

# Walla Walla County Conservation District

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Summer 2005

Published regularly to provide information to land users

Volume 7, Issue 1



**Visit our booth at  
the Fair: Learn  
more about CSP  
and District  
Programs**

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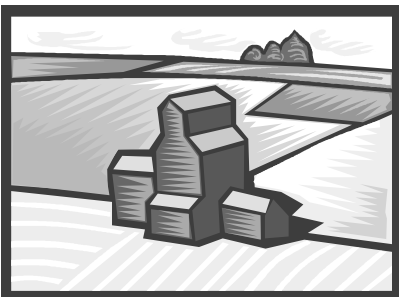
## The Conservation Security Program: Coming soon to a watershed near you!

By now, most producers have heard of the Conservation Security program, or CSP. CSP is the first program that rewards producers who have adopted good conservation practices as part of their regular operation. Each year, several watersheds in each state are selected, and producers within these watersheds are eligible during the sign-up time of that year. The Tucannon watershed, which includes part of Garfield, Columbia, and Asotin County, has been proposed for 2006. Walla Walla is on the docket for possible selection in 2007.

There are three levels, or tiers, of potential payments. To receive payment at the highest level, you must have addressed every resource concern on the acreage being enrolled *and* have records that show this good stewardship. You can enroll all or part of your operation, and that's an important thing to remember. If you enroll just part of your operation, even at the lowest tier, your entire operation can then be added later, one step at a time. But, if you are not eligible to participate during the six-week sign-up window, then you won't have another opportunity until all other watersheds in our state have been addressed. For Washington, this means about every 6 to 8 years, producers will have a six-week sign-up period in which to enroll. It is crucial to be prepared. You'll want to have at least part of your operation eligible when the Walla Walla Watershed is selected.

The program is somewhat complex, and the requirements strict. For example, you must use soil tests. If you don't have records of soil testing, you aren't eligible at any level. NRCS has a CSP Self-Assessment workbook. It's available on-line ([www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp)) and at the District office. The Self-Assessment workbook can help you determine exactly what you need to do to be eligible.

EQIP and other conservation programs are available to help you adopt new practices that will enhance your eligibility. For more information, call Jim Loiland at the District office or check out the CSP website listed above.



# CSP as it relates to other Conservation Practices and Programs

Jim Loiland, Soils Conservationist, NRCS

The Natural Resources Conservation Service's Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes on Tribal and private working lands. Working lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pasture, and range land, as well as forested land that is an incidental part of an agriculture operation. The program is available in all 50 States, the Caribbean Area and the Pacific Basin area. The program provides equitable access to benefits to all producers, regardless of size of operation, crops produced, or geographic location.

CSP will provide payments for conservation practices you have in place at the time of sign up. CSP "Rewards the Best and encourages the Rest." It is not an entitlement program but a competitive program that pays the land user for conservation on the ground. NRCS relies on farmer certification and inventory for the program. Visit the Washington NRCS website at [www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp](http://www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp) for additional information.

## SOME COMMON QUESTIONS

**Who is Eligible for CSP?** To apply you must: 1) have an active interest in operation, 2) have control of the land for the length of the contract, 3) share the risks and be entitled to share from marketing crops/livestock, and 4) meet the conservation requirements of the tier.

**What if I have CRP mixed in my crop land?** The CRP (including CCRP and CREP) acres cannot receive a CSP rental payment but may contribute to the eligibility of cropland or range land payments by improving wildlife and soil health rankings of the crop and/or grazing lands adjacent to it. Enhancements to CCRP and CREP (wider than minimum buffers) can benefit your applications. Riparian area protection is required to achieve Tier III, the highest level contract.

**If I have animals grazing next to a creek, what can I do?** Before CSP sign up begins, remove the potential environmental threat from the livestock by 1) enrolling the area in CREP or CCRP buffer programs, or 2) use EQIP to relocate the environmental threat from animal concentrations or protect area of animal access, or 3) remove the animals from the creek area by other means.

**Can I get CSP payments on my scab lands?** The answer to this question is "perhaps." Scab or outlands must be a) managed, and b) produce income to be eligible to receive CSP payments. For Range to be considered CSP Range, you or a tenant must run livestock on the acreage. However, your scablands will enhance wildlife and could affect erosion issues thereby affecting your potential payments.

**If I have an EQIP, CRP, CREP, or WHIP contract does that guarantee that I will be enrolled in CSP at the highest level?** No, most often the above programs do not address all of the resource concerns on your operation and seldom if ever address all of your operation. CRP, CCRP, CREP and WRP contracted acres are not eligible for CSP payments, but can support your other acres. For example, protection of riparian areas is one requirement to meet Tier III. A CREP project will help meet that requirement. EQIP is an excellent way to get started with conservation practices, and you may have an existing EQIP contract in addition to your new CSP contract on the same acres. EQIP is one vehicle that you can use to get your operation up to a higher tier in CSP. To get to the highest payment levels you must address **all** of the resource concerns on **all** of your operation. CSP rewards producers who are applying the highest level of conservation on their operation.

