

# OWYHEE

## 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

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| <b>Meeting Date:</b> January 10, 2024   |
| <b>LAC Members Present:</b> Rod Frahm (chair), Lou Wettstein, Vikki Price, and Charles Barlow |
| <b>Reporting Timeframe:</b> Calendar years 2021 and 2022                                      |

### PROGRESS MEASUREMENT

*This was a Light Review; progress toward Measurable Objectives will be reported at the next Full Review.*

| Activities (Owyhee Watershed Council)     | #  | Discussion   |
|---|----|--|
| Events That Actively Engage Landowners    | 3  | Workshops, demonstrations, and tours.  |
| Landowners Participating in Active Events | 25 |  |
| Landowners Provided Technical Assistance* | 28 | Flood to border irrigation conversion; flood to sprinkler irrigation conversion; irrigation ditch piping and tailwater pumpback recovery.                  |
| Site Visits                               | 26 | Site visits for flood to border irrigation conversion, flood to sprinkler irrigation conversion, irrigation ditch piping, and tailwater pumpback recovery. |
| Conservation Plans Written                | 0  |  |
| Funding Applications Submitted            | 23 | Grants written for technical assistance discussed above.   |
| Funding Applications Awarded              | 19 | Grants awarded for technical assistance discussed above.   |

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

### LAC DISCUSSION

#### Summary of Progress

- The 2022 Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) status and trends report is showing that there are several improving water quality trends in the Owyhee Management Area, including *E. coli*, total phosphorus, and total suspended solid concentrations. Owyhee River at Highway 201 is showing improvement in water quality, according to DEQ's 2022 Water Quality Index Report, and showed the strongest trend in improvement in the state.
- Monitoring shows an upward trend in water quality (e.g., *E. coli*), which is likely a result of the numerous projects that landowners and local conservation entities have implemented (e.g., converting flood irrigation to sprinkler).
- Early upland water projects from 20 years ago, such as off-stream watering facilities, jump-started water quality improvement in the Management Area.
- The Owyhee Watershed Council recently completed a database to track all projects that have been completed since 2002, which facilitates ease of tracking and reporting in the Management Area.
- Landowner engagement tends to be more successful with tours (rather than a meeting) and when the local conservation partners collaborate to hold these events. Small grant dollars are another important tool to get landowners engaged.
- Projects that are being completed in the Management Area translate into improved soil conditions. Upcoming infrastructure improvement projects with the Owyhee Irrigation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will reduce erosion, which improves water quality and soil health.

#### Impediments

- Cost of implementation has gone up, specifically material costs (up to four times the amount in the past few years). This has resulted in fewer projects making it to implementation.
- There is a data gap in the Owyhee Watershed Council's database; all other projects being done by other conservation entities are not reflected.
- Local conservation entities and agricultural landowners have utilized Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) small grants to convert flood irrigation systems to sprinkler to address water quality issues that can occur from tailwater runoff. A current proposed rule change to OWEB small grants will likely make

these projects onerous for local entities to implement and will also be considerably less attractive to agricultural landowners.

**Recommended Modifications and Adaptive Management**

- The Malheur SWCD, Owyhee Watershed Council, landowners, and NRCS will work to add projects to the Watershed Council's database to make it more comprehensive of the work that is being done in Malheur County.
- ODA will follow up with local partners to look at focused projects and agricultural water quality focal objectives for the next area plan revisions.
- It is important for western Oregon to recognize and understand that agriculture and the environmental elements (e.g., annual precipitation) are quite different on the east side of Oregon.

**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  | N/A   |        |             |                       |                         |                              |                         |               |