

People & Places

Rake removes aquatic vegetation

By DIANNA TROYER
For the Capital Press

CHESTER, Idaho — Frustrated with aquatic weeds choking irrigation canal flows, eastern Idaho rancher Bill Fuchs brainstormed and designed a chemical-free solution to the problem.

Fuchs designed the Aquatic Vegetation Rake (AVR) to attach to various sizes of excavators. The AVR scoops up plants, including the roots, while they are growing. With vegetation removed, water flow is immediately restored.

“The AVR is cheaper to use than herbicides and is effective on all aquatic vegetation because it simply removes them all,” Fuchs said. “It’s a tool that water managers have always needed.”

Fuchs developed a prototype in 2008 and hired engineers to fine-tune it after seeing several “shop-made” rakes built by canal managers that had limited effectiveness.

“The AVR engineering addresses the many aspects of attaching a rake to an excavator,” he said. “Newer excavators have joysticks, lots of capabilities, precision and attachment options. With minimal training, it’s easy to learn how to use the AVR to remove aquatic vegetation and floating debris from waterways.”

The units are manufactured in Paul, Idaho, in standard 8-foot, 10-foot, 12-foot and other widths.

“They’re painted green because the rakes are a green solution to weed removal,” he said.

The wide rake has metal teeth of various lengths and easily pulls up weeds while allowing water to drain away quickly. The removed veg-



Courtesy of Bill Fuchs

The Aquatic Vegetation Rake attaches to excavators of various sizes and cleans irrigation canals.

etation decays and becomes nutrient-rich compost.

“The AVR teeth are made of heavy steel to withstand lava rock we have around here,” said Fuchs, who lives near Chester, Idaho. “If a tooth does bend or break, it can be easily straightened or replaced. Teeth can be changed depending on the root depth of the targeted plant. Lily pads, for example, have roots like small pineapples, so you use longer teeth for them.”

Clients from Florida to Idaho, New Mexico, Montana and Arizona have bought the rake from his website, www.maximizedwatermanagement, to remove moss, flowering rush, bulrush, cattails, lily pads and other plants.

Fuchs said a client at a mosquito abatement district in Florida told him the rake

“revolutionized their maintenance program. Before using the rake, vegetation was so dense in their waterways

that an insecticide’s effectiveness was limited because the water weeds stopped the flow. After the weeds were cleared away, they were able to keep their mosquito population under control, and the drainage canals had the flows restored.”

Fuchs said the rake offers long-term weed control.

“By removing the plant and roots, it takes a long time or years for them to grow back,” he said.

Using the rake has carry-over effects for future water seasons, especially with controlling flowering rush, said Steve Howser, manager of the Aberdeen-Springfield Canal Co. in eastern Idaho.

“We tried controlling it with herbicides but were unsuccessful,” Howser said.

“The season following removal of flowering rush from our system’s I later with the AVR, we had less than 5% regrowth. Since then, we have almost elimi-

nated flowering rush from our system.”

Fuchs said another advantage the AVR has over herbicides is that by removing plants from waterways, it reduces the nutrient loads flowing downstream.

His clients have also used the AVR in versatile ways unrelated to agriculture.

Fly fisherman and author Mike Lawson of St. Anthony, Idaho, used the rake to remove stands of cattails that were encroaching on his sloughs and ponds.

“After one day of using the rake, vegetation was cleared in certain areas, and water flow was restored through my entire system,” Lawson said.

Fuchs said employees at a national wildlife refuge in Hawaii are planning to use an AVR to control invasive California bulrush and water lettuce instead of using herbicides.

While developing the AVR, Fuchs said he learned

Western Innovator

BILL FUCHS

Education: Graduated from Idaho State University with a bachelor of science degree in marketing, 1985.

Occupation: Third-generation cattle rancher outside Chester, Idaho; guest lodge operator; inventor.

Family: Wife and two adult children.

Website: www.maximizedwatermanagement.com



Capital Press
EMPOWERING PRODUCERS OF FOOD & FIBER
Established 1928

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EO Media Group
dba Capital Press

An independent newspaper
published every Friday.

Capital Press (ISSN 0740-3704) is
published weekly by EO Media Group,
2870 Broadway NE, Salem OR 97303.

Periodicals postage paid at Portland, OR,
and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: send address changes to
Capital Press, P.O. Box 2048 Salem, OR
97308-2048.

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1 year 4-H, FFA students/teachers \$30
9 months 4-H, FFA students/teachers \$25

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Mailing address:

Capital Press
P.O. Box 2048
Salem, OR 97308-2048

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CORRECTION

Tyson Foods reported that a cattle supplier misappropriated a total of \$285 million over four years by misrepresenting the number of cattle bought on behalf of the company. An incorrect total was reported in a story on page 4 in the Dec. 25 edition.

The Capital Press regrets the error.

Correction policy

Accuracy is important to Capital Press
staff and to our readers.

If you see a misstatement, omission or
factual error in a headline, story or photo
caption, please call the Capital Press news
department at 503-364-4431, or send
email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

We want to publish corrections
to set the record straight.

FFA students plant oaks they grew from acorns

By CRAIG REED
For the Capital Press

SUTHERLIN, Ore. — Sutherlin High School FFA students were spread across the hillsides. Working in pairs, they helped volunteers from the Friends of Ford’s Pond plant 200 Oregon white oak seedlings on Dec. 5.

