



United States Department of Agriculture



NRCS OREGON

# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

2020 MARKS THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY of the Strategic Approach to Conservation in Oregon, which has fundamentally transformed the way we do business. Through this approach, we work with our partners to proactively focus on the varied resource needs that impact producers throughout Oregon. This deliberate way of doing business allows us to achieve results on the landscape through locally-led conservation that encourages partnerships and collaboration.

Throughout 2020, we continued to harness new tools and processes to streamline our programs and improve customer service to farmers and ranchers. We successfully deployed the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool and the Conservation Desktop to our customers, which helped NRCS Oregon strategically assess and implement conservation management across the state.

IN THE LAST YEAR, we have overcome a wide range of obstacles to include the historic wildfires that raged across the state and the COVID-19 pandemic that we continue to navigate through. As we encounter challenges, our planned, collaborative approach provides a guide for moving forward and continuing to serve and empower our communities. This is especially important during these unprecedented times.

This report highlights our achievements over the past fiscal year to implement NRCS Oregon's Strategic Approach to Conservation. Today, NRCS Oregon is witnessing the benefits of the Strategic Approach to Conservation with partnerships built and projects planned that help support our customers with the tools needed to solve local problems.

We've accomplished a great deal since adopting the Strategic Approach in Oregon. I look forward to continuing forward with this approach to guide the way we do business for another ten years and beyond. And most importantly, I look forward to seeing what we can accomplish together as we continue to serve our communities, helping people help the land.

**Ron Alvarado, Oregon State Conservationist**



# FY20 INVESTMENTS IN CONSERVATION

## EQIP

### Environmental Quality Incentives Program

(includes all locally-led EQIP and state initiatives)

contracts....591  
acres .....224,886  
obligated ....\$24.2M  
payments....\$20.5M

## RCPP

### Regional Conservation Partnership Program

(includes RCPP-EQIP and RCPP-CSP)

contracts.....67  
acres .....19,548  
obligated.....\$3.5M  
payments....\$3.1M

## CSP

### Conservation Stewardship Program

(New contracts only. Includes CSP General and CSP Grasslands)

contracts.....119  
acres .....468,405  
obligated.....\$18.8M  
payments....\$1.8M

## SGI

### Sage Grouse Initiative

contracts....44  
acres .....62,114  
obligated ....\$3.6M  
payments....\$33,686

## Organic

### Organic Initiative

contracts.....5  
acres .....771  
obligated.....\$379,553

## High Tunnel

### Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative

contracts....45  
acres .....174  
obligated ....\$352,429  
payments....\$6,046

## NAQI

### National Air Quality Initiative

contracts....9  
acres .....189  
obligated ....\$483,371

## Joint Chiefs

### Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Initiative

(Partnership with U.S. Forest Service)

contracts....26  
acres .....7,205  
obligated ....\$2.7M

\*Includes 4 projects: Upper Crooked River (Crook County), Central Wasco (Wasco County), Elk Creek (Douglas County) and Chiloquin (Klamath County).

## Water Quality

### 2 National Water Quality Initiative Readiness Projects

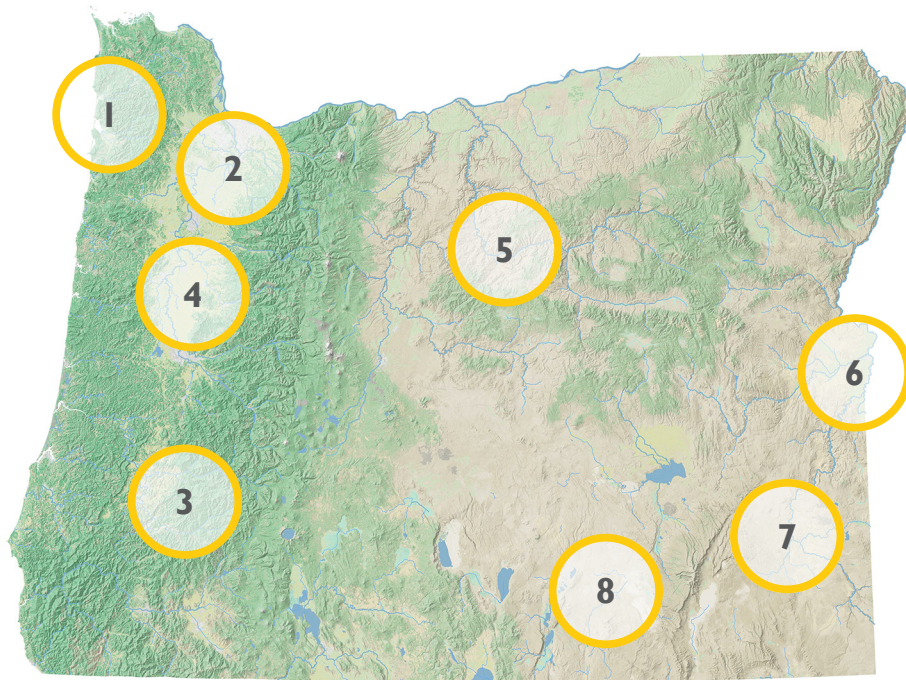
acres .....1,286  
obligated ....\$110,104

