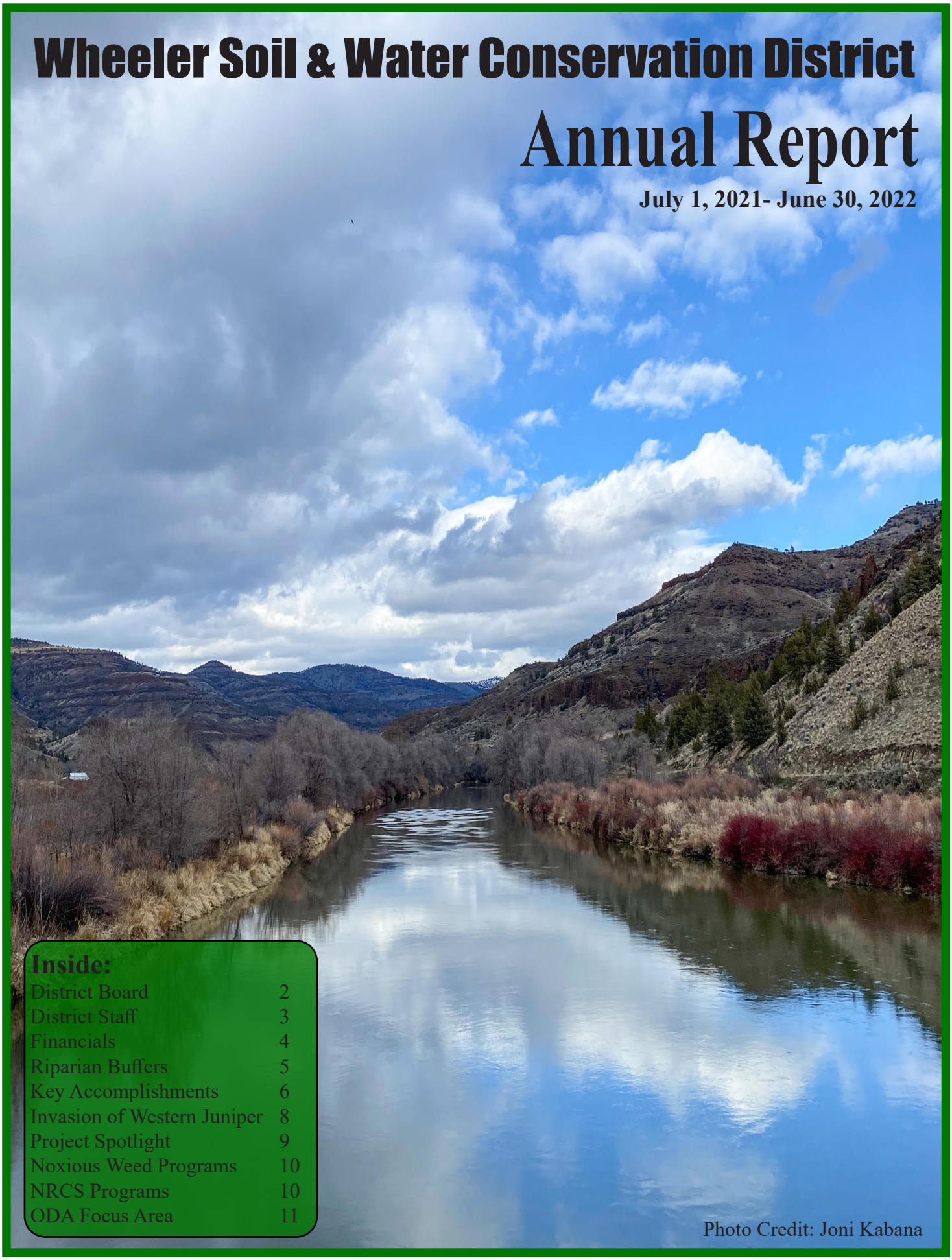
Wheeler Soil & Water Conservation District

Annual Report

July 1, 2021- June 30, 2022



Inside:

Photo Credit: Joni Kabana

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 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 - Dave Hunt
Zone 2 - Anna Thomas, *Vice-Chair*
Zone 3 - Jason Davis, *Secetary/Treasurer*
Zone 4 - Vacant
Zone 5 - Wayne Lindquist
At-Large 1 - Ross Ryno
At-Large 2 - Jim Bob Collins, *Chair*

