Changes Over Time

How many of us were here in Benton County when the Benton SWCD formed in 1956? I didn’t move to this area until 1963 but had worked with the Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS) in Modoc County of northern California. At that time I was aware that conservation districts existed because a brand new one was forming in the eastern part of the County, but I didn’t know much about them. I have learned a great deal about conservation districts since I joined the Benton SWCD board in 1997, and even in that time we have seen many changes in the world of agricultural and conservation practices. Just imagine the extent of changes that have occurred since BSWCD’s inception 55 years ago! TRANSITIONS IN AGRICULTURE, the theme of the District’s annual meeting, will focus on the land and people of Benton County, with emphasis on changes in farming culture and practices. Come to our annual meeting on October 26 from 5-8 pm at the American Legion Hall in Monroe and learn more about the history of our local landscape and farming community.

We are pleased to present this annual report, which highlights our accomplishments from the 2010-2011 fiscal year. Read on to get a flavor of what we do. As always, the District is here to serve the citizens of Benton County. Our staff and board of directors remain fully committed to providing the most up-to-date and effective information to you in your efforts to manage the resources under your control. We would be happy to help you meet your conservation goals during the upcoming year.

TRANSITIONS IN AGRICULTURE
~ Benton SWCD’s 55TH ANNUAL MEETING ~

Come spend an evening with local farmers. Hear their stories of how agriculture in Benton County has changed with the times. Audience participation is encouraged: share your family farm’s stories and ask questions! Bring a photo or small relic from your farm and tell its story too.

Date: Wednesday, October 26, 2011
Chili* & Cornbread: 5:00-6:00 pm
Program: 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Location:
American Legion Hall - 605 Main Street - Monroe, OR
From 99W, head west for one block on Main Street in downtown Monroe.
Want to carpool from Corvallis? Contact BSWCD office.
*Vegetarian option available.
Partners in Action  by Jennifer Ayotte

Here at Benton SWCD, we are fortunate to be part of an active community of conservation partners. Partnerships help us to expand our perspectives and our work. One successful partnership, the Benton Fish Passage Improvement Program, ended this year. For eight years, Benton SWCD employed a fish passage coordinator who was housed with Benton County Public Works. Funding came from Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and Benton County Title II funds. Teams of volunteers surveyed artificial barriers to fish passage (largely dams and culverts). The data collected by those volunteers led to the replacement of many culverts and consequential opening of miles of habitat for resident fish. This important work was undertaken by a partnership of Benton County Public Works, Benton SWCD and the Marys, Luckiamute and Alsea Watershed Councils. Our Fish Passage Coordinator, Taber Burton, has moved to the Portland area with his family.

In the year ahead, we look forward to maintaining strong landowner and community partnerships, especially as our work develops in the following areas:

- Building a Soil Quality Network
- Developing a county-wide strategy to combat invasive species
- Focusing collaborative efforts on the Albany-Corvallis reach of the Willamette
- Holding our Annual Native Plant Sale on Saturday, February 11, 2012.
- Working with you, the residents of Benton County, to put conservation on the ground.

Join us!!

2011 Native Plant Sale  by Alice Fairfield

In February the Benton SWCD hosted its annual native plant sale, coordinated by Alice Fairfield and with the help from the staff and 34 volunteers, we distributed over 14,800 plants to the community and generated $10,400. The proceeds of this sale will go towards scholarships and local natural resource projects.

Finley Wildlife Refuge once again supported our sale with a large order of 3,935 plants, along with the Calapooia Watershed who placed an order for 800. Greenbelt Land Trust, the City of Corvallis, along with several citizens took advantage of our Conservation Incentive Program with the purchase and planting of 533 trees and shrubs. We continue our tradition of offering an Educational Discount which provided affordable plants to 8 local teachers. Another educational opportunity arose when we partnered with Bob Pearson of Eddyville High School. His students propagated the Wild Ginger sold at the sale. We will happily be working together again in 2012.

With the exception of the 3,200 Black Cottonwood order for the Finley reclamation project, Douglas Fir remains the best selling tree, with 650 sold this year. The new plants available at the 2011 sale were Blue Blossom, Maidenhair Fern, and Western Buttercup. The goal for the 2012 sale is to provide more shade loving plants such as the native Rhododendron and Azalea.

