USDA NRCS
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Watershed Operations

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Improving Water Quality in Southern Washington County, Idaho

Introduction

The Southern Washington County Watershed project addresses water quality issues. The project will focus on assisting farmers and ranchers in increasing irrigation efficiency and installing practices to prevent soil erosion.

The project is located in southern Washington County, Idaho, and includes the City of Weiser.

Funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, this project is part of the Obama Administration's plans to modernize the nation's infrastructure, jump-start the economy, and create jobs. NRCS is using Recovery Act dollars to update aging flood control structures, protect and maintain water supplies, improve water quality, reduce soil erosion, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands. NRCS acquires easements and restores floodplains to safeguard lives and property in areas along streams and rivers that have experienced flooding.

Project Description

- **Location:** Southern Washington County, 1st Congressional District
- **Federal Funding:** $430,000

The project area is adjacent to the Snake River, which is the source of public water for the City of Weiser, Idaho. More than 90 percent of rural residents in southern Washington County obtain their drinking water from groundwater sources. The project will improve ground and surface water quality in the Weiser area.

Partners

- USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Weiser River Soil Conservation District
- Weiser Irrigation District
- Washington County Commissioners
- Idaho Soil Conservation Commission
- Idaho Department of Environmental Quality

Benefits

Improving irrigation systems and properly managing water, nutrients, and pesticides will greatly reduce contaminants in the project area's surface and groundwater. Project activities will result in a 65 percent reduction in

A filter strip catches sediment and contaminants in irrigation water runoff.

sediment and nutrients delivered to area streams, and a 60 percent reduction in nitrates leached to groundwater.

Economic Opportunities

Estimated crop sales in the county are over $19 million, making farming a very important part of the area's economy. The project will provide financial incentives to area farmers and ranchers to help them improve their irrigation systems and overall water management. The need for conservation construction and pipeline installation will offer opportunities for heavy equipment operators and contractors.

Statewide Perspective

When the project plan was developed in 2006, the southern Washington County area was the number one priority for nitrate reduction in the State—over 50 percent of the monitored wells exceeded the drinking water nitrate level. The project will assist in meeting ground water quality goals for the Weiser area, as well as meet the objectives outlined in the Weiser River, Weiser Flat, and Snake River-Hells Canyon water quality plans.

For More Information

USDA, NRCS
9173 W. Barnes Drive, Suite C
Boise, Idaho 83709-1574
Phone: 208-378-5700
Fax: 208-378-5735
www.id.nrcs.usda.gov

Local producers discuss the benefits of improved irrigation systems, such as gated pipe and surge to conserve water.