

Walla Walla County Conservation District

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The Work Plan is almost complete! Some last minute adjustments to the plan were made in response to public comments from the recent informal comment period. The Walla Walla VSP Work Group will submit the county-wide plan to protect critical areas **this fall** for state review. VSP meetings are held at the district office each month on the first Tuesday at 1 pm and are open to the public. *Check out our website for more info* <http://www.wvccd.net/>



CALLING ALL EDUCATORS

Conservation District staff can help explain erosion, watersheds, water filtration, stream habitats and other topics to you or your class. See above for a great desktop demonstration example. Contact Renee or Joanna at WWCCD for details.

Solar Workshop

Join us on **September 19th at 6 pm** at the WWCC Water & Environment Center for an informative workshop about renewable energy systems: solar, wind, biomass, and more.

As the cost of energy continues to rise, Washington's farmers and rural small businesses are looking to renewable energy and energy efficiency to meet their operational needs. If you have a renewable energy project in mind, your Conservation District can help! Walla Walla County Conservation District is partnering with Pierce Conservation District to spread the word about renewable energy opportunities. Pierce CD is working with nonprofit [Spark Northwest](#) to provide technical assistance to help local farms and businesses generate their own clean energy, while bringing down the cost with the help of USDA Renewable Energy for America Program (REAP) grants.

Agricultural producers or rural small businesses qualify for technical assistance to install renewable energy systems and upgrade to energy efficient equipment. In addition to providing free project consultations and project development assistance, CD staff can connect participants to grants, utility incentives, tax subsidies, and financing to help complete projects – and avoid pitfalls along the way.

Already have a project idea? Fill out an [Assistance Request Form](#) to tell us about it! After you submit your form, Pierce Conservation District staff will follow up with more information. If you have questions, please contact christinec@pierced.org.

We need to act fast as interested folks will need a DUNS number, SAM registration (both required to receive USDA assistance), a quote from a certified installer and your application submitted by Oct. 31.

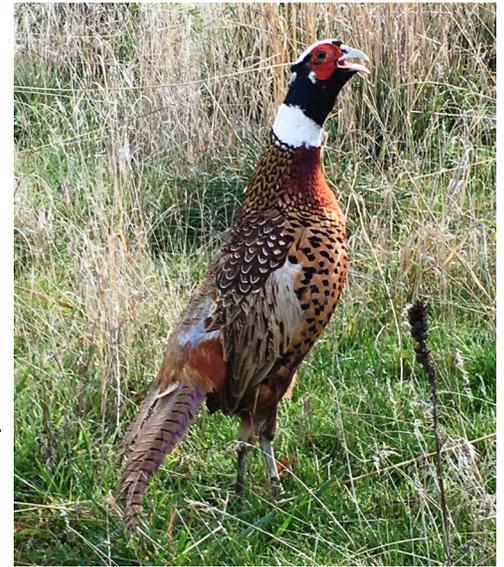
VSP Spotlight on Critical Areas: Fish and Wildlife Habitat

Walla Walla County has a significant number of CRP grassland acres. According to the 2015 FSA report, Walla Walla County had over 137,000 contract acres with over 62,000 expiring in September 2018. That is a lot of CRP ground. Many folks are asking: what can I do with CRP ground?

CRP is great at providing vegetative cover and protecting soil from wind and water erosion. CRP can also provide good habitat. Fish and Wildlife Habitat Areas and Geologically Hazardous Areas (which include both wind and water erosion) are two of the critical areas that farmers and ranchers need to protect under the Growth Management Act. Right now, how you protect those critical areas is your call. The Voluntary Stewardship program offers farmers and ranchers a chance to voluntarily protect those critical areas without government mandates. While farmers and ranchers have many options to protect critical areas, the following one is worth considering.

I spoke with Chet Hadley of the Blue Mountain chapter of Pheasants Forever. He explained that CRP grasslands are prime nesting ground for pheasants. But they noticed most, if not all of the hatchlings died off. Apparently, the chicks were starving. The CRP grasslands didn't have enough broadleaf plants which can provide an additional source of insects. Pheasant chicks needed a variety of insects to survive.

Blue Mountain Pheasants Forever (BMPF) is looking to partner with landowners in CRP contracts with 5 years or longer left on the contract. The cooperative agreement would allow for inter-seeding the existing CRP with a NRCS, BMPF, and WDFW approved wildlife friendly (forb & legume) seed mixture. This meets the NRCS conservation practice criteria for CP-33 habitat buffer for upland birds. Guidelines are listed below.



- 1) CRP contract has 5 or more years left on the contract.
- 2) CRP acreage will be enrolled in WDFW's "Feel Free to Hunt" program.
- 3) BMPF will reimburse the landowner their share of the seed mixture cost.

Applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis. For additional information, contact Chet Hadley, BMPF Habitat Planner: chethadley@hotmail.com

A REMINDER TO IRRIGATORS

The Walla Walla County Conservation District reminds all irrigators that **Washington State law requires** you to measure and report your water use. This applies to all irrigators who are watering crops or pasture from a well or pumping from a surface diversion.

Meters provide accurate water use information to irrigators, enabling them to better manage their irrigation practices, improve irrigation efficiency, and decrease energy use. Flow meters enable landowners to measure their water use and come into compliance with state water use regulations which are enforced by WA Dept. of Ecology. Well-documented water use records help landowners protect their water rights from relinquishment as well as facilitate water *(continued)*



Cover Crop Advantages

The NRCS Snake River Team held a field tour to discuss cover crops.

Jim Schroeder led the discussion and defined cover crops as the planting of annual crop mixtures to protect the soil during periods of vulnerabilities. He mentioned that the emphasis is now on building and enriching the soil biotic community by planting mixtures of cool and warm season broadleaf plants and grass species.

Cover Crops can reflect solar energy away from the soil surface by insulating the soil's surface in the summer and winter months. In summer, soil temperatures over 100 degrees Fahrenheit can shut down soil microbial activity.

Summer soil temperatures taken at 1 inch depth with an air temperature of 96 degree were measured as follows.

Field Condition	Soil Temperature degrees Fahrenheit
Chemical Fallow	104 - 106
CRP	96
Mulch tillage dry land crop	112
Convention tillage dry land crop	116

During the demonstration Jim Schroeder explained how cover crops can aid in building healthy soils.

- Jim stated that 1 teaspoon of healthy soil contains 100 million to a billion individual organisms.
- Improved soil organic matter and soil structure allows for better movement of water and air into the soil profile. A 1% increase in organic matter can add 25,000 gallons of available water per acre.
- After growing a cover crop, the soil is capable of providing higher levels of plant nutrients from the increased production of nutrient recycling.
- Jim also explained that cover crops can be grown in dryland conditions. Jim cautioned that cover crops should be terminated in early May or before broadleaf bloom. Planting warm season species may not be advisable. Warm season species will grow rapidly once soil temperatures warm up. However one should be considering terminating the cover crop in May.
- Cover Crops such as Austrian Winter Peas should be utilized to maximize potential nutrient gains.
- Cover crops will allow for increased earthworm activity that will improve soil quality.

The NRCS Plant Material Center will conduct a low rainfall Cover Crop Variety Trial in Walla Walla County. Casey Allen, from the Pullman Plant Material Center, plans to seed the cover crop variety trial in late September.



Cover Crop improves soil structure



United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

(continued) right changes and transactions. Recent improvements in meter technology have resulted in a new generation of meters featuring data logging and remote access and control over irrigation system operation. New technology in meter battery operation has provided longer battery life including a 5-year warranty replacement. New solar powered metering systems may be available for uninterrupted, maintenance free operation. Call the WWCCD to enroll in this cost-share program.

Your out-of-pocket expense will be 15% of the actual cost of the meter and installation. The remaining 85% will be paid by the WA Dept. of Ecology metering cost share program. Funding for this program expires in June 2018.

Consequences of not passing the state “Capital” budget

Well folks, it is time to share the ugly truth. Yes, the governor and state legislatures pulled together and passed a budget late June 30th for the fiscal year starting July 1 but...they only passed the operating budget. The operating budget keeps doors open and state agencies “operating”. But the capital budget, which funds projects and specific on-the-ground improvements, was not passed. Only the small amount of capital funds left over from unfinished work last year have been “reappropriated” and may be spent on current projects. This is uncharted territory for our state and many agencies, including the Conservation District. As most of you know, we obtain grants to help landowners install projects. Fish screens, meters, restoration of streams, irrigation efficiency improvements: all are funded by grants. Many of these grants are federal and require state matching funds. No capital budget means match funds are held up in the grid-lock of politics and the work is stopped.

Repercussions:

A restoration project funded with over \$200,000 of federal funds has been delayed until next August. A second restoration project is also delayed. These projects were developed to protect riparian areas and restore habitat, and now at least one, possibly both, will face another winter of high flows. Acres of farm ground are at risk and salmon habitat may be damaged by tons of fish-smothering sediment. Needless to say, landowners are very unhappy. The longer it takes to secure funds, the more damage is done and the higher the cost of restoration.

CREP is one of several programs operated under the capital budget. What does this mean for you? CREP funding, including maintenance, must be severely curtailed in order to keep the program in operation until the Legislature reconvenes and passes a capital budget. WWCCD must stretch limited funds from the state for much longer than usual. If you’re doing maintenance work on your project, **please don’t proceed without talking to conservation district staff first**. We can’t guarantee that funding will be available to cover your expenses.

Walla Walla County Conservation District

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