



2019-2020 Annual Report



Organization of the Union Soil and Water Conservation District (USWCD)

The USWCD, one of 45 conservation districts in Oregon, is a form of local government governed under Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) 568.210-890 and ORS 568.900-933, the laws which govern state agencies and special districts. The USWCD was established in 1946 and is currently led by a five member, locally elected Board of Directors. The USWCD generally overlaps with the boundaries of the Upper Grande Ronde River Basin and is divided into three zones. The Board of Directors is made up of one Director from each zone and two at-large Directors.

Mission

The Mission of the Union Soil and Water Conservation District is to assist and educate interested landowners in the development, protection, and conservation of natural resources.

Values

The following values guide our work:

- Wise use of natural resources to balance agricultural production with conservation.
 - Local people making local decisions to achieve conservation.
 - Voluntary initiatives over regulatory mandates.
 - Efficient and effective use of public resources.
- Projects are partnerships in which everyone contributes, everyone benefits.

2019-2020 Financial Summary		
	Year Ended June 30,	
	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>
Cash and Investments	\$416,353	\$388,839
Capital Assets	<u>3,582</u>	<u>7,053</u>
Total Assets	\$419,935	\$395,892
Total Liabilities	42,394	---
Net Position:		
Invested in Capital Assets	3,582	7,053
Restricted	42,394	---
Unrestricted	<u>331,565</u>	<u>388,839</u>
Total Net Position	\$377,541	\$395,892

Board of Directors

Jarod Teeter-Chairman, Zone 1
Paul Boehne-Vice-Chairman, At-Large
Curtis Ricker-Treasurer, At-Large
Doug Watts-Secretary, Zone 3
Fred Wallender- Zone 2
Gary Kiemnec- Associate Director
Dale Counsell- Director Emeritus

Staff

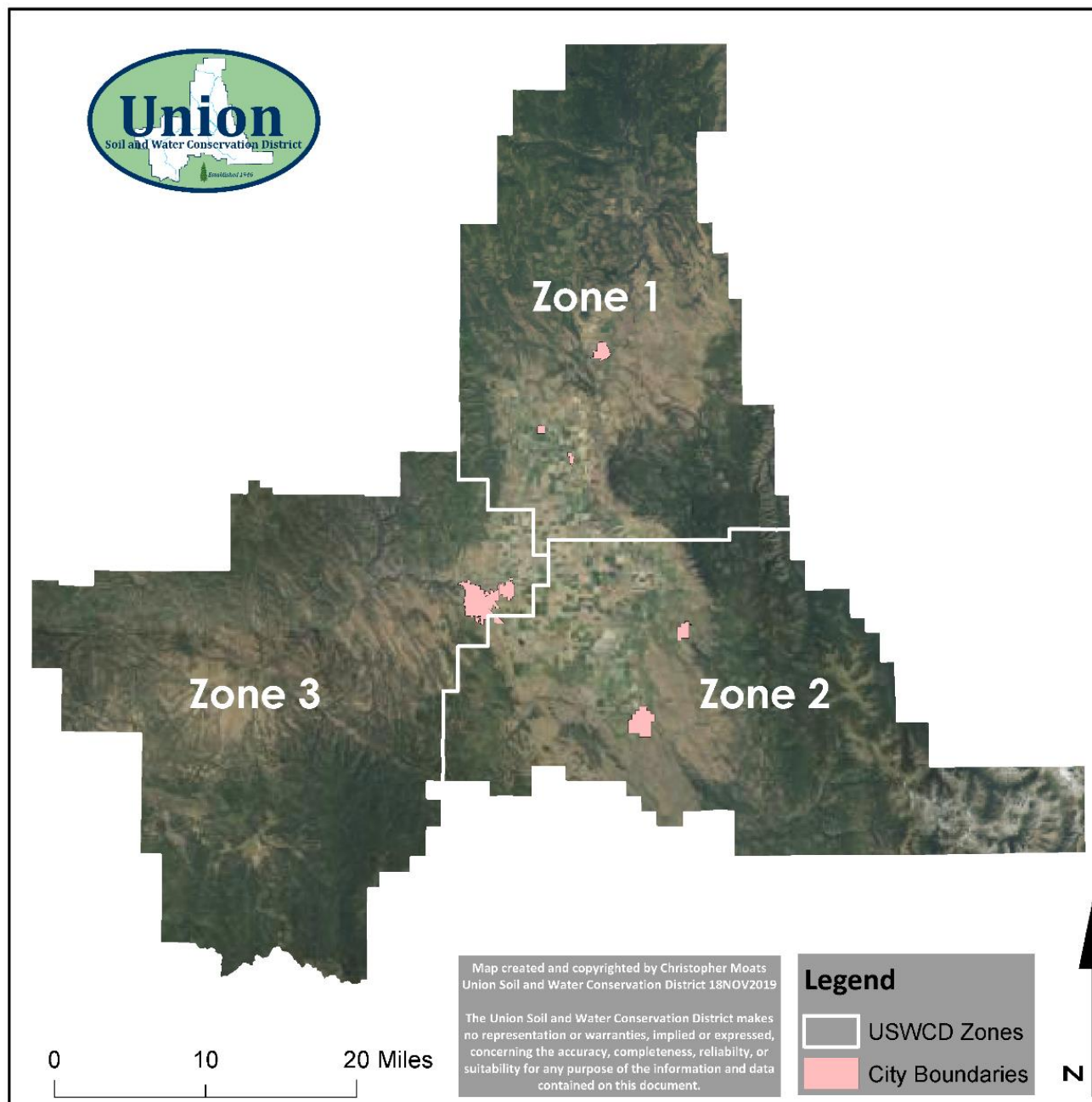
Jim Webster-District Manager
Aaron Bliesner-Project Manager
Deric Carson-Watershed Conservationist

