



# Umatilla Subbasin Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plan

January 2011

## Umatilla Local Advisory Committee Meets to Review Area Plan

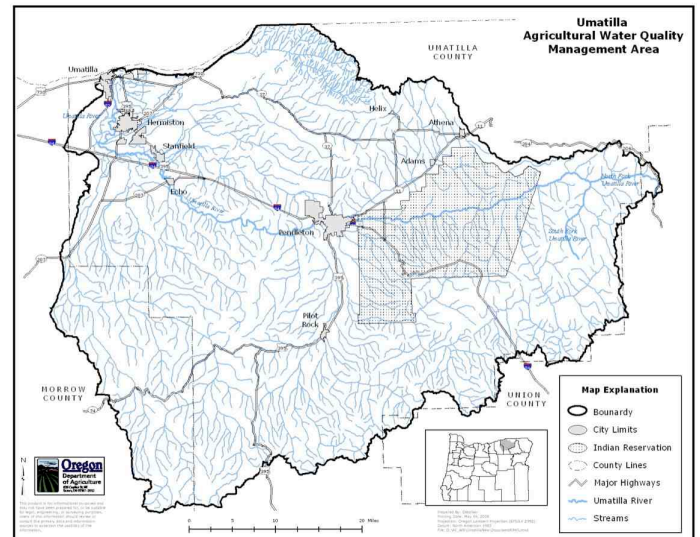
### *Executive Summary*

The fourth biennial review of the Umatilla Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plan was held on January 20, 2011. The Umatilla Local Advisory Committee (LAC) met with the Umatilla County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) to review progress of the Area Plan implementation. LAC members present were: Jim Harris, Bob Lazinka, Clinton Reeder, and Jack Mills. Also attending were representatives from the SWCD, Umatilla Basin Watershed Council (UBWC), and USDA - Agriculture Research Service.

ODA staff led a discussion of the ODA implementation program with a PowerPoint presentation of riparian and compliance issues from around the state. The LAC also reviewed the goals and objectives of the Area Plan and the Area Rules.

The SWCD presented their report of implementation activities conducted by the SWCD, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and UBWC over the past two years. The report included an overview of the education and outreach activities and financial and technical assistance provided to landowners during 2008-2010.

UBWC updated the LAC on the Umatilla Basin cooperative water quality monitoring program.



***The Umatilla Agricultural Water Quality Management Area includes all land that drains into the Umatilla River and all land in Oregon that drains directly to the Columbia River between the Umatilla River and the Walla Walla River.***

Monitoring continues on temperature, sediment, and nitrates. The technical team has nearly completed revision of the long term monitoring plan to determine future monitoring needs and procedures.

### *Summary of progress and impediments to implementation*

LAC members reported several issues that potentially impact water quality in the subbasin. Concern was expressed about the spread of weeds into cropland from riparian buffer areas.

Weed management options, especially with herbicides, are often limited in areas near streams. This results in weed contamination of nearby crops. Also in these areas, there is concern about the proliferation of many wildlife species that often spread weeds and damage crops. This can also be a public safety issue when buffers extend up to roadways near bridges.

Implementation of no-till farming and enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has resulted in large, unbroken expanses of highly flammable grasses, crops or crop residues. Devastating wildfires occur nearly annually that threaten farm crops and buildings. These wildfires are also impacting water quality in streams near burned over areas.

The current and future location of wind tower developments may impact water quality by increasing the potential of soil erosion and delivery of sediment to waterways. Wind tower developments usually contain many miles of roads, for construction and servicing of the towers that serve as conduits for runoff during heavy rains or snow melt. Future development is likely to occur on areas that are steeper, have higher rainfall and shallower soils with higher likelihood of runoff to streams. ODA, the SWCD, and the Umatilla County Planning Department are working on a procedure for consultation to make developers and landowners aware of the responsibility to prevent and control soil erosion.

Lastly, concern was expressed over lack of funding available to support water quality monitoring programs to show that the Agricultural Water Quality Management Program is making a difference in protecting and improving water quality.

### *Background*

The Area Plan was developed by the LAC to identify strategies to reduce water pollution from agricultural lands through a combination of educational programs, monitoring, suggested land treatment, and management activities.

The Area Plan is used by landowners and the SWCD for guidance to solutions for water quality problems and to enhance public awareness and understanding of water quality issues.

In September 1999, the Oregon Board of Agriculture adopted the Area Plan and Oregon Administrative Rules (603-095-0300 thru 0360). The Area Plan and Rules have gone through extensive review and modification since adoption. During the 2002 Biennial Review, LAC members approved rewriting much of the Area Plan to make it more informative and user-friendly and to incorporate information from the Umatilla River Total Maximum Daily Load and the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area. The 2006 Biennial Review resulted in modification of the Area Rules to simplify and clarify the Rules. Those modified Rules were approved on September 19, 2006.

