

District Story for 2016

Walla Walla County Conservation District



Washington Conservation Districts
Assisting land managers with their
Conservation choices

Featured Natural Resource Accomplishments in the Walla Walla County Conservation District (WWCCD)

Revised 1/23/2017

USDA FSA CREP Buffer Program WWCCD provided technical assistance

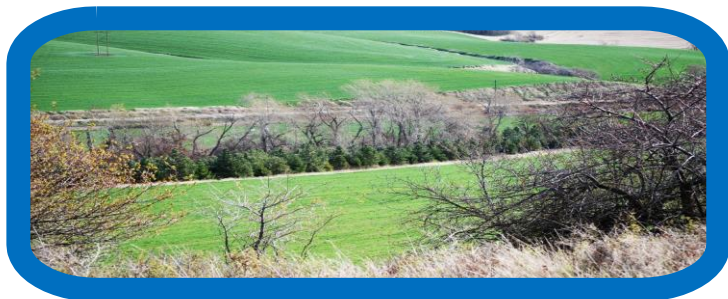
Resource Challenge: Hundreds of miles of Walla Walla County streams used by ESA listed bull trout and steelhead have had riparian vegetation impacted by activities such as farming, livestock use, urban development, and/or natural events. Woody cover was almost non-existent on many stream reaches until buffer restoration projects were initiated in 1998.

Project Summary and Accomplishments:

In cooperation with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), WWCCD has one of the most active programs in the State of Washington and accounts for **25% percent of the State's CREP**. Between 2007 and 2012, WWCCD worked with the Tri-State Steelheaders on the Creating Urban Riparian Buffers program to treat urban stream banks.

2016 results:

- 42,909 linear feet of stream bank treated,
- 89 acres of riparian forest buffer established
- 3.6 acres of wetland treated
- 6 acres of grass filter strip buffer



WWCCD Firewise & Fire Recovery Resource Challenge:

Periodic fires can lead to temporary decreased air quality, loss of organic matter protecting soils from wind and water erosion, and impaired water quality. The Firewise program offers education and assistance to prevent fires and create defensible space. Fire recovery assistance was offered to help individuals post fire. These were one-time funds provided through the Washington State Conservation Commission.

Project Summary and Accomplishments:

WWCCD offered Firewise outreach sessions at four locations in addition to the Firewise sessions provided by Walla Walla County Fire Dept. and WA-DNR. Fire Recovery funds provided assistance to protect 803 acres from soil erosion. Technical assistance will continue through June 2017.

Voluntary Stewardship Program WWCCD continues to develop the VSP Work Plan as an alternative to critical area regulation on agricultural lands

Resource Challenge:

Washington State Supreme Court ruled that agricultural lands could not be excluded from Growth Management Act regulations. VSP (RCW 36.70A.700) is an alternative to these regulations. The VSP developed for each county must develop voluntary actions to protect critical areas while maintaining existing agricultural uses. There are five critical areas in Walla Walla County: 1) Fish and Wildlife Habitat, 2) Wetlands, 3) Frequently Flooded, 4) Critical Aquifer Recharge & 5) Geologically Hazardous areas which includes sub groups: erosion by wind, erosion by water, liquefaction and steep slopes. With declining trends in ag use and smaller ag farms, WWCCD has a challenge to develop a plan that will benefit many areas.

Project Summary and Accomplishments:

WWCCD is working with the Walla Walla County Commissioners and Walla Walla County Planning Department. The VSP Work Plan document is being developed by the VSP Work Group which is comprised of area agricultural, environmental and agency representatives. Public outreach will expand in 2017 and public feedback will be incorporated in the Work Plan document.

Agricultural Burn Program

Resource Challenge: In Western Walla Walla County, there are areas with low annual precipitation and are highly susceptible to wind erosion. Extreme care is needed to maintain cover for soil protection. Agricultural field burning has been traditionally used to remove high crop residue loads for weed control, disease control, implement performance and ease of seeding. The WWCCD actively works with WA-Ecology on the ag burning program.

Project Summary and accomplishments:

WWCCD provided permit assistance to over 114 agricultural land users in 2016.

WWCCD Metering Program Walla Walla County pump stations & wells

Resource Challenge: Meters provide accurate water-use information to irrigators, enabling them to better manage their irrigation practices, improve irrigation efficiency, and decrease energy use. Additionally, State of Washington water laws require all shallow aquifer wells and pumping stations on streams and/or canals be metered. Meters have varied in quality and durability over the past decade and yielded unforeseen problems. Flow meters and well-documented water use records help landowners protect their water rights from relinquishment.