**NOT IN A WATERSHED NOW? HOW DO I GET READY?** Review the self assessment work books pertaining to your operation. Start or continue to gather the required documentation on your operation. Visit with NRCS to see if there are practices you should begin now, and if there are programs to help implement these practices.

# **Walla Walla County Conservation District**

## **Wildlife Farmer of the Year**

### **Sam Grant**

Walla Walla County Conservation District is pleased to announce Sam Grant as our Wildlife Farmer of the year for 2005. Sam Grant farms wheat on 1,800 acres near Prescott, Washington. The Grants have dedicated 25% of their operation to conservation programs. The 406 acres enrolled in CRP benefit many species of birds including pheasant, quail, birds of prey, and the occasional wild turkey. The Grants have one of the largest CREP projects in the county, with 60 acres enrolled along the Touchet River. CREP specifically benefits endangered salmonids, but the growing riparian buffer is home to numerous game birds, deer, and state priority species such as Great Blue Herons.



Above: Junipers provide shelter and food for wildlife

In addition to their participation in these programs, the Grants planted junipers and blackberries some 20 years ago to benefit ground birds, especially quail. The junipers provide shade, shelter from predators, and food. Juniper berries are an important winter feed source for many birds. Mr. Grant also sets out supplemental feed during the winter and his efforts have been rewarded. During the long summer evenings, Sam and his wife Georgine enjoy watching numerous quail raising broods in the lush cover afforded by the mature junipers. Migratory birds take advantage of the cover as well, with geese and ducks regular visitors to his property. Mr. Grant's long-range goals are to continue farming in a manner that allows these and other wildlife to flourish. For these efforts, the District is pleased to recognize Sam Grant as our 2005 Wildlife Farmer of the Year.



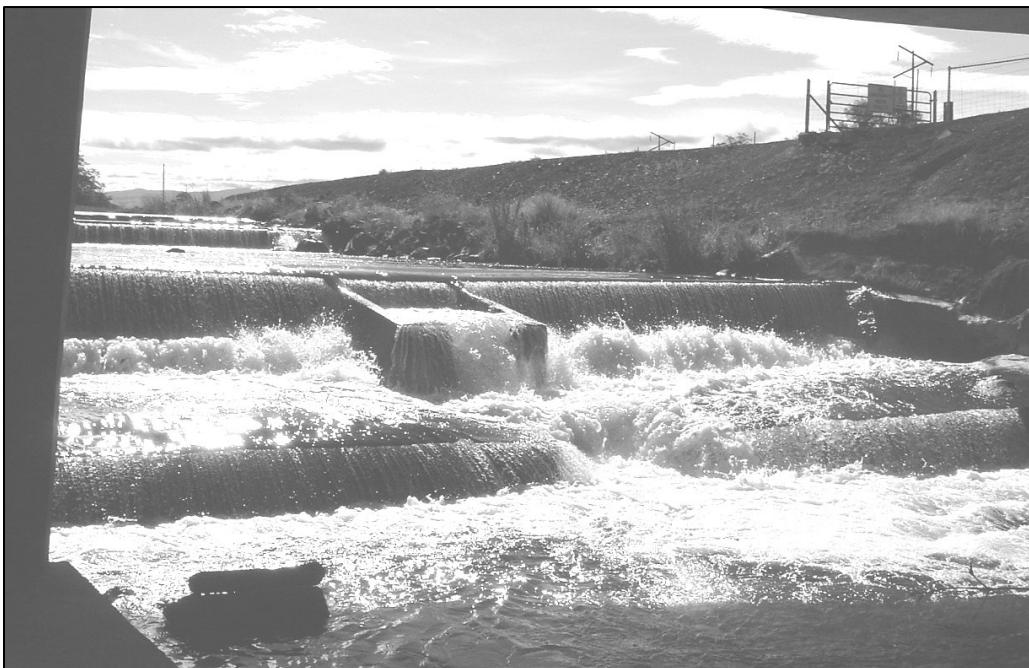
Right: New CREP plantings in the foreground will eventually shade the river. Established trees (background) help retain water during high flows and buffer the river from sediment transfer.

