

Natural Resources Conservation Service helping people help the land

2016 NRCS Oregon Annual Report

THE USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS) PROVIDES INNOVATIVE CONSERVATION SOLUTIONS TO RESTORE, ENHANCE AND PROTECT OREGON'S WORKING AGRICULTURAL LANDS. Our voluntary Farm Bill programs provide technical and financial assistance to help farmers, ranchers and woodland owners address natural resource concerns such as water quality, soil erosion, wildlife habitat, and much more. Using our Strategic Approach to Conservation, NRCS leverages partnerships across the state of Oregon to invest in landscape-scale conservation. This report captures NRCS Oregon's investments and successes throughout fiscal year 2016, which runs from Oct. 1, 2015 to Sept. 30, 2016.

NRCS Oregon FY16 Investments on Private Working Agricultural Lands



Environmental Quality Incentives Program
Contracts . . . 645
Acres 170,567
Dollars \$20.4 million



**Conservation Stewardship Program
(New Contracts)**
Contracts . . . 97
Acres 350,010
Dollars \$2.4 million
(Renewals)
Contracts . . . 86
Acres 272,513
Dollars \$2.4 million



Regional Conservation Partnership Program
Contracts . . . 54
Acres 13,858
Dollars \$3 million



Voluntary conservation works
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Snapshots of Success

NRCS Oregon FY16 Investments on Private Working Agricultural Lands



(From left to right) Mark Butterfield, Joe Dawson and Alan Klages discuss their success with cover crops.

Finding Soil Health Recipe for Success

NRCS Oregon continues to engage producers and partners on the benefits of soil health practices such as cover crops and no-till/reduced-till. This year, a group of farmers in Wallowa County worked with NRCS to seek solutions to soil health on their operations. Mark Butterfield, Joe Dawson, Alan Klages and Kevin Melville each have diverse irrigated cropland operations throughout the Wallowa Valley, each with varying management objectives. Some of them also have rangeland mixed in where their cattle graze in the summer. By working with NRCS, these producers explored options for cover cropping, companion cropping and grazing to achieve their soil health objectives. The lessons learned are being shared throughout the community. "These growers have found that the techniques and fundamentals of soil health are the same here in Oregon as they are everywhere else, but certain cover crop species that work in other parts of the country don't work within their rotations," says Nate James, District Conservationist. "We have a lot of learning to do and that's the fun part. There's no recipe book for our part of the country, so we're building them as we go."



Conservation Innovation grants
3 state grants \$224,601
2 national grants \$501,028



Emergency Watershed Protection Program
Projects 12
Dollars \$1.8 million

NRCS Oregon Initiatives



Sage Grouse Initiative (Includes EQIP, CSP and RCPP)
Contracts 43
Acres 86,978
Dollars \$4.4 million



Organic Initiative
Contracts 13
Acres 238
Dollars \$204,000



High Tunnel Initiative
Contracts 35
Acres 72
Dollars \$242,000



Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Initiative
East Face of the Elkhorn Mountains
Contracts 11
Acres 792
Dollars \$272,000
Ashland Forest All Lands Restoration
Contracts 32
Acres 1,200
Dollars \$1.5 million
Greater La Pine Basin Cohesive Strategy Project
Contracts 16
Acres 218
Dollars \$120,000



Easements

4,225 acres of wetlands restored across eight easements

\$730,000 obligated in wetland restoration contracts

2,173 acres across two new Agricultural Lands Easements in process

16,140 acres in closing on FY15 ALE easements



Cindy Collins is one of several fruit growers in the Hood River Valley working with NRCS to reduce air emissions.

Improving Air Quality in the Hood River Valley

As part of the National Air Quality Initiative, NRCS Oregon worked with fruit growers in the Hood River Valley to reduce the use of high-emission, diesel fuel smudge pots which are commonly used to protect crops from spring frosts. NRCS provided \$850,000 in financial assistance to help orchardists remove, convert or replace 3,730 smudge pots to cleaner, more efficient systems. NRCS estimates those smudge pot removals will eliminate 54 tons of particulate matter from being released into the air by the end of 2017. Additionally, these NAQI efforts are being complemented through the NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) program. In 2015, NRCS awarded a \$39,000 CIG to Hood River County and the Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers to purchase an air curtain burner. This machine allows growers to safely and cleanly burn diseased orchard trees and other vegetation while significantly reducing air pollution compared to traditional open-pile burning.

