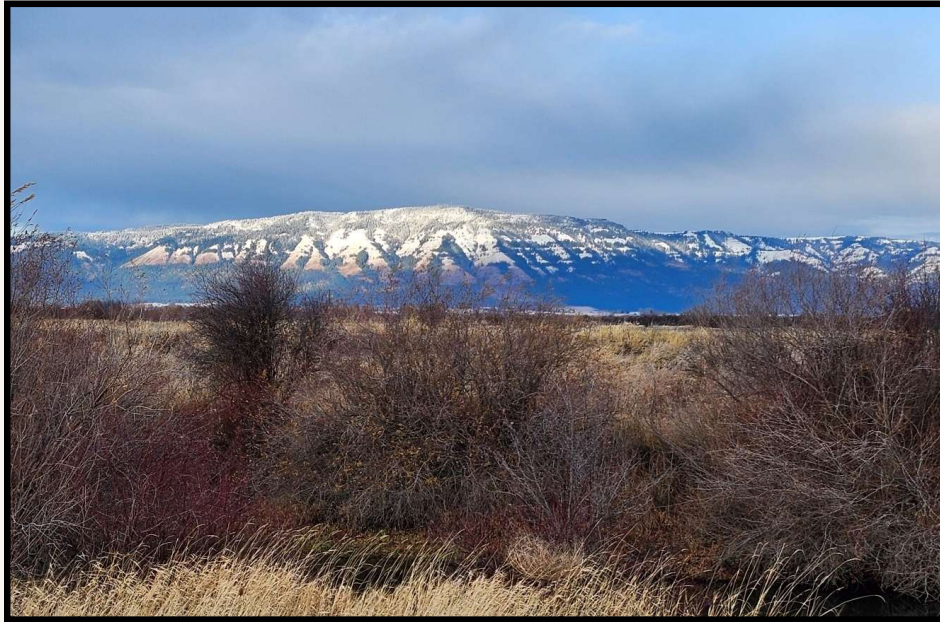




Local people making local decisions to achieve conservation

2023-2024 Annual Report



Our Mission

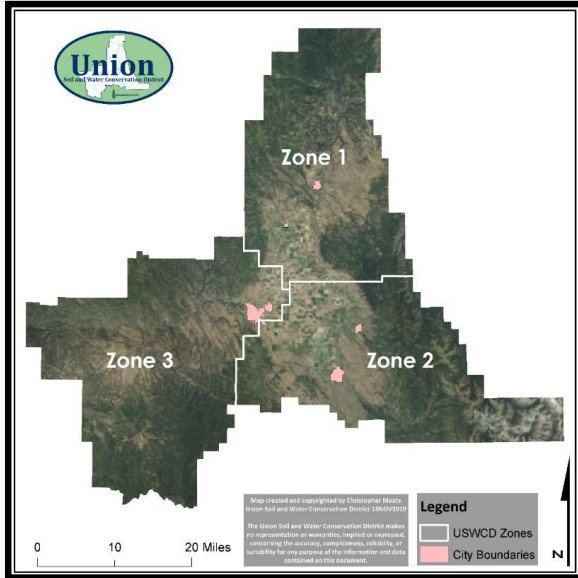
Assist and educate interested landowners in the development, protection, and conservation of natural resources.

How Can We Help You?

- **Assist** in developing, planning, permitting, designing, and applying for funding to improve and protect water quality, soil, and other resources.
- **Provide** technical support for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and other Farm Bill opportunities.
- **Help** you and your neighbors become a Firewise® community.
- **Equipment rentals** of a rangeland seed drill, soil aerator, and tree planter.
- **Share** up-to-date information on flows and water quality attributes of the Grande Ronde River, Catherine Creek, and associated tributaries.

Organization of the Union Soil and Water Conservation District (Union SWCD)

The USWCD is one of 45 conservation districts in Oregon that are a form of local government under Oregon Revised Statutes 568.210-890 and 568.900-933, the laws which govern state agencies and special districts. The USWCD was established in 1946 and operates generally within the boundaries of Union County and the Upper Grande Ronde River Basin. Management is provided by five locally elected board members with three representing zones of the district area and two at-large directors providing broad representation of the entire district.



Board of Directors

Jarod Teeter - Chairman, Zone 1
Paul Boehne - Vice-Chairman, At-Large
Curtis Ricker - Treasurer, At-Large
Fred Wallender - Zone 2
Travis Hampton - Zone 3

Staff

Jim Webster - District Manager
Aaron Bliesner - Project Manager
Renée Coxen - Watershed Conservationist
Anna Lindquist - Firewise Community & CREP Coordinator

2023-2024 Financial Summary		
Year Ended June 30th		
	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>
Cash and Investments	\$513,342	\$414,454
Capital Assets	-	-
Total Assets	\$513,342	\$414,454
Total Liabilities	112,423	116,329
Net Position:		
Invested in Capital Assets	-	-
Restricted	112,423	116,329
Unrestricted	<u>288,496</u>	<u>181,796</u>
Total Net Position	\$400,919	\$298,125



Wayne Doug Watts, Director Emeritus

August 26, 1952 - July 28, 2024

The Union Soil and Water Conservation District was saddened this year by the loss of long-time Board Member, Doug Watts. Mr. Watts served as an elected director for the Union SWCD Board for more than 33-years. During his long tenure, he held all the leadership roles on the board and provided valuable vision and direction for the district.

