

Walla Walla County Conservation District

325 North 13th Avenue – Walla Walla, WA 99362
Phone: (509) 522-6340, Ext. 5

Spring 2017

Published regularly to provide information to land users

Volume 19, Issue 2



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Voluntary Stewardship Program Update

The Walla Walla VSP work group is making progress on the County wide plan to protect critical areas. VSP meetings are open to the public and are the first Tuesday of each month at 1 pm in the USDA Service Center conference room at 325 North 13th Avenue, Walla Walla. Check out our website for more info <http://www.wvccd.net/>

SAVE THE DATES

April 28 pm Blue Mtn Land Trust: Learning-on-the-Land CREP see <http://bmlt.org/new-events/>
May 11, 11-noon Weed Seed Control WSU Pullman, Johnson Hall 204 see page 4 for details
May 23 all day Forest Health Field Workshop contact Lisa Naylor 509-386-6021
June 21 pm WSU Extension WW Cereal Grain Tour contact Paul Carter, WSU Ext. 509-382-4741

Resources You Can Use

Photograph & Track flora & fauna across the world at <https://www.inaturalist.org/>
Print free topographic maps at <http://www.natgeomaps.com/trail-maps/pdf-quads>
Soil Health: great for classrooms or a refresher for the landowner who may be a generation away from operating a farm <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/soils/health/>
Cereal Grains Tool Box with useful calculators <http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/>

SCREENS & METERS

Fish Screens: The Conservation District is currently in a funding gap period and can no longer offer cost share assistance for fish screens. But irrigators are still required to screen all diversions to protect endangered fish species. Sean Taylor of WDFW and Greg Kinsinger with WWCCD can evaluate your irrigation system and direct you toward an appropriate screen that meets NOAA fish-screen requirements. While we continue to search for alternative fish screen cost share grants, keep up the good work screening those diversions.

Meters: Cost-share assistance is still available for meters. This includes replacing meters that are no longer functioning or meters that are just plain dead. We are aware some early meters did not function as intended and had some battery life issues. We have learned what works and manufacturers have improved or developed new meters. There are more meter companies on the market now with better products and longer warranties. Greg Kinsinger and Lynda Oosterhuis can help you select the best meter for your application. Like screens, the meter program won't last forever: the early bird catches the worm so let us know if you are interested.

Farmer to Farmer Mini-session summary



Special Thanks to our 2017 hosts: Jon Walters, Guy McCaw, Jacquie Turner, Scott Ford & Mike Hagerman. After a two year hiatus, we regrouped and offered Farmer to Farmer Mini-sessions in February reaching 30 people. We started with updates about FSA, NRCS, and WWCCD programs followed by the importance and intent of the Voluntary Stewardship Program in Walla Walla County. Later, we asked farmers to discuss what was working and what wasn't. We asked what growers wanted the District to pursue. A few common themes were developed around your fellow farmers' concerns.

- 1) Chemical resistant weeds are becoming more difficult to control, specifically cheat grass, skeleton weed, Russian thistle & yellowstar thistle. Chem fallow fields tend to have the highest concentration of weeds, and perhaps more emphasis is needed on maintaining cover (whether as residue or cover crop).
- 2) CREP has made great strides in riparian protection in WW Co. Additional resources need to be developed for areas that are not on salmonid bearing streams and for portions of the rivers that migrate laterally and erode through existing buffers, cutting into prime farm ground and eroding thousands of tons of soil.
- 3) There needs to be more information shared regarding available grants, incentives & cost-share opportunities.

Other topics included:

- The difficulty of converting small acreage farms to direct seed methods because the high cost of equipment (rental or purchase).
- Some farmers shared if the incentive is for fewer than 5 years there is little interest, and would like to see more long-term funding.
- Soil erosion has been reduced in fields but is still an issue for farm roads. There is a disconnect between landowners and farm operators regarding land management decisions: residue management, crop selection, and soil health are driven by profits and ease of management, not necessarily sustainability.
- CRP grasslands and the trouble managing grasslands with the regulation on burning. We looked into this and found the following: Per FSA and the CRP manual, burning is not allowed during nesting times (April through July) but may be allowed as a "spot treatment of acreage" where existing conditions (weeds/pests) are detrimental to the health of a stand. But spot burns in CRP can be hard to manage. FSA requires filling out an "Exhibit 7" form to be reviewed/approved in advance by the FSA County Committee. Per NRCS, if CRP acres are included in your CSP contract, burning is not allowed.

Residue management concerns varied depending on location in the county. The relationship between maintaining cover (residue or cover crop) and soil health and water retention is well understood. Some folks shared the difficulty with residue breaking down unless using a rotary harrow/vertical tillage or burning residue. Others shared they have trouble maintaining enough residue.

Agricultural burning was a hot topic. There is a time and place to burn but when and how often, if at all, is a contentious issue. Some farmers use it as a last resort for weed management after all other options have been exhausted. Other farmers use it as a quick residue management tool, especially on leased ground. With WA DNR planning to do more prescribed timber burns in 2017, we can expect more restrictions this year on ag burning due to air quality.

Education is a concern. Community groups and some rural landowners are more disconnected from the methods of agricultural operations. There are well-educated people speaking out who have limited understanding of agricultural practices. Misconceptions are amplified by incorrect information in the media. Unfortunately, our society caters to the loudest voices and ag folks are not known as protesters or front stage speakers*. Agriculture activities are facing more regulation and stringent environmental compliance because a handful of voices**. There is a need for an ag voice in our area to speak up. Farmers shared it is uncomfortable for them to speak up when they observe a neighbor's detrimental practice and perhaps information should be filtered through an unbiased party for distribution.