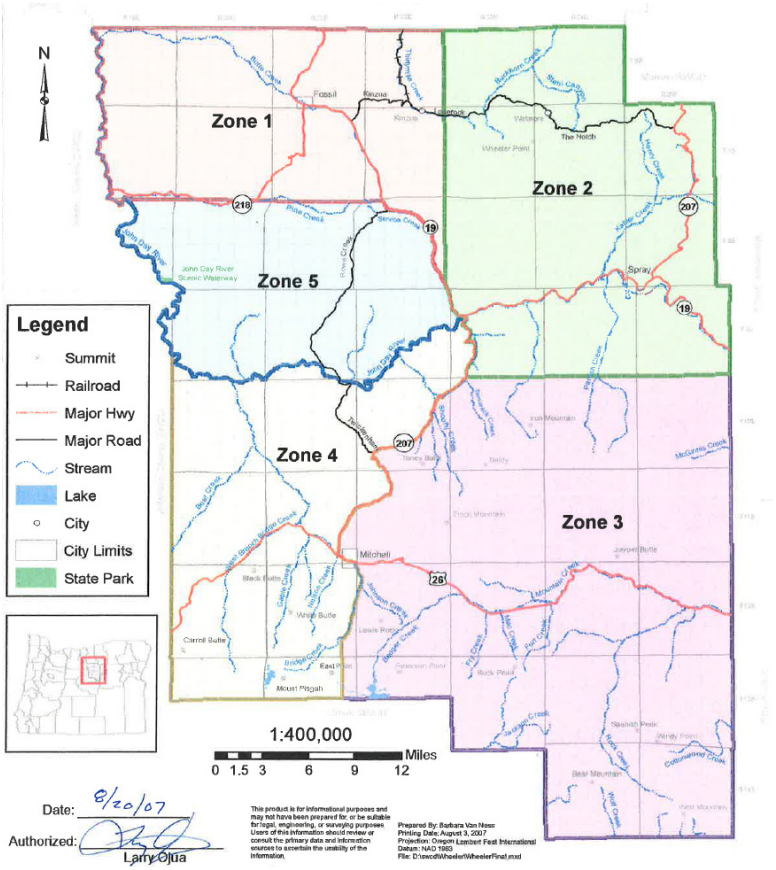
Director Emeritus

Ted Molinari
Jeremiah Holmes

Associate Directors

Amy Derby
Rob Wade
Brent Johnson
Zach Bruce

The District appreciates the dedicated service, tireless commitment and good goverance to the staff and landowners.



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 Statues (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 (LMA) for the Oregon Agricultural Water Quality program.

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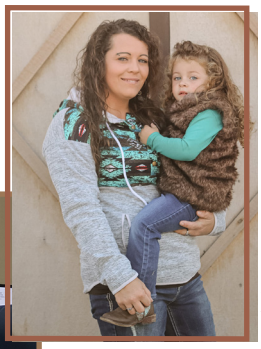
brooke.moore@wheelerswcd.org • kristenneuburger@wheelerswcd.org

Wheeler SWCD Staff & Partners

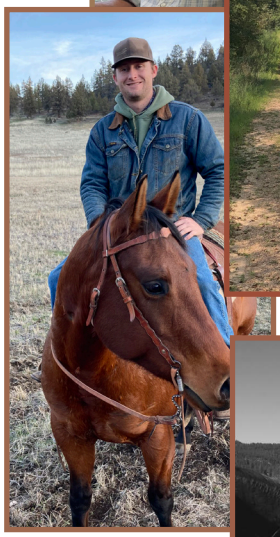
Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District staff members cover a variety of tasks to keep the District running and to serve our constiuents. The District had multiple staff changes during 2021-2022. expected to augment the Board's knowledge and experience level and assist with District programs and activities.

Randy Williams resigned as the District Manager in September 2022 and the position is currently vacant. The District Manager works closely with the Board of Directors to provide direction on the work of the District and oversee all operational, personnel, and fiscal components.

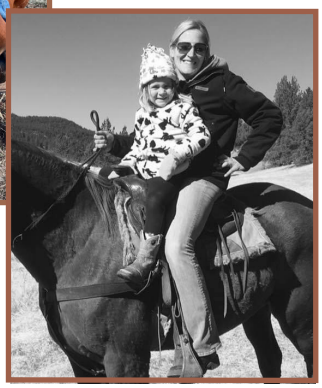


Cassi Newton continued her position as Offfice Manager during the 2021-22 fiscal year. Her title changed to Administrative Manager in July 2022 when she took on the fiscal management of the District. Cassi is also responsible for director correspondence and training, quarterly and annual reports provided to the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), policy revisions, general office management, and assisting staff with various tasks. Cassi is also serving as interim District Manager until the position is filled.

Daniel Goodell joined the District in August 2021 and served as a Conservation Technician I during the 2021-22 fiscal year. He managed the District's Weed programs, as well as helped manage the RCPP and OWEB projects. Daniel resigned from the District in September 2022.



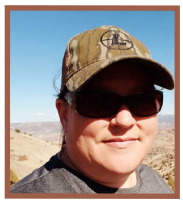
Brooke Moore continued her role as a Conservation Technician I during the 2021-22 fiscal year, and obtained a Conservation Technician II level position in July 2022. Brooke manages the CREP and NRCS programs for the District, having obtained her USDA clearance. She also continued to take the lead on 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.



