

GREATER HARNEY BASIN
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 14, 2023
LAC Members Present: Ron Whiting, Karen Moon, Steven Doverspike, Brett Seward, Steve Grasty, Steve Rickman, Alec Oliver, Dave Banks, Brandon Haslick, Chad Boyd, Dustin Johnson, and Rachel Beaubien
Reporting Timeframe: July 1 2021, through June 30, 2023

PROGRESS MEASUREMENT

This was a Light Review; quantitative details related to Measurable Objectives are not reported at Light Reviews.

Activities: (Harney and Grant SWCDs, Harney WC, NRCS)	#	Discussion
Events That Actively Engage Landowners	6	Agricultural Water Quality report at annual meeting; open house in Fields; hosted a tour for landowners and place-based planning members to learn about how the Silvies River flows throughout its floodplain.
Landowners Participating in Active Events	15	Events usually bring the common landowners around so number of landowners to number events are well balanced.
Landowners Provided Technical Assistance	371	Technical assistance (TA) come in form of phone calls, maps, walk ins.
Site Visits	224	Project sites for resource concerns related to water facilities, weed control, water efficiency, juniper thinning; four off-site water developments will be installed to reduce livestock impact on riparian areas; irrigation infrastructure post-project monitoring.
Conservation Plans Written	69	Plans written from TA, monitoring, and restoration grants as well as Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) projects or small grants and through various NRCS programs; 96 meetings held for a large collaborative effort for Community Based Water Planning for which a draft has been completed.
Funding Applications Submitted	73	Thirteen projects were submitted within area and through various NRCS programs; an Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) grant was submitted for the water developments; large OWEB grant for Silvies Subbasin irrigation structure design.
Funding Applications Awarded	66	8 water facilities; 2,900 pipeline water facility; 1 TA for engineer designs for stream restoration on 6 miles of stream; and various NRCS programs. An OWEB grant was approved for the installation of the water developments. Silvies Subbasin irrigation grant awarded.

LAC DISCUSSION

Summary of Progress

Greater Harney Basin Agricultural Water Quality Area Plan targets have been achieved and surpassed, which was helped by additional conservation agencies providing data for this reporting period. The LAC readily identified additional factors of progress and success. Landowners in the Management Area are more proactive than reactive, which contributes to successful land stewardship. Landowners and local conservation agencies are effective at engagement in this Management Area.

An advantage that enables successful engagement in this basin is that the population is sparse and the type of agriculture across the Management Area is similar. Also, neighbors are interested in collaborating across landscapes, which in turn facilitates ease of planning and implementing projects. For example, the watershed council, partners, and landowners have been working on community-based planning efforts across boundaries and this work benefits agricultural water quality goals. Additionally, today more landowners are interested and engaging in grant funding programs to make watershed health improvements than there used to be 20 years ago. Some landowners may prefer working with one entity over another. Some may not be aware there is a range of

opportunities across different agencies. Trout Creek, and other sub watersheds of this Management Area, have improved substantially in the past 50 years. But the LAC is unsure how to document the past work and improvements that have occurred to be able to show this to others.

Impediments

Discussion occurred on how best to report and show the improvements and practices that landowners implement to maintain the health of the watershed and water quality. In reviewing the activities reported above, it was noted that there is a data gap for the watershed health improvements that landowners implement on their own. Landowners at the meeting said they have implemented projects and/or made operational changes that benefit watershed health but did so on their own without grant funding or technical assistance from conservation entities.

The LAC questioned how best to capture the effectiveness of management practices utilized to maintain or improve water quality. Landowners also expressed challenge in knowing how much is enough. For example, if a landowner wants to assess the health and function of their riparian areas, how many stems/square feet indicated a healthy functioning riparian area? An assessment called Threat Based Management for Pacific Northwest Sagebrush Lands is currently being developed with the intent to serve as a guide so that land managers (e.g., agricultural landowners/operators) can quickly and easily assess stream reaches and identify healthy areas and where the weak points are that could benefit from management input to maintain watershed health and function. Technical advisors noted that prevention is usually a lot more effective, and costs significantly less, than repair and restoration.

Recommended Modifications and Adaptive Management

Local conservation entities (e.g., SWCDs, WCs) are typically more successful in working with landowners than state staff. The LAC recommends continuing to follow that model.

Several recommendations were discussed for how to assess and show improvements landowners make. Baseline monitoring is encouraged because it is helpful to establish what the conditions are. It was suggested that ODA present compliance data over the life of the program to help show success of landowners. However, compliance data alone would be limited in reflecting all that landowners have done and are doing to be protective of water quality. Another suggestion was that historical photos and data points is an effective way to show watershed changes over the past 50 years. This can help with other data points that aren't just vegetation. Additionally, assessments utilizing geographic information systems, such as Lidar, may be another way to capture improvements and management practices that landowners implement. Utilizing these types of assessments would help in capturing management practices and project work done with both grant funding and improvements landowners make on their own.

Because longtime local landowners and local technical advisors know firsthand the extent of improvements agricultural landowners have made over the past several decades, a discussion ensued of how best to tell the story of agriculture's resource conservation in the Management Area. One challenge noted is that agencies and the public outside of the area may lack understanding of the local ecology and local agriculture. It was suggested that Oregon Public Broadcasting's Oregon Field Guide would be a great place to reach the public beyond this Management Area. It was noted that much progress has been made through programs other than Agricultural Water Quality, such as the High Desert Partnership, Sage Grouse Initiative, etc., which could be tapped for the portions of these programs that overlap with Agricultural Water Quality goals to tell a more comprehensive story of landowner's progress. Harney SWCD suggested they will work with ODA to create an outreach campaign of the successes since the inception of the Agricultural Water Quality Program.

The LAC also discussed that there is a lot of water quality data that is housed across numerous entities, which would be helpful to house in one location. The LAC recommends that state agencies and other publicly funded entities be required to provide that data in one location.

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	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Within SIA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA