

Walla Walla County Conservation District

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Spring 2018

Published regularly to provide information to land users

Volume 20, Issue 1



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Local Traffic Jam



Time to get started! Walla Walla County VSP needs to record statistics on a county wide basis, not farm specific. It doesn't take much time to participate in VSP and it's easy.

- 1) Fill out a 4 page checklist (5 to 10 minutes) and
- 2) Complete a field visit with District staff (1-2 hours)

This will summarize what you are already doing to protect critical areas. If we can squeeze a field check into your schedule before spring seeding and spraying get underway, then the District staff can take care of the paperwork during the growing season. The last step includes talking with you about our observations, the info you provided and what might be available to help you transition to new practices. Check out our [website](#) for more information.

A NOTE FROM OUR FEDERAL PARTNERS

USDA Requesting Ideas From the Public Regarding Better Customer Service

In keeping with an executive order, Enforcing the Regulatory Reform Agenda, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is requesting ideas from the public on how to provide better customer service and remove unintended barriers to participation in USDA programs. To do this, USDA is asking for public ideas on regulations, guidance documents, or any other policy documents that are in need of reform; that is, ideas to modify, streamline, expand, or repeal those items. Read the full statement and learn how to submit comments [here: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/07/17/2017-14920/identifying-regulatory-reform-initiatives](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/07/17/2017-14920/identifying-regulatory-reform-initiatives)



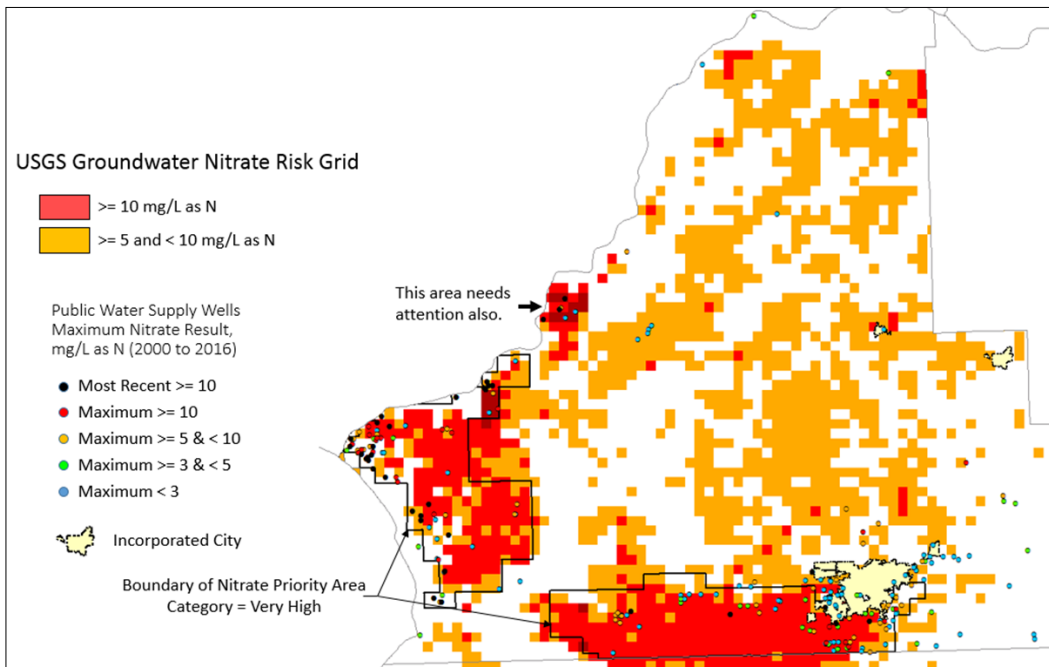


VSP Spotlight: Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas

Walla Walla County has 5 critical area groups, encompassing 10 sub 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 the opportunity to continue voluntary efforts to protect those critical areas without government mandates. In previous issues, we discussed how CRP grasslands can offer wildlife habitat and protect soils from erosion and how stream restoration can be Cheap & Cheerful. Those both apply to Fish & Wildlife Habitat areas. This issue will focus on Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARA). We have several aquifers in our area including surface gravels, a shallow cemented gravel aquifer, and multiple deep basalt aquifers. The upper two gravel aquifers often have streams and rivers (surface flow) contributing to those water reserves. The County Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas focus on the gravel aquifers and have both quantity and quality components.

