History

The White River Watershed, located west of the Deschutes River in South Wasco County, was the focus of early conservation efforts to restore food production in Wasco County. The watershed area encompasses Maupin, Tygh Valley, Pine Grove, Wamic, Pine Hollow, Sportsmans Park, and the surrounding areas. The major creeks are Tygh, Badger, and White River. There are two major reservoirs - Sportsmans Park and Pine Hollow. Both irrigation reservoirs are destinations for recreational visitors as well as year-around residents.

The early projects focused on upgrading irrigation delivery systems, pasture and range restoration, land leveling for crop production, and livestock production. All of these were crucial agricultural elements but they were also the areas most in need of applied conservation practices in order to be sustainable.

Later projects include converting cropping practices to no-till/direct seed, conservation buffers along creeks and streams, incorporating Precision Ag practices to reduce chemical inputs, and forest management.

TODAY

With the focus on preserving and improving water quality and quantity, irrigation districts are looking to their own irrigation ditches. Leaking and evaporation has not only left those on the end with barely enough water to grow crops, less water is available in the creeks. Through a Resource Conservation Partnership Program grant from the USDA NRCS, irrigators - both private landowners and irrigation districts, are working to implement a watershed project to address irrigation deficiencies. Through the RCPP, NRCS will invest $1.6 million and partners will invest $2 million over a 5-Year period.

Titled the White River Irrigation Efficiency and Stream Flow Restoration Project, this multi-year project, overseen by SWCD Planner Josh Thompson, and in cooperation with NRCS, will remove six fish passage barriers to increase fish habitat access. It will also improve irrigation efficiency to save 7,300 acre feet of water annually and restore flows in 21.9 miles of stream. Identified activities will increase water quality, improve irrigation efficiency, and improve fish habitat in this critical area.

Eligible projects includes Aquatic Organism Passage, Irrigation Pipelines, Irrigation System Sprinkler Upgrades, Irrigation Water Management, Well Water, and Pumping Plants.

One of the main projects includes the The Rock Creek District Improvement Company’s Ditch Piping Project. The problems addressed were two fold: the overallocation of water in Threemile Creek and the poor conveyance efficiency of the primary delivery canal. Both of these issues were addressed by piping 1.76 miles to the main canal.

The Juniper Flat Irrigation District just had a feasibility study concluded to identify issues on their ditches and possible solutions to address those issues. The Round Prairie Irrigation District has also expressed interest in implementing water conservation projects.

Individual landowners are addressing fish passage barriers by removal and/or upgrading to eliminate those barriers, installing more efficient irrigation delivery methods to their crops, installing irrigation monitoring systems to prevent over watering and waste, and installing more efficient pumping systems. The High Line irrigation ditch in Tygh Valley, which diverts water from the creek into the leaking canal, will ultimately be abandoned as irrigators move their water rights from the ditch and back into the creek.