



Groundwork

Groundwork Newsletter Special Edition

2025/2026

Message from the Manager

Annual Report

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This past year Wasco County SWCD saw steady, meaningful work across the District. We focused on our core conservation priorities: erosion control, water conservation, riparian enhancement, rangeland health, invasive species, forest and habitat work, and hands-on education. We managed grants, budgets, and planning efforts that support our daily operations and keep the District running smoothly.

Those priorities guided the projects we carried out on the ground. Staff worked on efforts to stabilize aquifer declines, improve irrigation systems, reduce wildfire risk, restore streams and riparian areas, manage noxious weeds, and support landowners with technical assistance. We also kept a strong outreach presence through field tours, radio updates, and other community events that help people stay connected to the District's work. This year, we updated our Long-Range Plan, and the Board leaned in with active oversight and policy updates that will help guide our direction in the years ahead.

I invite you to explore this report and see the range of projects and accomplishments from the past year. Thank you to the landowners, partners, and community members who worked with us. We look forward to continuing this work together in the year ahead.

Thanks, 

Introducing the Staff



Shilah Olson, District Manager
Dana Woods, Office Administrator
Abbie Forrest, Grants & Program Manager
Drake Gilbert, Watershed Coordinator
Allie Marker, Watershed Technician
Karen Lamson, Conservation Planner
Ryan Bessette, Conservation Planner
Scott Susi, Conservation Planner
Dean Dark, LDCWMA Coordinator
Samantha Filbin, Field & Office Assistant



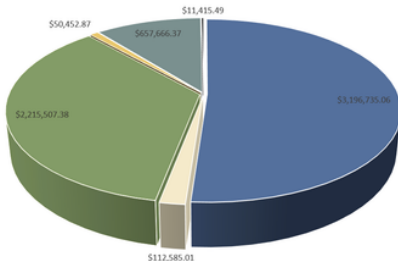
Seasonal Staff:

Holly Miles
Kyle Marick
Morgan Olson
Drew Grabacki
CWDG Crew:
Colby Gibbs
Bleu Moring
Dakota Divish
Ian Preston



Financial Report

The District uses cash accounting for its day to day operations. Fund accounts include the General Fund and Reserve Funds: The Building Reserve Fund and the Vehicle Reserve Fund. The District has a permanent tax rate limit approved November 2004 for \$0.25/\$1,000 valuation, which raised \$835,221.24 in the 2025-2026 fiscal year.



Unaudited Cash Accounting

Beg. Balance July 1, 2025
Income
General Fund Transfers
Expenses
Balance June 30, 2026

General Fund

\$864,149.00
\$3,196,735.06
\$(24,600.00)
\$3,047,627.12
\$988,656.94

Reserves

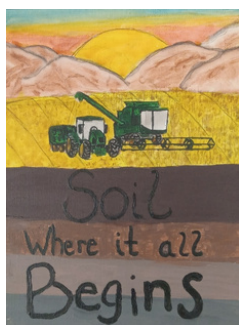
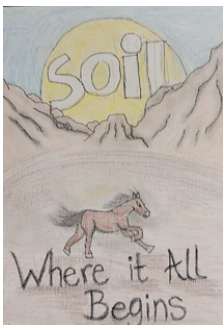
\$460,201.00
\$16,008.68
\$24,600.00
\$49,996.54
\$450,813.14

Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Grant Program Highlights

- 16 grants and agreements were completed or closed out during the fiscal year.
- 17 new grants and agreements were awarded and added to the District portfolio.
- Several programs were renewed or continued, including CREP TA, PSP, Forest Collaborative and LDCWMA
- Lifetime grant funding successfully secured by the district increased from \$21.2 million to \$23.4 million

Education & Outreach

2025 - 2026 was an active year for SWCD staff, who took part in a range of outreach events, including the OSU Cherry Days Festival and Tour, hosting an Earth Day Event, as well as participating on the Wasco County Crop Tour. Each offering opportunities to connect with landowners, youth, and community members around shared stewardship goals. This spring, Stewardship Week invited students from across Wasco County to channel their creativity into poster designs for the theme "Soil, where it all begins." The contest drew strong participation, and winning entries are displayed at left, which will go on to the State Poster Contest. Wasco SWCD also had a booth at the County Fair for exhibitors and attendees to grab informational pamphlets, read about the history of the SWCD, and learn more about current programs and ways we can provide technical and financial assistance. These efforts reflect the District's commitment to maintaining an active and visible role in community education, while fostering the next generation of conservation leaders.



