

*Wheeler
Soil and Water
Conservation District
Annual Report
2022-2023*

Board of Directors

Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District is led by a seven member board. Directors are elected by the electorate of Wheeler County at the November General Election, which is held during even-numbered years. The Wheeler SWCD Board may appoint a person to fill a board vacancy between elections for the duration of that position's term. Five of the seven positions are classified as zone positions and the other two positions are at-large positions. Director Emeritus and Associate Directors are appointed by the Board to serve two-year terms and do not vote on Board decisions, but are expected to augment the Board's knowledge and experience level and assist with District programs and activities.

Directors

Zone 1 (2026) David Hunt
Zone 2 (2024) Anna Thomas, *Vice Chair*
Zone 3 (2024) Jason Davis, *Sec./Treasurer*
Zone 4 (2024) Zachery Bruce
Zone 5 (2026) Brent Johnson
At-Large 1 (2026) James Collins, *Chair*
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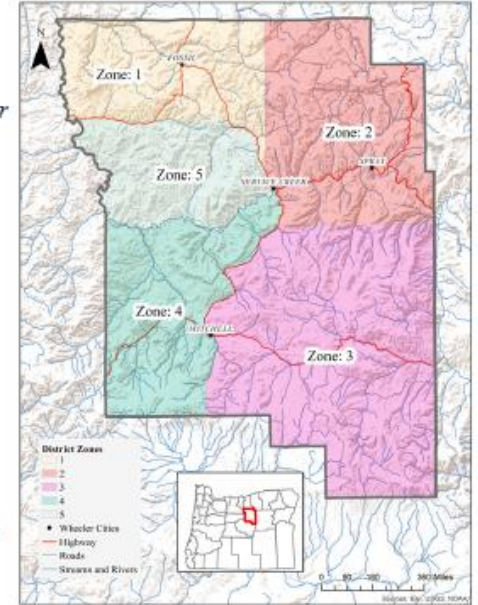
Director Emeritus

Ted Molinari
Jeremiah Holmes

Associate Directors

None

The District appreciates the dedicated service, tireless commitment, and good governance to the staff and landowners!



Who We Are and What We Do

Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District is one of 45 districts in Oregon. Conservation districts are defined by Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) as political subdivisions of state government. The District is not a state agency; rather, it is classified as a special district, a form of local government which is required to follow many of the same laws that govern state agencies. It is specifically governed by ORS 568 and led by a locally elected board of directors.

The District is responsible for conservation project planning, technical assistance, and grant writing for individuals and groups in Wheeler County. The work is accomplished by successfully engaging funding sources and creating partnerships with other agencies and landowners. Wheeler SWCD is also responsible for public education and outreach, project oversight, and serves as the Local Management Agency for the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Ag Water Quality Program.

40535 Hwy 19, Fossil, Oregon 97830 • 541.468.2990 • administration@wheelerswcd.org

Staff and Partners

Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District staff works closely with the Board of Directors to ensure the District operates efficiently to serve our constituents. As a small staffed office, all positions overlap and assist one another. Cross-training has been a core focus in 2022-2023, allowing for smooth transitions during staffing changes.

The District had three full-time staff and one part-time staff during 2022-2023. Additionally, one new full-time staff was hired.

Randy Williams resigned as District Manager in August of 2022 and Cassi Newton served as interim District Manager while maintaining her role as Administrative Manager



until accepting the District Manager position full-time in April. Cassi works closely with the Board of Directors to provide District direction, oversee all operational and fiscal management, run the Education and Outreach program, and supervise office staff. She has maintained her role in board correspondence and training, quarterly and annual reports provided to the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), policy revisions, general office management, and assisting staff with various tasks.

Brooke Moore continued her role as a Conservation Technician II during 2022-2023 fiscal year. Brooke manages the CREP and NRCS programs for the District, having obtained her USDA clearance. She also continued to take the lead on most of the District's projects, ensuring that requirements and deadlines are met; in addition to helping train and assist staff. Brooke is the District's drone operator and renewed her FAA license this year.



Ayla Morehouse accepted the position of Conservation Manager in June, moving to Wheeler County from North Dakota and joining the team in August of 2023. The Conservation Manager position was created through the staffing reorganization adopted by the Board of Directors in April. This position is responsible for supervising the Conservation Technicians, managing all conservation programs and projects, and assisting the District Manager with separation of accounting duties.

