



Wheeler Soil & Water Conservation District

Annual Report

July 1, 2020- June 30, 2021

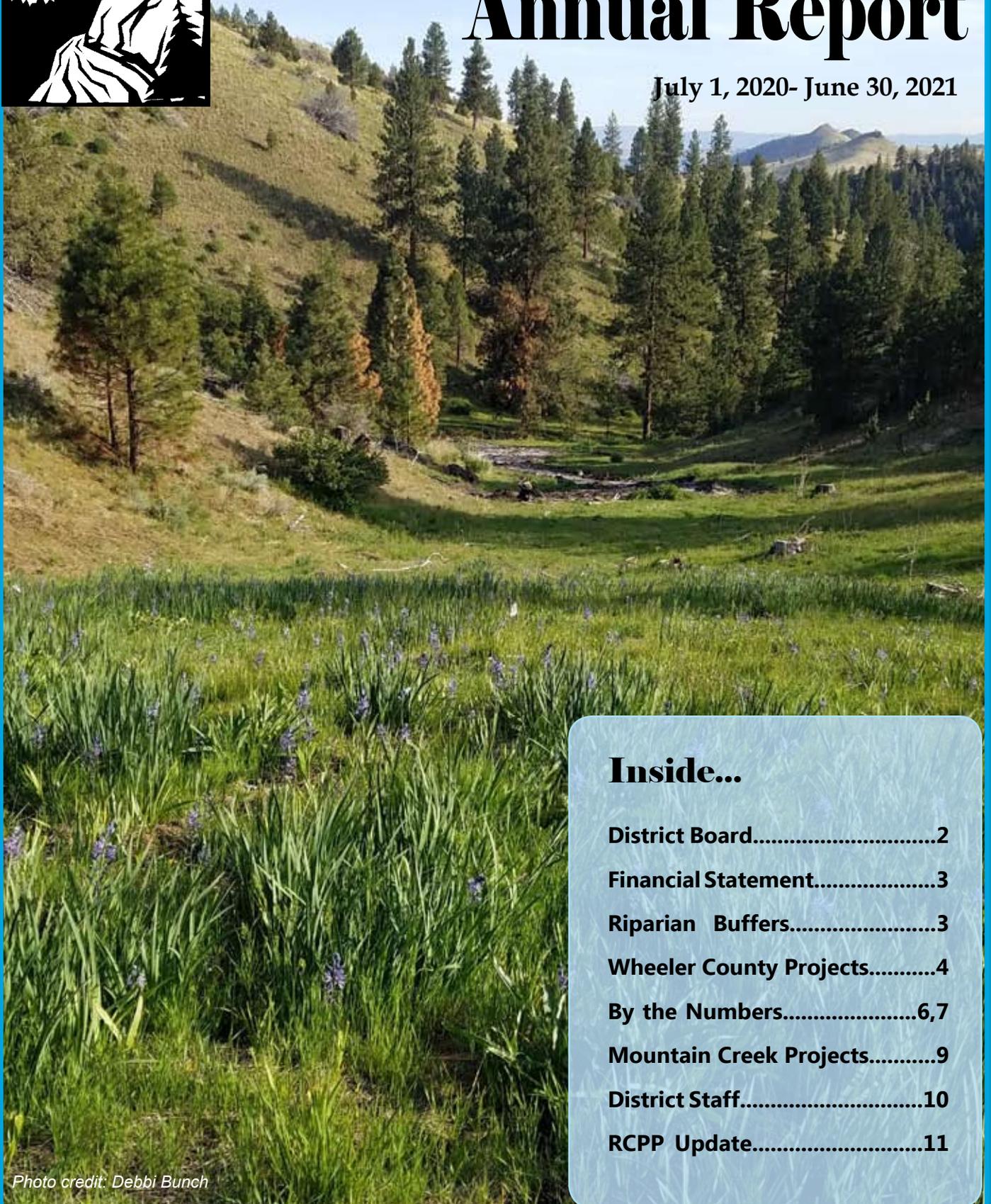


Photo credit: Debbi Bunch

Inside...

District Board.....	2
Financial Statement.....	3
Riparian Buffers.....	3
Wheeler County Projects.....	4
By the Numbers.....	6,7
Mountain Creek Projects.....	9
District Staff.....	10
RCPP Update.....	11

Wheeler SWCD Board of Directors

Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District is led by a seven member Board of Directors. Directors are elected by the voters of Wheeler County and serve four year terms.