Quantity can be impacted by municipal and irrigation use or drought. Many of our aquifer levels are declining but there are numerous agencies working together to develop solutions to the declining levels. You can do your part by reducing consumption. This could be as simple as fixing leaky nozzles, incorporating irrigation efficiencies, or reducing landscaping water use. We use **5 times** the amount of water in the summer compared to the other seasons. Even water used to maintain a green lawn should be managed carefully. You can calculate your home water use at watercalculator.org

Quality can be impacted by runoff from impervious surfaces, such as roofs and roads, or chemical applications, such as fertilizer or pesticides. During the state review of the VSP work plan, the Dept. of Ecology shared information about nitrate levels in Walla Walla County. It is important to note that past practices may continue to impact water quality as contaminants filter through the substrate. A few of the best management practices to reduce nitrate levels include nutrient management, waste storage structures, precision ag (weed seeker technology), and agrichemical handling. To learn more about how to protect the Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas, contact us at the district office.



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

Contracts are not automatically re-enrolled even if the buffer is well-established and functioning. When you receive your CREP re-enrollment letter, contact the FSA and Conservation District as soon as possible. It takes months to complete the site visits, plans, and then develop contracts. Your new contract must be fully developed and approved by USDA-FSA **before** the current contract expires. If the contract expires without a new one in place, the land is not eligible for future CREP or Continuous CRP enrollment. Contact Joanna at 522-6340 ext. 114 for details.

Wholesale Success Workshop The WSDA sponsored Wholesale Success workshop on Feb. 27th in Walla Walla was attended by ~30 growers. The workshop focused on the marketing side of farming, both wholesale and direct to consumer. The presenter, Atina Diffley, really drove home the point that knowing your consumers and their motives for buying your product are critical to developing successful and ongoing relationships. This workshop was valuable to both new and established growers looking to diversify crops and marketplaces instead of relying on commodity markets. For details email info@FamilyFarmed.org or call 312-874-7360. Also check out facebook.com/WallaWallaValleyFoodSystemCoalition

HELP! EXPIRING CRP ACRES?

There are over 62,000 acres of CRP contracts expiring September 2018. There has been some uncertainty about whether those contracts can be re-enrolled. CRP grasslands are planted to protect highly erodible land with incentives available through the Farm Bill. If the new Farm Bill limits CRP, this could impact vegetative cover, increase erosion, and degrade air quality in the county. The renewal of the Farm Bill is a lower priority in Washington D.C. where the focus has been on tax reform and other issues. At this time, no one knows if the CRP payment for the current year will be the last for those expiring contracts.

Some CRP acres are in steep areas. Some have friable, almost delicate, soils. Some areas are marginal. Some are flat or moderately sloped. There are many types of CRP areas. So what options do you have with expiring CRP grassland acres?

Both FSA and NRCS provided some ideas to consider. There is currently no continuous enrollment for CRP, except for CREP. Landowners can continue to maintain the expired CRP so as to meet a *planted or considered planted* status and possibly be eligible for future CRP enrollment. NRCS has provided some guidance: maintain your stand. Check for weeds and perform maintenance as necessary. This will ensure a smooth process if CRP enrollment occurs in the future. However, if the plant cover deteriorates or is degraded, it is not considered maintained and not eligible to be designated as *conserving use*.

The CRP [Transition Incentives Program](#) allows transitioning ground from a retiring owner or operator to pursue a long term lease with an eligible veteran or a farmer/rancher who has been farming fewer than 5 years. This

program is first-come first-serve basis as long as funding is available. For more information on this or other options, contact your FSA county office.

Leave as is. There may be no incentive payment in the future. But these soils were conserved for a reason. The benefits of leaving the ground with grassland cover may outweigh the cost or effort to convert back to production.

Put back into production. This may be feasible for corners or less steep portions of your fields. With changes in alfalfa seed contracts, and former CRP acres converted to production ground, more acres may go into wheat production and saturate the market. Specifics about putting CRP back into production are below. These critical areas should still be protected with conservation tillage.