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

Kristen Neuburger joined the District as a Conservation Technician Assistant in July 2022. Her role began as a 1-year training position working towards a Conservation Technician I position. Upon Daniel's departure, she moved into a Conservation Technician I and has taken over management of District's Weed programs and is training to take the lead on the District's OWEB projects. Kristen is in the process of obtaining her Public Applicator's License.

Kara Lanthorn is the FSA County Executive Director for for Wheeler and Gilliam Counties. She coordinates the CREP program for Wheeler County landowners.

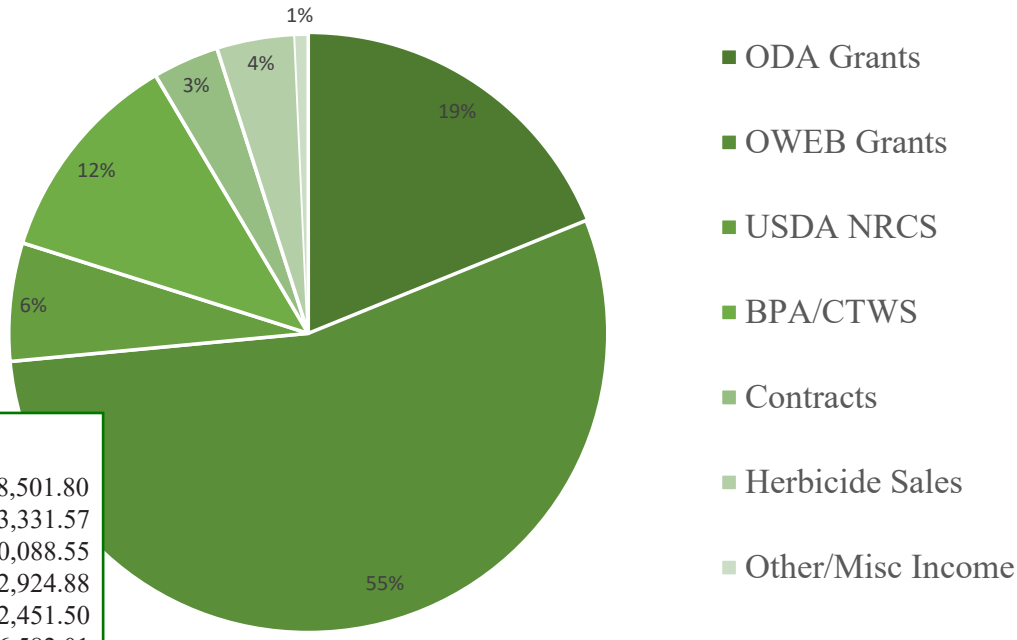


Debbi Bunch is the Executive Director for the Mid John Day Watershed Council. She works with Wheeler SWCD staff to share information and coordinate projects.

Judy Potter continued her contract as Finance Manager through June 2022, assisting the District by providing bookkeeping services.