David Weiner, BSWCD intern, worked with volunteers, Brian Wilson and Julie Skopal, to fill orders at the broadleaf tree station.

Fall / Winter 2011 Conservation Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date/Time/Location</th>
<th>For More Information Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSWCD Annual Meeting</td>
<td>Wednesday, October 26, 2011 5:00 to 8:00 pm at American Legion Hall, 605 Main Street Monroe, OR</td>
<td>Benton SWCD 541-753-7208 <a href="mailto:info@bentonswcd.org">info@bentonswcd.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitions in Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Celebrate our 55th year of service!</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Benton SWCD Native Plant Sale</td>
<td>Order pick up: Saturday February 11 pick-up time will be assigned&lt;br&gt;Overstock Sale: Sunday February 12 Time: TBA</td>
<td>Benton SWCD 541-753-7208 Deadline for orders: January 27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soil Quality Network Workshop</td>
<td>February 23–24, 2012&lt;br&gt;Lloyd Center Double Tree&lt;br&gt;Portland, OR</td>
<td>Amy Garrett OSU Benton County Extension 541-766-3551&lt;br&gt;<a href="mailto:Amy.Garrett@oregonstate.edu">Amy.Garrett@oregonstate.edu</a></td>
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</table>
FALL 2011

Technical Resources Report

by Donna Schmitz

How do Benton County residents benefit from Technical Resources services?

By telephone, office visits and site visits, we assist Benton County landowners in assessing resource concerns and suggesting conservation practices to correct problem areas and in some cases, working with landowners to obtain funding to implement practices. We also work with our local, state and federal partners to coordinate broader conservation activities in Benton County.

Resource Concerns

This year, we assisted over 100 landowners with these concerns:

- manure and mud issues
- irrigation efficiency
- noxious weed control
- soils maps
- native plant recommendations
- dam and culvert removals
- pesticide collection events
- hedgerows
- stream restoration
- wetland and riparian restoration
- permits
- fencing
- water conservation
- improving soil quality

Funding for Your Project

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Program restoration and small grants are available to fund eligible projects. BSWCD currently has some local community funds available to help fund additional technical assistance or project funds. Please contact our office to see if your project is eligible to receive grant funding.

Oak Creek Landowner Outreach Project

We received a grant from the Governor's Fund and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to conduct a landowner outreach project in the Oak Creek area to implement riparian plantings and install fencing to keep animals from entering the stream. We held a Rural Living Workshop at the Benton County Fairgrounds and encouraged Oak Creek riparian landowners to attend. The workshop was co-sponsored with OSU Extension and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). OSU Extension presented information on well and septic system care and ODFW described native fish of the Willamette Valley. Later in the spring we partnered again for an open house at Audubon's Hesthavn located along Oak Creek. Several people stopped in to take a tour of the newly planted riparian restoration at Hesthavn, view the new solar pump, rainwater catchment system and native Oak Creek fish and talk about Oak Creek projects. As a result of these outreach efforts, three projects have been identified and planning will commence this fall. We will make more outreach efforts in the upcoming year. If you are interested in what you can do on your property to improve it for water quality and wildlife habitat (even if you live outside of the Oak Creek watershed), please call Donna at 541-753-7208.

Pond Construction: August 2010

Chub Pond Project Report

Wetland and riverine habitats in the Willamette Valley have been severely degraded or destroyed by the loss of connectivity between rivers and their floodplains. This is largely due to channelization and bank armoring. As a result, species that rely on backwater areas in floodplains are declining. For the Oregon chub, the loss of beaver ponds and degradation of backwater sloughs has been a major factor in their decline. Another major factor for their decline is predation from introduced warm water fish such as largemouth and smallmouth bass. A remnant population of Oregon chub has been found in Bull Run Creek, which indicates that chub habitat, such as beaver ponds, once existed in the system. Oregon chub are rare in the western tributaries of the Willamette River. The Oregon Chub Recovery Plan, developed by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), calls for the establishment of sustainable populations in the Bull Run Creek Watershed. With funds from an Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Small Grant, BSWCD’s Conservation Incentive Program and USFWS, we installed an Oregon chub fish rearing pond this year on land that is well-suited to this project and belongs to a willing landowner. The project restored chub habitat by creating a pond with year-around water that is isolated from floodwaters to prevent colonization by non-native fish and to prevent entrapment of native salmonids. The project also helps improve water quality and provides habitat for migratory birds, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals.