Contact Us

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Buffalo Flats Floodplain Planning



During 2020 the USWCD and other conservation partners continued to investigate opportunities to restore functional floodplain and stream channel conditions on the Buffalo Flats Project Area. In collaboration with landowners, restoration activities will be designed to improve fish and wildlife habitat, while improving water storage, water availability, soil health, and vegetation conditions to support farming and ranching operations. A more natural meandering channel alignment that includes side channels across a wider floodplain in the project area will support a more productive meadow that stores water for late season release, improves fish and wildlife habitat, and improves conditions for livestock utilization. The addition of stable wood material will improve aquatic habitat, increase instream cover for fish, slow overland flow, and protect floodplain surfaces from erosion and support riparian vegetation growth. The combination of restoration actions will be specifically designed to:

1. Enhance and restore aquatic habitat quality, diversity, and complexity for salmonids,
2. Improve water quality conditions of temperature and sediment,
3. Promote conditions for restoring ecological function and improved soil health,
4. Improve riparian corridor and floodplain vegetative diversity and function,
5. Reconnect stream channels with floodplains and expand the amount of quality fish habitat,
6. Increase streambank and floodplain storage of water and ice; thereby, increasing the potential for attenuating flows and reducing ice formation.

The USWCD and project partners will continue in 2021 to gather information on the project site, evaluate design options, and develop alternatives that meet project goals while protecting surrounding properties from increased flooding damage. The USWCD will continue to communicate with neighboring property owners and land managers to identify and understand site conditions, concerns, and issues. Conceptual engineering designs will be available in the Spring of 2021 for public review. Environmental regulation compliance will also be a focus of work throughout 2021 as engineers and scientists with the Bureau of Reclamation and other partner agencies assist the USWCD.

CC-38 Habitat Restoration



Catherine Creek flows from Union, Oregon through the Grande Ronde Valley for approximately 40 miles before combining with the Grande Ronde River. The channel flows through privately owned agricultural properties and provides water for crops and livestock while also supporting populations of salmon, steelhead, bull trout and other aquatic species. The riparian area along the creek is small, relative to historic conditions, but provides habitat for wildlife and includes a vegetation community of deciduous trees and shrubs. Although the channel throughout this reach is relatively stable and has been in the same general location for many years, there are locations where eroding banks and lateral channel movement threatens farming operations and existing structures.

The USWCD has been working for many years with landowners to implement conservation and restoration projects along the first 3 miles of Catherine Creek downstream of Union, Oregon. The CC-38 Habitat Restoration Project (named for its location at River Mile 38) is located in this reach on a private farm managed for active ranching and farming. The landowners have an interest in maintaining a balance between a healthy riparian and stream condition while continuing a successful agricultural operation. Specifically, on this property, several areas of streambank are unstable and creating erosion that is a concern to the landowner and impacts fish habitat conditions.

Throughout 2020 the District has worked with the landowner and an engineering firm to produce construction ready designs. The project design is intended to benefit Endanger Species Act (ESA)-listed fish species and improve natural stream function. The CC-38 reach of Catherine Creek has documented some of the largest densities of overwintering Chinook Salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*). The Grande Ronde Subbasin Plan (NPCC 2005) lists several factors limiting the success of those ESA-listed fish; the most important being a lack of habitat diversity with few holding pools and very little large wood in the channel. In addition, high water temperatures and sedimentation also pose problems. Considering these limitations, project elements were developed and include:

- Installation of large wood structures
- Reduction of streambank erosion and sedimentation
- Maintenance and enhancement of existing fish habitat conditions
- Additional seeding and planting of riparian plant species

Construction of the design is scheduled for the summer of 2021 once regulatory permits are approved.

