

Walla Walla County Conservation District



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Walla Walla County Conservation District 2003 Conservation Farmer of the Year



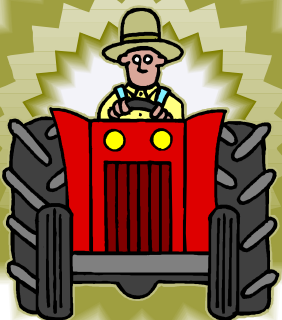
Matt Lyons, Jr.

Matt has been actively involved in conservation since he began farming. His overall goal is to leave the land “in as good or better shape than when I started.” He voluntarily set aside 43 acres for riparian restoration, taking these acres out of production and enrolling them in the CREP program. His land now includes a 150 foot riparian buffer planted in native shrubs, grasses, and trees along the Coppei Creek, resulting in 17,530 stream feet replanted—that’s three and a half miles of restored stream bank.

In addition to the riparian enhancements, Matt has been using low-disturbance tillage since the early 80’s when he worked with local farming associations and area farmers to adapt a no-till drill to the particular needs of his dryland farm. Matt reports that his investment in no-till seeding has pretty much paid for itself. Adapting his operation to reduce soil disturbance required an initial investment in machinery, but overall Matt found his costs are lower and his returns are good. By seeding through standing crop residue, he’s been able to control both wind and water erosion. The result is clean water for fish, cover for upland wildlife, and maintaining the topsoil on Matt’s cropland.

Endangered mid-Columbia Basin Steelhead have been the major beneficiaries of Matt’s conservation efforts, along with a host of other species—from upland game birds such as pheasant and quail, to Great Blue Herons (a State Priority Species) and the flock of wild turkeys recently seen taking advantage of the ground cover afforded by the growing buffer.

The Walla Walla County Conservation District applauds Matt’s efforts and is pleased to name him the District Conservation Farmer of the Year.



Conservation Compliance is Still Required on HEL Cropland

Larry L. Hooker, District Conservationist, Snake River Team

Each spring and fall, letters go out to a randomly selected number of producers who are growing commodity crops on Highly Erodible Land (HEL) or have had wetland areas identified on their farms. These letters notify them that the farm tract designated will be the subject of a “conservation compliance review” under the provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985 and modified under subsequent farm bills. While the number of tracts checked by NRCS is far fewer than we checked ten years ago, the compliance problems seem to be escalating.

The perception is that many producers are forgetting their responsibility to farm in accordance with their conservation compliance plan or in a manner that will meet or exceed the requirement of the Alternative Conservation System (ACS) for the area in which they farm. Failure to do so can result in forfeiture of farm program benefits. For example, a blatant HEL violation on cropland could also make a producer ineligible to receive CRP payments. So this is important stuff and should not be ignored.

What are the problem areas? Several quickly come to mind. First and foremost involves burning grain stubble for fall recrop. It is important to remember that there is no special program for burning and no-tilling (or two-passing), no dispensation, and no “get home free” pass. If one burns, the after-planting cover requirement must still be met. Failure to meet the cover requirement or equivalent treatment to the ACS is a violation.

The second most common problem area involves cover crops following low residue crops like onions and potatoes. Irrigators farming HEL need to be familiar with their conservation compliance requirements. Late harvested low-residue crops such as spuds harvested after October 20th have some special cover crop rules that need to be followed. Think “Cover Crop” after any low-residue crop on irrigated cropland.

My recommendation is to dig out those old conservation compliance plans and review them. If they can't be located, give the NRCS office a call for an interpretation on conservation compliance requirements.



WDFW Announces Small Grants Available for Habitat Improvement

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has approximately \$1.5 million available through their Landowner Incentive Program with applications due on or before February 27, 2004. For complete details of the program, including the application form for private land owners, go to <http://www.wa.gov/wdfw/lands/lip/>, or contact Ginna Correa at (360) 902-2478.

District Programs and Progress

- ◆ **Priority Projects:** The District has partnered with the Tri-State Steelheaders and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation to initiate a new program in the Walla Walla Basin that pools the resources and talents of the three entities to identify and implement high priority restoration projects. This program solicits project proposals from agency personnel or landowners who are aware of a fish habitat problem and have a suggestion for a remedial action. Proposals are ranked by a committee of private citizens and agency technical personnel. The three partner entities then work together to determine the best way to implement each project. In July the group issued the first project solicitation and received ten proposals which have been ranked and are currently being implemented. The first project completed under the program was the removal of a fish barrier and potential flood hazard, replacing a low profile bridge with a ford that allows the river to flow unobstructed. If you have a concern with a fish habitat issue, please contact the District, as we will be repeating the solicitation/ranking/funding process annually.
- ◆ **Lower Walla Walla Restoration Project:** The WWCCD has requested and received assistance from the Corps of Engineers in evaluating and developing a plan for restoration of an 8-10 mile reach of the lower Walla Walla River that is extremely unstable. The project is being done under the Corps' Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Program and will result in a set of engineered ready-to-construct plans and specifications. The plan will include extensive local bank stabilization to maintain stability until woody vegetation in a riparian corridor matures sufficiently to control bank erosion. The project is expected to be constructed in 2005.
- ◆ **Metering:** Meters are the best means available for irrigators to document use of their water right and avoid relinquishment. In an effort to help track the use of water in the state, the Department of Ecology is requiring irrigators to install flow measuring devices on all irrigation systems, including those that irrigate from shallow wells. The WWCCD has funding available to assess your irrigation system, redesign it (if needed) to accommodate a meter, and then install the meters. These meters can cost upwards of \$800.00, so the 85% cost-share available is a great help to landowners facing these regulations. Currently we have 60 landowners signed up in our meter program and the first nine meters have been installed.
- ◆ **Screening Program:** Screening irrigation intakes has been identified as one of the early action measures necessary to avoid "take" of ESA listed fish species/stocks in the Walla Walla Basin. This past year we provided cost-share for the installation of 133 screens, with more being installed this fall. We recently received a Salmon Recovery Funding Board grant to provide cost-share for fish screens and meters to the urban irrigator. This next phase of our screening program will help protect the endangered fish species/stocks present in fish bearing streams and ditches that run through the urban landscapes of Walla Walla and College Place. If you irrigate and have not signed up for a screen, please call as soon as possible. Funding is limited, and WDFW has been moving toward active enforcement of the screening regulations.