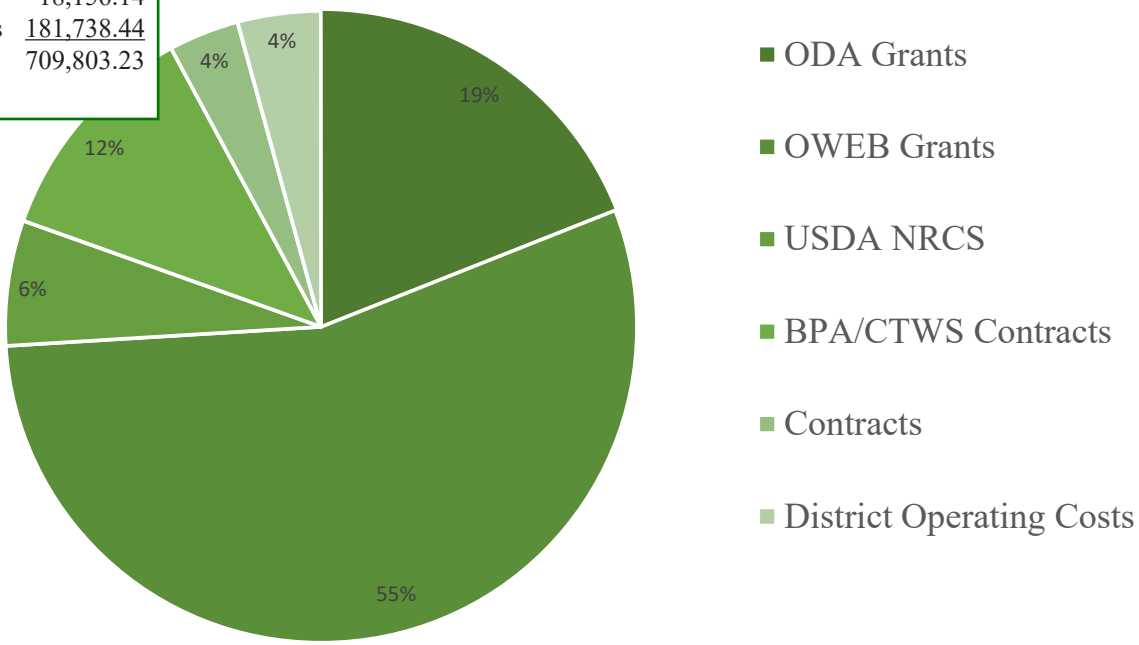
Wheeler SWCD Financial Statement

Revenues



Revenues	
ODA Grants	118,501.80
OWEB Grants	343,331.57
USDA NRCS	40,088.55
BPA/CTWS	2,924.88
Contracts	22,451.50
Herbicide Sales	26,582.01
Other/Misc Income	4,387.84
	628,268.15
Expenditures	
ODA Grants	86,448.64
OWEB Grants	330,202.32
USDA NRCS	3,171.23
BPA/CTWS Contracts	60,086.46
Contracts	18,156.14
District Operating Costs	181,738.44
	709,803.23
(81,535.08)	

Expenditures



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

Overview

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 UDSA to implement CRP practices that address high priority conservation and environmental objectives.

Partners work with FSA to develop CREP agreements designed to address conservation goals on agricultural lands in specific geographic areas. Possible conservation practices that can be implemented include riparian buffers, filter strips, wetlands, and pollinator plantings. Partners work with FSA to define practices that achieve substantial on-site and off-site natural resource benefits targeting one or more of the following goals:

- Restore/establish wildlife habitat
- Enhance water quality
- Reduce soil erosion
- Enhance air quality
- Restore/enhance wetlands
- Increase control of critical invasive species
- Enhance critical threatened/endangered plant and animal species survival

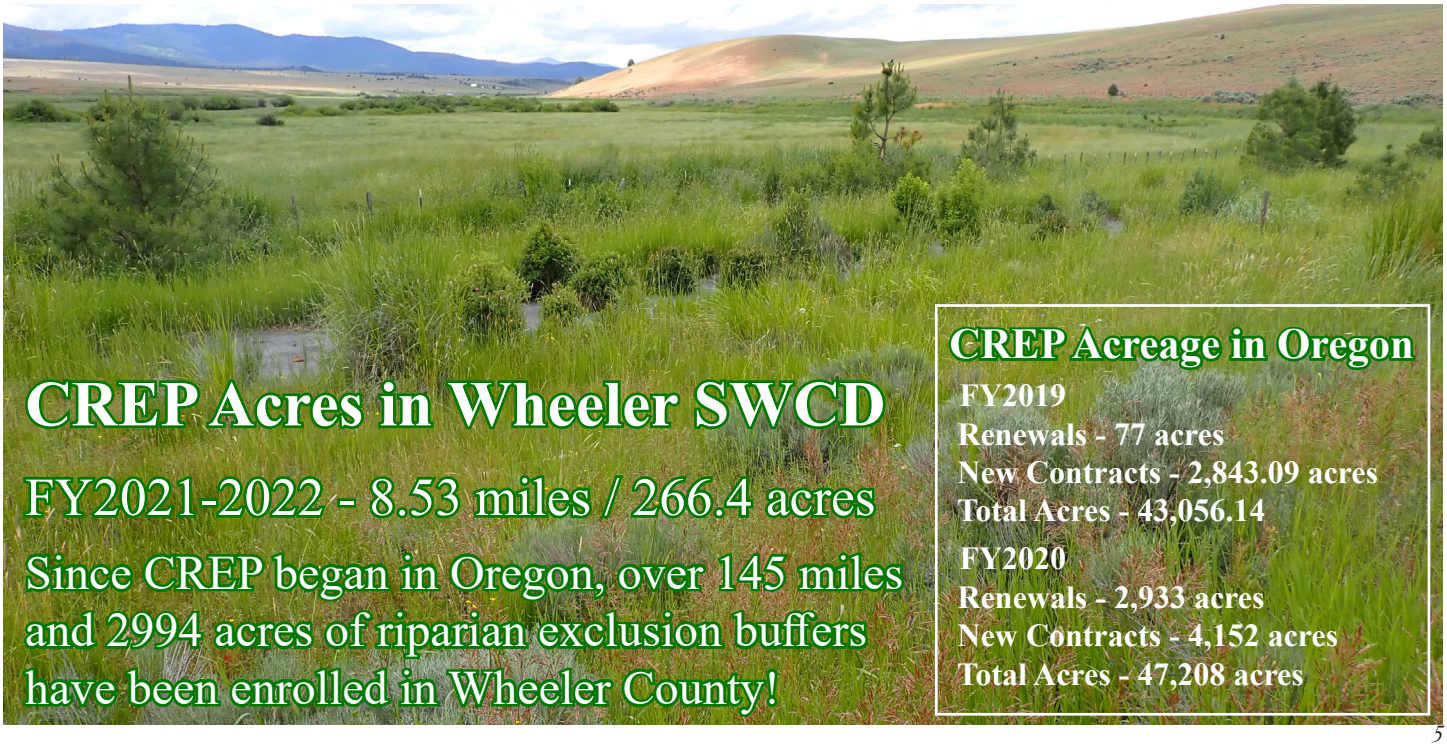
FSA encourages CREP agreements that target multiple natural resource concerns to maximize conservation benefits.

