

MIDDLE DESCHUTES

Agricultural Water Quality Management Area

Biennial Review Report to the Board of Agriculture and ODA Director

Submitted by the Local Advisory Committee (LAC)



OREGON
DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE

Meeting Date: April 1, 2025
LAC Members Present: Ben Walen, Collin Cowsill, Josh Bailey, Lori Campbell, and Mickey Killingsworth
Reporting Timeframe: Calendar years 2023 – 2024

PROGRESS MEASUREMENT		
<i>This was a Light Review; progress toward Measurable Objectives will be reported at the next Full Review.</i>		
Activities Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District	#	Description
Events That Actively Engage Landowners	6	Farm Fair; landowner meeting in Ashwood where 20 landowners came to learn about weeds and range management; June 11 Soil Health workshop; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) local work group meeting.
Landowners Participating in Active Events	165	
Landowners Provided Technical Assistance*	85	Technical assistance provided in Ashwood; North Unit Irrigation District (NUID); Upper Willow Creek; Campbell Creek; and Trout Creek.
Site Visits	108	Upper Willow Creek; Campbell Creek; and Trout Creek.
Conservation Plans Written	21	Vegetation management plan for Campbell Creek.
Funding Applications Submitted	36	Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) small grants • 1 Strategic Implementation Area restoration grant • Pesticide Stewardship Partnership grant • EPA Toxics grant • 1 OWEB technical assistance grant • 1 The Nature Conservancy/Portland General Electric restoration grant for Trout Creek
Funding Applications Awarded	16	See above

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

LAC DISCUSSION
Summary of Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SIA monitoring is successfully showing with nitrate, phosphorus, and total suspended solids (TSS) data the importance of keeping soil on fields and out of the water. • The Middle Deschutes Pesticides Stewardship Partnership is addressing issues effectively. • The Jefferson County agricultural Drought resiliency plan, facilitated by Jefferson County SWCD, has incredible participation and momentum, especially in croplands and outreach. • NUID is doing an amazing job making water available and accessible for patrons. The district is being proactive with automation and conservation efforts. • It seems as if there is more and more openness from landowners to trying new things and adapting to new conditions. • Jefferson County farmers are early adopters of new technologies and methods.
Impediments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drought conditions are changing management practices in the Management Area and making irrigation upgrades cost-prohibitive. These upgrades are often needed to protect water quality in the Management Area. • It is challenging to find funding sources outside of NRCS to help with irrigation upgrades. Infrastructure installation is costly.

- A lack of funding for cleaning out irrigation ponds is a challenge. Ponds fill up with sediment and allow for less and less water capture. This makes less water available to the landowner.
- The high cost of living and low pay makes it challenging to keep staff on board.
- The LAC would like to see more funding for weed abatement. Such efforts are often a component of a larger program proposal and not often a primary target.
- It is challenging to convince landowners to change their ways in terms of pesticide applications, even when there is sound evidence that new ways could improve yields and water quality protection.
- The LAC is concerned about conversion of farmland into residential: Jefferson County's economy is based on agriculture; if agriculture leaves the county the economy suffers and makes it potentially harder for remaining landowners to implement water quality work.
- The likelihood of new farmers taking over Jefferson County's agricultural legacy is decreasing based on cost of establishing and running an agricultural operation. This limits new ideas and new management perspectives that could have benefits for water quality.

Recommended Modifications and Adaptive Management

- Unify pesticide application recommendations (what pesticide companies recommend compared to what water quality protection requires) with the goal to make the information as easily accessible to the landowner as possible.
- Funding availability for irrigation infrastructure and modernization. Due to high cost, landowners who may be willing to make changes are financially unable in a lot of cases.
- Fewer restrictions on OWEB funding for irrigation upgrades.
- If possible, fill data gaps from partner data collection efforts.
- Get drought work into the Area Plan; a lot of grant funding sources ask if landowners are following a plan. It would be nice if the goals from the drought work group were aligned with and captured in the Area Plan.
- Plan a fall meeting with updates on key long-term LAC issues and a water quality tour.

ODA COMPLIANCE ACTIVITIES

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