The emergent vegetation is growing very well in the shallow part of the pond. The insect populations surrounding the pond have been quite noticeable and birds have been swooping down to eat the insects. Bird houses have been installed around the pond and violet green swallows have taken up residence. Wood ducks and a pair of hooded mergansers frequent the pond. This winter, 50 geese were counted using the pond and the surrounding areas. ODFW will be releasing chub into the wetland late summer or fall 2011.

Post-Construction: April 2011

Discussing newly planted natives at Hesthavn
Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

We assist the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency to promote federal farm programs to interested and qualified individuals.

One of those programs is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), which is becoming increasingly popular with Benton County landowners for restoring riparian or streamside native vegetation. The purpose of the program is to restore riparian habitat and protect surface water quality on agricultural lands. Participants receive rental payments and cost-shares to create conservation buffers (of minimum widths) on cropland and/or marginal pastureland for either 10 or 15 year contracts. Cost-shares are available for practices such as riparian fencing, restoration planting with site preparation and release, and off-channel watering.

OSU Animal Sciences Beef Farm on Soap Creek Road recently installed many miles of fencing and planted over 200 acres of trees and shrubs adjacent to Soap Creek and Berry Creek. Three private individuals in Benton County implemented their CREP projects last year. This year, we have had seven people sign up for the program and over 125 acres of riparian forest buffer are being planned and will be implemented within the next two years.

We hope that landowners continue to see the many benefits to both wildlife and humans in voluntarily protecting and restoring wildlife habitat along Benton County streams. Contact us for more information.

Soil Quality - A Growing Concern!

Thanks to a heap of generous partners—and especially a Conservation Innovation Grant from the Oregon Natural Resources Conservation Service—the Soil Quality Project Team has just completed the second project year during which we finalized a soil assessment package to guide farm management decisions. In year two, we worked with the 7 original project farmers and added 12 new participants. A total of 59 samples now provide information on soil physical, biological and chemical parameters. In addition to lab assessments, the SQP provided 10 farmers with soil mapping and classification services through Red Hill Soils and one farmer worked with Microbial Matrix, Inc. for a biofertility consultation.

Fashioned after the Cornell University Soil Health Program, the SQP provides farmers with a color-coded report that lists crop production constraints associated with poor soil quality. This written tool initiates conversations on soil function and management choices. Ideally, the SQP will connect farmers with cost-share incentives or USDA Farm Bill opportunities to implement soil-building practices, such as cover crops, crop rotation, reduced tillage and organic amendments.

The Oregon State University (OSU) College of Agricultural Sciences has dedicated lab space for sample processing and assessments. The SQP results provided real-time data for OSU curricula and students have joined as volunteers and interns. All told, 81 people have performed various SQP tasks; some minor and others monumental.

Throughout the SQP, farmers and agricultural professionals indicated a need for support to incorporate soil quality into their work. To address that need, Benton SWCD was awarded a professional development grant from Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (Western SARE) to launch the western region Soil Quality Network (SQN). Western SARE funds will provide a part-time OSU Extension Small Farms position and website, along with two workshops and a database. The SQP and SQN work will be sustained through continued BSWCD funding, as well. Future partners include the Oregon Soil and Water Conservation Society, the Oregon Society of Soil Scientists, and the Conservation Biology Institute.

For a copy of the SQP report titled The Soil Quality Project: Lessons, Case Studies and Facts email tmatteson@bentonswcd.org or call Teresa at 541-753-7208
The 2011 Water Fair provided families with numerous hands-on opportunities to explore water use, movement & conservation topics.

Participants at the “Learn About the Locals” Educators Workshop practice listening with deer ears before heading into the Jackson Frazier Wetlands.

A “salmon” tries to avoid the predators, dams, etc., as he heads back to his natal stream in the Salmon Migration Obstacle Course at Kids Day for Conservation.

Henry & Levi Storch pick up their order after working a volunteer shift at the 2011 Native Plant Sale.

Natural Resources Volunteers enjoy music, burritos & root beer floats at the Volunteer Celebration.

