Conservation Times

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Harvesting of wheat on Jim Petty's farm, August 8, 1968. Diversion terrace system that was seeded to intermediate wheatgrass in the foreground. /Asotin Co. SCD

Asotin County Conservation District Celebrates 82 Years!

Over eight decades of generations protecting natural resources.

Understanding Our History

During the Dustbowl Era of the 1930's President Franklin D. Roosevelt saw a need for soil conservation. He pushed Congress to develop a new agency called the Soil Stabilization Service. This agency became the Soil Conservation Service, and more recently, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). To increase the functionality of this new agency, Roosevelt decided local input should be a part of this mix. Out of this, he devised the idea for locally led soil conservation boards. Of course, these boards are now our conservation district board of supervisors.

In this way the federal government was able to get local input on which programs would be most locally acceptable. These new boards also facilitated twoway communication between local private landowners and the federal government. The boards were able to identify local soil conservation priorities, and in return informed the local public about new practices that could not only save soil, but could often mean more profitable farming. State Legislature created Chapter 89.08 of the Revised Code of Washington. RCW 89.08 created the Washington Conservation Commission and provided for the development and dissolution of conservation districts. It also explained the duties, responsibilities and powers of the Commission, conservation districts and district supervisors.

As technology and the world around us continues to change, the landowners, farmers and ranchers have the original wording remains because the focus and purpose of local conservation districts has remained the same. The law clearly identifies the need to conserve all renewable natural resources through the voluntary actions of Washington's residents.

RCW 89.08 clearly defines the role conservation districts fill in Washington State. It is the role of conservation districts to provide the state's residents with the tools, resources and skills necessary to voluntarily conserve the renewable natural resources.

Roosevelt went so far as to develop draft legislation (Standard States District Act) for each state so there would be continuity between states and so they would all have the same basic purpose. Roosevelt and Congress informed the states they would not be eligible to receive assistance from the federal Soil Conservation Service unless they had laws that allowed the creation of these boards and local communities were actively forming the boards. In 1939 the Washington

This law has been altered, amended and changed numerous times since it was created. However, much of

natural resources a priority.

continued to make

Function of a District

The primary function of the District is to assist landowners and others who participate in making land use decisions. This takes the form of encouraging proper use and treatment of renewable natural resources and making available the necessary technical and financial assistance. The District also identifies resource conservation problems and opportunities for solving these problems. As a result of

the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, Section 208, the District developed a Program of Best Management Practices and a plan for the implementation of those practices.

The Asotin County Conservation District includes all of Asotin County excluding incorporated cities and towns. The Conservation District also serves the Grouse Flat area of Garfield County. The District is governed by a Board of Supervisors, of whom three are elected by local landowners and two are appointed by the State Conservation Commission or Governor.

The district goals are to protect and improve the quality of the environment, provide planning assistance to all landowners, maintain and improve in the quality of the resource base.

Although conservation districts were first created address to resource conservation in the agricultural community, the State Legislature has their broadened scope over the years. Our state legislators recognize that for issues relating to natural resources, the most effective governmental link to private landowners in Washington State are conservation districts.

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LOCAL

82 years of conservation in Asotin County

An Emerging Partnership with Noxious Weeds

Weed Control

CCD and the Asotin ACounty Noxious Weed Control Board have teamed up to implement voluntary weed management projects and programs. Asotin County and the Asotin County Noxious Weed Control Board intends to designate the District as the entity that will coordinate and implement non-regulatory, voluntary weed management activities in Asotin County. The District has the technical expertise to coordinate the weed management activities and complete the weed management plans and desires to do so. District serves the citizens of the community to ensure the long-term use of natural resources in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner using non-regulatory, voluntary approaches.

A key goal is to develop and implement outreach and education opportunities for landowners and youth in Asotin County.

Mediterranean Sage found in Asotin County.





Three-sided concrete box culvert on Cottonwood Creek allows fish passage at all flow levels. /ACCD

Major Accomplishment for ACCD's 82nd Anniversary

Passage mprovement

C teelhead trout are a unique Species. Individuals develop differently depending on their environment. All wild steelhead trout hatch gravel-bottomed, fastin flowing, well-oxygenated rivers and streams. Some stav in fresh water all their lives and are called rainbow trout. Steelhead trout that migrate to the ocean typically grow larger than the ones that stay in freshwater. They then return to freshwater to spawn. Steelhead trout are vulnerable to many stressors and threats including blocked access to spawning grounds and habitat degradation caused by dams and culverts.

The culvert on the Grande Ronde River Road was identified as a fish passage barrier and a high priority by the Snake River Regional Technical Team. This barrier limited steelhead access to over 2.54 miles of spawning rearing habitat in and Cottonwood Creek. Habitat limiting factors and objectives for this reach include reducing imminent threats, such as removing obstructions. The Asotin County Conservation District secured funding for the design and construction of a three-sided concrete box culvert to restore full passage allowing steelhead to migrate during all stream flow conditions.

In partnership with Asotin County, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, and Snake River Salmon Recovery Board, the sixfoot corrugated culvert was replaced with a bottomless box culvert in 2020. Native grasses and trees were planted to All wild steelhead hatch in gravelbottomed, fastflowing, welloxygenated rivers and streams.

