

# LOWER JOHN DAY RIVER

## 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:** October 1, 2025

**LAC Members Present:** Rich Harper, John Anderson, and Wally Powell

**Reporting Timeframe:** January 2024 through June 2025

### PROGRESS MEASUREMENT

#### Strategic Implementation Area (SIA): Hay Creek

In 2024, the Hay Creek SIA was initiated with Gilliam Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) serving as lead district. ODA evaluated approximately 113,288 acres of agricultural land and 685 miles of agricultural streams to identify water quality concerns and conservation opportunities. Through this assessment, ODA identified 210 landowners likely in compliance, 19 restoration opportunities, one compliance opportunity, and one potential violation.

#### Strategic Implementation Area: Thirtymile Creek

Initiated in 2018, the Thirtymile Creek SIA was led by Gilliam SWCD. The compliance phase is complete and restoration and monitoring activities continue within the SIA through collaboration efforts among the district and partners.

Management Area-wide Activities (Sherman and Gilliam SWCDs)	#	Description
Events That Actively Engage Landowners	11	Events Held: 11 local meetings for producers, distribution of quarterly newsletters, and information displays at the local fair.
Landowners Participating in Active Events	438	Landowners who attended and participated in local SWCD events.
Landowners Provided Technical Assistance	309	Landowners received technical assistance on a variety of project types: process-based stream restoration; riparian and cross fence; cattle virtual fencing; range planting; noxious weed and annual grass control; stormwater runoff management; riparian restoration and planting; livestock water facilities; firebreaks; brush management; and haul road erosion control.
Site Visits	92	Site visits were conducted for project evaluation and development across a wide range of conservation practices.
Conservation Plans Written	0	
Funding Applications Submitted	33	Grant applications were submitted to support a range of restoration focused projects for private landowners.
Funding Applications Awarded	33	Applications were awarded to implement a variety of restoration-focused projects including stream restoration, including haul-road surface improvements for erosion control; cross and boundary fencing; livestock water facilities; a roof-runoff collection system; riparian planting and weed management; and 172 acres of sagebrush removal.

### LAC DISCUSSION

#### Summary of Progress

##### Sherman Soil and Water Conservation District

- Outreach and Engagement: Hosted seven neighborhood meetings, a local fair display, and distributed a quarterly newsletter, reaching a total of 191 landowners.
- Funding and Implementation: Submitted and received 18 funded applications supporting fencing; eight haul-road erosion-control projects; weed management; a roof-runoff collection system; 172 acres of sagebrush removal; 1,576 feet of cross-boundary fencing; and livestock water developments, including a pumping plant, spring development, pipeline, and trough.

- **Technical Support and Site Visits:** Provided technical assistance to 60 landowners and 31 site visits on a range of conservation and infrastructure needs including fencing, haul roads, riparian restoration, water developments, and vegetation management.
- **Additional Projects:** Advanced the Lower Grass Valley Canyon Pilot BDA project with 0.5 mile of process-based restoration and supported Farm Bill programs (CSP, EQIP, CRP, CREP) through the NRCS Technical Assistance Grant.

#### **Gilliam Soil and Water Conservation District**

- **Outreach and Landowner Engagement:** Conducted four outreach events that engaged 247 landowners, provided technical assistance to 249 landowners, and completed 61 site visits to evaluate conservation and restoration opportunities.
- **Project Funding and Implementation:** Submitted 15 successful funding applications for on-the-ground work; completed the Thirtymile SIA and advanced the Hay Creek SIA; implemented multiple small grants (including six spring developments, 4,856 feet of pipeline, 21,216 feet of cross-fence, and 40 acres of juniper removal); and continued extensive process-based restoration with 198 structures (7,053 feet) constructed in 2024–2025 and seven past BDA projects totaling 1,150 structures across 28.76 miles.
- **Major Programs and Outcomes:** Closed out Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) Focused Investment Proposal (FIP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funding pools with significant accomplishments, including five FIP projects and 11 RCPP contracts installing 15 spring developments, 26 troughs, 37,000 feet of pipeline, and 37,473 feet of cross fence. The Comstock Place Based Restoration project on Thirtymile Creek showed substantial ecological improvements, including increased channel complexity, backwater habitat, bars, dams, jams, and valley-bottom inundation.
- **Forward-Looking Initiatives:** Supported wildfire recovery through the Upper Rock Creek virtual fence project, deploying 1,065 collars, 10 mobile antennas, and establishing a basin-wide monitoring and outreach framework, while planning future investments, including a 2026 OWEB FIP and a new RCPP submission this fall, with a legislative tour scheduled for October 20, 2025.

#### **Impediments**

**Permitting challenges:** Significant delays and obstacles with Oregon Department of State Lands, Department of Environmental Quality, and tribal cultural reviews.

**High costs:** Increasing permit fees and staff time requirements are straining project budgets.

**Limited federal resources:** Reduced federal support is hindering project implementation and permitting.

#### **Recommended Modifications and Adaptive Management**

**Legislative solutions:** Explore potential legislative actions to improve accountability and efficiency in permitting processes with agencies.

**Leverage experience:** Apply lessons learned from past permitting challenges to streamline future efforts.

**High level advocacy:** Build and utilize strong relationships (e.g. Wally's previous work with Oregon Wheat Growers) to promote legislative and policy change, with support from Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, landowners, and partners.

**Expand water quality monitoring:** Increase water quality monitoring beyond the mainstem river to better assess conditions and restoration priorities. Establish additional monitoring sites within the lower John Day to more accurately represent area conditions and guide water quality restoration.

**Resource needs:** Secure increased funding and capacity for SWCDs and partners to support monitoring and project implementation.

**Innovative tools:** Continue supporting the virtual fence project, which is showing promising early results with landowners.

#### **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