Mr. Watts worked tirelessly to represent and uphold the mission of the Union Soil and Water Conservation District. He earned the utmost respect of producers, farmers, and ranchers throughout the District. In early 2024 Mr. Watts was nominated and elected to become Director Emeritus and was recognized by Resolution of the Union SWCD for Extraordinary Service and Leadership. Mr. Watts' contributions as an intelligent, thoughtful, and dedicated person are unparalleled and he will be missed by the Board of Directors and Staff of the Union Soil and Water Conservation District.

Little Creek Irrigation Diversion and Fish Passage Improvements

In 2024, the USWCD completed construction of two new diversion structures at the Israel-Ames and Weaver ditch diversions on Little Creek in Union, Oregon. Little Creek provides irrigation for surrounding farms at six diversion locations. The original diversion structures are outdated, do not meet state fish passage requirements, and contribute to flooding and ice issues. With the completion of upgrades at the Israel-Ames and Weaver diversions, the USWCD has now improved fish passage at three of the six locations to date. The new dam structures allow for natural flow in the winter and maintain access to irrigation water in the summer. Additionally, they provide a natural fish bypass channel for migrating fish and lamprey to access the Little Creek Watershed, and fish screens to protect fish from getting into the irrigation ditch systems.

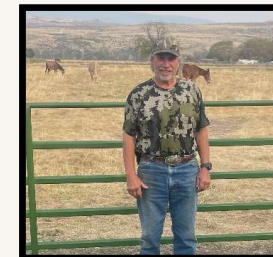


The 2024 Good Steward Award Winners: Dora Boyd Cohen and Greg Williams

Miss Boyd Cohen and Mr. Williams were presented the Good Steward Award for cooperation and coordination with the Union SWCD to complete the Little Creek Israel-Ames and Weaver irrigation diversion upgrades. **Thank you, Dora and Greg!**

The Good Steward Award is presented to individuals who promote conservation and land stewardship in coordination with agricultural operations. For agriculture to be successful over the long term, it is necessary to be good stewards of the land we manage. The USWCD considers the following criteria when selecting the winners of this award each year:

1. Partnerships with the District to complete projects or manage land for the purpose of conserving natural resources and promoting sustainable agriculture.
2. The amount or intensity of conservation practices implemented.
3. Projects that provide significant support to conservation and restoration of natural resources.



Catherine Creek Elmer Dam Fish Passage and Flow Improvement Project

Elmer Dam is a concrete flashboard structure located on Catherine Creek just northwest of Cove, Oregon. The dam was constructed in the 1950's to store water in the Catherine Creek channel as part of a larger irrigation system. A fish ladder was added to the dam after the original construction to allow passage of salmon and steelhead but has not functioned well during important periods of fish migration.

The USWCD, in partnership with Trout Unlimited and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, developed a new fishway design and irrigation system upgrade for efficiency. Additional partnerships with the Grande Ronde Model Watershed and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation have resulted in several grants being awarded from Bonneville Power Administration, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, and Oregon Water Resources Department. Project work began in 2024 to relocate irrigation pumps into wet wells outside the active channel, install intakes with fish screens, modify the dam with a hydraulic gate, and construct a new fishway. Project work will continue through 2025 and be completed in 2026 to allow the landowners to improve their water delivery systems and build on water conservation efforts in the Catherine Creek watershed.



Little Creek Buffalo Flats Restoration

The Little Creek Buffalo Flats Restoration project is located east and adjacent to the City of Union, Oregon and within the Catherine Creek watershed. In cooperation with the landowners and restoration partners, it is designed to improve and restore 1) habitat conditions for aquatic life, 2) water temperature and quality, 3) soil health, 4) riparian and floodplain vegetation, the project will also 5) reconnect floodplains, expanding quality floodplain habitat for fish, and 6) increase streambank and floodplain storage of water and ice, which will subsequently increase the potential for reduced flooding and ice formation in the project area.



In preparation for the project, the landowners worked with NRCS to install off-channel livestock watering. This improves the ecological condition of the site by removing the cattle pressure from the stream. Additionally, the USWCD and partners relocated freshwater mussels upstream of the future instream work area (pictured above) and is working with landowners to ensure the irrigation diversions on Little Creek are all properly screened by ODFW and provide passage for all native fish. Restoring and enhancing the working lands within the project area is a significant contribution to the Catherine Creek watershed.

