

Culvert project a win-win for ranchers

By GAIL OBERST
For the Capital Press

Cattle ranchers and timberland owners Andy and Maryrae Thomson had a problem.

Eber Creek, on their property west of Eugene, Ore., annually flooded the road to their timberland. The culprits? Two culverts that were too small to handle the creek's winter flow. The small culverts also blocked access to native cutthroat trout and other fish species in the Long Tom River drainage.

Long Tom Watershed Council to the rescue: The council gathered funds for a project that paid to replace the culverts with a sturdy bridge, serving both purposes: The Thomsons, whose ancestors had farmed the land since 1881, improved their business, and the trout could access the



Courtesy of LTWC

Before the Long Tom Watershed Council helped Andy and Maryrae Thomson replace their culverts, high waters regularly washed out the road to their timberland. After the council installed a bridge, both the Thomsons and the cutthroat trout in Eber Creek could access the higher reaches of the property.

upper reaches of the creek. Andy Thomson touted his success to neighbors, many of whom joined in improving 4.5

stream miles by replacing similar barriers.

With variations, the Thomsons' tale could be repeated

dozens of times among Oregon's 90 some watershed councils. For the past 20 years, farmers, ranchers, foresters and other landowners have worked with local councils on projects that serve to improve agricultural businesses while providing habitat.

"We're looking for the win-win," said Shawn Morford, the executive director of the Network of Oregon Watershed Councils, based in Salem.

The Network is one of four organizations that make up the Oregon Conservation Partnership, which also includes the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, representing the state's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, representing Oregon's 17 land trusts, plus the Oregon Conservation Education and Assistance Network, the education arm of the Partnership.

Although watershed councils, conservation districts and land trusts have their own unique missions and resources, they all work with agricultural and other landowners who voluntarily join in conservation projects.

The Network helps strengthen watershed councils by providing training and technical and scientific information to their staff and leaders, connecting them with funding sources, and providing resources such as policy and procedure templates.

In turn, watershed councils funnel state, federal, and private funding to their communities for ecosystem restoration, monitoring, and education. According to oregonexplorer.info, a website that tracks watershed restoration projects, in the five years from 2010 to 2014, there were 3,371 watershed

council projects in the state, representing an investment of more than \$293 million. Of that, 41 percent came from state lottery funds, an equal amount from federal, city and county funds, and the rest from landowners' contributions. In 2010-11, for example, those projects made 356 miles of streams accessible to fish migration, according to the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, a state agency that helps fund many of the councils.

"Oregon's watershed council model is unique and often envied by other states," Morford said.

Council members focus on the area of land that Morford refers to as the "ridgetop to ridgetop" — that is, the land that includes the waterways that start as small streams and eventually flow into a major river.

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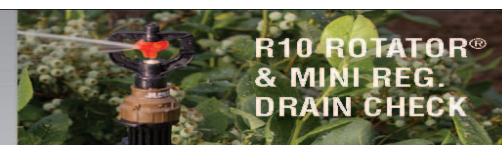
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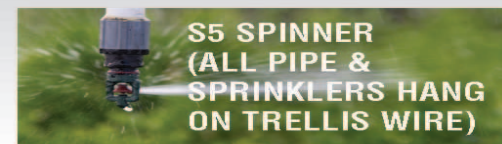
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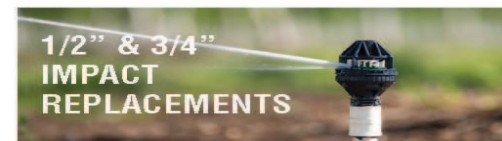
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