At Wheeler SWCD's January 2021 Board meeting Jeremiah Holmes was re-elected as Chairman. Jeremiah and his family have lived in the Spray area for thirteen and a half years. He currently serves as an At Large Director

Jim Bob Collins was elected as Vice-Chair. He ranches east of Mitchell and joined the Wheeler SWCD Board of Directors in 2011. Jim Bob continues a long family history with the Wheeler SWCD with his father and two uncles serving on the Board in the past. He serves as an At Large Director.

Jason Davis, Kale Haberman and Dave Hunt were elected Co-Treasurers.

Kale Haberman raises hay and produces Charolais and Red Angus cattle in the Mitchell area with his wife Madison and father-in-law Jim Anspach. He serves as the Zone 4 Director.

Jason Davis has been involved in agriculture his whole life. He currently manages the Fopiano Ranch. Jason serves as the Zone 3 Director

Dave Hunt raises cattle and hay on his ranch outside Fossil. He bought the ranch from his dad in 1971. Dave serves

as the Zone 1 Director.

Wayne Lindquist grew up in South Dakota and moved to Wheeler County in 1995. He and his wife Peggy raise purebred Angus, purebred Charolais cattle, and hay. Wayne serves as the Zone 5 Director.

Rusty Rutherford resigned from the Board in December 2020. Rusty and his family live outside of Fossil.

Anna Thomas was appointed as the Zone 2 Director in June 2021. Anna and her family ranch east of Spray.

The District appreciates the service and dedication of the current Directors. Thank you for your time!



*From left: Dave Hunt, Wayne Lindquist, Jeremiah Holmes, Kale Haberman, Jim Bob Collins, and Jason Davis.
Not pictured: Anna Thomas*

Who We Are and What We Do

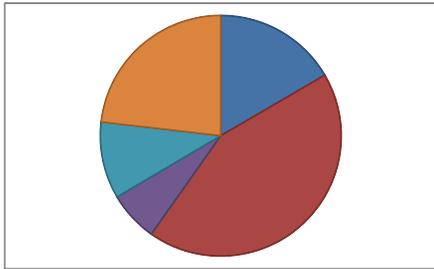
The Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District is one of 45 conservation districts in Oregon. Conservation districts are defined by the Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) as political subdivisions of state government. The SWCD is not a state agency; rather, it is classified as a special district, a form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

The Wheeler SWCD district is responsible for conservation project planning, technical assistance, and grant writing for individuals or 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 (LMA) for the Oregon Agricultural Water Quality program.

Wheeler SWCD Financial Statement

July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021

Revenues



- ODA Grants
- OWEB/OSWB Grants
- USFWS/USFS/BLM Contracts
- USDA NRCS
- BPA/CTWS Grants
- Other/Misc Income

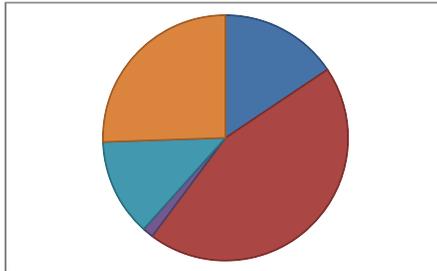
Beginning balance July 1, 2020..... \$810,154

REVENUES:

Oregon Dept of Ag Grants \$134,424
 OWEB/OSWB Grants \$349,597
 USFWS/USFS/BLM Contracts \$0
 USDA NRCS \$54,472
 BPA/CTWS Contracts \$83,354
 Other/Misc Income \$187,498
TOTAL REVENUES..... \$809,345

Expenses

- ODA Grants
- OWEB Grants
- USFWS/USFS/BLM Contracts
- USDA NRCS
- BPA/CTWS Grants
- District Operating Costs



EXPENSES:

ODA Grants \$108,457
 OWEB/OSWB Grants \$309,753
 USFWS/USFS/BLM Contracts \$0
 USDA NRCS \$10,000
 BPA/CTWS Contracts \$89,074
 District Operating Costs \$177,366
TOTAL EXPENSES \$694,650
 Ending balance June 30, 2021 \$924,849

The information presented above is unaudited. A copy of the audit report is available for review. If you'd like to review the report, please call the district office at 541-468-2990.

