

Walla Walla County Conservation District NEWSLETTER

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NRCS Staff Retirement



Ed Teel retired from NRCS as of December 31, 2018. After 15 years working as a soil conservationist in Whitman County and Gilliam County, OR, Ed came to Walla Walla as the NRCS District Conservationist for the Snake River Region. His calm demeanor and wealth of knowledge helped build a great work environment for our joint offices. Perhaps in retirement Ed will be able to complete the botany book he has been working on. He will be missed! Katy and Bryce will continue to help producers in the NRCS office during this transition.

Upcoming Events

- January 8-9, 2019 [Cropping System Conference](#) through the Pacific NW Direct Seed Association, Tri-Cities
- January 10, 2019 CHS Primeland meeting at WW Fairgrounds
- January 15, 2019 WSU Extension Cereal Grain meeting
- January 17, 2019 Columbia Conservation District Annual Meeting, Dayton
- January 22, 2019 **WALLA WALLA CO. CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING**
 - 8:00 Welcome & District Report
 - 8:30 Agency Reports, NRCS & FSA
 - 9:00 Ethan Estalilla, WA Dept. of Ag. Pesticide Management, "Licensing and Recordkeeping"
 - 10:00 Ty Meyer, Exec. Director of the Pacific NW Direct Seed Assoc., "Farmed Smart"
 - 11:00 Gwen-Alyn Hoheisel, WSU Regional Extension Specialist, "Calibrating Weed Sprayers"
 - * Three pesticide credits for WA & OR are pending.
- January 24, 2019 Columbia County Weed Board Annual Meeting, Dayton
- January 24, 2019 [Risk Management 101 for Small and Mid-sized Farms](#), Richland Public Library
- January 25, 2019 [Oilseed Workshop](#), Clarkston
- February 12, 2019 [Food Producers Workshop](#) at WW Fairgrounds
- February 27, 2019 [Palouse Alternative Cropping Symposium](#), Pullman
- March 12-14, 2019 [Healthy Soil Healthy Region Workshop](#), Pendleton

Local & Regional Food Economy

The Walla Walla Valley Food System Coalition (WWVFSC) is an organization working to grow a stronger local and regional food economy. The WWVFSC, in partnership with the Blue Mountain Action Council, has been awarded a grant from the USDA to conduct a feasibility study evaluating options for building a food hub to serve the greater Walla Walla Valley. A food hub is a central location with a business management structure that facilitates the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution and marketing of local and regionally produced goods.

The Blue Mountain Action Council's foodbank has outgrown its current space and needs a larger warehouse with more refrigerator and freezer space. Adding processing equipment such as a flash freezer could extend the life of donated produce and give area producers a means to sell produce to wholesalers and institutional buyers beyond the growing season. Food hubs can help small farms grow and larger commodity farms reach local consumers.

The Walla Walla County Conservation District is 1 of 10 partnering organizations that have committed to supporting the 18 month study. It is this commitment of area organizations that strengthened the application, one of 44 Local Food Promotion Program grants the USDA awarded nationwide this year.

The WWVFSC could use your help:

Area producers are needed to weigh in on the project by **completing a short survey** available online until January 25th, 2019 or by **attending the Food Producers Workshop on February 12, 2019**. The information gathered will be used to identify needs and interests in developing services, buying equipment and developing a facility.

The link to the producer's survey can be found here.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WWFoodHubSupplierSurvey>

For further information: www.wwvfsc.org.

Garrison Creek restoration at WWPS

In cooperation with Walla Walla Public Schools, conservation district staff worked with Washington Conservation Corps crew for 4 days in November to clean up the riparian areas along Garrison

creek at both Garrison and Pioneer Middle Schools. Six truckloads of invasive Blackberries, Reed Canary Grass, Flag Iris, landscaping fabric and trash were removed from the creek. All the work was performed with hand tools. Removing the invasive reed canary grass was more difficult than expected. The grass had grown into a "sod-like" layer of roots and sediment that was challenging to remove. They are called invasive weeds for a reason! Having most of the weeds removed will make future control more manageable and allow space for plantings of sedges, rushes, willows and shrubs.



Before:
Invasive plants in Garrison Creek



After:
Weeds and debris removed. Plantings are scheduled in spring.

While working, neighbors at both sites came out to thank us for our work and expressed interest in our plans for rehabilitating the riparian buffers at the schools. These type of projects allow the WWCCD to reach community members who are not directly involved in agriculture.

Upcoming Steps...