CREP Program

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 period 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.

CREP Partner Commitments

Partners can match USDA's commitments in the form of cash, in-kind contributions, or technical assistance. Each CREP agreement requires the partner to provide an annual performance report which details program accomplishments, contributions to the project, and progress in meeting program goals.



Wheeler Soil & Water Conservation District

2021-2022 Key Accomplishments by the Numbers

1430 ACRES OF JUNIPER REMOVED

2 culverts installed

5 Aspen stands protected

599 acres of noxious weed treatment

9 CONSERVATION PLANS WRITTEN TOTALLING 254.81 ACRES

4 springs developed

100 acres of forest stand improvement

52 on-site technical assistance visits

8.53 miles of stream improved

224 landowner technical assistance contacts

33 FUNDING APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED

20 acres of seed planted

61,398 FEET OF FENCE INSTALLED

Wheeler SWCD thanks the many partners and landowners who contributed in-kind and cash match towards projects to make the successful implementation of conservation practices possible!

The Quiet Invasion of Western Juniper

Right: The City of Fossil in the early 1900s compared to 2018.

Western juniper has been a part of the Oregon landscape for thousands of years. For much of that time, periodic wildfire kept juniper confined to rim-rock, rock-outcroups and shallow or unproductive soils where fire was less frequent.

In the past 130 years, juniper has rapidly expanded across the landscape, invading lands that have been historically fominated by sagebrush and native grasses. When juniper trees begin to occupy a site, there is often a corresponding loss of diverse native shrub, grass and wildflower communities, creating severe impacts on watershed function, wildlife habitat and livestock forage production. Wildfire suppression has been a crucial factor in the expansion of juniper

(The Juniper Working Group, Crook County)

Prevention/Treatment:

Prescribed Burning

Fire is often used to control juniper, particularly on sites in the early and middle stages of encroachment. These are sites with adequate fine fuels and ladder fuels. Sites fully occupied by juniper are often “fireproof” since tree spacing and the lack of fine and/or ladder fuels in the understory prevent fire spread. In this case, selective cutting of 25 to 35 percent of trees in a stand can increase ground fuels and permit fire to carry into most of the remaining juniper.

Mechanical

Small-diameter trees can be hand-lopped or controlled with a brush-beater. Large-diameter trees are best controlled with chainsaws, dozers, feller-bunchers, excavators/pullers, mechanical shears and mulchers or other mechanical means.

Chemical

Although herbicides are rarely used to control juniper, they can control aggressive, undesirable vegetation that proliferates following treatment.

Biological

There are currently no known biological controls for juniper.