Riparian Buffers in Wheeler County



Through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), landowners or land managers can lease their riparian property for contract periods of 10 or 15 years and receive cost-share funding to make improvements such as tree and shrub plantings, fencing and off-channel water developments.

A required component of the program is excluding livestock or any type of agricultural use for the life of the contract. Landowners are also responsible for fence maintenance and keeping weeds to a minimum within the buffer area.

The program is funded and managed by the USDA Farm Services Agency office in Condon and is facilitated by the Wheeler Soil & Water Conservation District's Conservation Technician I, Brooke Moore. Her responsibilities include assessing the property to see if it qualifies, helping landowners navigate the program paperwork, and writing the conservation plan.

This year 20 miles and 475.99 acres were enrolled in the program in Wheeler County. Since CREP began in Oregon, over 136 miles and 2,727 acres of riparian exclusion buffers have been enrolled in Wheeler County.

For more information regarding the CREP program, contact Brooke Moore, at 541-468-2990 or brooke.moore@wheelerswcd.org.



Greater Wheeler County Accomplishments

While Mountain Creek is the Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District's Focus Area, the neighboring watersheds of Bridge Creek, Bear Creek and Cherry Creek have been the additional recipients of the North Slope Ochoco Holistic Restoration grant from USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The District and Watershed Council also work in other areas of the county as opportunities arise. The following technical assistance project was completed in Wheeler County, outside of the Mountain Creek Focus Area in the district's 2020-2021 fiscal year. The District is currently managing one open technical assistance grant and nine open restoration project grants.

Bridge Bear Phase 4

Much of the lower reaches of Bridge Creek are incised with little or no floodplain access and simplified habitat complexity. There is also a lack of large wood to contribute to the in-stream habitat complexity. Vertical post structures (VPS) installed in previous phases have trapped debris and sediment and have caused base water levels to increase significantly. Bear Creek has been known to go subsurface for much of the summer months within the ~quarter mile reach directly upstream of its confluence with Bridge Creek. This discontinuity also represents a passage barrier to fish in both directions. The goal of this project was to increase habitat complexity and flow connectivity of Bridge Creek and Bear Creek. Additionally this project finished the final phase of Russian olive removal. With the completion of this project, it is hoped that natural processes will serve to raise the water table and eventually lead to flow connectivity between Bear Creek and Bridge Creek during low flow periods.

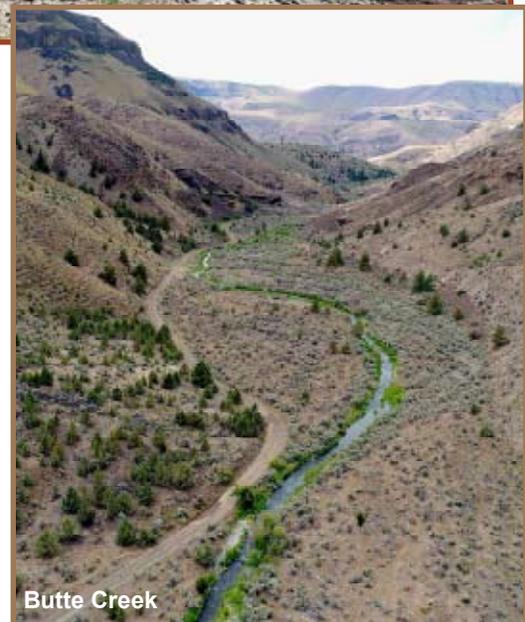
Phase #4 addressed a mile of the Bridge Creek corridor above and below the confluence with Bear Creek and the downstream end of Bear Creek. The project repaired two of the previously installed VPSs and installed 21 additional structures. The new VPSs built on the success of the previous projects and Large Woody Debris (LWD) was installed to assist in activation of the floodplain. Pieces of large wood were installed at 16 different locations to provide fish habitat. These pieces of large wood extend into the stream channel to promote habitat complexity. The VPS and LWD were aimed at restoring connectivity of Bear Creek and Bridge Creek in order to provide access to additional cold water refugia for salmonids later in the year. Removing Russian olive allowing for the expansion of native plant communities, and the overall ecosystem function of the riparian area will improve. This will benefit the steelhead and Chinook salmon by providing improved shading, food source, and habitat complexity.

