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
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.
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. 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.

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 205 miles of canals and laterals, for in-stream 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.

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.
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.

RECRUITMENT AND HIRING:

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.