

Walla Walla County Conservation District NEWSLETTER

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And more!

Welcome FSA Program Technician, Jill Monetta

Jill Monetta was born and raised here in the Walla Walla Valley. She graduated from Eastern Washington University in 2013 and earned her Master's Degree in 2017. After spending the last 6 years teaching in various locations, she relocated to Walla Walla to be closer to her family. She is very excited to be back and looking forward to working with local farmers through Farm Service Agency. And we are excited to work with her as our partner at the USDA Service Center.

Upcoming Events and Notices

- **USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA)** **There is an August 23rd deadline** for requesting extensions for expiring CRP contracts and submitting applications for certain practices under the continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) signup. According to the [FSA website](#), this is a "limited signup prioritizing water-quality practices furthering conservation goals." This year's signup includes such practices as grassed waterways, filter strips, riparian buffers, wetland restoration and others. FSA plans to open a CRP general signup in December 2019 and a CRP Grasslands signup later.
- **Conservation Commission Meeting in Walla Walla September 18 and 19:** The [State Conservation Commission](#) is the governing body for conservation districts statewide. Their Walla Walla meeting will include a tour of area projects on Wednesday September 18 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. followed by an interactive dinner. The

business meeting will take place Thursday September 19th.

Both events are open to the public and folks can [RSVP here](#) or contact the office.

Like districts, the SCC is governed by a board of supervising volunteers who give direction and support to SCC staff. The board has two members appointed by the governor, four representing state partners (Ecology, Dept. of Ag., DNR, and WSU), three members elected by the Washington Association of CDs, and our very own Renee Hadley, representing the Washington Association of District Employees.

Please contact the office for more details about the upcoming meetings.



These Osprey are nesting on a platform right by the District office. They clearly have taken the "reduce, reuse, recycle" message to heart!

VSP: Walsh Creek Project

The district is now actively implementing the Walla Walla VSP Work Plan. Limited funds are available for cost-sharing projects to protect and enhance critical areas. The Walsh Creek project was installed in June to enhance a riparian area and promote aquifer recharge.

The landowner had been in contact with the district for some time, seeking assistance with a failing culvert and restoration of the creek. The site was heavily infested with invasive reed canary grass. Reed canary grass, once established, creates a dense mat of roots that can completely fill a creek bed making it virtually impenetrable for fish. In this case, during times of high flow water was backed up and flooding a horse pasture, resulting in the transport of contaminants to the creek.

With the help of district riparian coordinator Joanna Cowles Cleveland, the landowner developed a plan to replace the culvert and restore the riparian area.



Before: reed canary grass hinders water flow.



Before: failed culvert also backs up flow.

As with all publicly funded projects, a cultural resources review was necessary, then staff obtained the necessary permits for working in the creek. Hand labor would be required to help remove both the reed canary grass and invasive blackberries. The district contacted Kooskooskie Commons to help coordinate a work crew from the penitentiary.

With permits in hand, the landowner wasted no time in getting work started. Local contractor Johnson Custom Farming installed the new culvert and removed the canary grass from the creek bed. For the first time in many years, water began flowing freely in the historic channel.



Restoration: ensuring culvert placement is at correct depth.

The corrections crew made fast work of the dense reed canary grass on the banks. Care was taken to preserve existing native wild roses. The corrections crew had previous experience in dealing with reed canary grass and didn't hesitate to get their hands (and feet!) wet.



The restoration included planting a variety of native plant species, including

willows to eventually provide shade and sedges to provide competition against the reed canary grass.

