ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021

Crook County Soil and Water Conservation District

Est. 1972

The mission of the Crook County Soil and Water Conservation District is to provide assistance to Crook County residents for the sustainability of agricultural lands and natural resources.

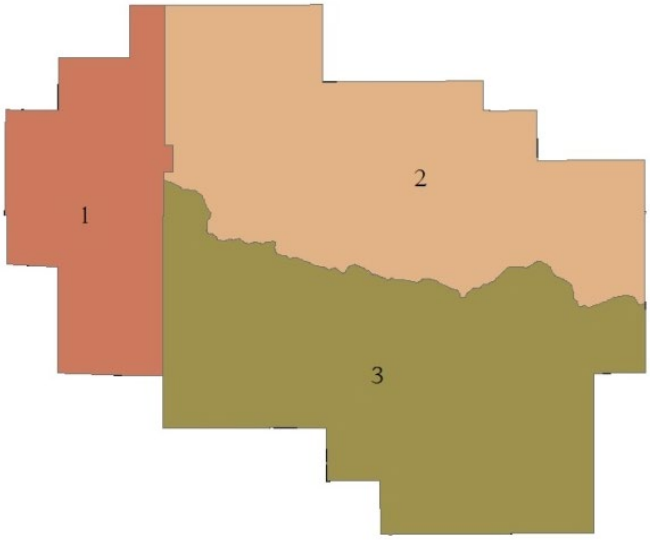
District Board Meetings

Monthly board meetings are generally held on the third Monday of every month at 9:00 a.m. at the Crook County Extension Service office. Meetings are open to the public and agendas are provided upon request. Topics discussed at meetings can vary depending on the current issues, projects, or concerns. Oregon Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Crook County Extension Service, County Weedmaster, Ochoco Irrigation District, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Crooked River Watershed Council regularly provide board with updates and notifications. The annual meeting is usually held in December and the annual Paulina Landowner Workshop is scheduled in February.

We would like to thank former Zone 1 director and Board Chair, Lee Dunn who stepped down from the board at the end of his term. Lee served on the Crook SWCD board for 27 years and will be sorely missed. Jason Dennis was elected to the vacant Zone 1 director position in November of 2020 and Zach Flegel was selected by the board to serve as Board Chair. We look forward to continuing the SWCDs good work under our new leadership.

Crook County SWCD Board of Directors	
Zone 1	Jason Dennis
Zone 2	Gary Bedortha
Zone 3	Jerry Coffelt
At Large 1	Bill Sigman
At large 2	Zach Flegel

Crook SWCD Zones



Crook SWCD's zones are intended to accurately represent natural resources and the agricultural community within Crook County.

Zone 1 includes the city of Prineville, the majority of small acre agriculture, most of the crop production, and irrigated lands below the major reservoirs. It also includes all current anadromous fish habitat within Crook County. **Zone 2 and 3** divide the remainder of the county into north and south zones following Highway 380. These zones share similar resources including significant forest lands, rangelands, and considerable areas of potential sage grouse habitat.

All zones include a large component of both public and private land, as well as a variety of land uses including agriculture, range, and forest with agricultural and ecological concerns that help steer district priorities. This alignment allows Crook SWCD to work effectively in all three zones.

Agriculture in Crook County Continues Efforts to Improve Water Quality

Crook County SWCD receives support from Oregon Department of Agriculture to assist landowners in improving agricultural impact on water quality through education, technical assistance, and grant development. The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted our ability to provide assistance to landowners while also limiting the amount of contracted services we completed. While our numbers are not nearly as impressive as previous years, we still made one on one landowner contact 261 times including 43 site visits, while managing 19 grant projects totaling over $1 million in funding.

Landowner Workshops a Successful Educational Tool

Unfortunately we were forced to cancel our 2021 Paulina Landowner Workshop. We will plan on having one again in 2022.