\*Includes readiness projects to improve water quality on surface and groundwater sources of drinking water in the following source water protection areas (swpa):

- North and South Santiam River SWPA serving multiple municipalities
- Clackamas River SWPA serving multiple municipalities
- Rogue River SWPA serving multiple municipalities
- Long Tom area SWPA serving the City of Monroe



# BASIN SUCCESSES



## 1. Salmon SuperHwy *Tillamook County*

## 2. Unlocking Carbon Markets for Non-Industrial Private Forestland Owners *Columbia, Washington, Multnomah, Clackamas Counties*

## 3. Elk Creek Watershed Restoration Project *Douglas County*

## 4. Oak Woodland and Prairie Restoration *Benton, Lane, Linn Counties*

## 5. Canyon Creek Ranch Easement *Wheeler County*

## 6. Restoring Water Quality in the Fletcher Gulch Watershed *Malheur County*

## 7. Burns Paiute Tribe Explores Medusahead Management *Malheur County*

## 8. North Warner Multi-Ownership Joint Chiefs Project *Lake County*

## 1. Salmon SuperHwy

*Tillamook County*

**The Salmon SuperHwy** is the biggest combined fish conservation and economic development partnership project on the Oregon Coast. In 2020, NRCS Oregon worked with private landowners and partners in Tillamook County using the Environmental Quality Incentive Program to increase fish habitat connectivity and improve water quality by removing three fish passage barriers on agricultural land. To date, the project has reconnected 95 miles of fish habitat with 35 fish barrier removal projects complete. The Salmon SuperHwy project has generated benefits to the local economy while increasing the resiliency of fish species traveling to the Pacific Ocean. The project is more than halfway to the end goal of restoring 95% of the historically available habitat.

## 2. Unlocking Carbon Markets for Non-Industrial Private Forestland Owners

*Columbia, Washington, Multnomah, Clackamas Counties*

**Through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program**, NRCS Oregon worked with partners such as the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Pinchot Institute for Conservation to educate landowners on forest carbon sequestration and carbon market opportunities. The general concept with a carbon crediting program is that healthy, well-managed forests sequester carbon from the air and store it during the tree's lifespan. If the forest stores more carbon than an average acre of forestland over a number of years, landowners can potentially sell that carbon as a credit. By targeting small woodland owners in this specific region, the project aims to reduce the transaction costs for carbon credit trading, thus making it a more affordable and practical option for small landowners to participate.



# BASIN SUCCESSES

## 3. Elk Creek Watershed Restoration Project

*Douglas County*

**The Cow Creek Band** of Umpqua Tribe of Indians are integral partners in the Elk Creek Watershed Restoration Project, which utilizes Joint Chiefs funding from NRCS and the U.S. Forest Service. The Elk Creek project is designed to reduce the risk of large-scale wildfire, restore a healthy forest ecosystem, and protect critical watershed values in the Elk Creek watershed while providing multi-party monitoring. This project also incorporates tribal lands, with approximately 68 acres of tribal land treated to date with aggressive conifer thinning within oak woodland and savanna areas.

## 4. Oak Woodland and Prairie Restoration

*Benton, Lane, Linn Counties*

**NRCS Oregon** is working to restore oak woodland and prairie habitat in Benton, Lane and Linn counties with the goal of enhancing 1,000 acres of threatened oak habitats within the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Conservation Opportunity Areas. To restore and expand oak woodlands and savannas, invasive weed species must be suppressed, trees that compete with oaks must be controlled, and new plantings of oaks must be established and maintained to ensure their prosperity. This project targets these goals, with the ultimate intention of revitalizing current oak populations and creating corridors to unite oak habitats that have previously been isolated.

