

Walla Walla County Conservation District

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2008 ANNUAL MEETING and ELECTION

January 31, 2008

8:00 to 3:30

Walla Walla Regional Airport Community Room

The Walla Walla County Conservation District will hold its 2008 Annual Meeting and Supervisor Election on Thursday, January 31, 2008, at the Walla Walla Regional Airport Community Meeting Room. Coffee and rolls will be available at 8:00 am. Chairman Pat McConnell will call the meeting to order at 8:25 am. This year we have applied for three pesticide credits in the morning and one in the afternoon session. Merrill Camp has accepted his nomination to continue serving on our board. Polls will be open from 9:00 to 11:30 am.

Agenda:

- 8:00** Sign in
Welcome and Introductions: Pat McConnell, District Chair
- 8:30** Nutrient Loss through Straw Removal: Don Wysocki, Oregon
Agricultural Research Station, Pendleton, OR
- 9:30** Break: Poster Session
- 9:45** Chemical Application Vs Burning for Weed Control; Dr. Robert
Parker, WSU Ag Research Station, Prosser, WA
- 10:45** Use of GPS to Reduce Overlap of Ground Application, Panel
Discussion: Don Anderson, Ed Chvatel, Steve Hair, Mark Sherry,
George Struthers
- 11:45** Low Interest Loans to Upgrade Machinery: Ty Myers, Spokane
County Conservation District
- 12:00** Hosted Luncheon, Award Presentation
- 1:00** Pesticide Fate—Why the Breakdown, John Fouts, WSU Ag Extension
- 2:00** Introduction to Mini-Sessions and the Long Range Plan
- 2:30** Fire Safety Training – Fire Chief Brian Bauer, Fire District #5
- 3:30** Changes to the Burn Program, Kary Peterson, DOE

Be Involved!

We are directed by our Board, a dedicated group of unpaid volunteers who meet once a month. We are always looking for volunteers interested in helping the District fulfill its mission. Anyone can become a non-voting Associate Board member. Please call the District if you are interested in helping great conservation projects "hit the ground."



At the diversion



Pipe delivered to the site



Pipeline installation in progress

Piping Project

The Touchet Westside piping project is currently underway. This is one of the largest projects ever attempted by the District, and one of the most promising in terms of restoring flows for endangered fish species while continuing irrigation. The new diversion structure at Hofer dam is at the head end of the piping project. A pump station is being constructed to serve both the Eastside and Westside Irrigation Districts. The installation of approximately 9.5 miles of pipe through the two irrigation districts, replacing open, unlined ditches, is the next phase in modernizing the irrigation system. The pipeline will be pressurized and the project will include piping of all laterals and modification of turnouts to provide water to each on-farm irrigation system.

The new irrigation system will change much for the irrigators of the Touchet Westside Irrigation District. Before, to get sufficient flow to the end of the ditch, excess water had to be released at the head, so maintaining the ditch was a perpetual problem as lush weeds responded to the water seepage. Now land formerly isolated by the ditch (and the area of the ditch itself) will be available for farming. The individual irrigators will also benefit from the pressurized water supply, which will require less energy when running the individual irrigation systems. The consistent, instant-on flow will mean much greater control over the irrigation at the field level.

The interest of the State is in helping ensure there is water for Mid-Columbia Basin Steelhead, Spring Chinook, and Bull Trout. Adult salmonids traveling the lower Touchet River between May and November encounter many difficult conditions, not the least of which is low flows. The Touchet Eastside and Westside Irrigation Districts have the legal right to completely dewater the Touchet River during times of the year that are crucial to fish passage. No one took this lightly though, and there has always been the possibility of a legal challenge based on the Endangered Species Act. Under the new irrigation system, the water diverted will be reduced by an amount equal to the estimated loss from evaporation and leakage from the old unlined ditch. This amount will be bypassed during the critical fall fish passage season. Due to the efficiency of the new system, this lowered diversion rate will not change irrigation for farmers. The irrigators will continue to receive their water while flows are protected for fish. It's a win-win for both farmers and endangered fish species.

Screen Funding: Going, Going...Gone

If you've been sitting on the fence, hoping that the legal requirement to screen your irrigation diversion will just go away, it's time to face reality. Now is the time to contact Greg Kinsinger at the District Office and make arrangements for a screen project. Our current grants will expire this spring, so the last day to apply for a screen project will be March 31, 2008. Unless we obtain more funding, which is not guaranteed, this means that after March 31st, the cost of screening your diversion will be entirely up to you. At that point, all we can do is take your application and use it to convince the grant agencies of the need for more funding. The District is committed to helping our producers avoid the legal liability involved with the accidental take of an endangered fish species, but we can only work with folks who come through the door and sign up.



