



Lower Deschutes Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plan

FALL 2010

Oregon Needs to Support Its Agricultural Water Quality Program

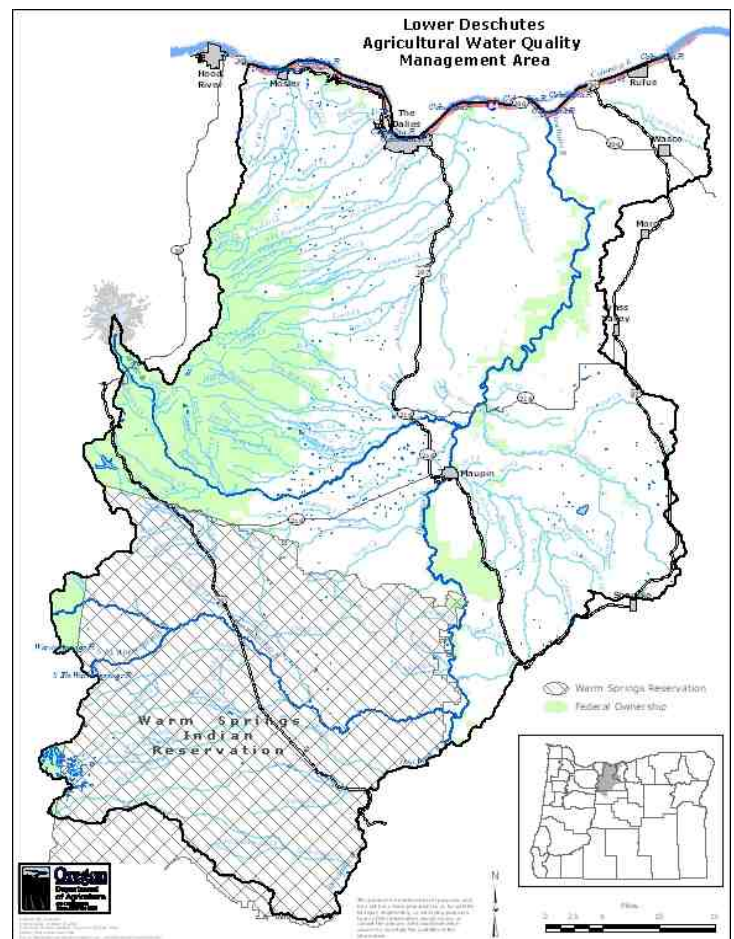
The state's diminishing resources to support the Agricultural Water Quality Program topped the list of concerns at the November 15, 2010, biennial review of the Lower Deschutes Agricultural Water Quality Local Advisory Committee (LAC).

The Wasco County and Sherman County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) have excellent relationships with their producers and actively pursue water quality improvement opportunities. They want to make sure that they and their agricultural landowners continue to receive the support they need from the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA).

Other concerns include:

- The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) lacks a numeric sediment standard. It currently has no methodology to determine compliance with their narrative standard. Stream reaches in the Management Area are on the 303(d) list for sediment but there is currently no way to determine whether they are now in compliance.
- Lack of support from state agencies has hampered efforts to control feral pigs and the devastation they cause wetlands, riparian areas, and agricultural land. The SWCDs would like ODA to make control or eradication of feral pigs a priority.

The LAC felt that one of the benefits of meeting every two years includes keeping up with items that need to be addressed through the biennial review process. For instance, DEQ's rulemaking process for toxics will result in tighter rules for



The Management Area consists of the Deschutes River drainage downstream of the Metolius River. It also includes all Oregon lands draining to the Columbia River between the Hood River drainage and the John Day Basin. It excludes the Warm Springs Indian Reservation and the Trout Creek drainage in Jefferson County.

some toxics such as pesticides, mercury, and arsenic and may require more stringent controls on agricultural runoff.



SWCD accomplishments

Sherman County SWCD

SWCD staff assists more than 100 landowners annually with on-the-ground conservation projects.