Daniel Goodell resigned in September and Kristen Neuburger was promoted from the Conservation Technician Assistant position to fill the Conservation Technician I vacancy. Kristen takes the lead on the District's weed programs and projects. She is a licensed Public Pesticide Applicator and obtained a UTV sprayer setup through grant funding in 2022-2023. Kristen also manages the District's Small Grant Program and assists with all other District projects.



Emma Logan joined the District in March to temporarily fill the Office Assistant position. Emma assisted the Technicians in completing the West Branch Bridge Creek Survey and did many special projects around the office during the four months she was able to help out.

Contact Information

Wheeler SWCD

40535 Hwy 19
Fossil, Oregon 97830
541.468.2990

District Manager
Cassi Newton
administration@wheelerswcd.org

Conservation Manager
Ayla Morehouse
aylamorehouse@wheelerswcd.org

Conservation Technician II
Brooke Moore
brooke.moore@wheelerswcd.org

Conservation Technician I
Kristen Neuburger
kristenneuburger@wheelerswcd.org

USDA-NRCS

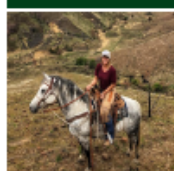
District Conservationist
DelRae Ferguson
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delrae.ferguson@usda.gov

USDA-FSA

Executive Director in training
Adrianna Salutregui
541.384.4251 x105
adrianna.salutregui@usda.gov

Mid John Day Watershed Council

Executive Director
Debbi Bunch
902 Willow Street
PO BOX 265
Spray, Oregon 97874
541.420.4479
debbi@midjohndaywatershed.org



DelRae Ferguson is the NRCS District Conservationist for Wheeler and Gilliam Counties. She coordinates all of the NRCS programs available to Wheeler County landowners.



Kara Lanthorn is the FSA County Executive Director for Wheeler and Gilliam Counties and is currently training Adrianna Salutregui as the next Executive Director. They coordinate the FSA programs, primarily CREP, for Wheeler County landowners.



Debbi Bunch is the Executive Director for the Mid John Day Watershed Council. She works with Wheeler SWCD staff to share information and coordinate projects.

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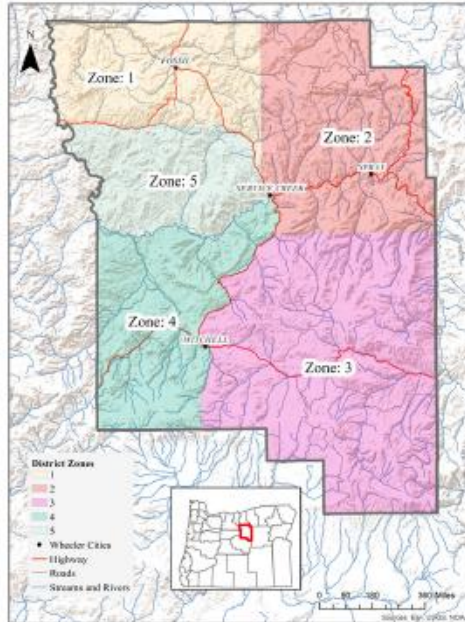
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Financial Statement

Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District does not levy taxes and is 100% grant funded.

All funds obtained by conservation districts, regardless of the source, are public funds, whether they come from public or private sources including grants.

Due to not levying ad valorem tax, Wheeler SWCD is not required to abide by the Local Budget Law of ORS 294.305-294.565. However, Wheeler SWCD prepares an annual budget which is adopted by the Board of Directors and follows the same guiding principles as the Local Budget Law. Directors have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that these public funds are expended in a proper and lawful manner. On July 1, 2022, financial management returned in-house after being contracted externally for four years.

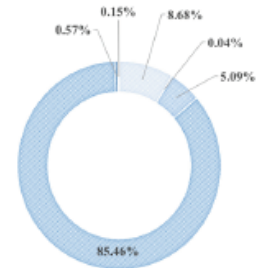
Oregon conservation districts are legal subdivisions of the state, and are subject to the Municipal Audit Law in ORS 297.405-297.555.

Per ORS 568.610, Wheeler SWCD completes a full audit annually. To view a full copy of the annual budget or audit, please visit the District's website or contact the office.