Above: The next generation of screens: the River Screen

Walla Walla County Conservation District 2007 Wildlife Farmer of the Year and

2007 Washington State Wildlife Farmer of the Year: Jeff Schulke

Walla Walla County Conservation District is delighted to announce that the 2007 Walla Walla County Conservation District Wildlife Farmer of the Year, Jeff Schulke, has been selected by the WDFW and the Washington State Conservation Commission as the 2007 State Wildlife Farmer of the Year.

In the 1990's the Schulkes started working with Federal, State and private conservation organizations. Jeff's first project was to install four acres of trees for upland birds with assistance from Pheasants Forever. These initial four acres later became part of a larger section set aside through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The project is still thriving today, though the CRP contract has long since expired. The Schulke Farm has also committed 26 acres to bird and game habitat with WDFW's Game Farm Alternative Program. In the late 90's, Schulke decided he needed a better use for his ground next to Dry Creek. Jeff didn't want to "let it go to waste," but the ground was degraded from years of intensive grazing. Jeff also believed he had a responsibility to make sure Dry Creek was clean for him and his downstream neighbors. Jeff became one of the first producers on Dry Creek to install riparian buffers through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), and over the course of three years, the Schulke Farm committed over 200 acres to the program. According to Jeff, enrolling in CREP was a "gigantic commitment to give up farm ground," but it gave him a better use for the ground. Upland bird hunters are willing to pay for the privilege of hunting the area, which helps the Schulke's diversify their farm income.



Jeff Schulke's CREP buffer provides thermal cover in winter



Sage and native grasses thriving, CREP buffer

Jeff feels that projects such as his provide a net benefit to the entire watershed. By replanting native vegetation the creeks are cleaner and the water quality has improved. "The water is cool and clear rather than looking like a chocolate milkshake," he said. Jeff believes there is now more water in the CREP area, which would reflect the restored ground's ability to store more water during times of high flows. Wildlife have also benefited. "There are more frogs and toads, and the habitat for deer is amazing." Jeff and his family enjoy walks along the CREP buffer where they observe the abundant wildlife. They feel the trees have made the land appear less barren. He takes pride in seeing the riparian areas "turned back to natural areas. It is exciting to see what my great-grandparents and grandparents might have seen when they were here."



Left, willows planted in early 2000



Right, established willows along buffer

Water Management Options

Interested in options for managing your water rights? Washington Water Trust is a non-governmental organization working to restore stream flows in the Walla Walla Basin. Working one-on-one with water users, Washington Water Trust uses market-based, voluntary and creative approaches. Water leasing and purchasing programs are flexible and can be seasonal, temporary or permanent, involving full or partial water rights. Contact Amanda Cronin at Washington Water Trust for more information: (206)675-1585 x100 or amanda@thewatertrust.org www.thewatertrust.org.

Mini Sessions Resume

Agency representatives from NRCS, FSA and the Conservation District will once again be traveling out into the communities to selected meeting sites hosted by volunteers. Agency reps will share information about programs available to land owners and operators. Mini-session participants will be asked to provide input to the Conservation District on types of assistance needed to solve natural resource problems. The plan is for mini-sessions to be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays through February and March.



Snake River Salmon Recovery Board Round 9 Project Solicitation

During the past 5 years over 5 million dollars have been invested in projects to help salmon recovery in our region. Walla Walla, Columbia, and Asotin county landowners have installed livestock exclusion fencing, set land aside for conservation easements, removed fish barriers, installed fish screens and completed other projects to aid salmon recovery. The next round of project solicitations starts soon. If you have a project in mind that can help aid salmon recovery, contact Larry Hooker at the District office.

Walla Walla County Conservation District

Pat McConnell, Chair
Merrill Camp, Vice Chair
Ed Chvatal, Secretary
Todd Kimball, Treasurer
Guy McCaw, Member

Rick Jones, District Manager
Marguerite Daltoso, Admin. Asst
Alison Bower, Project Coordinator.
Audrey Ahmann, Grants Admin
Greg Kinsinger, Project Coordinator
Frank Lane, Burn Program
Kay Mead, Civil Engineer Technician
Mike Denny, CREP Coordinator
Jeff Klundt, CREP Maintenance Technician
Larry Hooker, Ag. Project Coordinator

NRCS:
Ed Teel, District Conservationist
Jim Loiland, Soil Con., NRCS

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of the Year**

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