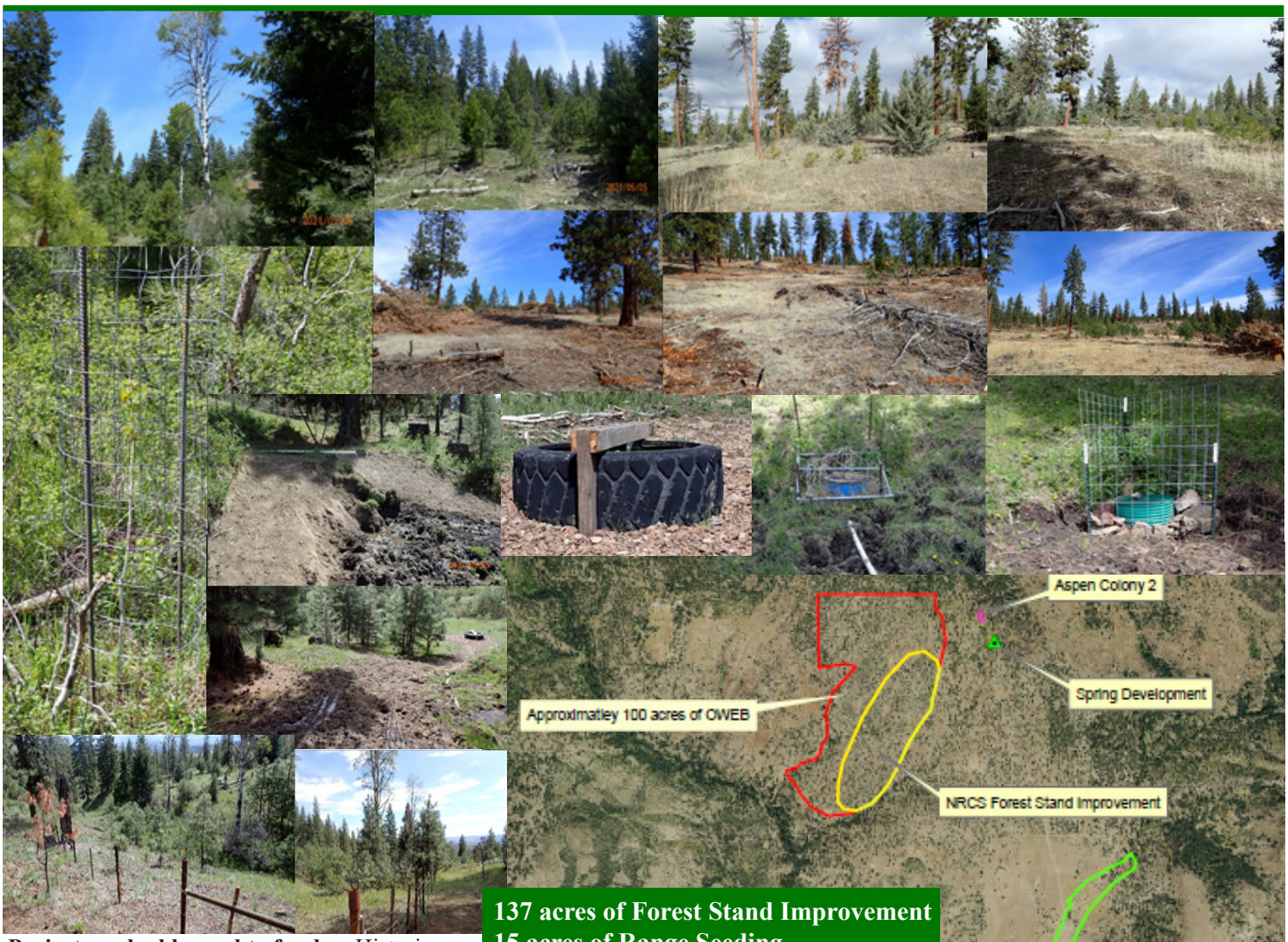
Seeding

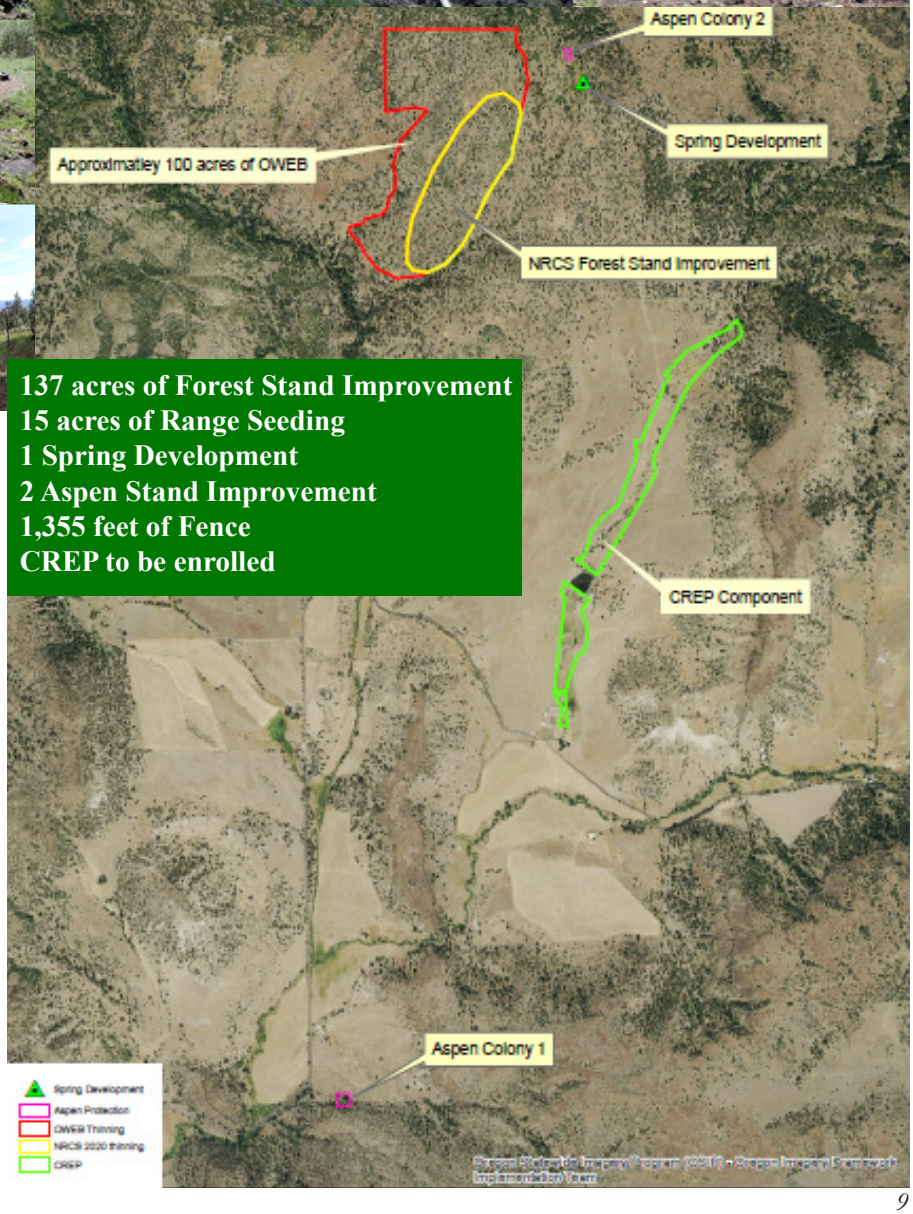
In the later stages of Western juniper succession where it is the dominant vegetation, shrubs have usually died out, and grasses and forbs may lack the density to reoccupy the site following juniper control. When planning to seed, select plants that will sustain site functions and processes that meet land use objectives (e.g. requirements for livestock forage, wildlife habitat requirements, etc.).

