

Final Completion Summary

This project is located East of Mitchell in the Mountain Creek Watershed in Southern Wheeler County in the area known locally as Waterman Flat. Willow Creek runs through the property and drains into Mountain Creek. Mountain Creek drains into Rock Creek and Rock Creek drains into the John Day River. The area has been heavily encroached by Western Juniper, decreasing the production of spring sources and streams, and causing a detrimental impact to Quaking Aspen stands. This has had a negative effect on water quality, quantity, and upland and riparian habitat. This project had the goals of addressing seven limiting factors in the Mountain Creek Watershed, however, a series of staff transitions and not fully discussing the grant funding process/procedures with the landowner led to minimal work being accomplished and cancellation of the grant application. This project accomplished 2 OWEB spring developments, protected one Aspen stand, 22 acres of hand cut Juniper, and 125 acres of mechanical Juniper and 3 spring developments through NRCS. Project partners included OWEB, NRCS, CTWS, Wheeler SWCD, and the landowner.

Background

This project is located in Wheeler County in the Mountain Creek Watershed and the property contains a significant portion of the Fopiano and Willow Creek sub watershed. The Mid-C Recovery plan list Fopiano, Willow, Mountain, and Rock Creek as having a high restoration benefit and as high priority protection reaches. Range and riparian health are one of the biggest challenges landowners in Wheeler County face. The encroachment of juniper and other invasive species combined with past land management and heavy fire suppression have greatly affected the present native rangeland plant community. Years of cattle pressure have damaged the native riparian vegetation communities and allowed for active erosion. Much of the riparian area has juniper within the floodplain severely encroaching native bunchgrass communities and the limited riparian species within Willow Creek. Without brush management practices these native communities will be replaced by invasive annuals. Native grass communities must compete with these species and subsequently suffer losses in health and vigor. These grasses provide the important watershed function of capturing, storing, and safely releasing water [Barret]. Juniper encroachment has also reduced the herbaceous understory which provides a food source for mule deer, elk and small herbivores that require a higher protein forb in their diet. Additionally, Aspen communities provide considerably greater foraging and nesting opportunities for all types of wildlife than sites that have become converted to dense juniper [RF Miller 2001].

Work Done

125 acres of North aspect Western Juniper was treated with a combination of mechanical cut sand pile and chainsaw hands cuts. 3 springs were developed using funding provided by a partnering agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Utilizing funding from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) 22 acres of Western Juniper was hand cut and left lay to provide habitat for small herbivores and upland game birds. An additional 2 springs were developed to NRCS

specifications and one declining Aspen stand was protected with 4 strand barbed wire. In spite of the conservation efforts, the Aspen stand ended up not surviving resulting in an empty enclosure. The Confederate Tribes of Warm Springs (CTWS) did supply Aspen plantings for the project, but as this project led to cancellation the plantings were delivered and used for a different project. The landowner had previously developed a spring within the protected Aspen stand. This will still serve the purpose to protect a developed spring from livestock browse. Even though the project didn't fulfill all the objectives in the purposed application, they have resulted in the preservation of bunchgrass communities allowing them to perform the vital function of capturing, storing, and safely releasing water into the hydrologic system of the Mountain Creek Watershed. The Western Juniper removal has reduced sediment inputs into nearby streams and allowed healthy grasses communities to return. The developed springs have assisted with livestock distribution and grazing management strategies.

Changes from Proposed

There were three SOW juniper removal location changes requested by the landowner who stated that the selected acres projected were too steep, rocky, shallow, and unproductive soils. Wheeler SWCD Conservation Technicians confirmed this, and submitted request with the OWEB regional project manager. Multiple modifications were done due to the landowner finding unsuitable juniper removal locations each time Wheeler SWCD staff provided on site technical assistance.

An additional SOW amendment was made to the project for the CREP component. The riparian component in this project had to go through a series of alternative changes and waiver processes to meet the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) requirements. This made the landowner uncomfortable with the requirements and didn't want to be held liable for not meeting the specifications. Because the CREP program was strongly encouraged to leverage funds and be a match for the upland restoration, the landowner felt pressured into the program making it difficult to proceed with the remaining project components as it was included in the restoration grant.

There were also two time extensions granted to this project in order to completely fulfill project obligations, however, the landowner wasn't able to complete the remaining juniper removal, Aspen protection stands/plantings, and prescribed burn. The landowner was highly skeptical of the large-scale prescribed burn which prevented other components being completed.

Public Awareness or Education

There was no active public awareness involved with this project beyond aspects of the partner funded juniper reduction, which were featured in displays set up at a Wheeler SWCD annual meeting and again at the Wheeler County Fair and Rodeo display booth.

