

MOLALLA/PUDDING/FRENCH PRAIRIE/NORTH SANTIAM SUBBASINS

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: January 24, 2024
LAC Members Present: Joan Zuber and Ed Beitel
Reporting Timeframe: Calendar years 2021-2023

PROGRESS MEASUREMENT

Management Area

Measurable Objective: N/A

Focus Area: Headwaters of the Pudding River

Measurable Objective: Increase agricultural land with cover by 500 acres by 2025.

Milestone: A 2023 assessment is ongoing.

Current Conditions or Assessment Results:

- 2021: Focus area opened and bare ground assessment completed.
- 2021-23: Outreach to focus area and industry groups about cover crops including Marion SWCD's Cover Crop Assistance Grant.
- 2023: Focus area continues in Headwaters of the Pudding River.

End of 2023: The SWCD is in the middle of a bare ground assessment as the milestone assessment as it moves into the 2023-2025 biennium of this focus area.

Activities and Accomplishments: Outreach to individual landowners and industry groups focusing on bare ground with cover crops. Marion SWCD's Cover Crop Assistance Grant was voted to be a permanent program by the SWCD board. Over the 2021-23 biennium, four cover crop grants were awarded in the focus area and one grant was awarded for riparian improvements.

Strategic Implementation Area (SIA): Howell-Prairie

ODA Measurable Objective: By November 4, 2024, all 43 tax lots identified as a Potential Violation or a Compliance Opportunity will be downgraded to Restoration Opportunity or Likely in Compliance.

SWCD Objectives:

- Develop an education and outreach/stakeholder engagement plan on topics impacting agricultural water quality within the watershed.
- Provide technical assistance to landowners identified through ODA SIA evaluation to address water quality concerns.
- Develop a long-term water quality monitoring plan for the SIA.

Current Conditions: SIA is open and SIA work is continuing. An adaptive management discussion will be available at the next biennial review.

Progress Toward Measurable Objective: 100% of Potential Violations contacted and 20% of Compliance Opportunities completed/downgraded. ODA currently working on contacting Compliance Opportunities.

Management Area-wide Activities (Marion, Linn, and Clackamas SWCDs)	#	Discussion
Events That Actively Engage Landowners	29	<p>Marion SWCD held a series of workshops and a field day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather and Climate Data for Farm Planning and Management. • Raptor and Beneficial Insects – Alternative Pest Control. This workshop promoted pesticide reduction by using biological control, and provided material on cover crops and soil health. • Soil Health Principles — Improve Farm Operations. This was an outdoor presentation including a demonstration of the rainfall simulator with five vegetative cover treatments (including no treatment-bare soil). • Cover Crop Field Day for perennial crops held at two Clackamas County hazelnut operations near Molalla.

		<p>Experts from OSU and GoSeed joined and talked about their experiences with cover crops.</p> <p>Clackamas SWCD partnered with OSU on a cover crop field day for annual crops.</p> <p>Clackamas SWCD in partnership with OSU and Clackamas Community College, held its annual Small Farm School offering education to small acreage farmers.</p>
Landowners Participating in Active Events	906	Some events are open to all, so landowner attendance is specifically from this Management Area.
Landowners Provided Technical Assistance	421	Assistance provided by SWCDs via walk-in, phone call, contact cards, via the website, or email.
Site Visits	185	
Conservation Plans Written	4	
Funding Applications Submitted	55	
Funding Applications Awarded	49	

LAC DISCUSSION

Summary of Progress

The SWCDs have made progress in services provided and capacity as well as inter-district networking. However, traction is being lost in landowner contacts. Outward communication is where focus is needed.

Impediments

- The time it takes to maintain riparian plantings (hand weeding, spot spraying, time commitment to maintain additional vegetation) makes it challenging to convince landowners to accept restoration projects.
- Current offerings of grants do not provide enough money to cover the full cost of projects due to post-Covid inflation.
- It can be hard to find approved native plants, especially in small amounts. Natural Resources Conservation Service and SWCDs confirm that the quantity required for minimum orders is a barrier to ordering from wholesale nurseries.
- Staffing issues, or constant turnover of staff, means landowners don't know SWCD staff and therefore are less willing to work with them.
- Newspapers are no longer a reliable source for communicating events and news to landowners.

Recommended Modifications and Adaptive Management

- LAC recommends the SWCDs network with each other to place group orderings of plants from wholesale nurseries, help to help manage grants and projects for each other. Also, that the SWCDs work with service providers (irrigation, field service providers, etc.) to help with outreach to landowners.
- Social media is the new way to communicate with larger audiences; higher level agencies and the whole conservation community need to be sharing and amplifying each others' content.
- For landowners within Conservation Reserve Enhancement Project, Oregon Department of State Lands doesn't allow heavy machinery to maintain the project (removing large wood, clearing vegetation, etc.). In the grant agreements for restoration projects, small power tools such as weed whackers often are allowed, but larger equipment is often needed as well. The need for larger equipment can mean extra work writing applications for permits and exceptions. Large equipment can be required for projects such as large woody debris emplacement or removal of vegetation in difficult-to-reach areas.
- SWCDs need more funding available or incentives for cover cropping and other beneficial practices vs. technical assistance for initial implementation. SWCDs need incentives for landowners to incorporate beneficial practices into their management strategies.

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	9	2	14	0	1	8	0	0
Within SIA	12	3	19	1	1	15	1	0