FROM FSA: When a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract expires on September 30, 2018, as of October 1, 2018, the ground can be put back into production. Any cover destroyed prior to October 1 **must receive prior FSA approval** before it begins. If you choose to destroy cover prior to the end of your contract, your payment will be reduced by the amount of time between when the cover is destroyed and the end of the contract. For example, if you destroy the cover on May 1, you will lose your 2018 payment on the impacted acres for the period May 1 – September 30. An NRCS plan may also be required depending on the land.

Producers with CRP contracts that expire this September can request approval to destroy the cover earlier than this fall in order to return the land to production. Only land in general CRP is eligible. Acreage within 120 feet of a water body is excluded.

If you will be planting a fall-seeded crop this year, you can destroy the cover as early as May 1. If you will be planting a spring-seeded crop next year, you can destroy the CRP cover by any means as early as July 1 this year. Cover destruction occurring May 1 – June 30 is limited to herbicide applications, or mowing plus herbicide applications. Starting July 1, other forms of cover destruction can be used.

WWCCD ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARY

Our Annual Meeting on January 18, 2018 had over 45 participants. Special thanks to our speakers Bill Dean, Karen Sowers, and Don Wysocki. They shared insights regarding sustainability and regulation in agriculture, canola as a crop alternative, and soil pH and nutrient stratification.

As your Conservation District, we know it is important to focus our efforts on your concerns. We asked attendees about their concerns looking forward in the next 5 years. The comments fell into a few broad categories.

Cropping & Tillage Alternatives: This was a bit surprising. Folks asked for information on crop rotation alternatives, baling, and assistance on reducing tillage.

Pest Management: Spray technologies and weed control made up 25% of the comments.

Stream Erosion & Flood Resiliency: Area streams are both incised and lacking structure. These conditions

create “flashier” flood events with wild and erratic flows that swing from one bank to another with little warning. This can be damaging to cropland, residences and infrastructure.

Soil Health: The topic of nitrogen use yielded some interesting perspectives, from using livestock to alternate crops to changes in application rates (soil probes). The economics of soil health have received some headlines through NRCS and new ideas about managing soils are researched every year. Who would have thought 50 years ago that there would be more to learn about the relationship between pH and nutrient use and the importance of soil microbes?

Thank you for your comments. A few of these comments overlap and a few are new for us to consider. We hear you. We are looking into how to address your concerns and provide assistance. As more information is available, we will share with you. If you have other suggestions for the District, contact us at the WWCCD office.



Farmer to Farmer Mini-Session Summary

We held 5 neighborhood roundtable discussions in early February. After updates from USDA NRCS and WWCCD, we discussed increasing regulation, the

Voluntary Stewardship Program, nitrate levels and ROW erosion across the county. Concerns shared by producers included the following:

- Erosion of streams and flood resilience
- Request for a residue management study: burn vs. bale vs. vertical till ...
- Request for narrow grass filter strips, edge of field buffers (10'), small waterway buffers (See table for possibilities)
- Request for additional testing/monitoring/tech. assistance regarding nutrient application.

We appreciate your comments and will consider these as we develop programs. Special thanks to **Ed Chvatal**, **Guy McCaw**, **Jacqui Turner** with **John Hair III**, and **Mark Sherry** for hosting and for everyone who participated.

Incentive Conservation Practices		
FSA	CP 29 Wildlife Habitat Buffer (Marginal Pasture)	20' min.
	CP33 Habitat for upland birds	30' min.
NRCS	393 Filter strip	20' min
	386 Field border	30' *
	342 Critical area planting	
	332 Contour buffer strips	15' + *
	412 Grassed waterway	*
	422 Hedgerow planting	15'
	423 Hillside ditch	20'+*
*Must be discussed/designed with your conservation planner. Some areas will require increased buffers based on slope angles.		

AGRICULTURAL BURN PERMITTING

Agricultural burn permitting has gone down significantly this year compared to the past decade. Changes in residue management, vertical tilling and baling (mostly for the straw plant) are contributing to less burning.

Post Burn Reporting should be completed using the Washington Department of Ecology website http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/air/aginfo/Blue_card.html or the Blue Cards sent with the burn permit.

Walla Walla County Conservation District

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View the WWCCD website
at www.wwccd.net

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Send a note to infomation.cd@wwccd.net

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