Butte Creek BDA Designs

Butte Creek is a large watershed in Wheeler and Gilliam Counties and flows into the lower John Day River. Butte Creek represents an important spawning and rearing tributary for the steelhead that utilize the watershed. However, much of the main channel on Butte Creek is subject to low and often intermittent surface flow



during summer, a period critical to the survival of rearing juvenile steelhead following emergence from gravel in the spring of the year. Low and non-existent surface flow also contribute to high summer stream temperatures and reduced riparian vegetation. In addition, much



of the channel on Butte Creek has been channelized against valley walls resulting in a high degree of channel incision and low habitat complexity. These conditions ultimately render the Butte Creek watershed a population sink for threatened steelhead, in which a high rate of returning adult steelhead produce few eggs and surviving juveniles capable of completing their life cycle.

This technical assistance grant allowed for the development of implementation designs for Beaver Dam Analog and Post Assisted Log Structures on 8+ miles of stream. Areas of key habitat were identified for protection and areas that have a high potential for restoration activities have been singled out for the implementation of selected Best Management Practices. With the

Wheeler County, continued

development of these design sets, restoration implementation strategies can now be put into place addressing these limiting factors beginning at the mouth of Butte Creek at the John Day river and extending to 8.6 miles upstream of Butte Creek and from its confluence with Butte Creek, up 1.2 miles of Deep Creek, an Essential Salmonid Habitat listed tributary of Butte Creek.

Circle Bar Restoration

West Branch Bridge Creek runs through the landowner's property and drains into Bridge Creek. The area has been heavily encroached by Western Juniper. This has had a negative effect on water quality, quantity, and upland and riparian habitat. Of the seven limiting factors in the Bridge Creek Watershed, this project addressed flow, sediment load, temperature, and key habitat quantity.

Priority juniper was selected for removal based on Northern aspect slopes where soils are deeper and grass and forb communities are healthier. On slopes greater than 30%, juniper trees were hand fell and left to be jackpot burned at a later date. Slopes 30% and under were slated for removal through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Wheeler SWCD's North Slope Ochoco Regional Conservation Partnership Project (RCPP). Under RCPP, 80 acres of juniper were cut and piled to be burned at a later date. These practices free up valuable resources, breathing life into the grass and forb communities. Utilizing OWEB funding, a total of 133

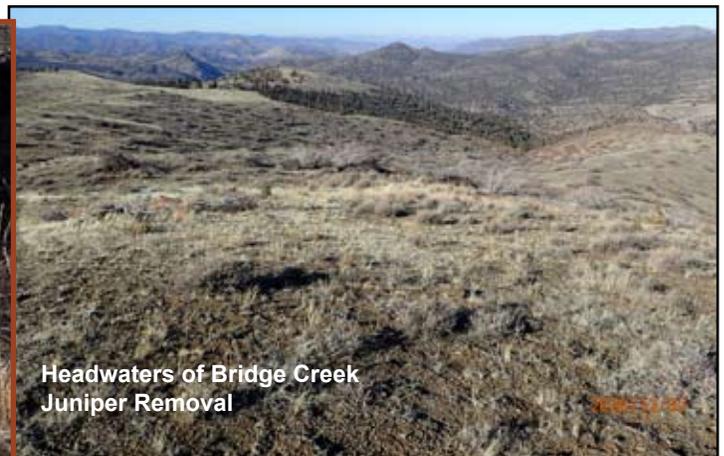
acres of juniper were hand fell, and 20 acres of range planting were completed throughout those 133 acres. Three declining Aspen stands were protected from livestock browse by erecting a standard 4 strand wire fence. Saplings within these livestock exclusion enclosures were also protected with heavy duty wire caging materials. This will allow the saplings to reach an age of maturity where they are no longer vulnerable to wildlife browse. One spring was developed using a 2ft diameter perforated pipe as a collection device and plumbed into two 528 gal rubber tire watering troughs. Partnering with NRCS under the RCPP, three additional watering systems were completed. Additionally, this project treated 40 acres of road networks, and one 235 acre pasture with Plateau herbicide to prevent the spread of the invasive annual grass medusahead rye.