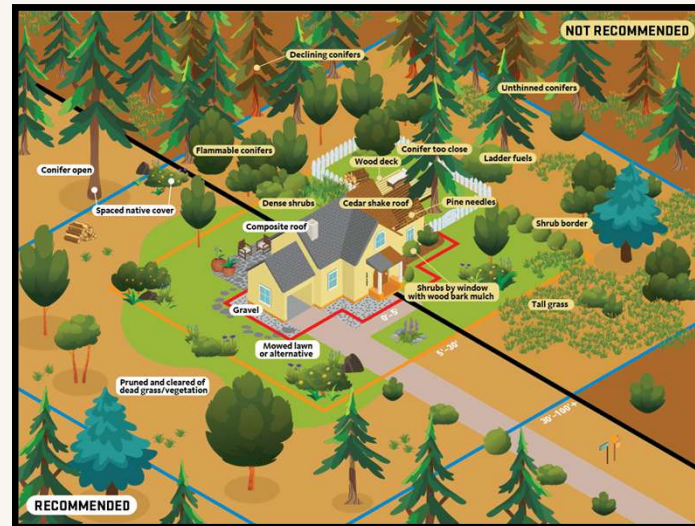
Firewise® Community Program

Wildfires are an ecologically important part of the Northeast Oregon landscape and Union County has, on average, greater wildfire likelihood and risk to homes than most other counties in the US. Recognizing the need to support local wildfire mitigation efforts, the USWCD expanded in 2024 to create a new Firewise® Community Program. By working with partners, the program helps Union County residents become more wildfire resilient by reducing the risk of wildfire to our homes and natural environment.

In addition to supporting individual actions, the Firewise Community Coordinator can help you and your neighbors through the collective process of becoming a Firewise® community. Through Firewise®, neighbors identify and collaborate on community-wide projects such as evacuation planning, forest thinning and fuel breaks, and hosting neighborhood events and workdays. Reducing wildfire risk at a larger community scale has multiple benefits, including:

- increasing firefighter and public safety,
- reducing loss of life and property damage, and
- minimizing post-disaster recovery time.

Congratulations to the Morgan Lake neighborhood for becoming the first recognized Firewise® Community in Union County in 2024!



Credit: Oregon State University

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

Union County relies on healthy rivers and waterways for agriculture, recreation, and more. CREP is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to restore riparian areas on agricultural land which may have been altered by historic grazing or crop production. The USWCD, Farm Service Agency (FSA), and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) collaborate to provide CREP technical support in Union County. If you have a stream running through your agricultural land that demonstrates a need for restoration, you may be eligible for CREP.

Participants commit to keeping land out of agricultural production for the life of a 10 to 15-year contract. In exchange, you receive cost-share assistance funding for restoration and annual rental payments. Additionally, Oregon's program is unique in having a cumulative impact incentive payment for a landowner or neighboring landowners who enroll more than 50% of 5-mile stream segment.

Interested in learning more about Firewise® or CREP? Contact Anna Lindquist: alindquist@unionswcd.org

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Small Grants

The USWCD can assist landowners as a local sponsor for the OWEB Small Grant Program for the implementation of on-the-ground restoration projects that improve water quality and conserve natural resources on private lands. Projects may include spring developments, off-channel water developments, windbreaks, riparian exclusion fencing, and more. Grant awards are up to \$15,000 and require a matching contribution from the landowner of 25% value that can be in the form of cash, in-kind services or materials. The USWCD can help landowners identify concerns, develop project solutions, and apply for funding.

NRCS and Farm Bill Programs

The USWCD regularly advises, supports, and encourages our community to work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to take advantage of the programs they offer under the Oregon Farm Bill to help farmers, ranchers, family forests, Tribes, and conservation partners perform voluntary conservation on private lands. A few of the programs they offer include:

- The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

The Union County NRCS Local Working Group Meeting will be March 4th at 10 am in the OSU-Extension Conference Room, 10507 N. McAlister Rd in Island City.

Contact Ana Gordon (541) 963-4178, (ana.gordon@usda.gov) or visit the NRCS La Grande Service Center at 1901 Adams Ave, Suite 6, La Grande, OR 97850 for more information.

Recruitment for: Local Advisory Committee (LAC) for the Upper Grande Ronde Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plan

As an LAC member you will be able to:

- Hear updates from ODA about water quality
- Recommend local water quality strategies
- Attend a biennial review of water quality progress

Please contact Jim Webster with the USWCD if you are interested in this opportunity to serve on our Local Advisory Committee.



Union SWCD Partners

The Union SWCD thanks our partners and colleagues for their assistance and support.

BOR – U.S. Bureau of Reclamation	BPA – Bonneville Power Administration
CTUIR – Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation	FSA – Farm Service Agency
GRMW – Grande Ronde Model Watershed	NOAA Fisheries – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Service	OACD – Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
ODA – Oregon Department of Agriculture	ODF – Oregon Department of Forestry
ODFW – Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife	ODSL – Oregon Department of State Lands
OSU Extension – Oregon State University	OWEB – Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
OWRD – Oregon Water Resources Department	TCCWMA – Tri-County Cooperative Weed Management Area
TU – Trout Unlimited	Union County – Planning and Public Works
USACE – U.S. Army Corps. of Engineers	USFWS – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USFS – U.S. Forest Service	

Contact Us

Website: www.unionswcd.org

Phone Number: 541-963-1313

10507 North McAlister Road, Room 7,
La Grande, OR 97850

The District prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, age, color, national origin, gender, religion, political beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means when working with the District should contact us.