Irrigation Efficiency for Water Quality Improvement in the Lower Crooked River

This project seeks to engage members of the agricultural communities in Prineville and Powell Butte with the purpose of spurring interest to improve agricultural practices and make a meaningful and lasting improvement to water quality in the Lower Crooked River Watershed. In 2019 Crook County SWCD submitted an OWEB Stakeholder Engagement Grant in an effort to begin a series of workshops. In February of 2021Crook SWCD hosted a ditchrider workshop where employees from COID and OID attended to learn about irrigation technology and resources available to landowners. This will hopefully allow irrigation district staff to identify potential improvements and get landowners information to help them get started on projects. Crook SWCD is also working on an irrigation geodatabase to organize and store pertinent irrigator information which should help seek funds to help improve irrigation efficiency. Ochoco Irrigation District (OID) and Central Oregon Irrigation District (COID) are the primary targets of outreach but other irrigators and districts are also welcomed to participate. Partners include OID, Prineville Insurance, COID, NRCS, OSU, Energy Trust of Oregon, WyEast RC&D, and Deschutes River Conservancy. This project will be completed in early 2023.

Camp Creek Atlas Completed!

In May, 2017 OWEB and Crook County SWCD signed a grant agreement to identify and prioirtize restoration activities with the highest impact to the watershed. The Camp Creek Watershed Restoration Atlas was intended to compliment the 2007 Camp Creek Watershed Assessment. The Atlas was completed in February of 2021 and was a great success!

The Atlas is currently being used to prioritize and justify restoration project in the Camp Creek Watershed. The first grant application to be a direct result of the Camp Creek Atlas will be a riparian planting project at the confluence of Camp Creek and the Crooked River. More projects are likely to come out of this effort in the future.

Sage Grouse Restoration Efforts Continue

Landowners continue to show their commitment to the sage grouse habitat efforts even after the not-warranted decision was made in September, 2015. In an effort to support those efforts, seven different districts in prime sage grouse habitat offer Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA); voluntary agreements where landowners agree to manage their lands to remove or reduce threats to sage grouse. In return, landowners receive assurances against additional regulatory requirements if the bird is listed. To date, 4 plans have been approved. Crook SWCD's CCAA will include an estimated 278,614 acres of privately owned sage grouse habitat in Crook, Harney, Lake, and Deschutes Counties. Crook SWCD received an OWEB technical assistance grant during 2018-2019 which should allow the district to complete the bulk of the plans by 2021-2022.

Designs for Fish Passage and Screening in the Upper Ochoco Creek Watershed Completed!

In April of 2019 the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board awarded $74,871 to work towards improving fish passage and screening on upper Ochoco and Marks Creeks. Ochoco Creek is a significant tributary to the Crooked River east of Prineville, OR. These streams exhibit rich ecological potential but past management and barriers to fish migration and survival have fettered their productivity. With proper fish passage and screening this lush valley has the opportunity to offer high value spawning and rearing habitat for redband trout while continuing to provide excellent big game habitat and agricultural production. This grant secured funds to engage a professional engineer to conduct necessary surveys and develop design packages needed to address 11 fish passage barriers and 9 fish screening locations to restore passage along 20.3 miles of Ochoco and Marks Creeks. The project includes three land ownerships, with both landowners excited to continue their work to improve fish habitat and overall watershed conditions. The designs produced through this project were used to apply for restoration funds. The first stage of restoration will focus on removal of barriers along Ochoco Creek below its confluence with Marks Creek and 3 barriers on lower Marks Creek.

Sabre Sage Steppe and Wetland Enhancement Completed!