Financial Report

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Invasive Species Program

by Heath Keirstead

2010-2011 was a busy year for Benton SWCD’s growing Invasive Species Program. With the help of our many partners and wonderful volunteers, we delivered weed information to diverse new audiences using these formats:

Neighborhood Weed Meetings
Benton SWCD hosted the first neighborhood weed meeting (& potluck) in the Upper Soap Creek area. The agenda included presentations on invasive plant identification (Henry Storch), Special Features of Soap Creek Watershed (Debbie Johnson), USFWS Partners Program (Steve Smith), and Benton County’s Road Maintenance Program (Laurie Starha). Then we broke into small groups to discuss resources available to help neighbors manage their weeds. A similar meeting was held on Deer Run Rd in Corvallis. Other meetings are scheduled for 2011-2012.

Weed Booth & Weed Presentations
We brought our “Weed Booth” to several community events. Weed Spotters volunteer Jean Townes and her husband Tom Smith staffed the Weed Booth at the Water Fair. The Weed Booth consists of an array of locally invasive plants and free copies of Garden Smart Oregon: A Guide to Non-Invasive Plants.

In addition to providing plant samples for the Weed Booth, Benton SWCD director Henry Storch has generously shared his botanical expertise for all of the projects undertaken this past year. He even developed a weed identification presentation, which he enthusiastically delivered to five different audiences. Special thanks to Henry for helping to create a robust Invasives Program!

Weed Spotters Volunteer Events
Volunteers gathered on a rainy fall Saturday for a mini weed training, followed by weed pulling and mapping with GPS units out at Owens Farm. The data will be used by Greenbelt Land Trust (GLT) to develop a management plan for the area. After a morning of hard work, volunteers enjoyed fresh cider and hearty vegetarian chili, courtesy of GLT’s Steve Lilly.

Benton SWCD offered a weed training on Thursday, May 12 at the Philomath Scout Lodge. Participants examined weed samples, learned their defining characteristics, went outside for Weed BINGO, and then returned to the classroom for a plant quiz. Help us deliver the type of training you like best: contact hkeirstead@bentonswcd.org and tell her what kind of training interests you.

Weed Spotters volunteers helped BSWCD raise awareness about invasive species. Henry Storch, Jean Townes and Tom Smith taught middle school students at Newton Creek Wetlands Spring Stewardship Days. Henry Storch, Jean Townes, Sunia Yang and John Ross completed 4 weed inventories for interested landowners this year. If you’d like to get involved, ask to be added to Heath’s Weed Spotters email list.

Working with Students
Philomath High School student, Rachael Kugler, devoted her senior project to the topic of Backyard Invaders, with Benton SWCD’s Heath Keirstead as her mentor. Rachael’s project resulted in a research paper on common invasive plants and manual control methods, a brochure entitled “Pretty Invaders Found in Your Backyard” (http://www.bentonswcd.org/invasive_species/index), a native planting project at Lupine Meadows in partnership with Greenbelt Land Trust and SOLV, and ivy removal in her yard and her friends’ yards.

Benton SWCD partnered with City of Corvallis Parks & Recreation, Cheldelin Middle School, and SOLV to coordinate a weed removal and native planting project at Village Green Park as part of Cheldelin’s Day of Service. Read more about it by searching the web for “Corvallis Gazette Times April 14, 2011 Day of Service”.

With our partners from Alsea Watershed Council, Benton County OSU Extension 4-H, and Alsea School, we received a grant from Oregon Department of Agriculture’s Noxious Weed Program to pay students to map and, when possible, remove Spanish heath and meadow knapweed from several Alsea locations.

In the Upcoming Year We Will:
Host volunteer weed pulls; create a county-wide action plan for Invasive Species; develop weed programs for the rural, underserved parts of Benton County; and offer Neighborhood Weed Control Grants to folks interested in working together on the management of invasive species.
Education & Outreach

by Heath Keirstead & Teresa Matteson

We continue to offer:

