

UPPER MAINSTEM AND S. FORK JOHN DAY RIVER
Agricultural Water Quality Management Area
Biennial Review Report to the Board of Agriculture and ODA Director
Submitted by the Local Advisory Committee (LAC)



Meeting Date: June 6, 2023
LAC Members Present: Joanne Keerins, Phil St. Clair, Roger Edgier, and Mark Webb
Reporting Timeframe: October 2020 through September 2022

PROGRESS MEASUREMENT

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

Activities (Grant SWCD, South Fork JD WC, NRCS)	#	Discussion
Events That Actively Engage Landowners	18	Grant County Natural Resource Fair 2022; Izee landowner contractor tour 2021; stakeholder survey; radio ads; and newspaper ads. The pandemic made it challenging to hold landowner engagement events.
Landowners Participating in Active Events	82	25 at Natural Resource Fair; 20 at Izee tour; South Fork John Day Watershed Council is tracking call-backs and mail received; Belshaw Creek Project; juniper removal; riparian fence.
Landowners Provided Technical Assistance	65	Various soils, seeding recommendation requests; technical assistance in the form of site visits, information handouts, restoration guidance.
Site Visits	230	Technical assistance; initial applications; Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) certifications; Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) Stakeholder Engagement grant and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) is providing funding for many site visits; juniper removal; erosion; Belshaw Creek; and Canyon Creek.
Conservation Plans Written	31	Funded Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) contracts
Funding Applications Submitted	108	Through various NRCS programs. RCP, OWEB, Oregon Water Resources Department, U.S. Partners for Fish and Wildlife. Juniper removal, riparian fence, Belshaw Creek.
Funding Applications Awarded	56	Through various NRCS programs. Juniper removal, riparian fence.

LAC DISCUSSION

Summary of Progress

- More landowners are implementing Conservation Reserve Program grasslands under CREP and grazing plans with NRCS.
- There are community wildfire funds being utilized to improve agricultural uplands to reduce fire risks from issues such as annual invasives and to improve vegetation community to natives, which reduces soil erosion and benefits agricultural water quality.
- Water developments are now also designed to fill wildfire water trucks, which provides additional benefit/incentive to support off-channel water developments, which can reduce use of riparian areas.
- More agricultural landowners are working on annual invasive grasses and juniper control, which will lead to better watershed health. Also, more landowners are engaging with juniper millers, and although it's still not profitable, coordinated effort has increased.
- There has been a big emphasis on annual grass control via aerial application thus covering many acres. The goal is to cover 100,000 acres in the next year in Grant County, which is important for watershed health.

- The U.S. Forest Service is doing a lot of instream work and riparian improvements that will benefit water quality.

Impediments

- The lack of workforce in the past several years has slowed project implementation. Local conservation entities are repeatedly posting vacancies without securing staff to conduct project work for which grant funding is in place. Funders are pushing to get the project work done and it is very challenging when there is a staffing shortage. Contractors are backed up and have not been a viable solution. Lack of affordable housing is also causing challenges with finding staffing, particularly seasonal staff.
- Permitting requirements from various agencies is a big roadblock to keeping landowners engaged in a project from the standpoint of time to get all the permitting in place. Additionally, one agency permit's requirements may contradict another agency's requirement for its permit. Costs associated with obtaining permits is also increasing.
- Several LAC members reported that effective coordination across multiple watersheds and among local, state, and federal agencies, and local landowners is occurring. However, improvement efforts made in this Management Area may not be realized because of issues that occur farther downstream.
- Discussion occurred about a need to identify more specifically what causes stress in aquatic species, particularly salmonids, and the geographic location of those causes. Some LAC members expressed concern that some causes are occurring downstream, and that upstream water quality and quantity are not the only cause of stress on aquatic species.
- Restoration efforts people choose to complete sometimes have a narrow focus to fix one item, but in fixing that, it causes another problem. For example, actions to address habitat needs for the Oregon spotted frog inadvertently negatively impacted Jefferson County agriculture.
- Statewide regulatory framework doesn't always reflect local needs.
- Timelines on water transfers is extremely lengthy.
- Noxious weeds being transported from one land to another.
- Expansion of juniper is taking up limited water resources.

Recommended Modifications and Adaptive Management

- Recommend that state agencies communicate with each other to develop some type of permitting program that works across all the state agencies to ease the burden of restoration project permit requirements. One form that goes to all agencies. Eliminate duplications, eliminate contradictions, create efficiencies, and use language that all can easily understand.
- For efforts to be realized in the health of the watershed and in the water column, public and private landowners need to coordinate across landowners and public land boundaries.

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	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Within SIA	Not Applicable							