

ANNUAL REPORT

2021-2022

POLK



**Soil & Water
Conservation District**



Message from the District Manager



As a long-time County resident and agriculturalist, I embrace this opportunity to engage in and positively contribute to the community. As the new District Manager for the Polk Soil and Water Conservation District (PCSWD), I will be leading a fantastic team to provide services to Polk County landowners and land managers. There are plenty of fresh faces to start 2023 at PCSWD, both on staff and Board positions. We intend to meet or exceed your expectations for project management, technical services, and conservation program outreach.

At the direction of the Board, our staff will focus on priority conservation issues in Polk County. I encourage anyone involved in land management to reach out to the District office, myself, or a Board member and start a conversation. Conservation is a collaborative, community effort. We look forward to hosting and attending more in-person events, site visits, and being back to a more normal schedule in 2023.

- Kevin Porter, District Manager

The District strives to practice goals from its long range plan through three main objectives:

Community and Landowner Engagement, by Providing Technical Assistance, and by partnering with other local natural resource groups to broaden the scope of work we can all accomplish together.

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Community and Landowner Engagement



Each year, one of the best ways we make ourselves known is through community and landowner engagement. We like to keep some activities consistent so that people come to associate us with certain events that happen every year, and we’re always looking for new opportunities to connect with the community and promote environmental stewardship. Some examples include: hosting the annual NRCS Local Working Group Meeting, the Cultivating tent at the Polk County Fair, attending farmer’s markets, and our seasonal native plant sales.

We also strive to keep up with providing current best management practice workshops for our constituents. For example: Climate Resiliency in Agriculture webinar, oak restoration tour, regenerative pasture management, Growing Farms Class Series, sheep tour and FAMACHA workshop, and a poisonous plants in pastures and paddocks webinar. Below are some brief descriptions of outreach events we hosted in fiscal year 2021-2022.

Polk County Local Work Group Meeting

At this meeting we recap constituents’ natural resource concerns and priorities from the previous year, report on how the District and its partners have been able to address those needs either with a funding pool or with information to further educate, and then discuss any changes to those priorities moving forward.

For the 2022 Local Work Group Meeting, we hosted a zoom meeting focused on the topics of forest health, oak woodland health, soil health and erosion. We discussed new technology opportunities in agriculture, the Agricultural Drainage Channel Maintenance program (ADCM) and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) program. There were 38 live participants.

Polk County Fair

Each year we attend the Polk County Fair. Two staff members helped set up and manage a booth at the 4-day event. The booth provided literature on a variety of best management topics, and District programs, including CREP. Activities included: a sauerkraut & kimchi making demonstration, kids pollinator BINGO, an herb demonstration, DIY seed balls, and bicycle blender. Special guests included Caesar the “No Drama Llama” and raptors from Chintimini Wildlife Center.

Reaching Landowners

- ◆ Over 750 people stopped by our booth at the Polk County Fair
- ◆ Over 260 direct engagements at farmer’s markets
- ◆ 2,398 native plants added to the landscape through our plant sale
- ◆ 46 E-blasts sent to 443 Subscribers

Community and Landowner Engagement

Cont.

Winter Wildlife Field Days

This was our first year participating in Winter Wildlife Field Days, a month-long event organized by the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex. We attended one of the field stations in Corvallis and created a wildlife activity for the website that people can do anytime!

Regenerative Pasture Management

With OSU Extension, Polk SWCD co-hosted and presented an online course about regenerative pasture management. The 60 participants learned about soil health, mud and manure management, and water quality.

Climate Resilience & Agriculture Webinar

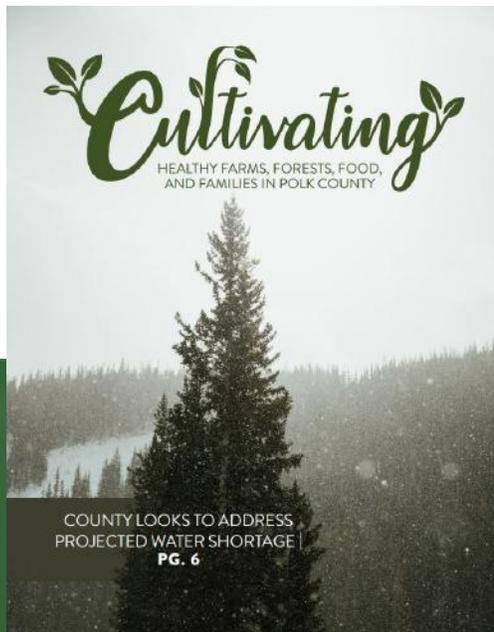
We organized an Earth Day webinar focused on climate resilience principles for agricultural producers. Two of the Polk SWCD Directors participated along with another Polk County farmer, NRCS and the Oregon Climate & Agriculture Network. There were 13 participants and it was recorded, available for viewing on the Polk SWCD website.

CREP Info Night

This information session was held at Gilgamesh Brewing in Independence. There were 14 participants that learned about the CREP program, networked with experts and farmers that are currently enrolled in the program. The Luckiamute Watershed Council also attended and they talked about how they aid landowners.

Volunteers

22 people from the Dallas Community School and Luckiamute Charter Schools came out to Cornerstone to help put 141 native plants in the ground. They also received donated plants for their schools. Polk SWCD staff also gave a presentation about Farmscaping to students at DCS.



Reaching Out to Landowners

- ◆ Active and updated website
- ◆ 250 postcards mailed about CREP program
- ◆ 44,000 Cultivating newsletters published with 19 articles
- ◆ New Facebook page and YouTube channel with TEK videos

Technical Assistance

It is the Polk SWCD's mission to be a community leader for natural resource information. The SWCD encourages land owners and managers to contact us for one-on-one technical assistance and smaller resource requests. County residents can rely on swift follow-ups for plant identification, weed treatment techniques, seed species recommendations and timings, and other small scale issues. We can you with provide references and additional information sources to get you in contact with experts, if we can't answer a query ourselves.