- **Horizons Newsletters**: With 3 issues a year, Horizons is your source for conservation information.
- **Making Ripples Newsletter for Educators**: 1-2 times a year, a newsletter for educators is released. The latest issue focused on soils.
- **Conservation Education Grants**: We provide grants for educators who need support for their conservation related projects.
- **Urban Creek Tours**: Every year, BSWCD and partners host a tour of one of the 5 main urban creeks in Benton County. This year’s tour was followed by a Water Fair with fun activities and demonstrations.
- **Workshops for Educators**: With a variety of natural resources education partners, we deliver 3 educator workshops a year.
- **College Scholarships**: We offer $1,000 scholarships to fund students pursuing degrees in natural resources.
- **Website**: Our website is updated regularly with events and information to help you make conservation decisions.
- **Email Lists**: Sign up online to receive our newsletter, community event announcements, job postings, invasive species updates, or information for educators.
- **Native Plant Sale**: Held annually, this sale is your source for over 60 species of plants native to the Willamette Valley.
- **Willamette Riverkeepers**: Each month, Alice, Jesse, Tucker, Ellen, Jim, Jessica, Jan, Paula, Ed and Colleen are volunteer monitors who check water quality at 5 sites near Corvallis. BSWCD houses the kit and orchestrates the schedule and supplies. Team work!
- **Activities at Community/Education Events**: Visit our booth at your favorite community event, such as Kids Day for Conservation or Spring Garden Festival.
- **Soil Quality Workshop**: In August 2010 we hosted a Soil Quality Workshop for Agricultural Professionals. Evaluations from the participants inspired the Soil Quality Network, a new 3-year project.
- **Landowner Workshops**: We help our partners to offer workshops on conservation practices and natural resource issues such as: soil quality, conservation planning, rural living and backyard conservation.
- **Brochures on a variety of topics**: Come pick them up at our office or download them from our website.

New Services of BSWCD:

- **Continuing Ed Scholarship for Educators**: We offer one scholarship per year to send a non-agricultural teacher to Session #1 of the Summer Agriculture Institute program, which helps teachers use agriculture as a context for teaching.
- **Neighborhood Weed Control Grants**: These funds can help you gain traction on a weed control project that involves multiple neighbors in Benton County.
- **Facebook Page**: “Like” our new Facebook Page for conservation tips, announcements and links.

Busy Bs of Newton Creek: The Brains, Brawn & Beavers at Work in the Watershed

This spring the Urban Creek Tour, organized by BSWCD intern David Weiner, took place in Philomath as we journeyed along Newton Creek. Along the way from the headwaters to the mouth, we visited diverse sites such as Greenbelt Land Trust’s Lupine Meadows and Newton Creek Wetlands, and learned how people and animals used this land in the past and how it’s being used today. Download the tour brochure from our website. We hope to see you at the 2012 tour of Jackson and Frazier Creeks.

Conservation Education Grants

We awarded $8,000 worth of Conservation Education Grants to help support 16 projects in Benton County this year. Several projects focused on gardens and native plants, like the Native Arboretum at Crescent Valley High School and the Starker Arts Garden for Education. Other projects helped educators attend Wildlife Stewards workshops and made some of Avery House Nature Center’s family science events and field trips possible.
Help us save valuable resources two ways...

1. Switch from snail mail to email by sending an email to tmatteson@bentonswcd.org with “e-news” in the subject line.

2. If you don’t want to be on this mailing list, call us at (541) 753-7208 and we will remove you.

The Benton SWCD mission:

is to provide leadership to Benton County residents through education and technical assistance for conservation and responsible use and management of soil, water and related resources.

Our Leadership

by Jennifer Ayotte

Benton SWCD is fortunate to have a Board with a wide variety of expertise in both land management and community involvement. Tom Bedell has been our leader since he was elected chair in 1999. He is key in helping Benton SWCD maintain both our vision and our organizational memory!

Over the past year our personnel committee, composed of Directors Tom Bedell, Cliff Hall and Anne Rigor, has been particularly active. I thank them for all their work in attending extra meetings to review and update our personnel policies and to help assure a well-functioning organization.

Our Invasives Program flourishes with help from Director Henry Storch who, as a travelling farrier, has his eye out for weeds wherever he goes!

Directors Frank Nusbaum of Bellfountain, Bobby Bewley of Alsea and Anne Rigor of N. Corvallis, and their families have been part of our farming community for generations. They add an important continuity to our work.

Jeni Richardson, an engineer for Albany Public Works, is experienced in public involvement, a proponent of conservation education, and has done habitat restoration work on her property. Cliff Hall, of Kings Valley, has done extensive habitat restoration on his property. It is a show case for conservation in Kings Valley and is actively used by the local charter school.

A heartfelt “thank you” from each of our staff to each of you!

The Benton SWCD is an equal opportunity employer, providing services to the public without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status.