Continuing with a landscape scale restoration approach, a total of 27.25 acres of West Branch of Bridge Creek were enrolled into the USDA Farm Service Agency's CREP program. This allowed for the removal of 25.46 acres of Western Juniper from the floodplain and riparian corridor. The CREP acres were also fenced and excluded from the ranch's livestock grazing operations. Continued restoration efforts are planned in the form of installing an additional 1,200 woody riparian plantings with HD caging protection this coming winter-spring. The combination of these restoration practices will help secure stream banks reducing erosion, lower stream temperatures by providing shading, serve as a source for large wood recruitment increasing habitat complexity and diversity, and provide species diversity for a range of terrestrial wildlife use.

Headwaters Bridge Creek

Range health is one of the biggest issues facing landowners within Wheeler County. 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 Bridge Creek's riparian areas have juniper within the floodplain. The native bunch grass and sagebrush communities in the uplands have been severely encroached by western juniper. The native herbaceous cover

Continued on page 8



Wheeler Soil & Water Conservation District

2020-2021 Key Accomplishments By the Numbers





17

Spring developments



1828

Feet of stream habitat improvement

13

Conservation plans written



341

LANDOWNER
TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE
CONTACTS

Wheeler County, continued

is currently in decline, but still remains intact. Without brush management practices these native communities will be replaced by invasive annuals. Juniper encroachment has reduced the health and vigor of the herbaceous understory which provides the key watershed function of capturing, storing, and safely releasing water into Bridge Creek. Historic fire suppression has allowed juniper encroachment which has robbed moisture and sunlight from native grass species.

This project funded the removal of 332 acres of juniper, a pre-commercial thin of 55 acres of Ponderosa Pine forest, and reseeded 43 acres of mechanically disturbed areas during the juniper removal process. This was part of a landscape scale restoration effort where the continued application of restoration practices resulted in an additional 85 acres of juniper mechanically cut and piled, 85 acres of Forest Stand Improvement (pre-commercial thinning), 7,760 feet of open irrigation ditch converted to buried pipeline, three spring sources developed with a total of 8,890 feet of livestock pipeline, two solar powered pumping plants, two buried cisterns, and seven livestock watering facilities.

Middle Bear Creek BDA Restoration 2

This project is located on Bear Creek, a tributary to Bridge Creek. Many sections of Bear Creek have been channelized, straightened, and confined to valley margins in order to increase the amount of area that is agriculturally viable. In these locations, this has resulted in channels becoming deeply incised, and lacking complexity due to high-stream power. This has degraded habitat in quantity and quality of this important spawning tributary for

the steelhead summer run in the John Day Basin. In addition, certain reaches within the project area experience low baseflow and intermittency.

Wheeler SWCD has been working with this landowner for a number of years on multiple conservation practices that overall benefit the summer steelhead population in Bear Creek. In 2017, the District completed a “pilot” beaver dam analog installation project in which 21 BDAs were install in the “Grizzly” reach of Bear Creek. That project showed success in reconnecting side channels and increasing the groundwater connectivity and prompted the District to develop this project to install structures on two more reaches of Bear Creek and a small tributary.

This project funded the construction of 25 beaver dam analog (BDA) structures on 600 meters of the “Beaver” Reach on Bear Creek that dewater annually, constructed 10 BDAs on 300 meters of Spring Gulch, a tributary to Bear Creek, with the intent of increasing surface flow duration both in the tributary and in the downstream portions of Bear Creek, and installed 24 BDAs on 400 meters of the “Rancher” reach of Bear Creek to increase the development of inset floodplains and facilitate the formation of scour pools and lateral and mid-channel bars. Project partners include Wheeler SWCD, OWEB, CTWS, ODF&W, and the landowner.

