

Soil Grant to aid county ag, economy

Programs will help reduce water use, improve soil and increase productivity

By Steve Tool

Wallowa County Chieftain

A \$3.2 million grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to local land resource agencies could add more than \$6 million with matching funds to the county's economy over the next few years while improving soil health and farm productivity.

The grant funds go to The Nature Conservancy, Wallowa Land Trust and Wallowa Resources.

The Nature Conservancy is the leading partner on the project. TNC project director Jeff Fields said that the grant will mainly focus on two is-

issues of soil enhancement: For on-farm improvements and irrigation efficiency for soil health. The other is for land conservation easements. The combination is intended to improve a broad cross section of farm land concerns such as soil health, wildlife habitat, climate change resilience and water quality/quantity.

"We're all bringing our expertise to the table," said WLT director Kathleen Ackley. To that end, Wallowa Resources will concentrate their expertise on irrigation/soil related enhancements, while the trust and conservancy concentrate on land conservation easements with

the conservancy concentrating on Zumwalt Prairie and the land trust on the lower portions of the valley.

The irrigation facet, under the auspices of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, will begin in 2018 with concern centered on system improvements. Farmers will improve soil through layers of applications, which will result in a reduction of water, fertilizer and pesticide/herbicide use as well as improved crop production.

Fields said that an increasing amount of farmers are diversifying their crops.

"One of the things we've heard from farmers is that in order to diversify, they need to effectively control their water supply and flood irrigation is not always the answer," Fields said.

Helping farmers transition either to sprinklers or pivot lines and possibly starting micro-hydro projects in irrigation ditches to help supply electricity for the participating farm are just a two of the possible improvements under consideration.

Another water-centered improvement includes the application of Biochar, a soil enhancing product that utilizes processed charcoal to help soils retain nutrients and water while adding other benefits.

The program is intended to cover nearly all the irrigated farmland in the county. "The purpose is to support landowners to maintain and enhance their farm operations and to maintain habitat for all the critters we share this place with," Fields said.

The conservation easements are part of the NRCS' Agricultural Land Easement program and begins in 2018. ALE partners with farmers to help conserve agricultural lands through financial and technical assistance.

"By giving farmers added value to their land through buying conservation easements, we can help keep farms from being sub-divided into smaller parcels, and we can maintain the rural nature of the county," Ackley said. Although the land trust and conservancy are landowners, they will not participate in the program.

"We are using these funds to help other landowners reach their goals," Fields said. "We've got great partners to make this happen, We've got the private landowners who

have already showed interest along with the land trust and Wallowa Resources."

All the organizations are working on the matching grants for future projects. Those funds will mostly come from private donations, a limited amount from the state and from private foundations.

Fields and Ackley said their respective organizations applied for the grant after ensuring enough local farmland owners expressed interest in the program to make it feasible. Other farmers interested in participating can call any of the three involved agencies for more information — The Nature Conservancy: 541-426-3458, Wallowa Land Trust: 541-426-2042, Wallowa Resources: 541-426-8053.

To catch a thief

By Steve Tool

Wallowa County Chieftain

Earlier this month a 27-year-old man pleaded guilty to charges stemming from a November incident in which he broke into a local retail store and made off with more than a half-dozen firearms.

After the theft, police were left with a clear trail to follow to find the thief and the stolen goods.

At 4:55 a.m. on Nov. 28, Enterprise Police Department received a call about a break-in at Wallowa County Grain Growers. EPD arrived at the scene minutes later. Snow had fallen that night. "I saw the broken window, and I could see the tracks going to the door and leading away from the door," EPD Chief Joel Fish said. The responding officers followed the tracks down to a trailer court located at 600 W. Greenwood St. lot 31 in Enterprise, where they caught up with Brian Scott Straub, 27.

"He walked across town and crossed two fences, he was trying to keep someone from finding him," Fish said.

Straub, a previously convicted felon, was found with eight pistols he had stolen from the store. Straub was arrested and charged with multiple counts of felon in possession of a firearm, parole violations, multiple burglary counts and perhaps not surprisingly, heroin possession.

At a Jan. 11 court appearance, Straub pleaded guilty to 1st degree burglary, for which he received a 28-month Department of Corrections sentence. Straub also received 30 days in the county jail for heroin possession and an additional 16 months sentence for being a felon in possession of a firearm, to be served concurrently (the same time as) with the burglary charge. Straub was also required to pay restitution to Grain Growers in the amount of \$6,622.85 and serve three years of post-prison supervision.

Soroptimists seek applicants for award

The Soroptimist club will provide a cash grant of \$2,000 to the recipient of its Fellowship Award, and applications are now being accepted.

The Fellowship Award will be paid in its entirety to the college or university the recipient attends.

The Fellowship Award is presented to a woman who is continuing her education with in a master's or doctorate degree program.

Applications are available at: Bookloft in Enterprise, Wallowa Public Library, beecrowbee in Joseph, Thrift Shop or by contacting Amy Stubblefield, 541-398-1068.

Completed applications must be returned by March 1, 2017. Mail applications to Soroptimist, P.O. Box 127, Enterprise, OR 97828 or return to the Thrift Shop

The Fellowship Award will be awarded to any woman who: 1) resides in the Northwestern Region of Soroptimist International of the Americas;

2) established in business or a profession; 3) holds a bachelor's or master's degree from an accredited college or university; and 4) presents a plan of worthwhile post-graduate study at an accredited college or university leading to an advanced degree or to enhance standing or competence in her business

or profession.

Soroptimist was founded Oct.3, 1921, in Oakland, California, and is now an International Organization with more than 100,000 members who are working through service projects to advance human rights and the status of women.


The Northwestern Region

of Soroptimist International of the Americas encompasses the states of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Montana and the Idaho Panhandle.

For more information about how Soroptimist improves the lives of women and girls, call Ann Browder, 541-426- 3204.

Thank You
to the wonderful staff at both Wallowa Memorial Hospital & Wallowa Senior Living. Your tender care, support & guidance was invaluable!
*Sincerely,
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Penny Stein*

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