Lessons Learned

The most valuable lesson learned from this project is to ensure the landowners know what they are committing to and how having multiple agencies involved in the project can impact the restoration activity

as a whole. When this project was in the planning phase, the landowner had dealt with so many different agencies that they were excited with the amount of conservation practices that were being thrown at them. However, once the project was awarded and it came own to signing contracts and agreements the landowner did not realize what they committed to and didn't have the knowledge of understanding the timeline and process of each program in the grant and the grant application itself. Starting at a smaller scale would have been more successful and the landowner would have been able to be more involved in the planning process altogether and been successful in implementation.

Additionally, in the planning phase, the CREP program was pushed really hard on the landowner as it would be able to leverage funds and contribute to the match requirement. As this pressured the landowner, they committed unwilling in hopes to have funding for the upland restoration portion of the project. The landowner did not realize even though the CREP program was from a separate funding source, it impacted the whole project as it was reviewed in the grant application. When having multiple agencies involved in the grant application it is extremely important to discuss with the landowner how each agency contributes to the project and how it effects the funders grant requirements, such as, budget, match, and the reviewers ranking process.

Another lesson learned for this project is to seek contractors early in the project. This landowner had been looking for contractors for long periods of time and then when one was hired, the contractor would either be a no show or work minimally and not complete the project components. Having the Wheeler SWCD staff provide technical assistance in looking for contractors relieves stress from the landowner and they can be involved in the process as staff works closely with the landowner and contractor(s).

Lessons learned on behalf of the district is to always take notes from emails, phone calls, site visits, etc. with the landowner and the agencies involved in the project. The Wheeler SWCD has undergone a series of staffing transitions, which led to a lack of communication of where the project was in implementation and what needed to be accomplished. One of the biggest delays in this project was not knowing how to start the prescribed burn process because there was no documentation or correspondence of what needed to be done. It was one year later before anything was accomplished because there was no communication or notes of where the project was at. Having thorough notes would ensure the project is managed properly and will enable staff who inherit projects the resources needed to be successful in managing and implementing.

Recommendations

One recommendation that I would make in correlation to the lessons learned is to not rush the planning process and make sure the landowner is completely involved in the project development. Having multiple one on one conversations and being upfront with the landowner builds a stronger relationship, which is key to creating successful projects.

Aquatic Habitat

Wheeler SWCD has read the Oregon Aquatic Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Guide and all project components are within compliance.

Special Conditions

Special Conditions for this project are fulfilled within the uploads section.

Funding Sources

Source	Identifier	Cash	InKind Type	Inkind
Confed Tribes Warm Springs (CTWS)		\$0.00	Materials	\$500.00
OWEB	218-6009-15626	\$21,245.52		\$0.00
USDA-NRCS	C#820436080NB	\$0.00	Labor	\$863.00
USDA-NRCS		\$48,122.00		\$0.00

Totals

OWEB Amount	Non OWEB Cash	Inkind Total	Non OWEB Amount	OWEB Match	Total Project Cost
\$21,245.52	\$48,122.00	\$1,363.00	\$49,485.00	233.0%	\$70,730.52

Uploaded Files

Image Type	File Name	Description
Photo Point	P8042743.JPG	OWEB spring to be developed.
Photo Point	P5160150.JPG	OWEB spring developed and protected with cut Juniper trees.
Photo Point	P8042755.JPG	Trough location.
Photo Point	P5160169.JPG	Overview of water facility with rock apron, inlet and outlet pipe protected, and animal escape ramp.
Photo Point	P6251609.JPG	Showing juniper canopy cover with healthy bunchgrass communities.
Photo Point	P5160218.JPG	Showing hand cut juniper allowing healthy bunchgrass communities to thrive.
Photo Point	P6251562.JPG	OWEB spring to be developed.
Photo Point	IMG_3821.JPG	OWEB spring developed.
Photo Point	IMG_3816.JPG	Overview of water facility with rock apron and piping protected.
Juniper Management Plan	LTJMP_218-6009_15626_07282022.pdf	Long Term Juniper Management Plan
Map	Photo Point Map (Final).pdf	Photo Point Map
Photo (other)	218-6009_Final_PCR_PhotoReport.pdf	Final PCR Photo Report
Photo (other)	Before_Photo_Report.pdf	Pre Project Photos
Grazing Management Plan	Juniper Butte Ranch Grazing Management Strategy.pdf	Grazing Management Strategy
Federal Lobbying Certificate	Federal Lobbying and Litigation Certificate.pdf	Federal Lobbying Certificate
Exhibit B	218-6009 EXHIBIT B Final.pdf	