Project Summary and Accomplishments:

WWCCD has partnered with Ecology to promote and fund this cost share program. The program is administered in tandem with the fish screen program for surface water diversions, and independently for all ground water diversions. Project design and installation is provided by the WWCCD.

Landowners are encouraged to apply early as the funding is limited. Between 2002 and 2016, 461 meters were installed.



New meter installation

WWCCD Irrigation Efficiency Program Walla Walla County irrigation systems

Resource Challenge: With declining water tables and reduced snow packs, the demand for water is increasing. There continues to be water savings captured through the improvement of our irrigation systems in congruence with increased efficiency. These savings may increase stream flows as well as decrease the financial burden of increased pumping costs.

Project Summary and Accomplishments:

Funding for the Irrigation Efficiency Program is provided through various agencies. The WA Department of Ecology and the WA Conservation Commission offer cost share grant programs in exchange for a portion of the saved water right. WWCCD acquires the funds, assembles technical data, coordinates with landowners, develops engineering plans and specifications, and bids out project construction.

Through recovery of losses associated with conveyance, the water savings from piping irrigation ditches has been trusted to instream flow. In addition, on-demand irrigation water in a closed system offers the ability to manage and increase efficiency.

Project Summary and Accomplishments:

The following are significant accomplishments of the WWCCD Irrigation Efficiency Program:

- 3 pivot conversions from flood; savings in trust water of 1,800 acre-feet.
- Small farms efficiency – 25 irrigation systems upgrades for water savings of 1.62 cubic feet per second (cfs).
- Large irrigation districts piping projects resulting in 19 cfs of water rights saved in trust and over 41 miles of earthen canals piped.



Installing 66-inch pipe for the 2,800 ft. phase of the GFID North Lateral in 2013

WWCCD Screening Program

Resource Challenge: In 2001 there were hundreds of irrigation diversions which did not meet required screening standards in the Walla Walla Basin. Most were operating with a screen designed as a trash rack rather than a safe, protective barrier for fish. Mortality rates were exceptionally high for salmonids as migrating juveniles were “taken” by irrigation pumping stations and diversion ditches. For the last 14 years, the WWCCD has implemented a cost share program which assists landowners coming into compliance with screen regulations. An estimated 10 percent of improperly screened diversions remain in Walla Walla County.

Project Summary and Accomplishments:

Many early projects were simple and straight forward. Today, projects are requiring sophisticated designs which utilize more specialized screens and /or screening methods. Many of the remaining screen projects have special issues (e.g. water right considerations) to resolve. Funding has waned for this program and WWCCD is actively seeking new sources to fund the remaining screens in the basin. Since 2001, the fish screen program has installed 391 screens in Walla Walla County and other counties across the state.

WWCCD Fish Passage Barrier Removal Program

Salmonid-bearing stream systems

Resource Challenge: Throughout the Walla Walla Basin, numerous man-made barriers hindered fish passage. These primarily resulted from efforts to divert irrigation water, but also from poorly engineered and installed bridges and culverts. Barriers have harmful impacts to migrating fish, affecting their survival.

Project Summary and Accomplishments:

In the past decade, fish passage barrier removal is among the highest priorities for WWCCD action because of the obvious impact to salmonid migration. The District has partnered with numerous federal and state agencies as well as the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to obtain funding and permits to remediate the following barriers.

- Removed 2 fish passage barriers on Spring Creek using step-up weirs.
- Historical channel on lower 1/3rd mile Doan’s Creek restored and buffer installed.
- Fish passage barrier at Hofer Dam removed, opening 188 miles of unrestricted access.
- Phases 1 and 2 of Gose Street Fish passage barrier project were completed featuring a new fish ladder and notched weirs.
- Stiller Ditch push up dam – remediated.
- Church Dam – remediated with 6 rock vortex weirs.
- Removal of 2 gravel push up dams on the Walla Walla River with construction of the Bergevin-William/Old Lowden Consolidated Diversion Structure.

Additional barriers will be removed or remediated as funding is obtained.

Innovation / Highlight

The WWCCD continues to support the addition of practices featuring new technology to NRCS’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). In addition, WWCCD is pursuing assistance for dryland farmers through soil health programs and education. Ranching assistance in the form of exclusion fencing or pasture rotation plans are upcoming. Watch for articles in the WWCCD Newsletter.