In 2006, the Snake River Basin DPS of steelhead trout was listed as Threatened on the Endangered Species List (ESA).

begin restoring the disturbed reiparian area. The streambed was restored to a roughened channel allowing steelhead to migrate through Cottonwood Creek and access 2.54 miles of cold-water habitat. Fish passage restoration is critical for steelhead and salmon recovery. There is only one more significant fish passage barrier in the Washington Grande Ronde River watershed, and a solution is scheduled for construction in 2023.

Key partners in the funding of the culvert replacement were Washington Recreation and Conservation Office (Fish Barrier Recovery Board and Salmon Recovery Funding Board), and Bonneville Power Administration.

176 Post-assisted Log Structures

were Installed

Habitat Restoration

he Asotin County District **L** Conservation (ACCD) is pioneering a Stewardship Forestland Program to source local, high-quality woody materials for in-stream fish habitat projects. enhancement Precommercial thinning and pruning practices will be applied to reduce fuel-loading and increase fire-resiliency in the upland forests which stand at the headwaters of our watersheds. ACCD will then use the harvested woody materials to construct in-stream habitat enhancement structures in

project areas around Asotin County.

PALS (Post-assisted log structures) and BDA's (beaver dam analogues) habitat enhancements are low-cost, hand-built structures which mimic a stream's natural process of wood accumulation (much like a beaver dam) which improves fish habitat. We will be installing PALS in several project areas within Asotin County in the Summer of 2020, 2021, and 2022. Future habitat enhancement projects are in the works, meaning we will need large amounts of woody materials in the future!



PAL structure installed in Couse Creek. /L. Ausman-Ditto

NEWS

82 years of conservation in Asotin County.

Healthy Wildlife

The Bighorn Sheep Health Outreach Program is based in the greater Hells Canyon region with the goal of educating sheep and goat owners about the risks of disease transmission between domestics and bighorn sheep. Spearheaded by the Asotin County Conservation District, the program is part of the Hells Canyon Initiative with contributions from Idaho Fish and Game, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Wild Sheep Foundation. The overall goal of the initiative is to conserve bighorn sheep populations by reducing the risk on the landscape by addressing pneumonia due to Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae (M.ovi) at its source.

M.ovi is a bacteria that occurs in domestic sheep and goats worldwide. This bacteria lives in the nasal passages of domestic sheep and goats, who frequently carry the bacteria while having no symptoms of disease. Bighorns become infected with M.ovi through close contact (noseto-nose, or within coughing distance) with domestic sheep and goats, or other bighorns within a herd that have M.ovi. A single wandering bighorn sheep can carry the bacteria back to a herd of bighorns and spread the disease. Once in a herd, M.ovi causes devastating pneumonia resulting in death in up 80% of the herd within months. Ongoing herd loss continues as lambs are born each year and die after exposure to adult animals that survive and carry the bacteria.

The Bighorn Sheep Health Outreach Program offers free,

Protecting Bighorn Sheep in Hells Canyon



Bighorn Sheep ram in a local yard poses a threat of intermingling with domestic sheep and/or goats. /IDFG

voluntary testing for domestic sheep and goats in high-risk areas for M.ovi. Tests are completed by swabbing an animal's nasal passages with a sterile foamtipped swab. These swabs are then sent to Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (WADDL) to be analyzed via PCR, which identifies DNA markers found in the swab to identify if M.ovi bacteria are present. The outreach program works with landowners on a case-by-case basis to develop biosecurity plans and implement precautions to reduce the risk of contact between bighorns and domestics. In the event of a positive animal being detected, precautions may include the use of double fencing, livestock guardian dogs, and/or rehoming the animal to an area outside of bighorn sheep habitat. The program is also able to work with owners interested in testing and removal of positive animals to achieve M.ovi-negative herds. Since its start in 2019, the program has successfully tested a combined 978 domestic sheep and goats. Approximately 34% of herds have had at least one positive animal in the group; herds that have breeding animals, or that have breeding animals, or that have animals traveling such as for shows or breeding, are more likely to have M.ovi positive animals. On an individual basis, 13% of goats and 6% of sheep have tested positive for M.ovi, with higher incidence in young animals under a year of age, and in intact breeding males. In this region, most people with domestics have never heard of pneumonia in bighorn sheep, have 1-5 pet goats, and want to treat positive animals or vaccinate their herd to reduce the risk of disease. Since no vaccine exists and antibiotics effective against M.ovi are not approved for use in sheep and goats in the U.S., education and biosecurity are key to reducing risk to bighorns for the time being.



Bighorn Sheep ram and collard ewe in Hells Canyon. /IDFG



Riparian tree and shrub planting with the WA Conservation Crew.



Direct Seeding in progress for N. Scheibe.



ACCD staff inspecting a new PAL structure.



A functioning spring development for livestock use.



ACCD and Clarkston High School evaluating Couse Creek.



Cattle are fed using manure management feed pads.





Forestry thinning is promoting good forestry health.





A wheat crop thriving amidst the wildfire smoke.



Riparian projects help protect fish habitat.

First and sixth grade students release trout for Salmon in the Classroom Program.