Weed Program

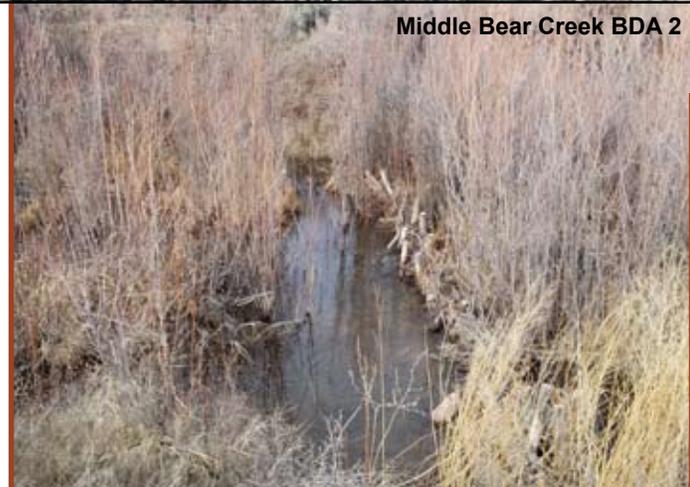
The Weed Program is led by Conservation Technician I, Daniel Goodell. The focus includes, but is not limited to monitoring, inventorying, mapping, and control efforts of noxious weeds in Wheeler County. Through the Weed Program, cost-share opportunities are available to assist landowners in treatment of noxious weeds. Treatment options may consist of herbicide use or biological controls, depending on funding availability. Wheeler SWCD also coordinates with partnering agencies to provide public outreach, education, and weed awareness.

Two projects were completed last year in the Mitchell area. 684 acres of Yellow starthistle, Scotch thistle, Russian knapweed, Spotted knapweed, Diffuse knapweed, Canada thistle, and Whitetop were treated across multiple landowners.

Daniel can be reached at 541-468-2990 or danielgoodell@wheelerswcd.org



Middle Bear Creek BDA 2



Middle Bear Creek BDA 2



Russian Knapweed and Scotch Thistle

Mountain Creek Watershed-Focus Area Accomplishments

Wheeler Soil & Water Conservation District has identified the Mountain Creek watershed in southeast Wheeler County as a Focus Area under the Oregon Department of Agriculture. With this designation, the District is concentrating restoration and tracking efforts in this area. The District has two open conservation project and several more that have been completed and are now in the monitoring stage. One project was completed between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021 and is described here.

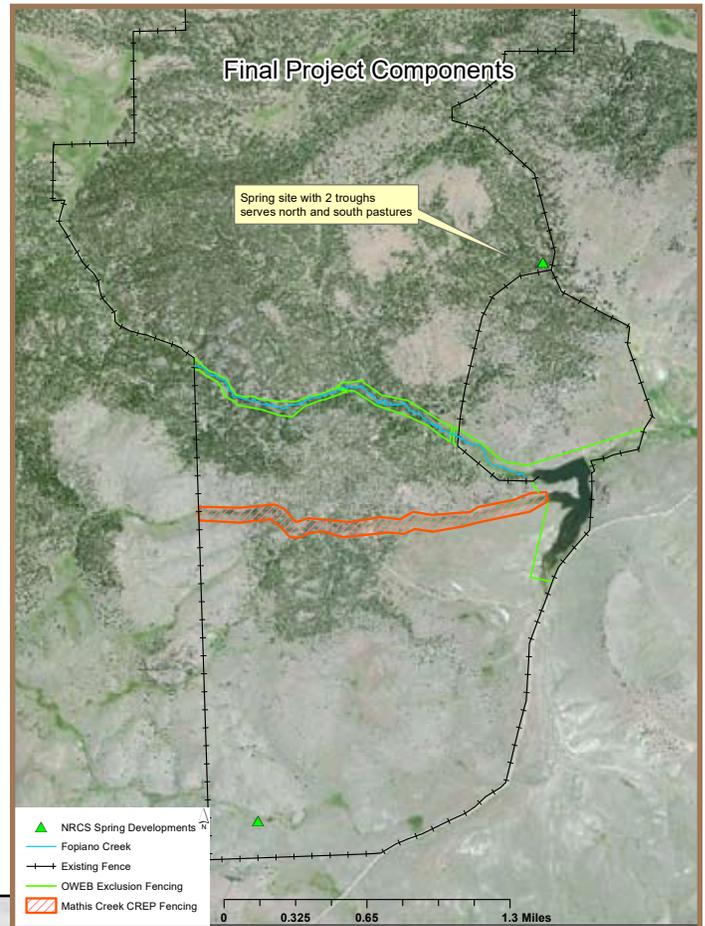
Fopiano Reservoir Protection

This project is located in the Southern portion of Wheeler County, above Mountain Creek; north of Waterman Road. Historic and land management practices of livestock pressure have degraded two major tributaries to the reservoir (Mathis Creek and Fopiano Creek) and the reservoir itself. Unrestricted livestock access to these areas was preventing any positive vegetative response. These conditions were creating water quality and quantity concerns for the tributaries, reservoir, and Fopiano Creek below the reservoir, which is listed as steelhead habitat by ODF&W.

