

CROOKED RIVER
Agricultural Water Quality Management Area
Biennial Review Report to the Board of Agriculture & ODA Director
Submitted by the Local Advisory Committee (LAC)



Meeting Date: December 6, 2023
LAC Members Present: Greg Bedortha (Chair), Bruce Scanlon, John Morgan, and Libby Rodgers
Reporting Timeframe: January 1, 2020, through December 31, 2022

PROGRESS MEASUREMENT		
<i>This was a Light Review; quantitative details related to Measurable Objectives are not reported at Light Reviews.</i>		
Activities (Crook County SWCD, Crooked River WC, NRCS)	No.	Discussion
Events That Actively Engage Landowners*	5	Fiftieth anniversary celebration with guest speaker discussing wolves and their potential impact on the landscape including shifts in grazing animal distribution away from riparian areas; community watershed series covering Water, Recreation and Fire, which was open to the public but not well attended. The pandemic and the drought affected active events.
Landowners Participating in Active Events*	57	LAC discussed that ODA revised how these metrics were counted, altering what the data for this report represents.
Landowners Provided Technical Assistance*	760	This is an estimate. Additionally, collating this data was complicated by ODA revising the definition of this metric mid reporting period.
Site Visits	474	
Conservation Plans Written	9	Primarily in the Lower Crooked River valley as part of Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program.
Funding Applications Submitted	46	Note: NRCS wrote approximately 60 program enrollment applications that are not included per ODAs activity’s description.
Funding Applications Awarded**	16	This number is only a portion the actual awards. ODA recently began requesting tracking of this metric. The 16 noted awards were primarily from Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board grants with some federal included. There were an additional 52 NRCS contracts awarded.

* In July 2021 ODA definition for these metrics was redefined.

** In July 2021 ODA began tracking this metric.

LAC DISCUSSION
Summary of Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over the past several decades streamside vegetation has greatly improved in the majority of the Crooked River Management Area. Also, resilience of stream flows has improved, and beavers have returned. It takes a while to see the progress from management changes that landowners have made but over time there is a difference. In general, the local community of this Management Area is very well informed about watershed health. The Crooked River Watershed Council (WC) continues to collect baseline water quality data covering 10 sites and eight water quality parameters. This project is Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Focused Investment Partnership-funded and will be completed in 2026. This monitoring is being done ahead of restoration work and will help illuminate project effectiveness. The Crooked River WC initiated a contract with United States Geological Survey to identify sources of nitrogen in the watershed using an isotope method (e.g., agriculture, municipal wastewater, septic systems, natural sources, etc.). There is a lot of beaver dam analog (BDA) work happening in the Management Area with large groups of volunteers and conservation organization staff working on the installation of BDAs. BDAs are a great low-cost tool that can help reconnect riparian areas and increase water retention.

- Lytle Creek is a high contributor of nitrogen to the Crooked River. Crooked River WC and partners are implementing a pilot project to determine if filtering through sand treatment area will remove or reduce the amount of nitrogen. They are also, experimenting with wetlands to treat and improve water quality.
- Crook County now has a dedicated Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) technician (used to be one technician for Jefferson, Deschutes, and Crook counties). CREP offsets the costs of removing riparian areas from agricultural use.
- The Crooked River Water Quality Partnership is a cohesive group with comprehensive membership and is set up for success to identify sources of water quality concerns, communicate that information with the community, and implement solutions to effectively address the concerns.

Impediments

- The biggest limiting factor in securing and implementing grant-funded projects on the ground is the local staff capacity for project planning, grant writing, and project management.
- The next limiting factor in project work is finding contractors to do the on the groundwork.
- Lack of forest management sets up situation where dead snags from overstocked forests and or wildfires causes trees to fall on fence lines impeding effective grazing management.
- Agricultural landowners/operators have done a lot of great work and the watershed has improved, but there is still the challenge of figuring out the best way to communicate and share that with others.
- Overstocked forest and juniper are a big challenge to watershed health.
- Dry Canyon is the second largest nitrogen contributor.

Recommended Modifications and Adaptive Management

- It often is great timing to implement BDA projects following forest treatments to reconnect a stream with its floodplain meadows.
- The LAC recommends that the State Board of Agriculture tour agricultural lands and watersheds for the on-the-ground perspective and to better understand local agriculture and resource issues.
- The LAC recommends ODA seek funding to conduct more agricultural water quality monitoring. This would assist ODA and local partners in long-range planning, as well as long-term monitoring efforts, and in being able to show the successes of landowner agricultural water quality improvements.
- Choose appropriate indicators and metrics to track changes over time. If ODA is not seeing improvements in the metrics it is measuring, there could be other ways to measure successes.

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	5	5	3	3	0	0	0	0
Within SIA	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A