As part of our ongoing Salt Creek Collaborative research, two weather stations have been gathering data during the last fiscal year. This data will continue to be collected during the next year to ensure meaningful conclusions. These monitors were also placed in Salt Creek to monitor localized weather patterns, shared with the land managers that live in the region.

Our Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) finalized the plant establishment portions of the newest enrolled contract covering nearly 22 acres and three quarters of a stream mile. The CREP program was given a boost in the last year – areas acting like a riparian area, without having to be a mapped stream, may be eligible for enrollment going forward, expanding enrollee opportunities.



Over 400
technical
assistance
contacts,
including
site visits

Natural Resource & Ag Concerns:

- General Agriculture
- Land Stewardship
- Beginner Farmer & Rancher
- Weed Management
- Plant Identification
- Pasture Management
- Mud & Manure Management
- Pest Management
- Livestock Management
- Small Horse Farm Management
- Compost
- Erosion
- Orchard Crops & Olives
- Ag Water Quality
- Water Storage
- Irrigation
- Biocontrol

Technical Assistance

Cont.

We provide Technical Assistance to NRCS for oak woodlands and savanna restoration associated with a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP). This grant provides the framework to collaborate with our partners at the Natural Resource Conservation Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde to bring on the ground habitat work to the county. Our partnership has strengthened our RCP funding pool with over \$1,250,000, for Oregon white oak restoration available throughout most of the county. In addition to new RCP grant funding, the District will conclude a prior NRCS Technical Assistance grant of \$31,000 to complete projects for clients who enrolled from a prior 2014-2019 funding pool.

The partnership between the Polk SWCD and The Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE) is now entering the third year working to establish populations of pure strain Kinkaid's lupine on 7.5 acres within the District's Cornerstone Project conservation easement. This grant is establishing stepping stones for the endangered Fender's Blue butterfly by creating more, and higher value, habitat across a patchwork of perpetually protected lands with our northern and southern neighboring counties. A year after the Lupine patch was designed, The IAE was awarded an additional restoration grant with OWEB to add another 6 acres of rare endangered Willamette daisy plantings to the mix at Cornerstone. The SWCD has 13 connected acres of restored habitat specifically prepared to support endangered vegetation. The areas are expected to be seeded and planted in the winters of 2022 and 2023.

The District continues to work with the Trust for Public Land, Bonneville Power, and Oregon Fish and Wildlife to finalize the land management plan into 2023. Polk SWCD is the steward of the largest single tract of conserved property in the county at 183.33 acres total, titled 'Smithfield Oaks'. Smithfield Oaks provides even more critical habitat for oak and prairie associated wildlife and vegetation, including listed species, similar to Cornerstone.



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Restoration Topics:

- Oak woodland & savanna
- Prairie
- Mixed woodland
- Riparian areas
- Weed control
- Native forb/grass species enhancement
- Management for wildlife species especially: acorn woodpecker, large game species, chinook and coho salmon



Partnerships

The third practice we promote is engaging in partnerships with other groups to reach as many people in our communities as possible. **Through collaboration, we can accomplish so much more.** Here are some examples of ways we engaged with partners during 2021-2022:



We’ve continued our partnership with OSU Extension and had 2 interns. One was shared with OSU to help with summer programming. They designed promotional content and attended all outreach events to support staff. Another intern was brought on in March ‘22 to help with our Salt Creek Focus Area; maintaining stream flow and water quality monitoring.

Polk SWCD joined Marion SWCD and OSU Small Farms Program to bring Conservation Spotlight, a regular segment of Willamette Wakeup on KMUZ’s community radio station. With this partnership, we bring interviews that highlight topics of natural resource conservation.

The Salem Audubon Society has helped bring more outreach to Cornerstone—our conservation easement. Two Bird Walks were guided by an Audubon member. Twenty-seven people attended and spotted 65 species of birds that have been recorded on eBird. They also led a webinar about birds at Cornerstone.

Our partnership with the Luckiamute Watershed Council and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde continues to grow as we completed and released our Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) video series on YouTube. We also coordinated and organized an oak restoration tour at the Tribe’s easement, as well as their native plant nursery. The Tribe’s staff guided a plant walk at Cornerstone and also participated in our Conservation Spotlight podcast.

Finally, we want to **acknowledge the land we work on.** The Polk Soil and Water Conservation District is located within the traditional homelands of the Kalapuya, who are represented today by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians. Since time immemorial, they have been the historic land managers of this region.

The Polk SWCD wants to express gratitude for the land itself and the people who have cared for this land throughout the generations, continuing the connection to place. We commit to caring for the land through native habitat restoration and promoting environmental stewardship.

We invite you to learn more about the native people of this land – (link to website - Native-Land.ca | [Our home on native land](#)).



Coming in 2022-2023

- Completion of Smithfield Oaks Conservation Easement management plan
- Final OWEB plant establishment grant to perform shrub clearing and planting over 12 acres at Smithfield Oaks was completed
- Middle of biennium of OWEB small grant funds will be available for projects up to \$15,000
- The District will gravel both entry roads and turnarounds for our 2 conservation properties in 2023.
- The District has hired a new District Manager and will hire a Resource Conservationist and other vacant positions.
- Further native plantings associated with large woody debris project along Gooseneck Creek
- Increase outreach to reach urban population
- Increase volunteer base to support conservation projects around the county
- Hold in-person Local Work Group Meeting with networking time for participants



*YOUR LOCAL SOURCE OF CONSERVATION INFORMATION AND
EDUCATION IN POLK COUNTY, OREGON SINCE 1966!*

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