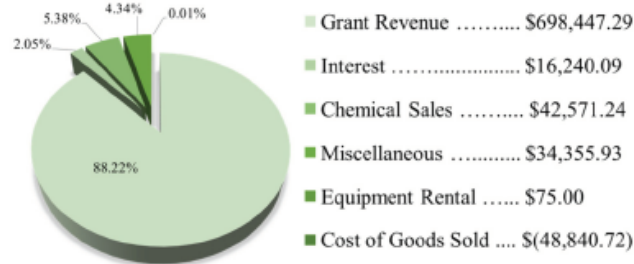
www.wheelerswcd.org/annual-budget-audits
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2022-2023 FUNDING SOURCES

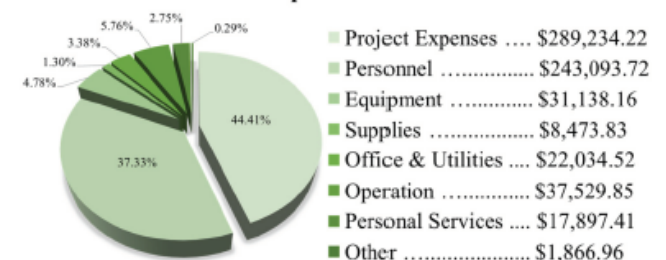
BPA	\$62,226.85
Chamber	\$300.00
ODA	\$36,464.25
OWEB	\$612,418.52
OWF	\$4,095.00
OWRD	\$1,079.99



Revenues



Expenditures



Mass Timber Conservation Community Center

The US Forest Service awarded \$300,000 to Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District for the Wheeler SWCD Mass Timber Facility Project through the Wood Innovation Program on June 9, 2023.

The award was one of 123 projects nationwide totaling more than \$43 million through Community Wood Grants and Wood Innovations Grants - longstanding Forest Service grant programs that promote innovation in wood products and renewable wood energy economies.

Principles

- Create a **centrally located hub** to serve the Wheeler County communities
- Create a **biophilic design** that is responsive to the climate and ecology of the site
- Build with **locally-sourced wood** from SWCD projects and other conservation stewardship efforts
- Support the **local economy** and promote the **environmental health** of the community
- Serve as a showcase for **mass timber** construction methods
- Incorporate **sustainability features** into the design

Site Plan



- SITE ELEMENTS:**
1. Access Drive and Parking Lot
 2. Proposed Building
 3. Septic System
 4. Equipment Storage & AT/Trailer Shed
 5. Chicken Coop
 6. Walk Pump House
 7. Greenhouse
 8. Community Garden
 9. Fruit Trees
 10. Interpretive Trail (BLM)
 11. Site Fence



Long-term aspirations include...

- Large outdoor nature trail that meanders through the property, showcasing educational displays and conservation structural models
- Invitation to BLM to continue the nature trail past property boundary
- Community garden and greenhouse managed by SWCD with schools invited to assist. It will also be open to the general public and an invitation extended to OSU Ext. to co-host classes/events with the SWCD.
- Space for OSU Ext. (and others) to host 4-H and other community education events.

Design Team

- LEVER Architecture
- DCI Engineers
- TallWood Design Institute (TDI)
- University of Oregon
- Mercer Mass Timber
- Vega Civil Engineering
- Understory Landscape Architecture
- Sustainable Northwest
- *More expertise being added as design progresses!*