WWCCD Upland & Wetland Programs

Resource Challenge: Wetland habitat critical for the survival of many species of birds and amphibians is rapidly disappearing from the Walla Walla County landscape due to urban expansion and improvements to transportation infrastructure. While both national and state policy states “no net loss” of wetlands, the cost of mitigation efforts often is inefficient and burdensome to the taxpaying public.

Ongoing Goal: Work through the conservation partnership to identify wetland mitigation opportunities and to develop a method of banking wetland restoration projects that can be used for future mitigation needs.

WWCCD Information & Outreach

Education Challenge: The Walla Walla County Conservation District recognizes the importance of educating decision-makers in achieving the mission of the district.

Summary: WWCCD continues to inform the public on activities and direction of the conservation district programs via newsletters, surveys, community outreach sessions, sharing WWCCD programs in secondary school and community college classes and participating in County wide community development programs (Bi-State Flow Enhancement Study, review of shoreline plans/regulations).

Occasionally, the District will pursue special grants for targeted high priority projects.

Featured Project: Farming on both sides of a river can be challenging with portions of fields having limited access, requiring farm equipment to cross streams with ESA listed fish. This portion of the Touchet River is excellent fish habitat and is used by endangered fish species for spawning and rearing. Property owners were aware of the risks to endangered fish species and sought help from the district in designing a solution that protected fish while access to fields on both sides of the river. Project manager Greg Kinsinger directed and monitored construction of the project. The Bridge project provided fish friendly access to agricultural land by constructing a 60 foot long railroad component bridge with elevated ramps. This project was complex and required a great deal of engineering, planning and coordination.

The end result: a completed bridge. Salmonids were spotted migrating beneath the bridge after completion of the project.

WWCCD's Key Partners Involved:

Blue Mountain Land Trust
Bonneville Power Administration
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
Inland Empire Action Coalition
Kooskooskie Commons
National Marine Fisheries Service
Snake River – Salmon Recovery Board
Tri-State Steelheaders
USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service
USDA – Farm Services Agency
U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Walla Walla Community College
Walla Walla County Commission
Walla Walla University
Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council
Walla Walla Watershed Management Partnership
Washington Department of Agriculture Washington
Department of Ecology
Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
Washington Department of Transportation
Washington Recreation & Conservation Office
Washington Salmon Recovery Funding Board
Washington State Conservation Commission
Whitman College
WSU Cooperative Extension

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Check out the WWCCD Website: www.wwccd.net

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Jeff Klundt, Burn Permit Coordinator
Lisa Stearns, Civil Engineering Technician
Joanna Cowles, Conservation Scientist, CREP
Lynda Oosterhuis, Conservation Technician
Lance Horning, Agricultural/Civil Engineer

NRCS Technical Staff:

Ed Teel, District Conservationist, Snake River Team
Jessica Taylor, Soil Conservationist
Katy Walters, Program Support

FSA Staff:

Kelley Betts, County Executive Director
Alexi Storm, Nicole Armijo, Norma Colunga;
Program Technicians

Legislative Districts:

State Legislative District # 16
Congressional District # 5

Natural Resources Status

Walla Walla County Conservation District

Background Information:

The Walla Walla County Conservation District is a consolidation of two previously organized conservation districts – the Walla Walla and South Walla Walla conservation districts. Consolidation was on December 18, 1961. Earliest organization dates back to April 22, 1941 for the Walla Walla Soil Conservation District and February 13, 1947 for the South Walla Walla Soil Conservation District. The District consists of 762,151 acres of privately owned land and approximately 45,000 acres of publicly managed lands totaling 807,315 acres. These lands drain into the Walla Walla, Snake, and Columbia Rivers, all of which host populations of ESA listed as threatened bull trout and steelhead. The population of 55,000-60,000 people live mostly in the cities/towns of Walla Walla, College Place, Waitsburg, Prescott, Dixie, Touchet, Lowden, Burbank and adjacent areas. The majority of the acreage of the District is cropland with approximately 312,000 acres of non-irrigated land and 91,000 acres under irrigation. Native forest and rangelands make up the balance of the district. Tourism has increased with the growth of the Walla Walla Valley wine industry that now boasts over 100 wineries.

Mission of the Walla Walla County Conservation District

WWCCD is dedicated to the conservation and restoration of the natural resources of Walla Walla County, facilitated by working on a voluntary basis with landowners to identify opportunities and create solutions, while consistently providing education, information, and assistance whenever possible.

WWCCD Vision:

WWCCD believes that many complex environmental problems can be solved through voluntary cooperation rather than by regulatory mandates. We will do this by creating and then implementing proactive programs that respect both the needs of the landowners and the natural resources of the County.