year.



### Unaudited Cash Accounting

Beg. Balance July 1, 2023  
Income  
General Fund Transfers  
Expenses  
Balance June 30, 2024

### GENERAL FUND

\$531,474.00  
\$2,014,433.00  
\$85,287.00  
\$1,972,549.00  
\$658,645.00

### RESERVES

\$375,014.00  
\$12,105.00  
\$45,000.00  
\$ -  
\$432,119.00

### Introducing the Staff

- Shilah Olson, District Manager
- Josh Thompson, Assistant Manager
- Jennifer Sampson, Office Administrator
- Abbie Forrest, Grants & Program Manager
- Drake Gilbert, Watershed Coordinator
- Karen Lamson, Conservation Planner
- Ryan Bessette, Conservation Planner
- Scott Susi, Conservation Planner
- Samantha Filbin, Field & Office Assistant

# Conservation Programs

## ODA Capacity and Monitoring

Water quality and quantity is at the forefront of priorities for the district. Capacity funding is provided by the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA). The support from this grant provides outreach and technical assistance to our landowners and community members. During the last fiscal year the SWCD distributed the Groundwork newsletter 6 times throughout the year to over 978 landowner and participated in 12 KODL "Coffee Break" radio shows. Technical assistance through one-on-one conversations and onsite visits was provided to 121 landowners through programs including the District Cost Share, CREP, and CRP. 2,813 acres were written into 48 conservation plans.



## BPA & OWEB CREP Buffers

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a Farm Bill program implemented through the Farm Service Agency. Conservation Plans are developed by our certified conservation planners. Financial support for this program is provided by the Bonneville Power Administration for anadromous streams and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board for all riparian areas, including non-anadromous streams. The primary goal of the CREP program is to protect and enhance riparian and floodplain habitat for fish and wildlife. Riparian buffers reduce sediment inputs, stabilize streambanks and provide shade. CREP plans typically include shrub/tree and grass plantings, weed control, and livestock exclusion to enhance riparian areas. SWCD planners completed 5 new CREP plans and 10 renewals.

## NACD Farm Bill TA

Technical assistance for Farm Bill programs was secured this FY through the National Association of Conservation Districts and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to assist our local NRCS with their workload and ensure that Farm Bill programs are successfully implemented in Wasco County. Conservation Planners provide technical assistance for the EQIP program as well as CRP and CSP. Forest Management Grazing Lands and Soil Health/Erosion were the primary natural resource concerns this fiscal year.

## Project Updates

The year was filled with new projects and the ongoing progress of existing ones. Here are the years highlights from our multi-year projects.

SWCD Staff worked with ODA and DEQ to develop a strategic plan for the implementation and monitoring of the PSP program for Wasco County. Funding was secured for SWCD staff to gather samples, as well as promote outreach and education to the public, orchardists, and spray applicators.

E. Coli monitoring is supported with funding through ODA. Sampling in Mill Creek continued through the summer of 2023 and the spring/early summer of 2024. Staff collect water samples at 6 locations, testing for E.coli concentrations, as well as collecting temperature, specific conductivity and turbidity measurements.

The Highline Ditch removal project is ongoing. This project involved numerous landowners and staff are assisting with on-farm irrigation upgrades and alternative water sources.

Mosier Million #2 has a qualified well driller pool. Work was scheduled to start on the first three wells in July, and contracting for the next few wells is in progress. Funds for this project must be obligated by December 31, 2024.

The Chenoweth Restoration project has been in progress for two years now. Efforts have included noxious weed control, large community clean up events, as well as the installation of informational kiosks along the trail. Permitting for the installation of large wood is in progress, and anticipated completion of the project to be Summer of 2024.

The SWCD has contracted with ODFW for steelhead monitoring under two separate OWEB grants in Fifteenmile and Mill Creek. SWCD staff assist ODFW in the spring to tag and gather data on all steelhead captured in these creeks to establish baseline smolt production estimates and smolt-to-adult (SAR) estimates for ESA listed summer steelhead, Coho, and coastal cutthroat. 2024 was the final year of operation of the screw trap in Mill Creek.

# District Cost Share Program

The District Cost Share program was as popular as ever with over half of the 2023/2024 pool of money being obligated within the first few months. There were 29 applications approved by the SWCD board for a total of \$150,000. Of those approved were 11 haul roads for erosion control, 4 fire restoration and fuels reduction projects, 5 irrigation upgrades, 5 spring developments/livestock water, one brush management, one orchard chipping, and two rainwater harvesting projects.

Twenty Cost Share projects were completed last fiscal year. 11 of those were haul roads, one cross fence, one juniper removal, one orchard chipping project, one livestock water/spring development and five irrigation efficiency/upgrade projects. Total reimbursed funds to landowners was \$88,744.80.