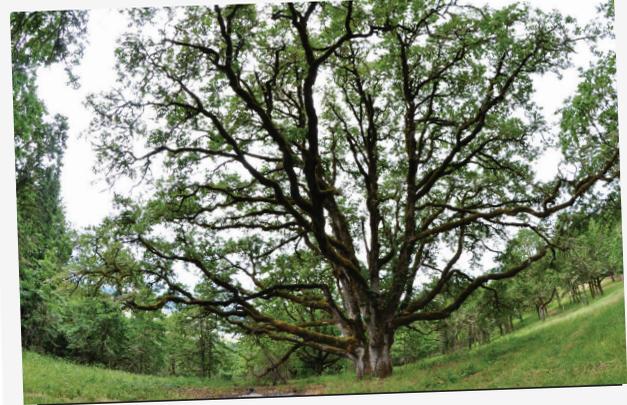


Hydrologist Julie Koeberle measures the snow depth on Mt. Hood.

Snow Survey Team Launches Successful Post-Fire Campaign

The NRCS Oregon Snow Survey Team launched a new initiative in 2016 to assist communities impacted by catastrophic wildfires in Eastern Oregon. NRCS hydrologists worked in conjunction with the National

Weather Service and other partners to produce weekly snow reports for three burned areas: The Canyon Creek Fire in Grant County, the Cornet Windy Ridge Fire in Baker County, and the Grizzly Bear Fire in Wallowa County. The information helped communities determine the potential for rain-on-snow events in burned areas, which can lead to debris slides and flooding. NRCS received positive feedback from local emergency management officials, partners and landowners. The Snow Survey team plans to continue this effort in future years. This is an excellent success story demonstrating the value of Snow Survey and its impact on local communities following a natural disaster.



Conservation Ramping up with Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Projects funded by the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) are ramping up conservation on-the-ground, such as the North Willamette Valley Upland Oak Restoration Partnership. This RCPP was awarded in 2015 in the first round of selections. For this particular RCPP, NRCS invested \$2 million over five years and partners have exceeded that investment by contributing \$3.9 million, bringing the total investment to \$5.9 million. The Yamhill SWCD and NRCS serve as the lead partners on the project. Additional partner groups include the Polk SWCD, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Trust for Public Lands, the Greater Yamhill Watershed Council, The Nature Conservancy, and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. Together, these partners are working with private landowners to restore and protect native oak habitat and improve habitat for threatened and endangered species like the Fender's Blue Butterfly. To date, this project has helped landowners restore native oak habitats on 254 acres with \$333,618 in financial assistance. NRCS plans to award an additional \$1.2 million in financial assistance for additional oak restoration in the next three years of the project.



The Evolution of SGI 2.0 - Addressing Rangeland Threats to Sage Grouse

One year after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that the greater sage grouse did not warrant a listing under the Endangered Species Act, Oregon conservation partners continue outstanding conservation efforts on public and private lands. Through the Sage Grouse Initiative 2.0, NRCS and partners are helping ranchers address a full suite of rangeland threats to improve sage grouse habitat and promote rangeland health. Since SGI began in 2010, NRCS Oregon has invested \$23.4 million to help more than 200 ranchers restore more than 331,000 acres of key sage grouse habitat. Those efforts target Priority Areas of Conservation that support about 90 percent of Oregon's sage grouse population. Additionally, thanks to the Sage Grouse RCPP, 179 Oregon ranchers have signed letters of intent with their local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) to enter into 30-year Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances. These agreements would provide long-term regulatory protection for ranchers and represent a continued commitment to maintain and enhance more than one million acres of privately-owned sage grouse habitat in Oregon.

Engineering Team Responds to Coastal Flooding

In response to heavy flooding on the Oregon coast in December 2015, NRCS requested and received \$1.8 million in Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) funds to repair damaged streambanks, remove debris from clogged channels, and protect infrastructure and property from damage. The NRCS engineering team is working on 12 EWP projects in partnership with the Columbia SWCD. Additionally, NRCS is working on two dam assessments and three dam rehabilitation projects (in the planning phase), representing a \$5.5 million investment to rehabilitate aging infrastructure in Oregon.



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Top 10 Most Contracted Conservation Practices

1. Woody Residue Treatment
2. Brush Management
3. Forest Stand Improvements
4. Watering Facility
5. Livestock Pipeline
6. Irrigation Water Management
7. Irrigation Pipeline
8. Structure for Water Control
9. Pumping Plant
10. Fencing

Irrigation Improvements at a Glance



Practices462
 Contracts110
 Acres117,479
 Dollars\$5.6 million

Oregon Quick Facts



Top 3 Commodities by Sales

1. Cattle/ Calves
2. Nursery/ Greenhouses
3. Hay

34,600
Farms in Oregon

474 acres
average farm size



16.4 million
acres of Farmland



\$4.8 billion
total ag production market value

* Source: 2015 National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Ag Census and 2012 Natural Resources Inventory