# Gose Street Bridge and Hofer Dam Projects

## The Gose Street Project

The Gose Street Bridge site was identified as one of four fish passage barriers that limits access to the Mill Creek drainage. This drainage includes 52 miles of stream habitat that could be a major production area for ESA listed Mid-Columbia Steelhead Trout, recently reintroduced spring Chinook, and ESA listed Bull trout. Much of this habitat is in a protected water supply catchment on Forest Service land. At the Gose Street Bridge, the concrete flood-control channel that protects Walla Walla has a steep drop for about 600 feet, and then the channel elevation drops 10 to 12 feet in a short 50-60 foot reach. As a result, during times of low flows, the water is shallow, warm, and moving quickly across a wide, steep channel. In the 1980's, the Tri-State steelheaders constructed a concrete fish passage structure that is functional at some flows, but passage under a wider range of flow conditions is needed due to the value of the habitat upstream.

WWCCD is working closely with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation on development of plans for a well-engineered project that will provide the narrower, deeper water flows that adults need to safely navigate on their way to the Upper Mill Creek spawning grounds, and juveniles need to safely pass through on their way to the ocean. The project could be a fish ladder, rock weirs constructed of large boulders, or a combination of these. A conceptual plan is nearing completion with detailed design work scheduled for this winter. Construction of the new structure is expected to be completed in the summer of 2006.



This structure improved passage during higher flow times, but does not address the problem during low flows.

# Salmon Recovery Funding at Work in Our Region



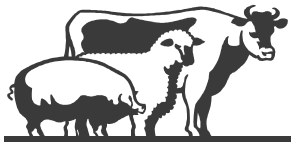
Governor Gregoire on a recent tour of projects visits Hofer Dam site with landowner.



## The Hofer Dam Project

Hofer Dam is an irrigation diversion for the Eastside/Westside Irrigation District located about 4 miles above the mouth of the Touchet River. The Touchet River is the largest tributary to the Walla Walla, and provides habitat for ESA-listed Mid-Columbia Steelhead and Bull Trout, as well as the Spring Chinook that have been reintroduced to the Walla Walla Basin. Hofer Dam is a barrier to adults returning upstream to spawning grounds on Touchet River headwater streams (like the Coppei) and an imminent threat to juveniles migrating downstream.

The Hofer Dam is quite possibly the biggest and most complex passage barrier in the watershed. Because of the convoluted nature of the project, the Salmon Recovery Board (SRFB) funded it as a two-phase project. WWCCD has acquired the services of Anchor Environmental to do the design work for the project, which must allow for both continued irrigation and fish passage under most flow conditions. In June, the district received a commitment of \$400,000.00 for construction of the project from the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council, with the expectation that balance of the project (Phase 2) will likely to be funded by the SRFB. WWCCD and the boards of the affected irrigation districts also plan to acquire funding to pipe the entire conveyance systems of both districts. The ultimate goal is to protect endangered fish species and conserve water while continuing irrigation.



# Livestock Grants: Sign-up now!

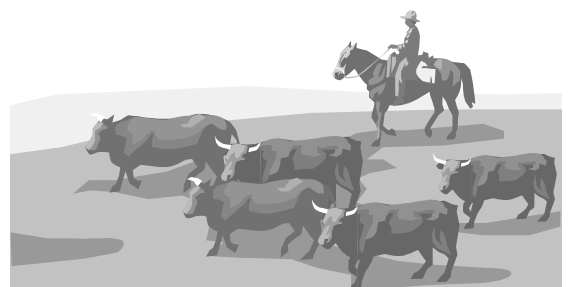
The District has money available to assist livestock producers develop and implement plans for nutrient management and runoff. Everyone with livestock (including horses and small operations) that have access to a river, stream, or pond needs to take action to ensure their operation does not affect water quality. If manure from your livestock comes into contact with the “public waters of the state” then you may be in violation of the Clean Water Act and subject to fines from the Department of Ecology. The “public waters of the state” includes not only flowing water like creeks, but overflow from a spring or trough systems. Size of the operation is not the only consideration; five cows in the creek can have more impact on water quality than a well-managed feedlot with hundreds of cows. There are cost-share funds available to help fence off waterways, install off-site watering systems, and address any other issues related to protecting water quality from livestock. We have a risk-assessment tool that will help determine what actions (if any) you should consider to protect water quality. The following are just a few of the questions on the assessment:

<i><b>Risk Assessment tool: Sample questions</b></i>	<i><b>Higher Risk</b></i>	<i><b>Lower Risk</b></i>
<b>Do all livestock at your facility obtain drinking water from a water bowl, water tank or automatic waterer?</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Are hardened water gaps used for access points to water?</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Where are the animals fed in relation to surface water? (when grass is not available for grazing)</b>	<b>Less than 100 feet away</b>	<b>More than 100 feet away</b>
<b>Do you stack/store manure under cover?</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>

Your answers to the complete list of assessment questions will help you determine whether your operation is at high risk or low risk for enforcement. We are signing up landowners now and will apply for funds in December. State funds are limited, and if local interest is low, chances are the state will focus funding efforts elsewhere. Please call the district if you have a livestock concern.