In the last two years, landowners constructed two grassed waterways, over 200,000 feet of terraces, and 218 water and sediment control basins to help prevent eroding soil from entering local streams. Rangelands were also improved with five wildlife watering facilities, two spring developments, and one range seeding. Almost 500 acres were enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to enhance streamside conditions. Three producers implemented Resource Management System plans from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for irrigation efficiency.



Wind turbines and terraced cropland in Sherman County.

Outreach and education are also priorities. The SWCD sponsors an Education Grant program. All schools, Oregon State University Extension Service (OSU Extension), and the Watershed Council have participated in this program. Sherman County SWCD also partnered for two years with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to provide schools with the Salmon/Trout Enhancement Program (STEP).



Sherman County elementary students releasing fish they raised through STEP.

Information isn't just for kids. Four "Conservation After Hours sessions" per year are sponsored by the SWCD. These include information from NRCS, OSU Extension, Farm Service Agency, and Mid Columbia Producers marketing specialists. In addition, the SWCD maintains a website and sends four newsletters out annually to 300 recipients.

Wasco County SWCD

The SWCD's principal means of limiting soil erosion has been to help producers shift from conventional tillage systems to direct seed / no-till on approximately 90% of Wasco County cereal grains cropland.

Landowners have also protected over 300 miles of streams with riparian buffers.

The SWCD has invested considerable time and money in helping producers improve irrigation efficiency, ranging from combination micro sprinkler and drip systems in orchards to replacing flood irrigation with center pivot. The district has completed piping system designs for two ditch systems, however money to pipe the systems has not yet been found.

Background

ODA approved the original Lower Deschutes Area Plan and Rules in June 2000. The LAC has reviewed the Area Plan and Rules every two years since adoption.

The LAC consists primarily of agricultural landowners residing in the Management Area, representing orchards, wheat, small grains, and cattle. Other interests include the city of Dufur and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Members attending this year include: Ken Bailey, Neil Harth, Gary Brown, Dick Lindley, Norm Lyda, and Tom McCoy.

ODA and the LAC’s goal is to “prevent or control water pollution from agricultural activities and to achieve applicable water quality standards”.

The LAC identified several objectives that will significantly improve water quality in the Management Area:

- acceptable rates of upland soil erosion;
- stream bank erosion within acceptable levels;
- eliminate placement, delivery, or sloughing of wastes into streams;
- adequate riparian vegetation for bank stability and stream shading consistent with vegetative site capability.

The LAC helped ODA develop Area Rules specifically for the Lower Deschutes. These rules address the objectives listed above. They require agricultural landowners to:

- control soil erosion on uplands;
- prevent active stream bank erosion beyond that expected as a result of natural conditions;
- prevent runoff of manure, fertilizer, or other wastes from reaching waterways; and
- enable development of vegetative cover along streams sufficient for bank stability and shading, consistent with site capability.



LAC Members
 Ken Bailey, co-chair
 Neil Harth, co-chair
 Gary Brown
 Rod French
 Bill Hammel
 Dick Lindley
 Norm Lyda
 Tom McCoy
 Glenn Miller

3 positions vacant

For assistance, contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District office:

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Residue helps prevent soil erosion

ODA investigated one complaint since the last biennial review. The complainants were concerned that soil eroding from a grain field was entering Fifteenmile Creek and degrading fish habitat. The landowner controls weeds through plowing, not chemicals, resulting in little residue on the field during the winter after planting. The field lacks terraces on the slopes and grassed waterways, allowing water to flow down the slope relatively unimpeded. ODA issued a Letter of Warning, and is tracking management changes. The landowner is working to increase residue above-ground and organic matter in the soil.



Photos (counterclockwise starting at left:

1. Looking down the slope at a gully that formed the winter after planting.
2. Rills in field on same day; note the amount of soil deposited at the bottom of the slope through overland flows that was available to enter local streams.
3. Same gully one year later. Note the large amount of residue on the ground that prevents soil erosion.

