

NORTH AND MIDDLE FORKS 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 7, 2023
LAC Members Present: Jim Bahrenburg, Rick Henslee, John Zakrajsek
Reporting Time Frame: 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 (Umatilla, Morrow, Grant, and Monument SWCDs; NRCS)	#	Discussion
Events That Actively Engage Landowners	8	Grant County Natural Resource Fair 2022; Ritter landowner contractor tour 2022; Covid challenges for outreach. Seminars, legislative tours, watershed scale assessments.
Landowners Participating in Active Events	220	25 at Natural Resource Fair, 15 at the Ritter tour. Riparian fence, habitat improvement on Fox Creek; stockwater project on Fox Creek.
Landowners Provided Technical Assistance	183	Annual grass drone flights. Various soils, seeding recommendation requests. Agricultural water quality best practices.
Site Visits	254	Annual grass drone flights. Early November 2021 went to Hughes Ranch just outside of Ukiah to look at potential stockwater development project. Technical assistance, initial applications, water right certifications. Riparian fence on Little Indian Creek, Junkens Creek, Starve Out Creek; habitat improvement on Fox Creek; culvert replacement Ritter area; riparian fence along South Fork Long Creek; stockwater project. Site tours for assistance and project development.
Conservation Plans Written	39	Funded Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency contracts.
Funding Applications Submitted	88	Through various NRCS programs. Riparian fence on Little Indian Creek, Junkens Creek, Starve Out Creek; riparian fence along South Fork Long Creek; Agricultural water quality projects related to noxious weed, uplands health, cattle management, etc.
Funding Applications Awarded	46	Through various NRCS programs. Riparian fence on Little Indian Creek, Junkens Creek, Starve Out Creek. U.S. Forest Service, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Oregon State Weed Board, funding sources.

LAC DISCUSSION

Summary of Progress

- Streamside vegetation has vastly improved in the past 20-plus years.
- Development of a consistent stewardship planning program that is available to interested landowners. The program assists in identifying landowners' goals and merging their goals with natural resource goals. The resulting product is a comprehensive stewardship plan that contains a prioritized list of projects.
- Landowners are continuing to develop and/or review current grazing management strategies, pasture fencing, riparian plantings, etc., to adapt and improve land stewardship.
- Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding is coming in through NRCS to local conservation entities, which provides more opportunities for watershed health improvement projects.
- Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs' greenhouse has been useful as it has increased access to local native riparian plants. North Fork John Day Watershed Council will supplement this effort.

Impediments

- Lots of resources (monitoring, on-the-ground implementation, improvements in agricultural practices, etc.) have gone into this Management Area for decades, particularly in the Middle Fork John Day River. It was expected that the result of decades of this work would show good improvements in the water column. But working in natural environment is very dynamic, and therefore implemented projects/practices don't always result in the anticipated improvement and there is still much to learn to obtain improvements needed to meet beneficial uses. Additionally, it should be evident to regulatory agencies how much effort has gone into this Management Area. However, pressure from regulatory agencies continues, which is disheartening.

- It is becoming increasingly difficult to find funding sources for irrigation efficiency projects. It seems surprising that state and federal funders aren't supporting these efforts considering the extreme and exceptional drought conditions that have been occurring in Oregon for the past several years.
- The amount of the IRA funding that could be acquired for watershed health improvement projects will be limited by the amount of match that can be secured. Also, the contracts with IRA have definitive implementation deadlines.
- There has been an increase in absentee landowners. Some lack knowledge of watershed health issues and/or are less engaged. Whereas others have more of an interest in wildlife, than ranching, which can cause a shift in priorities and concerns.
- Drought and wildfires have added complexities to managing healthy lands/watersheds.

Recommended Modifications and Adaptive Management

- The LAC encourages state leaders and regulatory agencies to acknowledge and provide recognition of the work that has taken place and the improvements that landowners have made, even if there are more water quality concerns to address.
- State leaders are encouraged to allocate funding sources that support irrigation efficiency improvements.
- For Oregon to be more effective in acquiring IRA funding, the LAC requests that the Board of Agriculture support state leadership quickly identifying and allocating funding sources for IRA match so that this opportunity will not be lost.
- The LAC recommends that local students are utilized to do restoration work.
- Note that there is currently a potential pending 80,000-acre timber harvest at the headwaters of the Middle Fork. If it occurs this may cause shifts in how the watershed functions.
- Partnering organizations locally can make Regional Conservation Partnership Program grants easier to pull off.
- The LAC encourages local, state, and federal conservation entities to use the North American Salmon Stronghold Partnership Oregon strongholds map to demonstrate that this watershed is highly important for salmonid conservation and recovery.
- Compile useful data analysis/datasets in the basin and summarize and report all that has been done.
- Alders should be considered more for riparian planting projects because they are hardy against floods and beavers, and beneficial for shade.
- More cross communication across local, state, and federal entities to eliminate duplicative efforts.

ODA COMPLIANCE ACTIVITIES

Location	Cases		Site Visits	Agency Actions				
				Letter of Compliance		Pre-Enforcement Notification	Notice of Noncompliance	Civil Penalty
	New	Closed		Already in compliance	Brought into compliance			
Outside SIA	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Within SIA	Not Applicable							