Post-Treatment Management

It is essential to carefully manage livestock grazing (through rest or deferral) or other surface uses (e.g. off-highway vehicle use) in the treated area that may negatively affect site hydrology, soil surface stability, native plant recovery, or the establishment of seeded species.

Wheeler SWCD Project Spotlight





Project need addressed to funder: Historic logging practices and increased fire suppression has led to the over-stocking of timber stands and allowed for the expansion of invasive Western Juniper. This has resulted in a forest setting that is highly vulnerable to disease and insect infestations, as well as large fuel loads that increase the risk of catastrophic wildfire. The property also hosts two declining Aspen stands that are in need of protection and enhancement. Additionally, historic grazing practices have resulted in a nearby riparian area being nearly void of any woody species.

Project proposed solution addressed to funder: This project seeks to thin stands of Ponderosa Pines back to healthy density, eradicate the presence of Western juniper, restore the riparian area through the USDA/FSA's CREP program, develop one spring for stockwater use, and protect two declining Aspen stands.

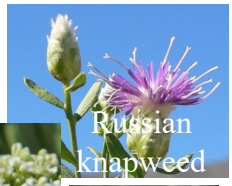
Henry Creek Forest Restoration

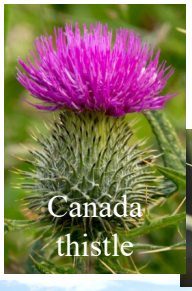
Wheeler SWCD Weed Programs

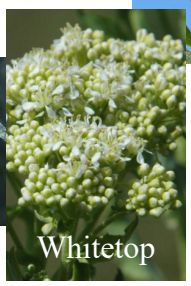
Wheeler SWCD was awarded a grant from ODA that assisted with the purchase of equipment that will allow Wheeler SWCD to build an internal cost-share program to provide noxious weed treatment to the public year-around. Wheeler SWCD will continue participating in the ODA Noxious Weed Program to bring assistance to Wheeler County.

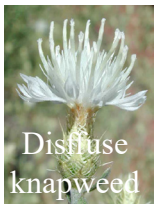
The following equipment is scheduled to be delivered during the winter of 2022:

- John Deere Gator XUV590M
- 45 gallon bed sprayer
- Trailer w/ mounted water tank
- Other accessories and small equipment









^ Before treatmeant of Russian knapweed and after >

675.25 gallons of herbicide distributed!

599 acres treated w/ Wheeler SWCD assistance!