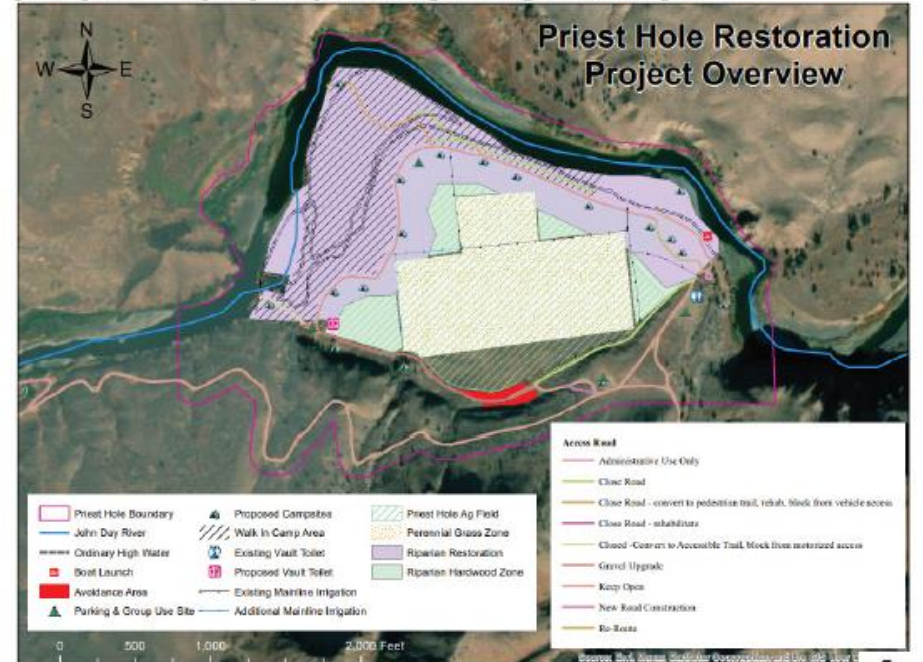
Priest Hole Restoration



Wheeler SWCD was awarded \$1.3 million in partnership with BLM to develop Priest Hole Recreation Site. The developments include pull through campsites, walk-in access to tent camping along the river's edge, ADA accessible day use areas, groupsites, road/access improvements, and a second vault toilet. In addition, riparian plantings, restoration within the ag field will occur, and improvements to the irrigation system.



