

Walla Walla County Conservation District NEWSLETTER

Summer 2020
Volume 22, Issue 1

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been up to...

Save the Dates

Tuesday **Sept. 8th** at 6 p.m.
This virtual public meeting will allow you to weigh in on the plan assessing restoration priorities on the Touchet River from Prescott to above Dayton.

Tuesdays **Sept. 15th and 22nd** 3-5 p.m. American Farmland Trust's Women for the Land "Regenerative Agriculture in the Walla Walla valley"

Contact Renee 509-956-3756 or renee.hadley@wwccd.net for meeting links or details.

CRP

As numerous FSA compliance letters are sent across the county, the WWCCD would like to clarify our role. WWCCD was asked to assist NRCS and FSA in completing CRP field checks and in developing CRP contract paperwork. Our job was to coordinate with landowners, obtain permission, walk each field and record several transects of vegetation type, abundance and percent of weeds present. The data and photographs were recorded and passed up to NRCS for review and later to FSA for determination.

Staff at the conservation district have been concerned about the high number of expiring CRP acres for the past few years. The district recognizes the benefit those grass stands offer in reducing erosion, increasing organic matter and water holding capacity, and habitat benefits, as well as offering an important option for landowners concerned about their highly-erodible land. The number of acres needing review was compounded as many expiring contracts were rolled over to this year. Reviewing these acres and contracts before they expired was daunting but very necessary. The new Farm Bill requires a field status review before a contract can be renewed. The Farm Bill no longer allows producer self-certification. The NRCS office has been short staffed and asked for help to complete field checks on all the contract acres. Without district assistance, many contracts were at risk of being dropped from the program just for lack of a field check.

The outcome of those compliance checks is a bit more stark than any of us would have hoped. Many components have contributed, including but not limited to spreading of weeds throughout the area, a lack of formal mid-management checks which could have provided maintenance suggestions, changes in rainfall impacting growth of certain species, etc. Please understand our conservation district staff are only reporting existing conditions, not making compliance determinations. FSA has offered a path forward and there are options. Producers are encouraged to contact the FSA staff for specifics. If you have further questions, please contact Renee with the WWCCD or the FSA office.

Rules Rules Rules! Burn Permits and access to the USDA building

No one expected Covid-19 restriction to continue into the fall but here we are! The conservation district office is co-located with federal agencies, so the office building is governed by federal procedures, not state guidelines. Please bear with us as we continue working under the following restrictions. These are subject to change without notice.

- ◆ Only a limited number of staff can be in the building at one time. Staff are encouraged to work remotely.
- ◆ Burn permit forms are available on our [website](#) and can be submitted via email or post. Please plan ahead as it may take up to 7 days to process applications.
- ◆ Members of the public are not allowed in the office. Appointments with WWCCD staff can be scheduled and held in the parking lot. **Please call ahead for appointments.**
- ◆ Masks are required when meeting with staff to complete paperwork and requested when meeting at project sites if social distancing is not practical.
- ◆ Public meetings in the office are not allowed. To date, the regular monthly district board meetings have been held via phone conference. As always, the district welcomes attendance from anyone. Contact Renee or Audrey at 509-956-3777 to receive info about [board meetings](#).

Thanks for adapting to ever changing conditions. We look forward to continuing to work with you.

South Fork Russell Creek bridge

An earthen ford was used for farm equipment for decades and resulted in a hardened surface and twofish passage barriers. These looked like simple waterfalls but removing the barriers was important to steelhead recovery in the Walla Walla basin. The landowners recognized this issue and reached out to improve conditions on the site.

The James C. Lyons Sr Farm and H.T. Rea Farms worked with the Walla Walla County Conservation District for over 5 years to complete the project. As with all projects, it takes time to design a project to withstand the permitting scrutiny and secure funding.

Special thanks to the following for their involvement.

James C. Lyons Sr Farms,
H.T. Rea Farming Corporation
Farm Service Agency
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Washington State Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
Washington State Conservation Commission
Barker, Inc.



Hoisting one of three bridge decks into place.



Nearly completed bridge, minor earthwork to do...



Previous stream channel with fish passage barriers.



Reconstructed stream channel with barriers removed.
Planting to follow...

Snapshot in time

Some projects fall into place. Others seem painstakingly slow. The preliminary bridge design was completed in 2015 but it took a few years to secure funding through our partners: the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Washington State Conservation Commission. Our partnership on the project also involved the Washington State Dept. of Fish and Wildlife. The WDFW were instrumental in designing the stream to remove the passage barriers and install a series of rock vortex weirs to reduce the potential for additional streambed erosion (incision).

2 years to complete geotechnical soil assessment and revise bridge design for soft soils and flood modeling.

8 months to obtain permits involving over 25 documents.

Start to finish construction <3 weeks including prep earthwork.

It took a village to lift the project from those design pages but what a great accomplishment for steelhead recovery efforts.

South Fork Russell Creek bridge

The James C. Lyons Sr. Farm and H.T. Rea Farms sought assistance from the district to address an earthen ford. This ford had been used for farm equipment for decades, resulting in a hardened surface and two fish passage barriers. These looked like simple waterfalls but the hardened surface interfered with normal pool development. Without at least a marginal pool, fish could not get enough momentum to leap even these small barriers. Removing the barriers was important to steelhead recovery in the Walla Walla basin. The landowners recognized the problem and reached out to the district for help. As with all restoration projects, it took time to develop designs that withstood permitting scrutiny and apply for funding.