79 acres Yellow starthistle
250 Russian knapweed
85 acres Diffuse knapweed
20 acres Spotted knapweed
79 acres Scotch knapweed
58 acres Canada thistle
28 acres Whitetop

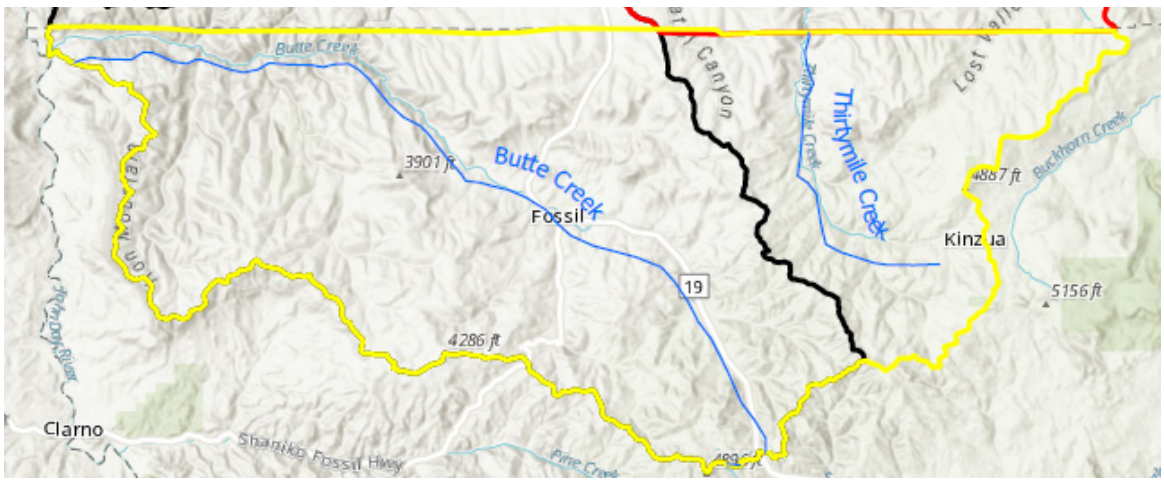
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

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 ?Damn Analogs (BDA)

Through the partnership with Gilliam SWCD and USDA-NRCS, there were 12 contracts awarded to Wheeler SWCD landowners in 2021 and 8 in 2022!



Wheeler SWCD - ODA Focus Area

In 2012, Wheeler SWCD identified the Mountain Creek watershed as a Focus Area through the Oregon Department of Agriculture Ag Water Quality Program. With this designation, the District has concentrated restoration and monitoring in this area. Every two years, District staff conducts a a survey using the "Intermediate Survey Level" as defined by "Surveying Oregon's Streams 'A Snapshot In Time': Aquatic Inventory Project Training Materials and Methods for Stream Habitat Surveys." As a result of the survey, the following data is collected:

- Unit Number (consecutive numeration for record keeping)
- Unit Type (pool, riffle, glide, etc.)
- Channel Type (main channel, side channel, etc.)
- Percent Flow (for determining relative size of side channels)
- Width (m)
- Depth (m)
- Percent Slope (measured with an inclinometer)
- Shading (measured in degrees for both banks w/ an inclinometer)
- Percent Substrate Composition (measured as % of each type)
  - Silt/Organic Matter, Sand, Gravel, Cobble, Boulder, Bedrock
- Boulder Count (boulders > 0.5 m in diameter)
- Percent Active Erosion
- Count of Small, Medium, and Large Woody Debris
- Comments and Notes deemed relevant by surveyor
- Location coordinates for the beginning of each unit

During the 2021 survery, there were 441 points assessed and nearly 4 miles.

Shade

2019 Weighted Average of 20.86%

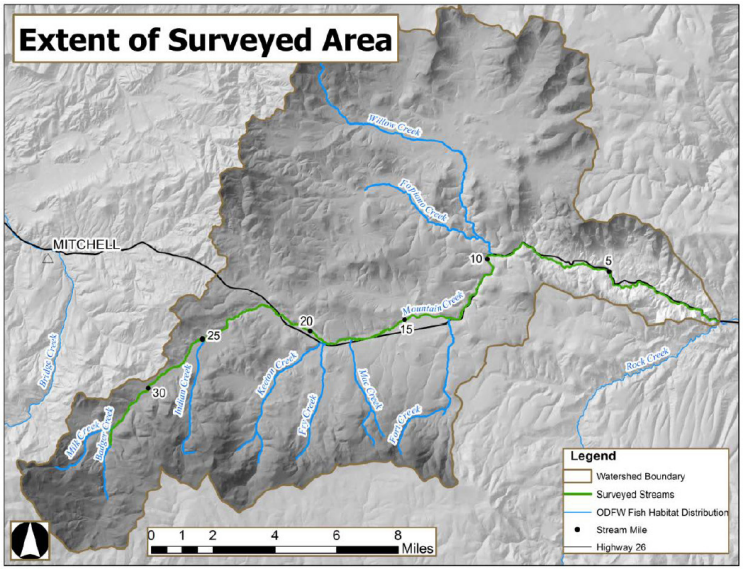
2021 Weighted Average of 25.61%

Erosion

2019 Weighted Average of 17.46%

2021 Weighted Average of 13.13%

Next survey August 2023



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.

Wheeler Soil & Water
Conservation District
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