[Below] Preliminary map - subject to change as designs are developed



2022-2023 Key Accomplishments by the Numbers

84 partnership meetings

133.28 acres of planting

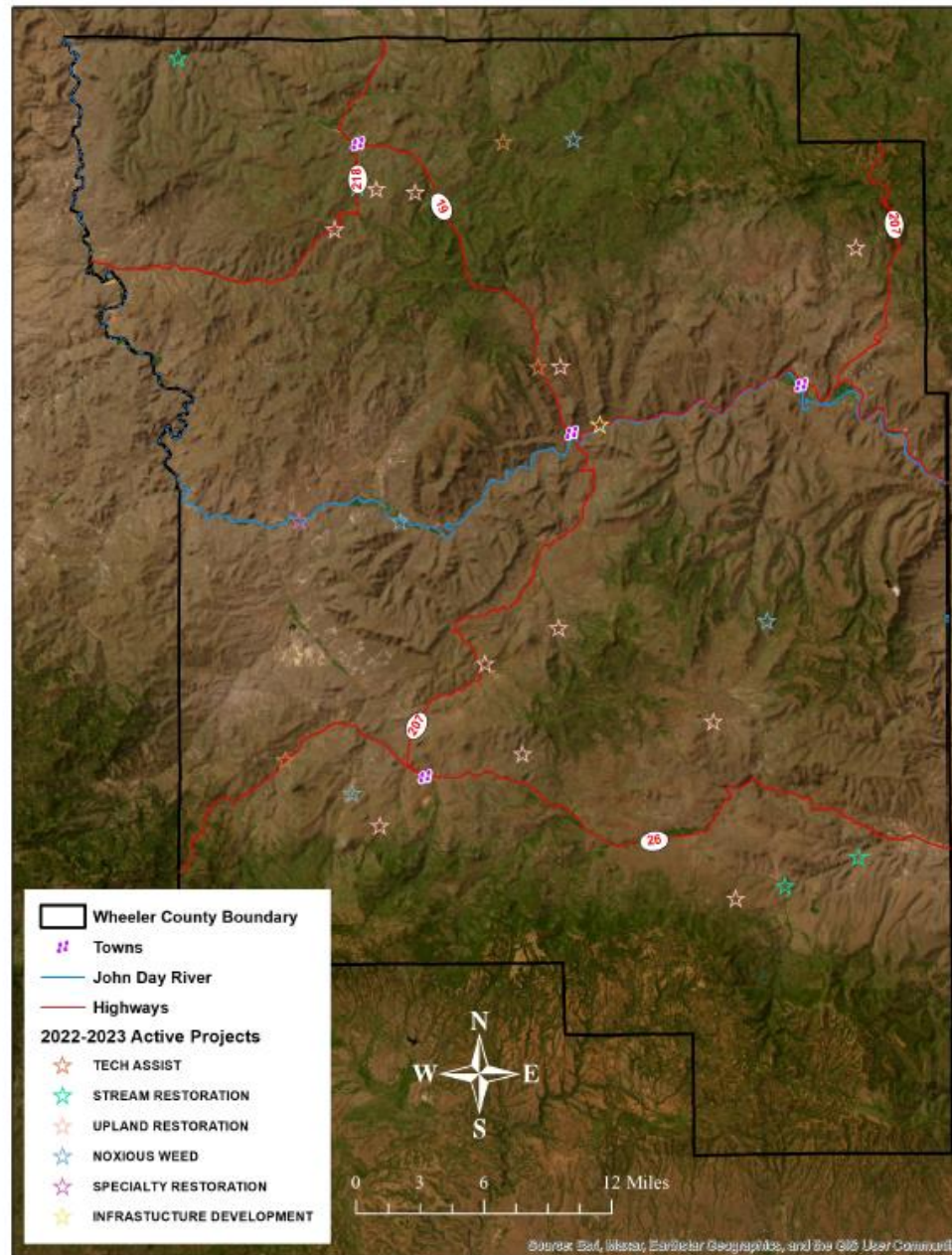
52 acres of forest stand improvement

214 acres of Juniper removed

262 landowner technical assistance contacts

27 funding applications submitted

19 conservation plans written totaling 1395.11 acres



70 on-site technical assistance visits

615 feet of pipeline

992.2 acres of noxious weed treatment

40,125 feet of fence installed

26 acres of seed planted

3 springs developed

16.44 miles of stream improved

Wheeler Weed Warriors (3WP)

With funding assistance from Wheeler County, Wheeler SWCD was able to develop an in-house cost-share program to assist landowners of 320 acres or less with treatment of noxious and invasive weeds. This program does not replace existing resources utilized by landowners, rather supplements current efforts in achieving mutual goals. Funding opportunities will be available annually in February and May with each award having six months to complete treatment on high priority species and receive up to 50% reimbursement.



East Wheeler Grant Funds Awarded

Wheeler SWCD was awarded a grant to treat 240 acres of noxious and invasive weeds in the Waterman Flats region. Species to be treated include Scotch thistle, Canada thistle, Cutleaf teasel, Diffuse and Russian knapweed, and Yellow starthistle.

Partnerships

Wheeler SWCD spent 2022-2023 building relationships with agencies and collaborating treatment efforts. These partnerships are vital in gaining control of noxious and invasive species within Wheeler County, facilitating knowledge between more experienced individuals and staff - ultimately enhancing technical assistance performance and boosting Wheeler SWCD capacity to compete for additional funding.

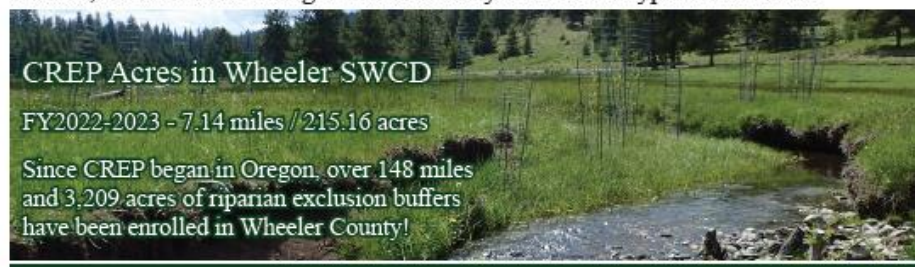
Kristen got licensed as a Public Pesticide Applicator!



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program is a component of the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CREP is a public-private partnership program, allowing states, Tribal governments, non-profit and private entities to partner with USDA to implement CRP practices that address high priority conservation and environmental objectives.

In exchange for removing environmentally sensitive land from production and establishing permanent resource conserving plant species, farmers and ranchers are paid an annual rental rate along with other federal and non-federal incentives as specified in each CREP agreement. Participation is voluntary, and the contract is typically 10-15 years. Common restoration practices within a project seek to address limiting factors. Tree and shrub species can be planted to increase shade, lowering water temperature, and grasses can be established to stabilize banks preventing erosion, all while increasing habitat diversity for various types of wildlife.



Region Conservation Partnership Program

Wheeler SWCD has an agreement with Gilliam County SWCD to contribute technical assistance to Wheeler SWCD landowners within the boundaries of their RCPP. The goal of the Lower John Day Canyons Restoration Initiative (LJDCRI) is to protect and enhance over 40 miles of critical Mid-Columbia Steelhead habitat in the Lower John Day Basin. Planned project activities include landscape-scale restoration efforts using exclusion fencing, beaver dam analog structures and riparian plantings to improve native fish habitat.

Possible RCPP Practices:

- Forest stand improvement
- Brush management (Juniper removal)
- Spring development
- Livestock pipeline
- Livestock water facility (troughs)
- Fencing
- Range seeding
- Beaver Dam Analog (BDA)



Through the partnership with Gilliam SWCD and USDA-NRCS, there were 8 contracts awarded to Wheeler SWCD landowners in 2022 and 9 in 2023!

