

NORTH AND MIDDLE FORKS 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)



Meeting Date: July 10, 2025
LAC Members Present: Gary Adams, Jarred Livingston, John Zakrajsek, Mike and Shirley Titus, and Zach Cunningham
Reporting Timeframe: October 2022 through December 2024

PROGRESS MEASUREMENT

Focus Areas: Cottonwood and Fox Creek

Cottonwood Focus Area
The Focus Area was closed in 2023 due to a shift in priorities from sediment management to water temperature and water quantity concerns.

Fox Creek Focus Area
Measurable Objective: Streamside Biomass Assessment (SBA)
Pre-assessment and interim assessments were completed in 2015 and 2018, respectively. A post-assessment will be completed once new LiDAR data becomes available, though the timeline is currently uncertain. Between 2023 and 2025, monitoring was implemented to test alternative riparian plant protection methods, which have shown success at reducing wildlife browse. Several large-scale stream restoration projects are also proposed to improve water quality in Fox Creek.

Strategic Implementation Area (SIA): Camas Creek

In 2024, the Camas Creek SIA evaluation by ODA assessed 98,944 acres of agricultural land and 653 miles of agricultural streams to identify water quality concerns and conservation opportunities.
Measurable Objective: By September 4, 2028, all 3 tax lots identified as a Compliance Opportunity will be downgraded to Restoration Opportunity or Likely in Compliance.
Monitoring Objectives: From 2026 to 2028, this project will monitor temperature trends and assess *E. coli* levels at five publicly accessible stream sites to establish baseline conditions and evaluate the extent of TMDL impairments. If elevated *E. coli* levels are detected, environmental DNA (eDNA) testing will be used to identify primary sources.

Management Area Restoration Projects (1997-2023 Oregon Watershed Restoration Inventory)

- 211 miles of streamside vegetation were installed or enhanced on agricultural lands.
- 44 miles of instream habitat was improved.
- 15 cfs of instream flow was enhanced over 52 miles of stream.
- 33 fish passage projects were installed enhancing over 326 stream miles.
- 261 acres of wetlands were enhanced.

Water Quality Monitoring

- Temperature: Out of 187 total sites, 10 are attaining the standard, 55 are not attaining (122 unassessed). Of the 34 sites with sufficient data for trend analysis, 25 are improving, nine are degrading and one no trend.
- Bacteria: One site is attaining the standard.
- Dissolved oxygen: One site is attaining the standard (12 unassessed). One trend site is improving.
- John Day Basin Temperature TMDL replacement is required to be complete by fall of 2027.

Management Area-wide Activities (Grant, Monument, and Umatilla SWCDs, NRCS, NFJDWC)	#	Description
Events That Actively Engage Landowners	10	Public informational meetings for restoration and post-fire recovery.
Landowners Participating in Active Events	123	
Landowners Provided Technical Assistance*	239	Technical assistance for seeding, stream and riparian restoration projects, noxious weed management, juniper removal, and spring developments.

Site Visits	257	Restoration projects and conservation plans.
Conservation Plans Written	101	EQIP, CSP, RCPP, and stewardship plans.
Funding Applications Submitted	192	OWEB and various NRCS programs.
Funding Applications Awarded	132	Restoration and technical assistance grants.

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

LAC DISCUSSION			
Summary of Progress			
Monument Soil and Water Conservation District			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 2024 Court Rock Fire burned approximately 20,000 acres, advancing up to 4 miles in a single day. Healthy riparian areas within the burn perimeter experienced only light impacts. The SWCD is serving as the post-wildfire recovery fiscal sponsor for the John Day Basin partners affected by the 2024 fire season, with funding from Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB). Restoration projects identified from post-wildfire assessments will prioritize riparian restoration and erosion control to protect water quality. An Area Plan measurable objective has been established to assess riparian areas on private ag lands throughout the Management Area, helping to identify and prioritize future restoration work. In the Cottonwood and Fox watersheds, planning is underway for 12 miles of instream habitat and riparian restoration, combined with upland improvements such as juniper removal. To date, 5,000 upland acres have been treated. Strong partnerships have been essential to the success of restoration projects. 			
Natural Resources Conservation Service			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding from NRCS has been instrumental in supporting wildfire recovery efforts on private lands affected by the Battle Mountain Complex, Court Rock, Rail Ridge, and Fall fires. 			
Other			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The John Day Partnership has successfully built capacity and completed numerous restoration and monitoring projects with funding from the OWEB Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) program. The Partnership is now preparing to apply for a second FIP grant to continue and expand these efforts. 			
Impediments			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 2024 wildfires burned upland and riparian vegetation on both private agricultural and public lands, likely degrading water quality through increased sediment runoff and elevated stream temperatures due to the loss of riparian vegetation. Heavily burned areas may take decades to fully recover. State and federal permitting and compliance processes, both regulatory and cultural, are taking significantly longer, delaying stream restoration projects by two to three times compared to recent years. These delays stall critical water quality improvements. Streamlining the process is essential to maintain momentum and support accelerated recovery. 			
Recommended Modifications and Adaptive Management			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional information, including assessment and ongoing monitoring, is needed to evaluate the 2024 wildfire impacts on water quality on private agricultural lands. Documenting impacts such as sedimentation, riparian loss, and stream temperature changes is essential to guide next steps for wildfire recovery. Expanded water temperature monitoring is needed throughout the Management Area to better understand if, and how, agriculture impacts water quality. 			

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