Walla Walla County Conservation District

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REMINDER!! SPRING BURN SEASON ENDS JUNE 30TH

If you did not get all your planned acres burned this spring and would like a refund, sent your refund request to the WWCCD office, 325 North 13th Avenue, Walla Walla, WA 99362

$8 MILLION IN PROJECTS ON TAP FOR WWCCD IN 2012-2013

The 2012-2013 program year is going to be very busy indeed for the Walla Walla County Conservation District. While the staff was busy wrapping up old projects and writing grants for new ones over the past year, they will now be challenged with implementing about $8 million in projects across Walla Walla County in the coming months.

The first project out of the gate will be the Blalock Fish Screen Project. The Blalock diversion is the largest unscreened diversion on Mill Creek with a 10 cfs water right. Located on the Mill Creek flood control dike adjacent to the Walla Walla waste treatment facility, this project has been awaiting funding and design for several years.

SITE SHOWING FOR CONTRACTORS INTERESTED IN BIDDING ON THE GFID #13 2,800 FT. PROJECT

Within about two weeks from the start of the Blalock project, construction will begin on what the WWCCD calls the "2,800 ft. Project". This is a piping project that runs from the Pine Creek siphon intake almost to the Lowden-Gardena Road on the Gardena Farms Irrigation District #13's upper canal. The designs have been completed, the call for bids advertised and a site showing for potential contractors held. The project will utilize 66-inch diameter pipe!

On the heels of the 2,800 ft. Project and as soon as the in-water work window allows, construction will start on the McCaw in-stream fish habitat restoration project located on the Touchet River below Waitsburg. In addition, the second year of the WWCCD's Japanese Knotweed Removal Project will get underway at about the same time.

Next up will be the Bergevin-Williams/Old Lowden Diversion consolidation project on the Walla Walla River. This project will eliminate two gravel push-up dams that impede fish migration. It has taken a lot of cooperation by many agencies and entities to make this project a reality.

In the late fall and winter of 2012-2013, work will begin on the GFID #13 North Lateral Piping Project which will result in the complete replacement of the present GFID open north canal with a closed gravity pipeline approximately 7 miles in length. Almost concurrently, work will also begin on the Bergevin-Williams/Old Lowden Piping Project. This effort will replace two old inefficient open delivery canals with approximately 8 miles of new gravity pipeline delivery systems. These projects will result in water savings of 5.1 and 4.5 cfs respectively to be put into trust. *By: Larry Hooker, Agricultural Projects Coordinator, WWCCD*

RIPARIAN FOREST BUFFER PROGRAM STILL A HIGH PRIORITY

The design and installation of riparian forest buffers along live streams in Walla Walla County is still a very important part of the programs promoted by the WWCCD. Funded through a partnership between the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC), the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) has been very successful in this area and has served as the cornerstone of endangered fish recovery efforts over the past 12 years.

THIS BUFFER ON COPPEI CREEK WAS PLANTED IN 2001 AND BOASTS CONIFERS EXCEEDING 15-FEET IN HEIGHT. THIS PROVIDES NEEDED SHADE FOR THE STREAM AND PROTECTION FOR THE STREAMBANKS.

The popular buffer program is a great example of a win-win for landowners, natural resources and resource managers. Landowners win by protecting land adjacent to troublesome streams with an adapted native cover of trees, shrubs and grasses in exchange for an annual per acre rental rate based on predominant soil types, five years of maintenance covering replanting needs and weed control. Installation costs are covered by the FSA-WSCC partnership and the District covers costs of replanting and maintenance (also funded by WSCC). Resource managers such as WA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) and WA Dept. of Ecology (WA-DOE) win with improved habitat conditions for fish listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and improved water quality conditions on impaired water bodies. Walla Walla County wins because improved water quality helps meet the intent of the County's Water Quality Improvement Plan. The above benefits all fit within the missions of both the NRCS and the WWCCD but the biggest winners are the natural resources—soils, water, fish and wildlife.

The program's success speaks for itself. In the past 12 years, the WWCCD has assisted landowners develop 155 long-term contracts to enroll over 3,280 acres into the CREP program treating over 190 miles of stream banks within Walla Walla County. As a result, close to 1.5 million native shrubs and trees have been planted. With contracts ranging in size from as little as 0.9 acres to a whopping 125 acres, Walla Walla county can boast to having approximately 25% of the total CREP buffers in the State of Washington.