Planting stock was collected locally by the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs (CTWS) and grown at their native plants facility in Prairie City. OWEB funding was used to install the plantings and build heavy duty caging around each individual plant. This project used funds from OWEB and the landowner to install the 20,918 feet of riparian exclusion fence to protect the plantings and exclude livestock from 1.87 miles of stream and an additional 4,426 feet of fence to protect Fopiano Reservoir itself. The fence has effectively protected all riparian areas of the headwaters of Fopiano Creek above the reservoir in this mountain pasture of the ranch, and 10.25 acres below the reservoir.

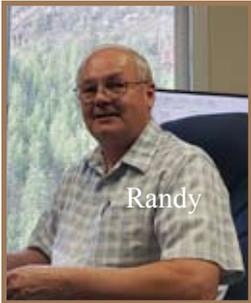
In total, 68.63 acres of riparian were fenced excluding the area around the reservoir. The fence and plantings will allow for all riparian areas in the project to begin to regenerate, and the off channel watering systems will help to promote proper grazing patterns and lessen the risk of concentrated grazing. An immediate restoration response is expected for herbaceous species along the streambanks to limit erosion and sediment inputs to the system. A long-term positive restoration response is expected with shrub and tree species planted, which will eventually provide shade to help improve water quality in the form of lower temperatures and provide improved habitat for resident redband trout.

◆◆◆



Wheeler SWCD Staff & Partners

Wheeler SWCD staff members cover a variety of tasks to keep the district running and to serve our constituents. The District had two staff changes in the middle of 2021.



Randy

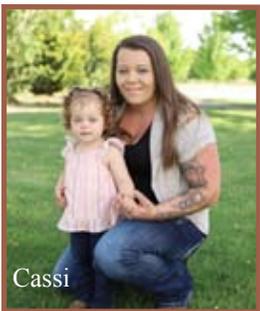
Chase Schultz resigned as District Manager in April and **Randy Williams** started in the role in June. The District Manager works closely with the



Chase

Board of Directors to provide direction on the work of the district and oversee all operational, personnel, and fiscal

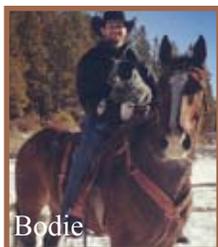
components.



Cassi

Cassi Newton's position as Administrative Assistant changed to Office Manager in January. She is responsible for WSWCD

and Wheeler County Weed Board meeting organization and records, Director 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.



Bodie

Bodie Brown resigned as Field Tech II in July 2021. to take a position with the Crooked River Watershed Council. He worked

with landowners and NRCS to navigate the Farm Service Agency Conservation

Reserve Enhancement Program. Bodie also managed the weed grants and was a vital component to the Wheeler County Weed Board.



Brooke

Brooke Moore served as the District's Field Tech I in the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Brooke worked with NRCS and landowners to manage the RCPP grants for the

District. Brooke has taken the lead on many project reports, ensuring that requirements and deadlines are met. She is the District's drone operator having obtained licensing through FAA last year.

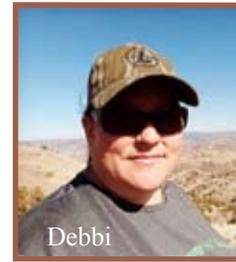
In August 2021, Wheeler SWCD made changes to the Technician position descriptions to better delineate responsibilities. Brooke's position has changed to Conservation Technician I. She has taken over the CREP program and is the lead project manager on several open District projects. She continues to work closely with the RCPP program.



Daniel

Daniel Goodell started working at the District in August 2021 as a Conservation Technician I. He is taking over the weed program and is project manager for several District projects. Daniel also

helps manage the RCPP projects.



Debbi

Debbi Bunch is the Watershed Coordinator for the Mid John Day - Bridge Creek Watershed Council. She works with landowners planning

conservation projects, writing grants, managing projects, monitoring, managing the OWEB small grant program in Wheeler County and serving as the lead for the education and outreach program. Debbi works closely with Wheeler SWCD staff to share information and coordinate projects.



Judy

Judy Potter continued her contract as Finance Manager, assisting the District by providing bookkeeping services.



