

Groundwork



Groundwork Newsletter Special Edition

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2022-2023 Fiscal Year Annual Report



A Message from the Manager

This year presented the District with many opportunities and a few challenges. We worked to broaden our capacity, while adaptively managing operations in response to the ongoing pandemic and difficult economic times. We continued to work in close partnership with area Watershed Councils, NRCS, FSA and WyEast RC&D.

I attended the NACD summer meeting, along with our board Secretary/Treasurer, Shawn Sorensen, and his wife Chris. This meeting was an excellent opportunity to network at the national level and learn from the other 3,000 Conservation Districts across the nation. We met the Chief of NRCS, Terry Cosby, and he later took time to visit us in Wasco County. We also made connections with NACD staff in Washington DC, who are eager to help us provide input on national programs and policy.

Through our annual report, I hope you find a connection with the work that the District is doing to support conservation efforts and help our local community to be resilient and sustainable. Thank you to our board, staff, partners, and most importantly, the landowners and agricultural producers who we serve.

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*



Finances

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 \$610,795.58 in the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

2022 / 2023 Financial Report

Unaudited Cash Accounting	General Fund	Reserves
Beg. Balance July 1, 2022	\$851,132.00	\$146,269.00
Income	\$1,936,331.00	\$203,938.00
General Fund Transfers	\$(179,949.00)	\$277,500.00
Expenses	\$2,076,065.00	\$252,693.00
Balance June 30, 2023	\$531,449.00	\$375,014.00

Projects Completed

- Lindell Dam Removal- OWEB \$159,050
- Ingles Place Pivot- OWEB SG \$15,000
- Wasco-Hood River Forest Restoration Collaborative- OWEB \$48,576
- Fifteenmile MUS Pilot Project- OWEB TA \$74,910, OWEB SE \$31,513, OWRD \$185,000, Tides Foundation \$100,000
- White River Wildfire Impact Response- OWEB \$7,748
- Wasco County EDRR- OSWB \$16,594
- Weed Control Equipment- ODA \$20,000
- 2021-22 FAST Grant- OWEB \$110,000
- 2023 FAST Grant- DEQ \$45,022
- Watershed Assessments- ODA \$125,855

Project Updates

Mosier Groundwater: The Mosier Deep Well #2 was completed with the installation of the variable frequency drive and all the final testing. For Mosier Million #2, staff have been in the process of securing proposals from qualified drillers as well as gathering agreements from participating well owners.

The Bakeoven Restoration project was awarded full funding through OWEB for uplands and rangeland enhancements. 4 landowners are participating and have completed several projects including spring developments and cross fencing that will provide better utilization of uplands and range ground for both livestock and wildlife.

15Mile MUS finished its first round of pilot testing in the spring of 2023. An additional phase of pilot testing will be needed before this project moves forward to full-build out. A TA grant application was submitted to OWEB to help fund assistance from OSU and our contractors to gain further knowledge on the basin project. More detail on this project can be found within the Watershed Council Annual Report.

Tygh Valley Water Projects: The Lindell Dam removal has been completed and progress is nearing completion on the Highline Ditch project. All of the wells are completed and we are working with ODFW on another fish screen.

Conservation Programs

ODA Capacity & 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 landowners and participated in 12 KODL "Coffee Break" radio talk shows. Technical assistance through one-on-one conversations and onsite visits was provided to over 276 landowners through programs including the District Cost Share, CREP, and CRP. 8,967.7 acres were written into 62 conservation plans. E.coli monitoring efforts continued in The Dalles Area Watershed and water quality samples were taken in support of the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership (PSP) Program. Water samples for the PSP program were also collected on Fifteenmile Creek near Seufert Falls.

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 3 new and 21 renewal CREP plans in the fiscal year protecting 1,037.72 acres of riparian habitat and 32.12 miles of streams.

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.

District Cost Share Program

The last fiscal year had another successful round of District Cost Share projects with \$150,000 being awarded to 28 applicants for on the ground conservation.



Approved projects included 7 Haul Roads, 5 irrigation upgrades, 1 manure storage facility, 1 cover crop, 7 livestock water/spring developments, 4 fire restoration projects, 1 juniper removal and 2 cross fence projects. There were 32 projects completed that totaled \$133,630.56. Projects include: 10 haul roads, 2 cover crops, 2 fish screens, 8 irrigation upgrades, 6 livestock water/spring developments, 3 fire restoration projects, 1 updated water management plan and 1 community raised bed project.

The Cost Share program is changing and improving every year for our landowners in hopes we reach more folks in the county who would like technical and financial assistance restoring the natural resources on their property while also addressing the goals of the conservation district.



Pesticide Stewardship Partnership (PSP) Program

The Wasco County PSP Program is entering its 13th consecutive year of monitoring in 2023. To date, PSP sampling occurs within three streams in Wasco County, those being Mill Creek, Threemile Creek and Fifteenmile Creek. There are currently three pesticides of concern within the Wasco PSP area. Malathion is still of high concern due to it being detected at or above 50% of the acute aquatic life benchmark, although it is relatively infrequently detected. Glyphosate and AMPA (a breakdown product of Glyphosate) are of moderate concern due to their frequency of detection, despite receiving no detections above the acute aquatic life benchmark. SWCD staff are in the process of updating the strategic plan due to be completed this Fall. ODA and DEQ are helping through the process and we are gathering input from our local advisory committee as well as OSU Extension. If you have agricultural pesticides to dispose of there will be 3 events coming up this fall. More details will be shared on our website.