In summer of 2020 Crook SWCD completed a $259,378 OWEB project which assisted landowners in improving the condition of local ecosystems; stabilizing wildlife habitat, watershed function, and agricultural production. Combined with partner contributions this project totaled to $778,412. The two private landowners participating in the project accounted for 67% of the project area. When combined with an additional 27% of the project area that is federally owned, the participating landowners and agencies control 94% of the Watson and Paulina Creek watersheds. This project focused on building infrastructure in order to help facilitate better grazing distribution and protect resources important for wildlife habitat and watershed health. In total the project will funded 4.6 miles of livestock pipeline, 7 off channel water developments, and 16.35 miles of riparian and reservoir fencing. These landowners are continuing work with other agencies to treat invasive junipers and noxious weeds. Waterfowl and shorebird habitat was a main focus of this project since the area provides habitat which is otherwise limited in Crook County.

PIPELINE INSTALLATION IN MINIFIE VALLEY. THIS PIPELINE ALLOWS THE PRODUCER TO LIMIT LIVESTOCK ACCESS TO THE RIPARIAN AREA BY PROVIDING ALTERNATE WATER SOURCES ALONG ITS ENTIRE LENGTH.

NEW FENCING WILL ALLOW THE VEGETATION TO RECOVER AND HOPEFULLY FOR CHANNEL CONDITION TO IMPROVE OVER TIME. CATTLE HAD BEEN REMOVED FROM THIS AREA FOR APPROXIMATELY 2 MONTHS PRIOR TO THIS PHOTO. MANAGERS ARE COMMITTED TO KEEPING GRAZING OUT OF RIPARIAN AREAS FOR 3 YEARS AND THEN IMPLEMENTING A ROTATION SYSTEM DEPENDING ON RECOVERY.

PHOTOS SHOW RECOVERY OF MEADOW AND SPRING AREA FOLLOWING THE ADDITION OF FENCING, MANAGEMENT OF LIVESTOCK, AND REDEVELOPMENT OF SPRING WITH TROUGH PLACEMENT OUTSIDE OF MEADOW AREA.

THE RIPARIAN FENCE AND STOCKWATER PIPELINE HAVE ALLOWED MANAGEMENT TO USE THIS RIPARIAN AREA DIFFERENTLY. NOTICE THE ALDERS THAT HAVE NATURALLY ESTABLISHED IN THE FOREGROUND SINCE PROJECT INCEPTION.

FOSTERING THE NATURAL ECOLOGY OF RESILIENT LANDSCAPES ON HAMPTON BUTTES

In April of 2020 the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board awarded $268,508 for this wildlife habitat and watershed improvement project on Hampton Buttes. The project area offers a precious combination of elevation and aspect, giving it the potential to provide highly productive habitat for species in need of seasonal forage and cover like sage-grouse and mule deer. Our holistic approach focuses on an area on the north slopes of Hampton Buttes where alterations in natural disturbance regimes have caused plant communities to shift, degrading the native ecology. These shifts include juniper encroachment and the decline of native bunch grasses, forbs, shrubs, and quaking aspen. The project area is predominantly comprised of uplands with a north facing aspect, which respond well to restoration because their deeper soils and cooler temperatures provide the foundation for a resilient native plant community where disturbance is more likely to produce a directional change that aligns with local and statewide management objectives. This project is addressing many of the limiting factors identified for this area by working with private landowners to address multiple objectives using a landscape approach. Project elements include: initiating prescribed burns on 1,895 acres of sage steppe that has been invaded by western juniper; cutting junipers on 2,184 acres of sage steppe, rejuvenate 6 acres of aspen woodlands by removing encroaching conifers and reducing browse pressure; Redeveloping five springs and adding wildlife escape ramps to improve livestock distribution, decrease grazing pressure, and preventing drowning at water sources. Partners include: landowners, NRCS, ODFW, and ODA

THE PROJECT WILL EMPLY MULTIPLE TREATMENT PRESCRIPTIONS IN ORDER TO PRODUCE A MOSAIC OF PLANT COMMUNITIES

THIS SPRING DEVELOPMENT WILL BE REMOVED AND THE SPRING WILL BE ALLOWED TO RECOVER AND FLOW INTO THE FENCED ASPEN STAND BELOW

THIS SPRING WILL BE REDEVELOPED AS PART OF PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS

Small Grant Efforts Lead to Big Improvements

The OWEB small grant projects funded within the Crooked River Watershed during 2020-2021 benefitted the watershed and water quality using a variety of approaches. The flexibility of the Small Grant Program makes it one of our most valuable tools. It provides the ability to help landowners accomplish meaningful projects with a relatively quick project development and funding timeline.