Snapshot in time

Some projects fall into place. Others seem painstakingly slow. The preliminary bridge design was completed in 2015 but it took several years to secure funding through our partners: the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Washington State Conservation Commission. The Washington State Dept. of Fish and Wildlife were instrumental in designing the project.



Previous stream channel with fish passage barriers.



Reconstructed stream channel with barriers removed. Riparian area will be replanted.



Hoisting one of three bridge decks into place.



Nearly completed bridge, only minor earthwork remaining.

The final project plan included a bridge to keep equipment out of the streambed, elimination of the passage barriers, and the installation of a series of rock vortex weirs to reduce the potential for further streambank erosion (incision). Good planning led to quick and efficient installation.

- 2 years to complete geotechnical soil assessment and revise bridge design for soft soils and flood modeling
- 8 months to obtain permits involving over 25 documents
- Start to finish construction: less than 3 weeks including prep earthwork.

It took a lot of landowner and staff persistence to lift the project from those design pages but what a great accomplishment for steelhead recovery efforts.

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STAFF CHANGES

New Faces at the District!

We had two new staff join the conservation district in November: Cat Garza and Lorna Emerich. Both helped with grant writing over the winter months and joined with Joanna and Lynda to develop conservation plans and assist with field work.

Catalina Garza, also known by her nickname Cat, grew up in Umapine, Oregon on a farm growing alfalfa hay and raising cattle. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Applied Science in Agricultural Systems degree at Walla Walla Community College. In her free time she enjoys hiking with her two dogs, kayaking, gardening and helping her grandpa feed cows. She is thankful to work at the Walla Walla Conservation District as an intern and hopes to grow her career here in conservation science.

Lorna Emerich has lived in Spokane since 1996. She received a bachelor's degree in biology from Eastern Washington University in 2004. She likes botany, backpacking (especially in alpine areas) and growing a big household garden.



Cat Garza



Lorna Emerich

Welcome to FSA, Tiffani Maccarone

Our USDA Service Center partners also have new faces. Tiffany Maccarone joined the Walla Walla FSA Office in January as a Temporary Program Technician, specifically for CFAP. She is a Walla Walla area native. She has been and looks forward to helping our area producers.



Cassie Jacobson

Welcome NRCS Soil Conservationist, Cassie Jacobson

Cassie Jacobson joined the Walla Walla NRCS Office in August as a Soil Conservationist. In her own words...

“I started my career with NRCS in Minnesota as a soil conservation technician in 2016. Prior to that I worked for two Soil and Water Conservation Districts, a Lake Improvement District, and a county land and resource department all in Minnesota, and also in Wyoming for the US Forest Service and as a ranch hand. I have a degree in Natural Resources Park Management from the University of Minnesota. When not at work I enjoy wandering around outside, gardening, animals - especially my pets, photography, and reading. I am looking forward to experiencing life in Washington!”

District response to the 2020 Flood

We heard from over 100 landowners after the Feb. 2020 flood and recorded nearly \$10,000,000 in damage to private property. This is in addition to the millions recorded by various departments across the county for road and other damages. The Washington State Conservation Commission used this information to apply for state disaster funds. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has caused unprecedented budget shortfalls and there are virtually no additional funds available. But district staff are still working to secure grant funding. The following are a few avenues we are pursuing:

- USACE Section 206-inquiry-Winter
- USDA-NRCS RCPP application submitted in Dec. 2019
- USDA-NRCS NWQI submitted request for watershed assessment on Mill Creek submitted June 2020
- WA-Ecology Floodplain by Design for upper Mill Creek application submitted July 2020

Additional grant applications in the works for fall submittals. Some of the above grants may help flood recovery, and some may improve the region's ability to handle future high water events.

If you have a natural resource concern and need help, from technical assistance to possible grant funding, reach out to WWCCD staff. We are here to help.



3000 willow whips were harvested and soaked (as shown above) for planting on a section of creek stripped of vegetation by the Feb. 2020 flood. It will take years for nature to regrow the lost trees and shrubs. Landowners can kick start regrowth by planting this fall. Contact Renee if you are interested. We are planning projects for fall and spring.

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
Cat Garza, Conservation Technician
Lorna Emerich, Conservation Scientist
Lance Horning, District Engineer

Board of Supervisors

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

www.wwccd.net

Our USDA SERVICE CENTER partners

NRCS Staff

Tracy Hanger, District Conservationist Snake River Team
Bryce Krueger, WW area Resource Conservationist
Cassie Jacobson, WW area Soil Conservationist
Katy Walters, Snake River Team Program Support

WDFW Staff

Sean Taylor, Fish Passage & Screening Biologist

FSA Staff

Kelley Betts, County Executive Director for WW & Columbia
Nicole Armijo, Program Technician
Norma Colunga, Program Technician
Jill Monetta, Program Technician
Tiffany Maccarone, Temp. Program Technician, CFAP

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