Weed Program

Through funding from BPA and an ODA EDRR Weed grant we were able to purchase a UTV for use with CREP field visits and weed control activities. The past year SWCD technician Scott Susi responded to new noxious weed class "A", "B", and "T" infestations throughout Wasco County. Some weeds of concern that were treated and monitored include Yellow Flag Iris, Yellow Star-Thistle, Spiny Cocklebur, Ravenna Grass, Musk Thistle, Spotted Knapweed, and Meadow Knapweed. Scott has been in discussions with district staff, board and partners to develop a new weed program here within Wasco County, with the intent to compliment the work of the local Weedmaster to investigate and treat emerging infestations that are outside the Weedmaster's contracted areas.

Forest Collaborative

Over the last year, the Wasco County Forest Collaborative has worked with the Forest Service to plan three vegetation management projects on the Mount Hood National Forest: Grasshopper Restoration Project, Gate Insect and Disease Project, and 27 Road Fuel Break Project. In total, these planning areas encompass more than 12,000 acres of federal lands. Recently, the collaborative was also instrumental in bringing together partners to successfully secure a USDA NRCS-Forest Service Joint Chiefs competitive grant. The funding associated with the Joint Chiefs project will accelerate fuels reduction and forest restoration projects on private lands and the state-managed White River Wildlife Area. These recent achievements build on past projects including Rocky Restoration Project (14,300 acres), South Pen Insect and Disease Project (2,430 acres), South Five Mile Project (3,000 acres), and 2020 White River Fire recovery efforts.



Outreach & Community Events



The SWCD in partnership with the watershed councils and our local partners hosted and participated in several community engagement and outreach events. This year we reached hundreds of people through our booth at the Cherry Festival/Earth Day event, Sherman and Wasco County Crop Tours, a community cleanup and tree planting event in partnership with Toyota, and our booth at the Wasco County Fair.

NACD Stewardship Week, held annually from the last Sunday in April to the first Sunday in May, includes an annual Poster Contest for students. This year we had over 30 students submit posters. Congratulations to this year's poster contest winners: Russell Filbin (K-1), Eva Underhill (Grades 2-3), Keegan Gast (Grades 4-6), Alma Compo (Grades 7-8).

FROM OUR PARTNERS

2022-23 At a Glance



NRCS

- Enrolled 23,391 acres in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP); \$1,582,495 awarded to Wasco County producers to continue increasing their stewardship of forestland, cropland, and grazing lands.
- Enrolled 1,159 acres in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP); \$1,004,378 awarded to Wasco County landowners to establish pollinator habitat and address forest health and wildfire fuels.
- Because of partner efforts from ODF, USFS, ODFW, SWCD and ECOP, we were awarded our 2nd Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership funding. This project spans 3 years total and will fund cross-boundary fuels reduction work on private forestland, Forest Service public lands, as well as the White River Wildlife Refuge.
- As a result of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), NRCS received funds for Climate-Smart projects. 2023 was the first year this was available and it's anticipated that 2024 and 2025 will see funds in the millions to continue these efforts. Stay tuned!

FSA

- Enrolled 20,402 acres in the Conservation Reserve Program- Grasslands Initiative (CRP-Grasslands) on 17 new contracts
- Re-enrolled 10 Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) contracts on 163.73 acres in Federal FY2023. Previous years had been the bulk of the expiring contracts that had already been bid back in.
- General CRP contract included two new contracts and 1 re-enroll. Again, the bulk of the contracts had expired and been re-enrolled in the last couple of years.
- With our systemic drought conditions, we have approved 39 requests for Emergency Grazing of CRP on 7,686 acres in Federal Fiscal Year 2023.
- Due to the Miller Road Fire in 2022, FSA enrolled 23 applicants into the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) on 108 miles of fencing.
- This was in addition to the increased workload from disaster and pandemic programs, including the Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP), Emergency Relief Program- Phase 2 (ERP-P2), the Livestock Forage Program (LFP) and the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-raised Fish (ELAP).

Wy'East RC&D

This past year has been an exciting one for Wy'East!

- In January, Wy'East became Energy Trust of Oregon's Irrigation Efficiency Lead. As a result Wy'East hired Brad Moore as a Program Engineer to work on ETO energy efficiency projects.
- Sara Sweetser joined Wy'East as an Admin/Finance Manager in July of 2022 and has improved Wy'East's financial practices.
- September of 2022, Michael Kluz joined Wy'East as a RARE AmeriCorps Fellow and provided rural energy technical assistance to many small business owners and producers.
- Wy'East is thrilled to welcome our new RARE Lanier Fussell in September 2023 as Michael joins Wy'East staff as a Rural Energy Project Manager.

Wy'East is excited to continue providing assistance for rural energy and irrigation projects statewide, all while having our headquarters based in Wasco County.