A week later, another group of FFA students planted another 200 oaks.

The planting effort by about 35 students, a few helping on both days, was the culmination of a process that started in 2018 when the school’s FFA program was approached by Friends of Ford’s Pond about helping to restore an oak savanna habitat to the west of the former log pond. Blackberry vines and hawthorn bushes had invaded the hillsides.

The 95-acre pond and surrounding 107 acres are undergoing a transformation into an open space, community park. Restoring the oak savanna was one of several projects in the park’s master plan.

The FFA officer team considered the oak proposal and was quick to agree to help.

“We thought it fit well as a community service project for us,” said Wes Crawford, Sutherlin High’s ag science teacher and FFA adviser. “We had never dealt with trees before so there was the plant science, the greenhouse management, the ecology and the forestry to learn from the project.”

Previously the FFA program had only planted and grown flowers and vegetables.



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

Sutherlin High School seniors and FFA members Libby Whited, left, and Katie Price work together planting Oregon white oak seedlings on Dec. 12 on the hillside to the west of Ford’s Pond. Sutherlin FFA students are helping to restore the hillsides near the pond to oak savanna habitat.

Students collected 1,000 acorns from 15 oak trees in the Ford’s Pond area, sorted them and planted 700 of them in pots in the school’s greenhouses. Students watered and weeded the pots.

“Overall, we’re pleased with the result,” said Crawford. “The kids

did a great job. They were enthusiastic about helping out.

“This was the type of activity that can happen during these COVID times,” he added. “We were outside and spaced out across the hillside.”

Katie Price, a senior and the

president of Sutherlin FFA, was an officer on the team that agreed to help with the project back in 2018. She has been involved in the project from collecting acorns to planting the seedlings.

“We need more of these getting-your-hands-dirty projects,” she said. “Students have been able to learn about and understand ecosystems first hand rather than just in a classroom. This definitely gave us a different opportunity, a different experience from what we usually do, which is planting flowers and vegetables in the greenhouse.”

Price estimated that almost 100 FFA students helped during the three-year project. Crawford said the 2021 FFA officers will decide if they want to collect more acorns and start another crop of oaks for future planting. There is more ground on the park’s property available for additional trees.

Libby Whited, a Sutherlin High senior, said the restoration taught her the benefits that wildlife, birds and insects get from oak savanna habitat.

“I’ve got faith that all of these young trees, or at least most of them, will grow up to be big strong oaks,” she said. “We want them to be there in 200 to 300 years. It’s definitely been a great experience. It’s been a great project to be a part of.”

Price agreed. “To think in about 10 years I can come back, to see the trees that I helped plant as little acorns,” she said. “I’m definitely excited to watch them grow up and to know I had a part in this.”

CALENDAR

**TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY
JAN. 19-20**

Dairy Strong Annual Conference (virtual): The annual conference is organized by the Dairy Business Association. More details to come. Website: https://www.dairystrong.org

**WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY
JAN. 20-23**

41st EcoFarm Conference (virtual): Save the date for the 41st EcoFarm Conference Jan. 20-23. Building upon its farmer-to-farmer education model, EcoFarm is an essential networking and educational hub for ecologically minded farmers, ranch-

ers and all who work to support their success in growing a healthy food system and world. Mark your calendars for Jan. 20-23 and get ready for an EcoFarm Conference unlike any before as we will convene online for our 41st event. Phone: 831-763-2111 Email: info@eco-farm.org Website: https://eco-farm.org/conference

FRIDAY JAN. 22

Family Foresters Workshop (virtual): The Family Foresters Workshop is designed to strengthen the skills of consulting foresters, state-employed service foresters and other natural resource professionals who work with family forest owners. It serves as a forum to provide updates on emerging technology and knowledge appli-

cable to family forestry. This year’s program will be held online via Zoom. There is no registration fee this year, but those wishing to participate should register at https://bit.ly/31JJs80 by Jan. 15. For questions, contact Chris Schnepf at cschnepf@uidaho.edu, (208) 446-1680; Sean Alexander at sean.alexander@wsu.edu, (509) 680-0358, or Andy Perleberg at andyp@wsu.edu, (509) 667-6540.

**MONDAY-THURSDAY
JAN. 25-28**

Dairy Forum 2021 (virtual): Presentations will focus on leadership, technology, global trade, sustainability, product innovations and navigating the political landscape. Website: https://www.idfa.org

Submit upcoming ag-related events on www.capitalpress.com or by email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

**SUNDAY-WEDNESDAY
JAN. 10-13**

American Farm Bureau Annual Convention (virtual): The convention will focus on top issues including the impact of COVID-19, sustainability and the future of the supply chain. Website: https://www.fb.org

THURSDAY, JAN. 14

Create a Plan for Your Land Workshop (virtual): Learn from experts about soil, water and wildlife conservation. Classes are geared

toward small farms and rural properties, but anyone is welcome. We will provide technical assistance to complete conservation plans and potentially find funding for conservation projects on your land. Plan to attend all four free sessions, which will be from 5 to 8 p.m.:

Jan. 14: Conservation planning — Soil.

Jan. 21: Water and vegetation.

Jan. 28: Streamsides and woodlands.

Feb. 4: Working lands — Putting it all together.

Contact: Marion Soil and Water Conservation District, 503-391-9927. Registration: http://virtualp-fyl.eventbrite.com