## 5. Canyon Creek Ranch Easement

*Wheeler County*

**Through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program**, NRCS Oregon partnered with OWEB to enroll 6,783 acres of the Canyon Creek Ranch in a permanent easement. Blue Mountain Land Trust holds the easement. The ranch, located in Wheeler County, resides adjacent to the Painted Hills National Monument and BLM land, which increases habitat

connectivity to protected lands, providing essential habitat for mule deer, elk and other species. Approximately 3.1 miles of Bear Creek, a tributary off the John Day River, flows through the property and provides critical habitat for steelhead. Other conservation success includes juniper cuttings, riparian plantings and stream restoration. This permanent easement will help protect a large landscape and keep the ranch land in working agriculture forever.

## 6. Restoring Water Quality in the Fletcher Gulch Watershed

*Malheur County*

**Landowners in the Fletcher Gulch Watershed** continue to see success in the water after converting to pressurized pipelines and on-farm sprinklers. Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding assisted farmers to convert from flood irrigation to sprinklers. Grant funding from Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and the Bureau of Reclamation, Malheur County SWCD, Owyhee Watershed Council and Owyhee Irrigation District allowed for main lateral conversion to an underground pipeline. Average sediment concentrations in the watershed have decreased by 97% (from 2008 to 2018) and average flow discharge was reduced by 80%. Farmers can use water more efficiently and cut back on energy usage, maintenance, and overall cost.

## 7. Burns Paiute Tribe Explores Medusahead Management

*Malheur County*

**The Burns Paiute Tribe** is battling medusahead using a Conservation Innovation Grant to explore the best control and revegetation methods. The project will benefit the Burns Paiute Tribe by improving the long-term vegetation community and wildlife habitat resources on tribal lands, and will hopefully serve as a template for other land managers dealing with medusahead infestations, and the associated economic and ecologic loss.

## 8. North Warner Multi-Ownership Joint Chiefs Project

*Lake County*

**The North Warner Multi-Ownership Joint Chiefs Project** has become a model to emulate for community collaboration success. Collaborative efforts and a shared vision among 15 different partners and 30 private landowners allowed for restoration goals to be met across public and private land boundaries. In total, approximately \$11.5 million was gained for large-scale landscape restoration goals. The benefits further extend from those directly involved in the project to those who live in the community, as the demand for related local contracts and jobs increased. This project has outlined a roadmap to help plan and implement successful forest health projects in the future.

## PL566

**During FY20**, NRCS Oregon continued PL566 planning efforts with Tumalo Irrigation District and Swalley Irrigation District to address watershed problems and resource concerns. Oregon also approved two additional PL566 projects with Central Oregon Irrigation District and East Fork Irrigation District.

Implementation of the Preferred Alternative with these four districts will improve water delivery reliability for 2,399 patrons serving 61,694 acres, conserve up to 114 cubic feet per second of water for instream uses, reduce operation and maintenance costs on more than 149 miles of district infrastructure, reduce electricity costs from pumping, and improve public safety.

In FY21, NRCS Oregon anticipates that three additional plans will be approved. Modernization efforts with these seven districts could cumulatively improve water delivery reliability on more than 205 miles of canals and laterals, for more than 2,600 patrons servicing approximately 99,000 acres.





## RECRUITMENT AND HIRING:

HIRED 30 NEW EMPLOYEES IN FY20 (not counting agency transfers or reassignments within NRCS). Increased staffing from 79% to 90% over the course of FY20.

Staffing additions included 6 veteran hires, 10 female hires, 2 historically underserved minority hires.

KEY POSITIONS HIRED: easement programs specialist, RCPP coordinator, state agronomist, state biologist, state forester, state archaeologist, 4 hydrologists, state engineer, state hydraulic engineer, assistant state conservationist for watershed resources, Plant Materials Center manager, 2 basin resource conservationists, public affairs officer, 5 district conservationists.

## CELEBRATING STEELHEAD RESTORATION

THIS YEAR, NRCS OREGON PUBLIC AFFAIRS was proud to produce an interpretive panel celebrating steelhead restoration work completed in the lower John Day watershed. This five-foot panel highlights the cooperative efforts of NRCS, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District, and John Day Fossil Beds National Monument in implementing conservation practices to restore habitat in the region that benefit wildlife, including steelhead. Complete with an interactive, three-dimensionally sculpted section that brings a Beaver Dam Analog (BDA) to life, this interpretative panel will be installed by the National Park Service at the entrance of Oregon's Painted Hills.