Gabe

Gabe Williams, PE continues to contract with the District to design and implement the complex in-stream and irrigation

efficiency projects.

Damon Brosnan was the NRCS District Conservationist for Wheeler and Gilliam Counties. He coordinated all of the USDA programs for Wheeler County landowners. Damon moved into a Team Lead position in Redmond in April.

DelRae Ferguson took on the District Conservationist position in May.



NRCS- Resource Conservation Partnership Program Grant Update

The Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service completed contracting to implement the North Slope Ochoco Holistic Restoration Project three years ago. The majority of those contracts have been implemented. District staff are working closely with the landowners to complete the remaining conservation practices. The District has shifted to partnering with Gilliam County Soil and Water Conservation District to implement the Lower John Day Canyons Restoration Initiative. This proposal includes Butte and Thirtymile Creeks in Wheeler County and two more John Day River tributaries in Gilliam County.

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. Additionally, upland objectives will also be pursued to reduce sediment inputs into the river. These include forest stand improvement, brush management, spring developments, expired Conservation Reserve Program reseeding, sediment control basins, firebreaks, and a working lands conservation easement.

The project partners with the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Agriculture, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, Gilliam and Wheeler SWCDs, and the Gilliam-East John Day and Mid-John Day Bridge Creek Watershed Councils and complements the OWEB Focused Investment Partnership grant held by the John Day Basin Partnership.



Juniper removal sites, stock water development

Landowners in Butte and Thirtymile Creek watersheds were awarded contracts for 232 acres of brush management, 12 spring developments, 2610 feet of livestock pipeline, 10,200 gallons of water facilities and 17,970 feet of fence.

For more information, contact Brooke Moore or Daniel Goodell, Wheeler SWCD at 541-468-2990, or DelRae Ferguson, NRCS at 541-384-2671, ext 107.



Thanks to our Partners

This Annual Report of the Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District (WSWCD) reflects activities that occurred during the fiscal year - from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021.

The successful implementation of projects would not be possible without the SWCD's partners. Cash or in-kind contributions were made by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) in partnership with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon State Weed Board, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, Gilliam County Soil and Water Conservation District, John Day Basin Partnership, Mid John Day - Bridge Creek Watershed Council, Blue Mountain Land Trust, and of course the cooperating landowners.



MISSION STATEMENT

To maximize economic and environmental watershed values for Wheeler County residents by developing, conserving and protecting water, soil, plant structures and other natural resources.

~ Improve the health of the watersheds through holistic measures that enhance water quality and quantity, soil health and conservation for beneficial uses

- Promote implementation of the Mid-John Day Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plan.
- Promote and implement USDA Programs.
- Assist and promote watershed council activity.
- Seek funding for projects.
- Provide technical assistance to the public.
- Set strategic priority work areas.
- Implement District projects.
- Initiate major offensive against invasive species.
- Form or maintain partnerships with federal, state and local agencies and tribes.
- Promote relevant research and monitoring.
- Conduct watershed assessments/action plans/conservation planning.

~ Provide education and outreach to the public

- Produce newsletters and annual report.
- Organize tours and workshops for students, landowners and land managers.
- Participate in community activities.
- Partner with local schools to further natural resource educational opportunities.
- Develop funding source for public education activities.
- Provide AgWQMAP fact sheets and information for distribution.

~ Manage the business of the district in an efficient and effective manner

- Encourage staff and director development by attending workshops, conventions and training sessions.
- Meet state filing requirements for budget, audit and reports.
- Hold monthly board meetings and December annual meeting.
- Seek secure funding by exploring creative and productive ways to finance district operations and fund employee positions.
- Develop operational policies and procedures.

BOARD MEMBERS

Jeremiah Holmes,
Chair

Jim Bob Collins,
Vice-Chair

Jason Davis
Co-Treasurer

Kale Haberman,
Co-Treasurer

Dave Hunt,
Co-Treasurer

Wayne Lindquist

Anna Thomas

DIRECTOR EMERITUS

Ted Molinari

ASSOCIATE BOARD MEMBERS

Amy Derby

Rob Wade

Non-Profit
US Postage
PAID
Permit #8
Fossil, OR

WHEELER SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT
40535 HIGHWAY 19
FOSSIL, OREGON 97830
TEL: 541 / 468-2990
FAX: 541 / 468-2991