## Weed Control

As of July 2024, we had 8 grant agreements for weed control in place. These are in partnership with and funded through ODA, OSWB, OWEB, ODFW, USFS, Sherman County SWCD, and the Port of The Dalles. Towards the end of the FY, the opportunity came to be the lead agency for the Lower Deschutes Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA). The SWCD will hire an individual to be responsible for coordinating and implementing weed control activities on the Lower Deschutes. SWCD staff have also been working with Wasco County to develop a plan for noxious weed control once Merle Keys, longtime Weedmaster, retires at the end of 2024. We are also working with BLM on a proposal to treat weeds along the Deschutes River from Pelton Dam to Maupin, meaning the entire river corridor within Wasco County will be addressed.


## Education & Outreach

2023/2024 was a busy year for SWCD staff who led field tours for students, native planting trips along the Lower Deschutes River, as well as participated in multiple outreach events including the OSU Cherry Days Festival, Wasco County Fair, Natural Resource Career Day, the Wasco County Crop Tour, and NCLA Bull Tours. Stewardship Week was held late this spring with students from Wasco County putting their artistic talents to work by creating "May the Forest be with you Always" posters for this year's theme. Poster contest winners are displayed at left below. In addition to having a display at the Wasco County Fair, the SWCD has donated \$1,000 towards the Wasco County Livestock Youth Auction pool that will help ensure better prices for each animal sold at the fair.


Grades 2-3: Cassidy Bowen



Grades 4-6: Daisy Proctor



Grades 7-9: Alma Campo



**Stewardship Week Poster Contest Winners**

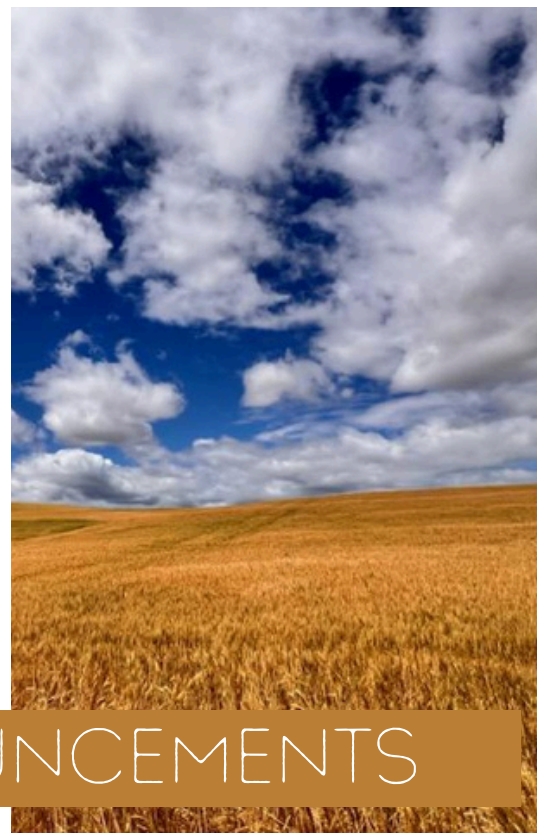


# Breaking News

We have some exciting news to share about the upcoming fiscal year!

We've been working closely with various agencies across the county to make great things happen. For instance, we're now the fiscal sponsor for the Fifteemile Large Wood Instream Habitat project with the USFS. We've also been supporting the East Cascades Oak Partnership in securing funding for Cultural Resource Surveys in the Columbia Gorge Scenic Area. And we've managed to secure approximately \$1.5 million through Wasco County to help with wildfire mitigation efforts in the Juniper Flat area.

In partnership with Wy'East RC&D, we've applied for funding through the ODOE C-REP program. If approved, this funding will help us enhance critical infrastructure locations throughout Wasco County, providing resilience for our rural and remote communities by using pre-wired transfer switches, off-grid modular backup batteries, and small scale off-grid solar arrays.



## REGULAR UPDATES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The SWCD Board has changed their meeting dates. SWCD Board meetings will now be taking place on the 2nd Wednesday of every month. The next regularly scheduled board meeting will be held on Wednesday October 9th, 2024 at 1PM at the USDA Service Center in The Dalles. The Aug & Sept meetings were canceled.
- Listen for SWCD & Partner updates on the KODL Coffee Break the first Monday of each month at 10:07AM on 1440 AM radio, 100.7 FM or streaming online at kodl.com.
- The USDA Service Center will be closed in observance of all Federal Holidays.
- The SWCD is hosting a photo contest. The goal is to have enough photo submissions to build a calendar to showcase local talent, and agriculture around Wasco County. Please submit your photos by November to be included in the contest. All photography levels are welcomed and encouraged!
- The next issue of the Groundwork Newsletter will contain the annual Tree Sale order form. If you are a landowner enrolled in CREP or other Farm Bill programs and are going to be ordering from the tree sale this year, reach out to your conservation planner for assistance.