Left: Landowner has installed a nose-pump to provide water and installed fencing to protect a pond.



# Programs and Progress

**Doan Creek** was diverted into an agricultural irrigation ditch almost 100 years ago. The original channel was filled and the water used to irrigate pasture, eliminating the creek's connection to the Mill Creek Watershed and availability to fish. The Conservation District, the National Park Service, and other partners sought to restore Doan Creek by constructing a more natural, meandering channel with pools, gravel riffles, woody debris jams, and a riparian buffer.

In 2004, a new channel was excavated. The site is infested with reed canary grass which must be controlled before planting the buffer. Reed Canary grass grows so thickly along banks and in the shallows that fish species are prevented from using the area entirely and native plant species are choked out. This invasive weed reproduces by rhizomes and seed. It can only be controlled either by repeated and persistent spraying, or by covering the ground with light-blocking fabric mulch so that the plant, deprived of sunlight, eventually exhausts the root's stored energy and dies. This process can take up to two years, but is preferred when possible as chemical control can affect water quality. Light-blocking mulch will be installed this fall. A forest buffer of native trees and shrubs will be planted along the creek banks in 2007. The buffer will eventually provide shade, bank stability, food, large wood debris, and protection for a variety of wildlife species.

## Screens and Meter Update

The **fish-screen program** is winding down. Currently, the District has provided cost share to over 240 landowners who have installed screens and are now in compliance with state and federal laws. Some of these were relatively inexpensive screens while others cost thousands of dollars. Even a small screen will cost around \$600.00, but with the help of District cost share, a \$600.00 screen would only cost the landowner 15%, or \$90.00. The District still has funding for screen installation, but time is running out. The screen program is scheduled to end in 2006, and that means new landowner applications can't be accepted after June of 2006. All irrigation diversions, even folks irrigating small lots and pastures, are required to have an approved fish screen at the point of diversion.

All irrigators are also required to have a **water meter** and record their water usage. In fact, recording your water usage provides an accurate record of water used and protects your water right. Meter costs can vary considerably and range from \$250.00 to over \$1,000.00 (including installation.) Meter cost share will be available until 2007, but the requirement to report your water usage is in effect now. Irrigators should know that the Department of Ecology is under pressure from environmental groups to throttle back water rights, but if you have a standing record of water usage, you have good protection against water rights relinquishment.

## Visit us at the Fair!

To learn more about these and other programs the District offers, come to our booth at the fair in the Pavilion. There will be wealth of information about the Conservation Security Program, screens, meters, and the livestock program. We'll see you there!

Booth 14



Left: This recent CREP photo shows astonishing growth of four-year-old aspens and pines planted on mulch.



## Burning Issues

The recent School burn and other accidental fires have affected the number of burn days for the region. Air quality has to be the top concern for the Department of Ecology. The only way to avoid increased regulation from the courts is to keep the number of citizen complaints at a minimum. Even when Department of Ecology calls a specific producer and gives permission to burn, it is still the responsibility of the producer to be sure the smoke does not impact other residents or nearby roads. Local conditions can fluctuate, and weather models, though more accurate all the time, aren't infallible. All the meteorological data used by DOE does not substitute for the ag-producers good judgment. Remember, no matter what the burn call from Spokane is, the fire and its smoke are your responsibility.

### Call your Fire District before burning:

Everyone knows to call the Ag Burn line in Spokane before burning to be sure it's a burn day for your zone. Once you have Ecology's permission to burn, call the county line (527-3226) and leave a message describing your burn plans. Be sure you have your permit with you when you burn! The final call is to your local fire district to let them know you plan to burn.

### Assistance with Burn Permits:

As in the past, the District has staff members trained to assist you in completing your burn permit application. Forms are always available without appointment, but District personnel may be out in the field and unavailable. Please call ahead and schedule an appointment if you will need maps or assistance with your application.



#### Walla Walla County Conservation District Personnel

Mike Buckley, Chairman  
Guy McCaw, Vice-Chair  
Pat McConnell, Secretary  
Merrill Camp, Treasurer  
Ed Chvatal, Member

Rick Jones, District Manager  
Marguerite Daltoso, Admin. Asst  
Alison Bower, CREP Coordinator.  
Audrey Ahmann, Grants Admin  
Greg Kinsinger, Engineer Technician  
Frank Lane, Burn Program  
Kay Mead, Technician

Larry Hooker, D.C., NRCS  
Toots Ekholm, Soil Con. Tech, NRCS  
Jim Loiland, Soil Con., NRCS

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*See You at the Fair!*

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