NRCS: Farmers shared that NRCS programs and incentives have helped educate them about conservation practices and what to do. They expressed a desire to start or stay enrolled in some programs but have frustrations with rigid restrictions. They need to adjust their methods based on weather, precipitation, and soil needs and cannot always wait for paperwork exemptions. Another concern is regarding programs that run counter to each other such as enrolling in one making a farmer ineligible for another. They requested email updates regarding contract management (NRCS) and new grant opportunities (both NRCS and WWCCD). Folks also shared the frustration and occasional miscommunication regarding funding rounds. A producer may apply five years in a row during round 3 of an annual funding program and not know the timeline and likelihood of funding in rounds 1 and 2. The most pro-active producers tend to receive the most benefits and programs because of their persistence and resourcefulness. Several farmers prefer to receive information instead of digging for it and risk missing out on opportunities.

*The PNWDSA direct seed cropping system conference this year showcased ag producers who speak up and are influencing others. Check out "The Real Dirt of Farming" <http://www.realdirtontofarming.ca/>

**Hirst Decision, Growth Management Act: Critical Area regulation over ag activities resulted in VSP, EPA & ECY water quality regulations.

CREP Re-enrollments

Washington Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

USDA FSA has changed the deadline for re-enrollments. Walla Walla County is near the cap on CRP acres which includes CREP, and as the cap narrows, so do deadlines. In 2016, the deadline was moved up two weeks, but this year, the deadline has been moved to **July** and may be moved up again. This means it is more important than ever to apply early to allow time for approval of the new contract **before the current one expires**. Contracts are not automatically re-enrolled even if the buffer is well-established and functioning. A re-enrollment contract needs to be developed with required supporting documentation and signatures. When you receive your CREP re-enrollment letter, contact the FSA and Conservation District as soon as possible. Between the site visits, plans, and contracts that need to be developed, please allow plenty of time. Joanna and Lynda are working diligently to ensure current contracts are enrolled in time. Your contract must be approved by USDA-FSA before the deadline of the year 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.

CREP Annual Maintenance: FSA is paying you to grow a crop: a riparian forest buffer crop. As with any project, ongoing maintenance is important. The Conservation District can provide planting recommendations or seed/plant suppliers to help you keep your contract in compliance.



High Water Update

October to March gave us more than our typical annual precipitation. Follow all that rain and snow with warm winds in early March and the result was several high water events. Some areas flooded, while others suffered severely eroded banks. We hear your concerns. These are disheartening circumstances. Unfortunately, the Conservation District does not have funding to deal with these types of events. It is exceptionally difficult to obtain funds for river restoration and disaster relief, but we are actively seeking grants to help all landowners hit by this extreme weather.

Burn Permits & Refund Info

It has been a wet spring with limited good burn days. We anticipate quite a few burn refund requests. If you need a refund for the 2017 Spring Field Burn or Pile Burn season, your request must be submitted to the WWCCD by 6/15/2017. Refund request forms are available at the WWCCD office. Refund checks will be sent from Walla Walla County in July 2017. No refunds can be issued for less than \$25.00 per WAC 173-430-041 (7)(b).

We have received some incomplete applications of late. A few reminders: 1) Be patient, the state allows 7 days to process an application. 2) You need to provide an accurate map and driving directions; District staff can help 3) You MUST report your completed burn, preferably using the Ecology website: http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/air/aginfo/Blue_card.html

Internet reporting allows ECY to instantly remove your acres from the list of those needing to be burned. This helps them make a more accurate burn call and helps your neighbors waiting for a metered burn day. This will become more important as Washington Department of Natural Resources intends to have more controlled burns in 2017.

NRCS offers assistance for ON-FARM SECONDARY CONTAINMENT FACILITY (319)

An on-farm secondary containment facility is a permanently located facility designed to provide secondary containment of oil and petroleum products used on farm. The practice is available through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). These facilities control accidental release of oil and petroleum products to prevent contamination of groundwater and surface waters and provide measures for a safe, effective and timely clean-up of a spill

or leak. Think of it as a large drip pan for your chemical and/or fuel tanks.

Contact Ed Teel at the NRCS office for details 509-522-6340 ext. 106.

Implementation and Adoption of Harvest Weed Seed Control in Australia

Dr. Michael Walsh, The University of Sydney, Narrabri, NSW



And joined by Ray Harrington, farmer and inventor of the Harrington Seed Destructor, Darkan, WA & Jud Wheatley with de bruin Engineering, Mount Gambier, SA



Where: Johnson Hall 204,
WSU Pullman Campus

When: Thursday, May 11
from 11:00 a.m. to noon



Weed resistance; note dying weed and healthy one

Walla Walla County Conservation District

WWCCD Board of Supervisors

Pat McConnell
Jeff Schulke
Ed Chvatal
Jim Kent
Todd Kimball
Mike Hagerman
Rick Jones

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Renee Hadley, District Manager
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Jeff Klundt, Burn Permit Coordinator
Lisa Stearns, Civil Engineering Technician
Joanna Cowles, Conservation Scientist
Lynda Oosterhuis, Program Technician
Lance Horning, District Engineer

NRCS Staff

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Jessica Taylor, Soil Conservationist
Katy Walters, Program Support

WDFW Staff

Sean Taylor, Fish Passage & Screening Biologist

FSA Staff

Kelley Betts, Co. Executive Director
Nicole Armijo & Norma Colunga, Program Technicians

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