Red Mill Reach Phase I

The Red Mill Reach project area is located directly west and downstream of Union, Oregon and includes a reach of Catherine Creek that flows through several privately-owned agricultural properties. The USWCD has teamed with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) to investigate opportunities in this area to improve water quality and quantity and restore aquatic habitat conditions. The project is organized into three stages that will include 1) irrigation upgrades, 2) stream channel and floodplain restoration, and 3) riparian protection and conservation.

During 2020 the USWCD completed Stage 1 of the three-stage approach by upgrading a flood irrigation system and increasing instream flow. Approximately 65 acres of flood irrigation was converted to a high efficiency, pressurized system. Flood irrigation has proven to be inefficient water use and can result in degraded water quality due to sediment and chemical laden water returning to the main channel. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) designed the new irrigation system to distribute water more efficiently and estimated a reduction in water use by 40-60%. This landowner also entered a Cooperative Conservation Agreement allowing for future stream restoration to be designed in Stage 2 of the project.



Stage 2 of the project will be focused on working with landowners along the reach to restore a functional floodplain, reduce erosion, improve water quality, and enhance fish habitat through the project reach. The BOR will assist the USWCD and landowners to design changes to the Catherine Creek channel and floodplain to meet the project goals. Landowner participation will be necessary for this project to be implemented and successful outreach and communication will be a priority.

Stage 3 of the project will promote and protect a functional floodplain and healthy riparian vegetation community. The USWCD will work with landowners to develop floodplain management plans and explore opportunities for creating conservation easements. Established program options, such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), may provide landowners with benefits that complement their existing land management approach.



Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Small Grants

OWEB Small Grants award up to \$15,000 per project to assist landowners with lower cost, on-farm projects that improve water quality and conserve natural resources. These projects may include spring developments, off-channel water developments, windbreaks, riparian exclusion fencing, and more. Grants require a contribution of 25% from the landowner, and can be in the form of either cash, in-kind services or materials. The USWCD can help landowners identify concerns, develop project solutions, and apply for funding. Please contact us about a project on your property.

Currently the District is working on a Spring Development and a Forest Thinning grant.



Proposed Trough Location



Proposed Thinning Area



Completed Trough



Completed Thinning

Upper Grande Ronde Initiative

Focused Investment Partnership

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) developed the Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) funding opportunity to address natural resource issues. The Upper Grande Ronde Initiative (a partnership of the USWCD, Grande Ronde Model Watershed, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and US Forest Service) was awarded a FIP grant in 2016 to support fish habitat improvements in the Upper Grande Ronde River Basin. The Upper Grande Ronde FIP is now in the third and final biennium of the grant and will help this local partnership plan, develop, and implement coordinated restoration and conservation projects.

FIP grant projects are intended to improve and increase habitat quantity, quality, and diversity for spring Chinook salmon, summer steelhead, and other aquatic species in Catherine Creek and the Upper Grande Ronde River. Partners of the Upper Grande Ronde Initiative are committed to the restoration of aquatic habitat by protecting and restoring watershed processes, cold water refugia, and diverse instream and floodplain habitats. The results of this effort over the last five years have been positive and effective at meeting project goals.

The Union SWCD plays an important role in the partnership with local landowners and agricultural producers. With knowledge of agricultural history, practices and technical programs in the basin, the USWCD offers technical assistance to landowners to facilitate project development, design, and implementation with partners and funding agencies. This is ultimately achieved through collaboration with landowners to develop conservation projects that have both ecological and land management merit while engaging in variety of habitat and upland restoration.

Union SWCD Partners

BOR-Bureau of Reclamation

BPA-Bonneville Power Administration

CTUIR-Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

DEQ-Department of Environmental Quality

DSL-Department of State Lands

EPA-Environmental Protection Agency

FSA-Farm Service Agency

GRMW-Grande Ronde Model Watershed

NACD-National Association of Conservation Districts

NOAA-Fisheries-National Marine Fisheries Service

NRCS-Natural Resources Conservation Service

OACD-Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

ODA-Oregon Department of Agriculture

ODF-Oregon Department of Forestry

ODFW-Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

OSU Extension-Oregon State University Agriculture Extension Service

OTEC-Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative

OWEB-Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

TCCWMA- Tri-County Cooperative Weed Management Area

Union County-Planning and Public Works

USACE-United States Army Corps of Engineers

USFS-United States Forest Service

USFWS-United States Fish and Wildlife Service

WRD-Water Resources Department

The District prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, age, color, national origin, gender, religion, political beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means when working with the District should contact us.