Conservation Programs

ODA Capacity and Monitoring - Water quality and quantity remain top priorities for the district. Funding support from the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) enables the district to provide outreach, education, conservation planning, and technical assistance throughout Wasco County. During the past fiscal year, SWCD staff participated in 4 outreach events, including crop tours, a cherry tour, a spring and fall native plant sale, and Earth Day activities, reaching approximately 188 participants and distributing educational materials to 75 attendees. Staff provided technical assistance to 50 landowners through conservation programs including District Cost Share, CREP, CRP, and emergency grazing assistance. A total of 16 conservation plans were developed, covering approximately 417.89 acres.

BPA & OWEB CREP Buffers - The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), a Farm Bill initiative administered through the Farm Service Agency (FSA), is supported locally through conservation planning and technical assistance provided by certified SWCD staff. Funding from the Bonneville Power Administration (for anadromous streams) and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (for all riparian areas) helps landowners establish and maintain riparian buffers that improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat, stabilize streambanks, reduce erosion, and provide shade to streams. During the fiscal year, SWCD staff assisted with 16 CREP contracts and supported implementation of riparian buffer practices covering more than 430 acres throughout the district.

NACD Farm Bill TA - Technical assistance for Farm Bill conservation programs was made possible with support from the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and OWEB. This funding helped SWCD staff work closely with NRCS to deliver conservation planning and application assistance for Farm Bill programs, including EQIP, CRP, CREP, and CSP. Staff assisted producers with conservation planning, applications, contract implementation, and site visits, helping ensure voluntary conservation practices were successfully applied across working lands in Wasco County. Priority resource concerns addressed through this assistance included water quality, grazing management, wildlife habitat, soil health, erosion control, and forest and rangeland stewardship.

District Cost Share Program



The District Cost Share program continued its strong success with 28 applications approved by the SWCD board, totaling \$139,281. Approved projects included 12 Haul Roads, 3 fuel reductions, 3 rainwater harvesting, 2 irrigation upgrades, 2 spring developments, 1 chipping, 1 reseeding, and 1 fire line reseeding. Additionally, 1 rainwater harvesting project was approved through the Urban Cost Share.

During the previous fiscal year, 20 Cost Share projects reached completion, with \$89,532.85 in reimbursement funds distributed to landowners. Completed projects consisted of 11 haul roads, 2 fire restoration, 2 spring developments, 2 livestock waters, 1 irrigation upgrade, 1 orchard chipping, and 1 weed treatment.

Weed Control

The District advanced coordinated noxious weed management across Wasco County and the Lower Deschutes corridor in both Wasco and Sherman Counties, focusing on priority species including Rush Skeletonweed, Dalmation toadflax, Yellow Flag Iris, perennial pepperweed, Ravenna grass, Scotch thistle, Poison hemlock, Hoary cress (whitetop), Yellow starthistle, diffuse knapweed, Russian knapweed, blackberry, Tree of Heaven, puncturevine, Canada thistle, houndstongue, tansy ragwort, annual invasive grasses and Leafy spurge. These priorities reflect work completed through State Weed Board funding, the Lower Deschutes CWMA, federal agreements, and countywide rapid-response efforts.

In the Deschutes River corridor, crews treated high-priority sites from Pelton Dam to Maupin under our BLM grant and continued coordinated work downstream from Maupin to the Columbia River through our CWMA partnership. Treatments addressed priority weeds across remote canyon systems, recreation corridors, and high-use road networks.

Countywide OSWB/ODA work involved extensive survey and treatment across multiple riparian and transportation corridors. Ravenna grass remained a top priority, with continued monitoring and treatment at known sites and response to two newly discovered landscape infestations. The District also supported White River Fire disaster recovery through targeted houndstongue and tansy treatments in the eastern portion of the South Wasco planning area. Annual grass control was completed for the U.S. Forest Service along the 2700 and 2710 road systems and at Kern Pit.

Within the CWDG footprint, staff followed roadside fuels reduction work with strategic weed control to prevent new seedbeds, reduce flashy fuels, and stabilize treated corridors. Expanded monitoring, rapid response surveys, and prevention practices helped contain new infestations, protect high-risk travel routes, and support long term restoration goals.