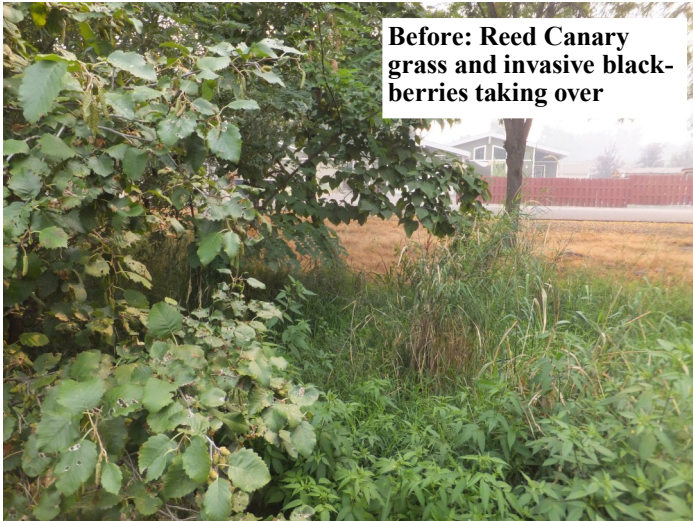
The restoration isn't complete. Plans are in the works for a second phase of the project which will involve removing invasive weeds on another section of the reach and replacing them with trees and shrubs. For the time being though, water can flow freely in the restored channel and native plants, not invasive weeds, are taking root.



Staff plant sedges in biodegradable mats.

Garrison Creek Restoration!

With help from a grant from the Wildhorse Foundation, the district rehabilitated two overgrown areas along Garrison Creek at Garrison and Pioneer Middle Schools. These had become overgrown and collected sediment and trash. The District restored the areas which can once more be used as a “living classroom” for students.



Before: Reed Canary grass and invasive blackberries taking over

The two riparian buffers were overgrown with blackberry brambles and reed canary grass, choking out the channel. Planted in 2010, the buffers, which are crucial to the health of waterways and native fish species, had been overlooked and were too dense with brambles for



Before: Dense mats of reed canary grass

student volunteers to manage.

These streamside plantings were originally installed as part of the Creating Urban Riparian Buffers program through a grant from the Department of Ecology. The buffers protect water quality by keeping pesticides, fertilizers and other chemical runoff out of the stream. Buffers also enhance property values, prevent erosion



During: Whitman students and district staff tackle the weeds.

and reduce flooding potential.

Conservation District staff worked with the Washington Conservation Corps to remove 3.5 tons of weeds from the sites. Native shrubs from the CTUIR Tribal Native Plant Nursery such as Snowberry, Mockorange, Mallow Ninebark, Oceanspray and Coyote Willows were planted on the banks to increase shade on the creek and provide wildlife habitat. Whitman College ecology students planted more than 1000 wetland plants.

These sites can now serve as living classrooms for natural science, culture and history classes, and be enjoyed by the local community.

The Wildhorse Foundation is managed by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and awards grants to area organizations working within the tribe's homelands of Northeastern Oregon and South-eastern Washington.



After: Native sedges and rushes adapted to the riparian area are set in place along with willows and other native plant species.

Rainfall Newsworthy!

Hello, dedicated rainfall data gatherers, and those who want to become data gatherers! In the news: We are investigating using more technologically advanced tools for data collection. Staff are developing a flyer with information on simple data gathering techniques, like placement of the gauge and consistency in recording to ensure accurate records. Look for this brochure when you receive the new data collection cards.

Just as a reminder, June was the end of the rainfall year. Now is the time to send in the green monthly totals card. The white daily chart is for your records. Any questions, please feel free to call Lisa Stearns at (509) 956-3762.

Thanks to our dedicated volunteers, we have over 80 years' worth of rainfall data, an invaluable resource for our area producers. We are always looking for additional rainfall reporters in our county. If this might be of interest to you please call the office 509-956-3777 or email Lisa at lisa.stearns@wwccd.net

Soils workshop

The "Healthy Soils, Healthy Region" workshop held in Pendleton last spring brought together diverse individuals united by their interest in promoting soil health. Experts spoke on soil health related topics from cover crops to new tools and technology.

Time was reserved for discussion on promoting soil health. Some major obstacles were identified as standing in the way of improved soil health:

- A need for more local information and resources
- Soil health education for crop insurance and loan providers as well as policy makers
- The need for more region specific soil health and testing information
- The issue of initial investment costs with high risk and little immediate return.

Having a diverse group of stakeholders discussing the potential options was an important step towards addressing the concerns and improving soil health throughout the region. It was encouraging to see so many people committed to supporting growers in their efforts to improve soil health.

Walla Walla County Conservation District

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Lance Horning, District Engineer

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