### *Compliance Summary*

No formal complaints were received and investigated during past two years. However, one informal inquiry was received from a member of the Environmental Quality Commission concerned with lack of riparian vegetation in the drainages from cropland north of Pendleton. ODA responded to those concerns by explaining the nature of runoff in those dry drainages and their limited capability to support riparian vegetation. LAC members received a copy of the response.



*Wind towers in wheat fields in northern Umatilla County*

**Implementation Activities**

*Area Plan Goals Summary*

- Promote planning and implementation of scientifically-based conservation practices;
- Create awareness and understanding of water quality issues;
- Invite agricultural community and public involvement;
- Ensure funding and administration of the program.

*Rules Summary*

- Control runoff or discharge of wastes;
- Control soil erosion and sediment delivery;
- Establish and maintain streamside vegetation;
- Control runoff from livestock operations;
- Control irrigation runoff;
- Control runoff of crop nutrients and chemicals;
- Manage drains.

*Implementation Activities*

**Technical Assistance -**

The SWCD and NRCS promote USDA conservation programs to assist landowners to implement Best Management Practices to protect water quality in surface water and groundwater. Program enrollment includes:

- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) – 154,291 ac.
- Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) – 106,949 ac.
- Agricultural Watershed Enhancement Program (AWEP) – 135 ac.
- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) – 2,554 ac.

The SWCD and UBWC assist landowners implement conservation practices funded with non-federal money.

Projects include:

- Direct seed and variable rate fertilizer application;
- Cooperative projects with irrigation districts to replace deteriorating irrigation ditches;
- Off-stream facilities for livestock watering;
- Range enhancement through fencing and reseeding;
- Diversion dam/fish passage improvements;
- Relocation of feedlots;
- Conversion of flood irrigation to sprinkler systems;
- Weed control.

**Financial Assistance -**

The USDA programs provide cost-share payments to aid landowner’s adoption of conservation practices. The SWCD provide grant-writing services to other funding sources to provide incentives or cost-share for conservation practices and to fund outreach activities. Funding sources include the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) 319 program, and the Wildhorse Foundation.

**Education and Outreach -**

The SWCD and partner organizations continue to make implementation of the Area Plan a high priority element of their annual and long range plans. Educational events include:

- Annual weed/crop tours;
- Annual sustainable ag. Forum;
- Monthly newsletters and e-Notes;
- Four workshops;
- Annual outdoor school and watershed field day presentations;
- Clean Water Neighborhood program.



*Watering facility that provides upland water for livestock, reducing grazing pressure near Butter Creek*

**LAC Members**

Robin Fletcher  
 Jim Harris  
 Karl Jensen  
 Bob Lazinka  
 Jack Mills  
 Jeff Newtonson  
 Clinton Reeder



*Water quality testing demonstration to 5<sup>th</sup> graders at 2010 Watershed Field Days*



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## Success Story

The District has been working with the irrigation districts in the Hermiston area to secure funding to improve their irrigation water delivery systems.

The irrigation systems were constructed in the early 1900's and originally delivered water to farmers to be used for flood irrigation in developing the agricultural industry in that area. The irrigation projects were instituted by the federal Bureau of Reclamation and many adjustments have been made over the years to make water available to more landowners, to protect water for instream uses, primarily salmonids, and to install more efficient irrigation systems. Millions of dollars have been spent to provide an exchange of Columbia River water for Umatilla River water to allow water to be left in the river at critical times for salmon.

Still, the 100-year old canals and ditches are the keystone for getting water to the patrons of the irrigation districts. These structures have been repaired and patched for years and continue to lose 30-40% of the water intended for the irrigators. To meet legal water rights, more water must be diverted from the river.

Over the past three years, grant funds have been obtained to fund the installation of pipelines to replace the old leaky ditches. The Hermiston Irrigation District and the Stanfield Irrigation District have replaced a total of over 39,500 feet of ditches, improving water delivery to 429 irrigators. At the same time, the irrigators have been required to change their irrigation systems from flood to sprinkler.

The efficiencies gained here will allow water users to receive their entire water rights for the full season as well as making the stored water available for longer irrigation seasons. But most importantly, these more efficient systems will free up stored water in McKay Reservoir to be used for critical fish passage and improved water quality in the Umatilla River.

## Monitoring Summary

Water quality in the Umatilla River subbasin has been intensively monitored, since the mid 1990's, by a partnership of federal, state, and local agencies under coordination of the broad-based Water Quality Technical Committee. Current monitoring efforts began during the development of the TMDL and Water Quality Management Plan (2001) and have continued to evaluate progress toward achievement of those goals.

The Umatilla water quality monitoring program includes investigations of sedimentation, nitrate, bacteria, temperature, land use practices, and stream channel morphology. While basin-wide monitoring is continuing, on a limited scale, under numerous agency programs, the Wildhorse Creek watershed has been the focus area of the monitoring program. A majority of the watershed is farmland, which allows for evaluating the effectiveness of changing farming practices over time.

The technical team has nearly completed revision of the long term monitoring plan to determine future monitoring needs and procedures.

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**[http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/NRD/water\\_quality\\_front.shtml](http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/NRD/water_quality_front.shtml)**