- Install signs explaining the connection between healthy waterways and tribal first foods.
- Visit the CTUIR nursery in early January to order plants for spring.
- Line up volunteers from area colleges and the Walla Walla Trout Unlimited chapter, a local fly-fishing group.
- Plan spring work parties at both sites for weed control and planting.

If you like planting and could spare a few hours, join us! Call 509-956-3777 to help plant the WWPS sites as well as other sites this spring.

Tips For Maintaining Your CREP Grass Stand



Above: a grass stand within a CREP riparian buffer

In the early days CREP was advertised as a “hands off” program and maintenance activities were discouraged. While it’s true that CREP should be a natural habitat area, it does require work to maintain a healthy buffer and it is the responsibility of the producer to check on it regularly. Below are some tips and reminders to keep your grass stands healthy while maintaining the wildlife benefits.

Herbicide Application

At a minimum CREP contracts acres should be spot sprayed annually to control noxious weeds. Be sure to follow all label directions and ensure you are using the right products by consulting with a chemical dealer. If it’s been awhile since the contract had any weed control it may require more extensive spraying. Be careful to avoid any damage to native trees and shrubs.

Mowing

Mowing is a good way to control weeds before they go to seed while opening up the ground to sunlight to improve native grass seed germination. It can also be paired with herbicide applications when access is hampered by tall grass or overgrown areas. Whenever possible mowing should be done after native grass has gone to seed and the mower deck should be set at least 3 inches or higher to reduce the risk of damaging crowns. To ensure wildlife have adequate cover you should avoid mowing the entire contract acreage in one season. Fall

mowing should be done before October 15 to allow some regrowth for winter and spring wildlife cover.

Primary nesting season

Significant disturbance to perennial cover is prohibited between April 1 and July 1. This includes mowing and any major spraying. Unfortunately this often interferes with effective weed control. If it is necessary to treat some areas of your contract during the primary nesting window you can talk to FSA and get an approved variance to do some work.

Improving thin grass stands

Over time some areas of grass may thin out as weed pressure increases. This can often be improved by treating the weeds and then broadcast seeding native grass. Harrowing the area both before and after seeding will help improve seed soil contact and increase planting success. Follow up weed control will also be needed.

A healthy stand of native grass serves as important wildlife habitat and reduces the impacts of farming on the stream and native trees and shrubs that line the banks. It will likely reduce weed pressure in the surrounding farmland as an added benefit!

If you have questions or concerns about your CREP contract we would be happy to take a look and offer some suggestions! Joanna is the CREP coordinator and can be reached through the main office line 509-956-3777 or emailed at Joanna.cowles@wwccd.net.

Fall Summary

WWCCD received funding for three projects: an engineered design of a 1/2 mile restoration project on the Walla Walla River, removal of a concrete fish passage barrier and installing a series of Post Assisted Log Structures, and a pilot restoration project on Cottonwood Creek.

Grant Applications: Each year we receive requests for assistance and apply for grants to address those requests. This fall we applied for 6 grants to help landowners with their natural resource concerns.

Dept. of Ecology, Water Quality

- 1) Design & construct a stream res-

toration project to alleviate flood hazards and associated damage on Mill Creek,

- 2) Install riparian buffers on areas not eligible for CREP,
- 3) Construct a 1/2 mile restoration project on the Walla Walla River, and
- 4) Tackle False Indigo along the Touchet River including concentrated riparian plantings.

Dept. of Ecology, Streamflow Restoration funds

- 1) Monitoring and renewed operation of two shallow aquifer recharge sites and
- 2) Piping an earthen irrigation ditch to provide more flow instream.



Above: WWCCD Staff and a local Washington Conservation Corps crew collected and planted over 1,600 willows.

If you have concerns about your land or streams, contact us at 509-956-3777. We are here to help.

Walla Walla County Conservation District

District Staff

Renee Hadley, District Manager
Audrey Ahmann, Assistant Manager: Finance
Jeff Klundt, Burn Permit Coordinator
Lisa Stearns, Civil Engineering Technician
Joanna Cowles Cleveland, CREP Scientist
Lynda Oosterhuis, Conservation Technician
Lance Horning, District Engineer
Eric Rannestad, Media Intern

WWCCD Board of Supervisors

Pat McConnell
Jim Kent
Todd Kimball
Jeff Schulke
Ed Chvatal
Associate Mike Hagerman
Associate Annie Byerley

www.wwccd.net

Our USDA SERVICE CENTER partners

NRCS Staff

vacant, District Conservationist
Katy Walters, Program Support
Bryce Krueger, Resource Conservationist

WDFW Staff

Sean Taylor, Fish Passage & Screening Biologist

FSA Staff

Kelley Betts, Co. Executive Director
Nicole Armijo, Program Technician
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