

Agencies help farmers improve stream habitat

By MITCH LIES
For the Capital Press

The stream running through Ralph Duyck's Washington County, Ore., farm is fully shaded, the ash trees and brush helping improve aquatic habitat by keeping the water cool.

As recently as 10 years ago, that wasn't the case. When Duyck first signed a 15-year contract with the Enhanced Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, or ECREP, the stream was fully exposed to sunlight, which threatened water quality and increased the water temperature.

The situation on Duyck's farm has been repeated again and again by Washington County landowners working with project managers at the Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District. Through ECREP, a program unique to Washington County, extra funding assistance is available from Clean Water Services, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Oregon Department of Forestry and

the Freshwater Trust, providing a boost to the financial incentives available in the federal CREP.

Statewide in Oregon, 1,683 projects involving 41,920 acres are participating in federal CREP, according to Taylor Murray, outreach coordinator for the Farm Service Agency in Oregon. In Washington County, 46 projects involving 467 acres are enrolled in ECREP.

The programs help landowners improve water quality by providing financial and technical assistance that enhance the conservation performance of riparian areas. ECREP brings additional dollars to the table from local sources to further reduce economic barriers, said Jennifer Nelson, a program manager for the Tualatin SWCD.

Duyck, who was the second landowner to enter into an ECREP contract in Washington County, said he was skeptical of the program until he met with representatives of the local and federal agencies that administer and implement the program.



Courtesy photo

Washington County farmer Ralph Duyck, left, and Ken Bierly of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board take part in a 2005 dedication ceremony of a conservation project on Duyck's farm. The ground today is lush with trees and shrubs.

Duyck said ECREP offered several improvements over its sister packages, CREP and the Conservation Reserve Program, which is more suit-

ed to the east side of the state. It paid a higher rental fee and provided more technical assistance and more financing for the purchase, planting and

maintenance of contracted acreage.

"With (ECREP), they upped the ante and they plant the trees and do all the work,"

Duyck said.

Duyck fielded several calls from neighbors after the word got out that he was signing an ECREP contract.

"There were a lot of people that I talked to who were very skeptical," he said. "I told them I was happy with it, and within two or three months, everyone I talked to signed up and went with it."

Despite the complications that can arise when several agencies are involved in a project, Duyck said he found it easy to participate.

"I never had any problem with it," he said. "It was very relaxing and I enjoyed working with the Tualatin SWCD very much. We went to work and put together a program, planted the trees and the vegetation, and it is all growing."

The project involved planting upward of 25,000 trees and shrubs on 29 acres.

The rental fee generated by the project "isn't going to make you rich," Duyck said. "But it pays the bills."

In 2020, when the contract expires, Duyck will be required to leave standing the trees and shrubs nearest the stream, but will be allowed to harvest trees outside the buffer zone.

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