

Walla Walla County Conservation District

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Please fill out our survey
at [https://
www.surveymonkey.c
om/r/RC6X2XX](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RC6X2XX)

*Burn Permits
If you need help with
your burn permit(s),
Jeff Khundt and Lisa
Stearns are available
to help Monday
through Thursday or
by appointment.*

FIREWISE: A New Program at the District

Last summer was hot and dry and prime for fires. This summer we also lost our snow pack early and had some hot spells, but it hasn't been as bad thanks to the mid-summer rains and quick action from local fire departments. That doesn't mean our awareness should wane. Fire is still a danger.

So what can we do? Implement Firewise Principles, maintain fire routes, and be vigilant. After the Blue Creek fire last summer, fire crews explained that clear access from the road to the house is important. A fire crew is not going to go into a forested driveway just to save a burning structure because they could be trapped. This is where Firewise Principles can save the day. It is not just location but the surrounding landscape that determines a home's fire hazard. Creating a zone of well-irrigated areas within 30 feet of your house provides space for emergency crews to work safely. The surrounding 100 feet from a home should have low growing plants or trees that are spaced to prevent the crowns from touching. The remaining 100 to 200 feet from your home should continue with low growing or well-spaced trees with a low volume of vegetation (fuel). So how do we create those types of spaces?

There are programs to help. Landowners can apply for a Washington Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) cost share program that uses efficient labor workers to get a lot done using limited funds. Once approved, landowners have two years to complete fuel reduction work. The "EASTERN WASHINGTON FOREST LANDOWNER COST-SHARE INFORMATION AND APPLICATION" is at the DNR website. Cost-Share applications are due to Washington DNR in Olympia by September 30, 2016. Lisa Naylor of the Blue Mountain RC&D is working with DNR to assist landowners in completing the applications and providing the needed financial assessments for the landowner. She can be contacted at (509) 386-6021 or email her at

lisa.naylor@rocketmail.com. If folks decide to apply, Lisa Naylor suggests contacting her, then send the form (completed page 6 and signed page 8) to the address in Olympia *plus* a copy to Chuck Wytko in Ellensburg prior to September 30, 2016 and save a copy for their files.

Another program is available through the Conservation District. We received a grant to help install Firewise practices such as fuel reduction. For more information contact Lisa Stearns or Renee Hadley at the Conservation District at 509-522-6340 x5. Meanwhile, take a look at www.firewise.org. Under the Home and Garden tab there are detailed instructions on protecting your home and structures.

Notes from the Manager:

As a new manager, I have had my ear to the ground and am trying to learn new things. The following is part of what I have gleaned in the past few months. There has been a lot of discussion about soil health and cover crops this year. WSU Extension, north central Washington farmers, and NRCS are conducting legume varietal trials, planting cover crop demonstration plots and spreading the word on soil management, respectively. The goal could be to increase microbes, nitrogen, fertility or an attempt to break up the harder “plow pan” that is inhibiting root penetration. Folks are exploring new ideas. Bottom line: Do we have enough moisture to grow our crops and will our soil hold up for another generation? All are centered around the 4 basic soil health principles:

Do not disturb soil profile

Keep living roots in the soil year round

Grow a diverse mixture of plants

Cover the soil

Tilling has its advantages and disadvantages. For years we thought tilling would allow more moisture to soak in the ground. Tilling cuts through roots and breaks them up. Rain that might have followed a decomposed root pathway doesn't absorb as quickly as in a no disturbance area. Rain may soak the outer edge of a soil clod. But break it open — is it dry inside? Now dig in a no till area. Do you see the same spotty moisture in a no till area? Or does rain absorb more uniformly?

Microbes, bacteria and fungi can help or hurt crops depending on abundance and diversity. Generally, the more diverse, the better the soil. Allowing soil to have vegetative growth or residue during peak summer temperatures can influence soil microbes. It is known that most soil microbes die after 2-3 days above 130°F. NRCS staff measured soil temperatures last week with some surprising results as shown in the table below:

Soil Temperatures		
Ambient Air Temperature 96-103°F, 7/28-29/2016		
Sample Site	Soil Temp. (°F)	Soil Temp. (°F)
Chem-fallow	79	103 to 106
Recently harvested wheat or Min. Till	80	112
Bare ground or Conventional Till	87	116
CREP & CRP	69	94

Areas with CRP or CREP that had living roots had the lowest soil temperature, being the same as air temperature at 1 inch and 30 degrees cooler at 4 inch depth. Chem Fallow was generally 10°F higher. Bare ground or Conventional tillage had ~20°F higher soil temperatures. Imagine how hot our soils get at 3 pm on a week at 100°F. Adding vegetative cover and/or residue could decrease soil temperature by 10 to 20°F.

Wheat, corn, triticale oats, barley and sorghum are varieties of grasses. Mixing it up and alternating with either a legume or other broadleaf crop rotation might give you an opportunity to manage your weeds and reestablish nutrients. You could also try a simple cover crop. Cover crops provide advantages such as increasing the organic matter in soil, breaking up that pesky “plow pan”, and adding depleted nutrients. Just 1% of organic matter can hold 1 inch of water in the soil profile.

When to terminate cover crops or whether just let them grow is up for debate. We are still learning what works in our area. WSU Extension conducted research that implied the best time to terminate was at the peak of succulent vegetative growth before flower production. The theory is terminating early will restrict moisture depletion in the soil. If another 2% of organic matter is added by letting a cover crop grow until it is time to plant the next crop, will there be an additional 2 inches of water in the soil profile or will the moisture be depleted? Will there be more moisture retained just by having the soil covered and less evaporation? More research is in order. I am interested in hearing your thoughts and comments. It is a great time for discussion and collaboration. Please fill out our survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RC6X2XX>

Sincerely, Renee M. Hadley

Re-enroll in **CREP**

Washington Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

There is good news for existing CREP participants whose contracts are about to expire. CREP offers re-enrollment of existing practices at attractive land rental rates.

If you have a CREP contract that is expiring you can apply to re-enroll the practice. There are some important things to bear in mind. You need to apply early enough 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 all required supporting documentation and signatures. You must have approval by USDA-FSA before September 30th 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.

If the current CREP contract does not meet the criteria for a functioning buffer, it may still be eligible for re-enrollment. When you apply, a technician will visit the site and determine what needs to be done to improve the buffer function. The technician will develop a cost estimate for the FSA County Committee. The County Committee then decides if it is economically feasible to re-enroll. If the project is approved for re-enrollment the landowner is responsible for installing the improvements, though FSA and the District can provide cost share to help cover the cost.

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, you should allow plenty of time. Ideally, you can begin the process during the slow winter months and sign the contract as early as April. This way you'll avoid trying to meet deadlines during busy summer harvest times. At a minimum, you should make your plans to re-enroll known to FSA and the District by the first of July.

Annual Maintenance: All CREP participants need to remember FSA is paying you to grow a crop: a riparian forest buffer crop. As with any project, ongoing maintenance is important. Fall is a great time to reassess your stand, determine bare or dying patches, and replant if needed. The general guideline is to plant from November 1st to March 15th. The Conservation District can provide planting recommendations or seed/plant suppliers to help keep your contract in compliance. Just ask: that is why we are here!



Two well-established Walla Walla County CREP buffers





Welcome to Lynda Oosterhuis

Lynda is the newest staff member at the WWCCD and will be assisting Joanna and Jeff with CREP and working on the Screens and Meters program with Greg Kinsinger. Ms. Oosterhuis is originally from the Washington D.C. area but developed an interest in agriculture and land use issues after working on several farms and dairies throughout the Northwest. She is currently working on her degree in Natural Resources Technology Management at the Walla Walla Community College and hopes to put all that knowledge to good use here in the Walla Walla Valley.

Completed your burn?

REMEMBER: All permit holders who have completed field burns need to report their burn, preferably using the Ecology website as shown on your permit cover letter. The blue cards can be used of course, but the internet reporting allows DOE 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.

Walla Walla County Conservation District

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**View the WWCCD
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