



NRCS OREGON 2018 ANNUAL REPORT



Sustaining Oregon Agriculture through Voluntary Conservation

Throughout 2018, NRCS Oregon continued to implement our Strategic Approach to Conservation, helping farmers, ranchers and forest owners address on-farm natural resource concerns while achieving landscape-scale results.

Due to devastating fires and worsening drought, this year proved especially challenging for Oregon producers. With tremendous support from our field staff and local partners, NRCS responded quickly and decisively to assist communities successfully.

As you explore our 2018 annual report, I want to emphasize this document is more than a collection

of numbers detailing our conservation investments—although these measures are certainly important. This document is also a collection of success stories.

Conservation is often measured at the farm scale, but with our Strategic Approach, we display positive and enduring impacts at the landscape and watershed scale. At NRCS, we are privileged to work directly with farmers, ranchers and forest owners who make voluntary conservation happen. We wouldn't have it any other way.

Ronald Abrarado

State Conservationist

New Contracts Awarded

EQIP

Environmental Quality
Incentives Program

(includes all locally-led EQIP and state initiatives)

484 contracts

550,198 acres

\$24.4 million

RCPP

Regional Conservation
Partnership Program

(includes RCPP-EQIP and RCPP-CSP)

102 contracts

58,891 acres

\$4.3 million

Rapid Fire Response in Wheat Country

New Contracts Awarded

CSP

Conservation Stewardship Program
(includes new contracts and renewals)

252 contracts

642,689 acres

\$4.5 million



Intensely hot and dry conditions aided fast moving fires that devastated Oregon's wheat country from Wasco to Morrow County. By the end of July 2018, over 200,000 acres were in ashes. The situation demanded fast action. Bare soil began to blow away as soon as the crops were gone, and precious livestock feed was up in smoke. The exposed ground also presented an opportunity for invasive annual grasses, such as cheatgrass and medusahead, to spread.

The NRCS response resulted in a \$7.2 million recovery investment over 52 contracts on 451,670 acres. Conservation efforts were primarily focused on stopping soil erosion and invasive plant establishment. USDA also opened emergency haying and grazing on Conservation Reserve Program land for an extended period to alleviate grazing pressures.

Organic

Organic Initiative

13 contracts

3,845 acres

\$310,155

High Tunnel

Seasonal High Tunnel
System Initiative

57 contracts

180 acres

\$390,883

Conservation Easements

Conservation easements are becoming increasingly popular among Oregon's farm communities to keep land in agriculture for future generations, prohibit future development, and conserve wetland habitats. In 2018, NRCS nearly doubled its investment in wetland easements with \$8.5 million obligated for restoration. Additionally, NRCS nearly doubled its investment in easements that protect grasslands of special significance at \$1.4 million, and enrolled 5 sites into Agricultural Land Easements that will protect agricultural land use forever:



The Nature Conservancy

Wallowa County
8,500 acres
NRCS Investment: \$1,402,500

Wallowa Land Trust

Wallowa County
480 acres
NRCS Investment: \$352,500

The Nature Conservancy

Wallowa County
6,660 acres
NRCS Investment: \$732,600

Blue Mountain Land Trust

Wheeler County
6,785 acres.
NRCS Investment: \$1,250,000

Blue Mountain Land Trust

Baker County
8,953 acres
NRCS Investment: \$2,400,000

Sage Grouse Initiative

Sage Grouse Initiative

33 contracts

25,392 acres

\$3.2 million

Innovation Takes Root in Wallowa County



“That won’t work here.” Throughout Oregon’s farming communities, that’s a common reaction to the idea of adopting regenerative farming practices that enhance soil health. Not in Wallowa County.

Mark Butterfield, Joe Dawson, Alan Klages, Kevin Melville, and Woody Wolfe are proving the naysayers wrong—replacing skepticism with innovation. Over the last few years, these farmers have teamed up to share ideas, experiment with field trials, and seek technical expertise to develop a unique recipe for soil health that suits their operations.

NRCS staff worked closely with these producers and encouraged them to try different cover crops on their farms and share lessons learned. All of them are using a combination of soil health farming practices through EQIP, such as cover crops, no-till, crop rotations, and grazing. See their full story at bit.ly/wallowasoilhealth.

Contracts with Underserved Farmers and Ranchers

Veterans

23 contracts

\$713,011

Limited Resource

25 contracts

\$378,529

Beginning

165 contracts

\$4.4 million

Socially Disadvantaged

21 contracts

\$949,501

Native American Tribes

3 contracts

\$229,368

Conservation Innovation Grants

Developing Native Plant Communities on Working Agricultural Lands



This project helps landowners establish native plant communities on working agricultural lands. The program determines best practices for selecting and integrating native plant species into grazing lands and tracks the viability of native plant species in various grazing conditions to identify those compatible with livestock production.

Awarded to:

Oregon State University

NRCS Contribution:

\$74,779

Conserving Mesic Habitats in Sagebrush Country

Payments Made

EQIP

588 contracts

25,392 acres

\$3.2 million



RCP

83 contracts

18,709 acres

\$1.8 million

In the arid American West, water is as good as gold. Wet mesic habitats — places where water meets land — comprise less than 2 percent of the landscape. Yet neither people nor wildlife can survive without them. Recognizing the importance of mesic habitats in the desert, the NRCS-led Sage Grouse Initiative provides targeted assistance to help ranchers protect and enhance these wet, green places.

Participating ranchers like the Fitzgerald family in Lake County, Oregon, have seen a transformation across the landscape. Using conservation practices such as juniper removal, cross fencing, grazing management, invasive grass treatment, and water conservation measures, the Fitzgeralds have transformed 12 Mile Creek that used to run dry in mid-July. Even during the driest parts of the year, Fitzgerald Ranch can rely on the good grass down in the meadow for their cattle. The same applies to wildlife such as the sage grouse.

Read the full story at bit.ly/fitzgeraldranch.

CSP

987 contracts

3 million acres

\$24.3 million



Strategic Water Conservation through Irrigation Modernization

A major portion of NRCS Oregon's workload in 2018 was devoted to a partner-driven, landscape-scale effort to conserve water in the Deschutes Basin by modernizing aging irrigation infrastructure. NRCS Oregon is fully engaged with local irrigation districts and the Deschutes Basin Board of Control as project sponsors, with additional funding and planning support from the Farmers Conservation Alliance and the Energy Trust of Oregon, to develop watershed plans for these projects. The plans are being developed utilizing NRCS's Watershed and Flood Operations Program (authorized by Public Law 83-566). These improvements would convert open-ditch canals to closed-piped, underground systems, resulting in significant water use efficiencies to sustain local agricultural needs while keeping water in-stream to support fish and wildlife habitat.

Current PL-566 Planning Efforts Underway in the Deschutes Basin:

- Tumalo Irrigation District (Final Plan Authorized Summer 2018)
- Swalley Irrigation District
- Central Oregon Irrigation District
- Lone Pine Irrigation District
- East Fork Irrigation District

Additional watershed projects are on the horizon, with upcoming projects planned in Wallowa County, Deschutes County, and Columbia County.