Don't get the idea that the work is all done. Most of the "low hanging fruit" has been plucked from the tree but there is still a lot of work remaining, especially on the lower reaches of some of the major streams and on most of the minor tributaries like Cottonwood Creek, Russell Creek, Yellowhawk Creek, Big Springs Creek and the East Little Walla Walla River. In some cases, stream banks are unstable and therefore not eligible for enrollment into CREP. In other cases, the individual parcels are so small, it is nearly impossible to get a contractor to come in to do the work unless neighbors cooperate and develop a large enough project to make it worthwhile for a contractor take on the project. *By: Larry Hooker, Agricultural Projects Coordinator, WWCCD*

FISH SCREEN & METER FUNDING STILL AVAILABLE

The WWCCD still has funding available for both NOAA compliant fish screen installations and metering. If you need either a fish screen or meter, get your name on the list! Call Greg Kinsinger at the WWCCD office at (509) 522– 6340 Ext. 109.

WETLAND RESERVE PROGRAM - IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

Over the last century or so the state of Washington has lost approximately 30-50% of its wetlands state wide and in some more developed areas up to 100%. Primary historic causes for wetland loss were agricultural and industrial expansion. More recently, the primary causes have been urban development, changes in agricultural practices, and most recently, expansion of exotic species.

Wetlands perform many critical environmental functions, which include providing vital habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species; improving water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals; reducing flooding; recharging groundwater; and protecting biological diversity. Creating wetlands through WRP can also offer farmers battling marginal or wet land an opportunity to relieve the burden of cropping that ground and gain economically from a conservation easement.

The Wetlands Reverse Program (WRP) is a voluntary easement program that provides technical assistance to restore and improve wetland resources on private lands administered by the USDAs Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS pays all acquisition costs – appraisals, surveys, title work, and recording fees. Once all the legal work is done, NRCS' technical staff can follow through on restoration plans and let the wetland come alive. WRP contracts last as long as you want – 10 years without an easement, 30 years with an easement, or a perpetual easement.

In addition, landowners retain ownership of the land, control access to the land, may use the land for recreational purposes such as bird watching and hunting, and may sell the land. There are two parts of eligibility for WRP, one is landowner eligibility and the other is land eligibility.

Landowner Eligibility:

1. Own the property for at least seven years (there are some limited exceptions granted), and
2. Adjusted gross income less than 1 million dollars, and

General Land Eligibility:

1. Land must have an agricultural use history (row crops, pastureland, hay land, orchards, etc) or
2. Riparian areas that connect two protected wetland areas, or
3. Previously restored wetland areas.

WRP operates under a continuous sign-up so applications are accepted by NRCS anytime.

To discuss the program or to complete an application, please contact the Walla Walla NRCS Field Office or visit us on the web at www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp/wrp.html. *By: Erik Lewis, Wetlands Farm Bill Biologist, NRCS, Spokane*

SAVEWATER/SAVEENERGY (SWSE) WORKSHOP A BIG SUCCESS!

The workshop sponsored by the WWCCD for regional irrigators in early March at the Walla Walla Community College Water & Environmental Center was a very worthwhile effort judging by the participation of farmers, vendors and energy providers. The workshop has already triggered interest by irrigators in some of the incentive programs available through various agencies or energy providers and vendors looked at it as an opportunity to show folks ways of making water or energy saving improvements to their farming operations. The objective is to save on these valuable commodities and therefore improve the farmer's bottom line.

The SWSE program is offered through the Blue Mountain Resource Conservation & Development Council and is a cooperative effort between regional RC&Ds, Bonneville Power Administration, and local farm energy providers. An estimated 60 participants attended.

LOWER WALLA WALLA RIVER RESTORATION STRATEGY–UNDER DEVELOPMENT

The Lower Walla Walla River from the Lowden-Gardena Bridge to its mouth at Madame Dorian Park lies in a mantle of loessal silts and is highly unstable. This instability not only results in significant losses of soils from farm and pasture lands adjacent to the river channel but also degrades the quality of water important to endangered salmonid species.

While there are excellent opportunities for creating riparian buffer habitat along "stable" riverbanks, unstable banks are ineligible for participation in most available programs. Creating shade and a source of large wood in the river provides salmonids important habitat complexity and sanctuary cover from predators. It is estimated that more than 50% of salmonid out-migrants are lost in the lower reaches of the Walla Walla River.

The magnitude and complexity of the problems in the lower river is far more than any one group or agency can handle on its own. Recognizing this fact, a partnership was formed to leverage their combined abilities and influence to develop a long-term strategy to restore the Lower Walla Walla River. This partnership includes representation by federal and state agencies, local groups and organizations, and commercial business. Strategy partners to date are: Blue Mtn. Land Trust, Boise, Inc., Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Tri-State Steelheaders, U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Walla Walla County Conservation District, WA—Dept. of Ecology, and WA– Dept. of Fish & Wildlife. Landowners, however, are the most critical stakeholders in this effort. With landowner participation in this voluntary effort, the restoration team is committed to looking for funding for potential projects and providing technical assistance for implementation. *By: Larry Hooker, Agricultural Projects Coordinator, WWCCD.*

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