Note to Current Screen Program

Participants: *If you received a landowner agreement in the mail but have not responded, please be aware that **the funding set aside for your project will no longer be available after the fall.** We cannot guarantee funding will be available later if you choose to wait to have your screen installed. Please contact Nichole Maestretti immediately if you wish to have your project funded!*

Water Acquisition

The Conservation District has been contracted to perform outreach for several groups working to increase flows in area rivers through *water acquisition*. Under these programs, those with water rights can lease them to the Washington Water Trust or the Walla Walla Watershed Alliance. They will pay the owner of the water rights a negotiated amount in exchange for the water rights being transferred to DOE's trust water-rights program for the term of the lease. At the end of the lease, the landowner can either renew the lease or resume irrigation. Landowners in the program are guaranteed protection of their water rights.

As the program is currently designed, the District acts as liaison for the water rights owner. The Washington Water Trust determines the value of the water being considered for a lease. The Washington Watershed Alliance is facilitating the process as well, with the final lease contract and funding from DOE.

The goal of the program is to increase river flows for endangered species without adversely impacting those who need to continue irrigating. Please contact the District if you are interested in putting some of your water rights into trust.

2003 Inland Empire Natural Resources Youth Camp

Thanks to generous donations from area businesses, seven local students attended the Inland Empire Natural Resources Youth Camp this year. Alyce Magnaghi, Andrew Crawford, Arron Suckow, Eliza Van De Rostyne, Keshia Arland, Kyle Anderson-Schmidt, Mary Magnaghi, and Ryan Nelson learned about conserving natural resources while attending the camp near Lake Coeur d'Alene. If you know a student who might be interested in attending next year, please contact the District as soon as possible. The camp is for students ages 13 to 16. Please support the businesses that made it possible for these students to attend:

McDonalds Zaring Insurance Co
The McGregor Company
The Monsanto Company
Reese, Baffney, Schrag & Frol,
Att.at Law
Royce Hydroseeding
Tri-State Steelheaders



Burn Program Refund Deadline--December 15, 2003

If you applied for a fall burn permit but didn't burn all the permitted acres, apply now for a permit refund. Applications are available in the District office. Because the County needs time to process the requests, we cannot accept applications for refunds after December 15th.

The Department of Ecology considers all permitted acres as "burned" unless you apply for a refund or otherwise inform them that you did not burn the acreage applied for. Everyone benefits when our burn numbers are accurate—please report unburned acres if you don't apply for a refund.

Remember to send the Blue Burn Cards: These are not optional; they are required if you burned any acres. It is not enough to call and leave a message at DOE—you must send in the blue burn cards.

Walla Walla County Rainfall Data

Help! We need more volunteers to gather rainfall data for the District. These figures are important to many agencies, including NRCS and FSA. For example, the rainfall data helps agency personnel determine which species to plant in restoration projects. Volunteers simply record data from their rain gauges and send in a yearly report card. If you are interested in helping the District collect this important information, please call the District office.

The following information is taken from the 2002-2003 rainfall report just completed.

*The difference between the highest reported rainfall and the lowest is an impressive 22.24 inches.
The average recorded rainfall for 2002-2003 is 14.25 inches, which is 1.5 inches **more** than last year.
Out of **45** initial volunteers, only **24** are still active in the program—please consider volunteering!*

New to the District

The NRCS is pleased to welcome Jim Loiland, Soil Conservationist. Jim brings a lifetime of agricultural experience to NRCS with his background in farming, plant materials, and other ag support industries. Prior to joining NRCS, Jim worked for 3 years with the Umatilla County Southwest Conservation District. He joined NRCS in January of 2000. Jim hails from Umatilla County, Oregon, and is a welcome addition to the staff here at the office.

Change of Address? Please notify the district if your address has changed.

District Annual Meeting: Coming up this spring, date to be announced.

Internet Sites of Interest:

<http://nacdnet.org/buffers/03Jul/>

<http://conservationbuffers.unl.edu/>

<http://www.wwbwc.org>

Walla Walla County Conservation District Personnel

Merrill Camp, President
Ed Chvatal, Vice President
Guy McCaw, Secretary
Mike Buckley, Treasurer
Pat McConnell, Member

Rick Jones, District Manager
Marguerite Daltoso, Admin. Asst
Alison Bower, CREP Coordinator.
Doug Higbee, District Engineer
Nichole Maestretti, Restoration Project Coordinator
Audrey Ahmann, Grants Admin.
Frank Lane, Burn Program
Rich Garcia, Intern

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