Landowners implemented practices such as juniper treatments, riparian fencing, off-site watering developments, non-commercial thinning, and ditch to pipe projects directly benefiting wildlife and watersheds.

During 2020-2021 Crook SWCD initiated 1 small grant which demonstrated a clear benefit to aquatic species, wildlife, and watershed health. This Grant finished out the cycle by exhausting the available small grant funds. A new round of funding is expected at the start of 2021-2022.

Additionally landowners completed 5 small grants initiated during 2018-2020

Maury Mountain to High Desert Migration Enhancement

In July 2020 Crook SWCD received a $73,855 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to work in the Maury Mountains. NFWF recognized the incredible habitat potential that this area offers for seasonally migrating big game animals and other sensitive species that are dependent on sagebrush ecosystems. This habitat exists largely on private working lands owned by multigenerational family ranchers, possessing a strong conservation ethic and desire to see the land and species that live there thrive. Habitat potential is being degraded by the proliferation of Western Juniper; invasion of non-native annual grasses; and legacy fences that form migration barriers. These factors combine to limit the quantity and quality of wildlife cover and forage available to migrating Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, and pronghorn in the Upper Crooked River basin. We are in the process of reducing conifer cover, mapping and treating noxious weed infestations, identifying areas for native plant seeding, and developing grazing management strategies that will reduce the need for fencing while ensuring plant communities remain healthy for seasonally migrating big game. Funds will be used in partnership with NRCS, USFS and ODFW to create landscape scale changes necessary to improve the health and reproductive success of resident wildlife populations and migrating ungulates.

CONIFER ENCROACHED ASPEN GROVE IN THE MAURY MOUNTAINS

Maury Wildlife Migration Corridor Enhancement

In July 2020 Crook SWCD was awarded $99,877 through the US Fish and Wildlife Partners Program through a federal initiative to improve big game winter range and migration corridors. This projects is designed to benefit mule deer, elk and pronghorn through restoration work focused on grassland restoration, invasive species management and aspen stand restoration. This work is reducing juniper cover on 513 acres in order to promote the understory bunchgrass communities and open the canopy to improve bitterbrush recruitment which is generally shade intolerant. The juniper treatment is designed in a mosaic pattern that with retain thermal cover for the big game while also opening up the adjacent areas to provide forage. There are two aspen groves that are choked out with conifers and shrinking in size. In that rare and declining habitat type we are working to promote suckering of young trees and increase water availability in those draws. The final step will be to spot treat the medusahead on the south facing slopes to discourage spread and control the spotty outbreaks.

AREAS WHERE JUNIPERS HAVE BEEN PREVOIUSLY TREATED SHOW GOOD BUNCHGRASS AND BITTERBRUSH COMMUNITIES. TREATMENTS ARE INTENDED TO MIMIC THIS EFFECT.

CROOK COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Crook County, Oregon

STATEMENT OF REVENUES, EXPENDITURES, AND CHANGES IN FUND BALANCES - MODIFIED CASH BASIS

GOVERNMENTAL FUND

For the Year Ended June 30, 2021

	General Fund
REVENUES	
Charges for services	$ 31,545
Grants	226,384
Investment earnings	9
Total revenues	257,937
EXPENDITURES	
Current	
Conservation activities	
Personnel services	148,050
Materials and supplies	53,842
Capital outlay	59,255
Total expenditures	261,147
Excess (deficiency) of revenues over (under) expenditures	(3,210)
Fund balance - beginning, as restated	98,338
Fund balance - ending	$ 95,128

See accompanying notes and independent accountant's review report.