This year, the SWCD Board formally became the Wasco County Weed Advisory Board, establishing a coordinated structure for countywide weed management and positioning the District to pursue additional funding and strengthen regional partnerships. The District also began early implementation of a new ECOP FIP partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, Oregon State Parks, Friends of the Columbia River Gorge, and Columbia Land Trust. This emerging project will support oak habitat restoration in the Columbia Gorge west of The Dalles, including targeted Rush Skeletonweed and annual grass control across multiple ownerships.



Community Wildfire Defense

In partnership with Wasco County and local Rural Fire Protection Districts staff and crews have completed 143 assessments and defensible space work around 104 homes since work began in June 2025.

Through local contractors and leadership from the Juniper Flat Fire Protection District fuels reduction along roads has been completed rounding out the year far beyond our annual goal. Over the next 3 years we will continue to support Wasco County in creating firewise communities, defensible space and fuel reduction efforts.

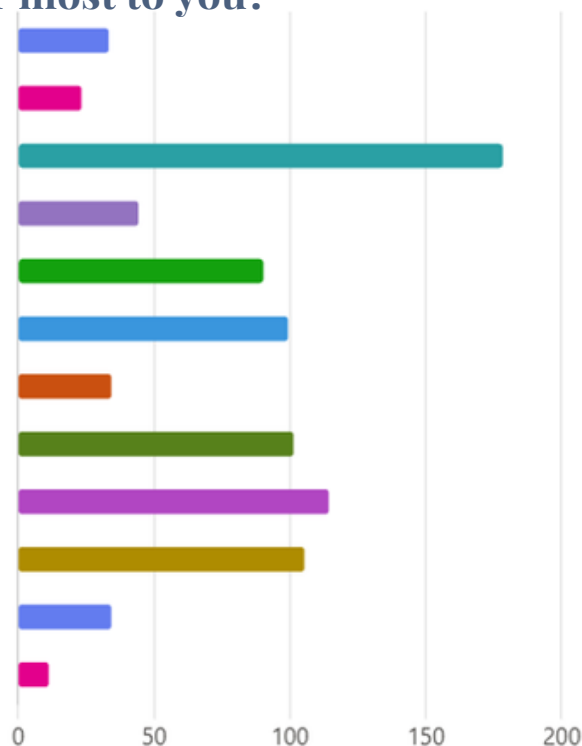
Long Range Plan Survey Results

To support development of the Wasco County SWCD Long Range Plan, the District conducted a community-wide survey to gather input on natural resource concerns, conservation priorities, and opportunities for future programs and partnerships. The survey received approximately 200 responses from residents, landowners, agricultural producers, and community members throughout Wasco County. Questions were designed to capture both measurable trends and open-ended feedback, asking participants to identify priority natural resource issues, conservation needs, desired program areas, and local opportunities, while also providing space for written comments and detailed perspectives. The results demonstrated strong public interest in conservation planning and locally relevant natural resource work, reflecting a community invested in the long term stewardship of Wasco County's natural resources.

Survey responses highlighted a clear preference for practical, place- based conservation efforts that address the needs of both working lands and local communities. Water quality and water availability emerged as top priorities, followed by soil health, fish and wildlife habitat, wildfire preparedness, watershed health, and overall land stewardship. Respondents emphasized the importance of continued on the ground conservation assistance, resilient landscapes and collaborative efforts that address local challenges and opportunities. The feedback provides a valuable foundation for future planning and will help ensure that district programs, outreach, technical assistance, and partnerships remain responsive to the priorities and concerns identified by Wasco County residents. Overall, the survey reinforced strong public interest in protecting water resources, improving ecosystem health, reducing wildfire risk, and maintaining productive working lands throughout Wasco County.

What resource concerns matter most to you?

Soil health & erosion control (<i>keeping soil in place and productive</i>)	33
Rangeland condition (<i>health of grazing lands and native range</i>)	23
Water supply (<i>groundwater levels, well reliability, drought, streamflow, storage</i>)	178
Water use efficiency (<i>irrigation systems, piping, conveyance</i>)	44
Water quality	90
Watershed health (<i>overall condition of streams and the lands that drain to them</i>)	99
Invasive weeds	34
Forest health (<i>tree/vegetation condition, wildfire resilience</i>)	101
Fish & wildlife habitat (<i>pollinators, deer/elk, beaver, salmon/steelhead, lamprey, etc.</i>)	114
Wildfire risk & recovery	105
Urbanization / land use change (<i>development pressure, fragmentation</i>)	34
Other	11



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