

UPPER GRANDE RONDE
Agricultural Water Quality Management Area
Biennial Review Report to the Board of Agriculture and ODA Director
Submitted by the Local Advisory Committee (LAC)



Meeting Date: November 30, 2023
LAC Members Present: Curt Howell, Jed Hassinger, Maarten Tromp Van Holst, and Wade Bingaman
Reporting Time Frame: Calendar years 2021 and 2022

PROGRESS MEASUREMENT

This was a Light Review; progress toward Measurable Objectives will be reported at the next Full Review.

Activities (Union Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Grande Ronde Model Watershed)	#	Discussion
Events That Actively Engage Landowners	14	Public informational meetings for restoration projects; field meetings to present concepts for improved water quality, quantity, and fish passage; landowner tours for past and future restoration projects.
Landowners Participating in Active Events	327	
Landowners Provided Technical Assistance*	333	Improving and maintaining water quality, project planning and implementation for improving riparian vegetation conditions and water quality, and improving the riparian plant community, and increasing stream shade. Including all NRCS contract inventory and evaluation and technical assistance. Help with streambank erosion, water diversions, riparian and stream habitat.
Site Visits	179	Site visits conducted at areas of concerns with landowners and partner organizations, including site visits on Gordon Creek, Hamilton Creek, Philips Creek, Grande Ronde River, Clark Creek, Catherine Creek, Little Creek, Willow Creek, Buck Creek, Dry Creek, and an unnamed tributary to the Grande Ronde River. NRCS applications and technical assistance.
Conservation Plans Written	40	NRCS on all land units: crop, range, forest.
Funding Applications Submitted	29	Grants written for technical assistance discussed above, and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).
Funding Applications Awarded	20	Grants awarded for technical assistance discussed above, and CSP and RCPP (2021 - \$410K/2022 - \$900K).

* Number reported likely double-counts some landowners due to tracking methods.

LAC DISCUSSION

Summary of Progress

- Local conservation entities' restoration efforts go above and beyond agricultural water quality regulations, creating a larger watershed benefit. They combine restoration dollars with NRCS dollars to conduct instream, floodplain, and riparian restoration along with on-farm improvements that benefit the landowner.
- The NRCS Conservation Implementation Strategy that includes the Catherine Creek SIA addresses numerous natural resource concerns including irrigation upgrades, floodplain reconnection, and tree and shrub establishment in riparian areas.
- Local landowners/operators farming practices have evolved in practices and equipment uses (e.g., no till and cover cropping) that reduces erosion, and improves soil health, water quality, and water quantity.
- The Grande Ronde Model Watershed conducted a monitoring study in the Grande Ronde Valley to investigate if smolt mortality issues were due to poor water quality. Numerous water quality parameters of

concern were analyzed including pesticides, fertilizer, and nutrients. The current data found little concerns regarding water quality, indicating that agriculture is effective at protecting water quality.

- Significant funding opportunities coming in 2024 and 2025 due to the Inflation Reduction Act, which will be funneled through NRCS programs such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program and CSP that will provide opportunities for landowners to make agricultural water quality improvements.
- Landowners are interested in implementing watershed health projects and practices. Some of this beneficial work does not have grant funding sources.
- Progress is being made to address high-flow bank degradation issues.

Impediments

- It is challenging to find funding for stream bank erosion caused by flood impacts and channel avulsion problems unless it can be tied into high priority for fish and in stream benefits.
- There is little restoration funding in the Grande Ronde Valley because it is not a high priority area.
- Local agency offices are understaffed. The workload for planning, designing, and implementing conservation projects is greater than the existing staff can complete. It has been difficult to fill open positions because of several reasons including low offered salaries, high living costs, and lack of interest to move to the area.
- Cost and time for permit requirements has increased over the past few years. Added rules and requirements with intent to protect environmental qualities have done the opposite by hamstringing conservation project planning and efficient application of funding to the ground.
- Wind erosion is a challenge to prevent, particularly if the timing hits right when a crop comes out and before there is a chance to get a cover crop in.

Recommended Modifications and Adaptive Management

- Provide funding for nonconventional type restoration projects (e.g., bank stabilization) in areas with limited or no funding opportunities.
- Encourage agencies to streamline permitting processes.
- Seek opportunities to coordinate with local colleges and promote an intern-type approach to recruit for technical and conservation staff.
- Expedite processes to help utilize and spend the large sum of funds coming through the Inflation Reduction Act (NRCS).

ODA COMPLIANCE ACTIVITIES								
Location	Cases		Site Visits	Agency Actions				
	New	Closed		Letter of Compliance		Pre-Enforcement Notification	Notice of Noncompliance	Civil Penalty
				Already in compliance	Brought into compliance			
Outside SIA	1	2	2	1	0	1	0	0
Within SIA	1	1	4	0	1	1	0	0