

Water erosion halted on Rhea Creek

Rhea Creek has taken its last pasture land from Heppner rancher Bob Hoskins, thanks to a Soil Conservation Service program. Today the banks of Hoskins' land are stable with the help of rock and planted vegetation.

For several years the creek has cut away from the channel and chewed at alfalfa fields and pastures. Spring floods and run-off have taken eight to ten feet a year according to Scott Madison who farms with his father-in-law, Hoskins.

Madison contacted the Soil Conservation Service in Heppner for help.

With Cliff Harris, technician for the office, Madison walked three miles of creek to define the problem erosion areas and determine solutions. A five-year stream bank riprap plan was decided on and put into action. The SCS will pay 75 percent of the cost.

Harris received additional help on the project from Bernie Hughes, SCS engineer from Pendleton, who covers similar water erosion problems in 10 counties in eastern Oregon.

The first step was to move approximately 500 yards of rock of all sizes into the banks of the creek where erosion was a problem. Madison hauled the rock and did the work himself.

"We wanted to stabilize the bank



and stop erosion without straightening out the channel, explained Madison. "The winding curves keep the velocity low and curtail the erosion."

Before and after the rock was dumped on the site, straw was added and perennial grasses were planted. More work on the creek will be done this fall. Willows and other trees will be planted next spring.

The next four years, more rock, planting, and grasses will be used on the remaining problem areas of the creek.

"With any program, maintenance is a very important part of the success of it," said Hughes.

A neighbor upstream from Hoskins did some work on creek

erosion by stabilizing the creek bank with plantings. Eventually Madison hopes to get erosion control with willows rather than rock.

The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife was interested in establishing a grazing project on creeks with erosion problems. A one-half mile fence was put up on both sides of the creek. The department supplied the materials and Madison put up the fence.

No livestock will graze the pasture for a year or two. Then livestock will be turned into the pasture during spring and summer only.

"Hopefully, controlled grazing will prove to be better for riparian zones and for livestock owners," Madison said.

Who's who in conservation work

The members of the Morrow County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Directors work to secure the maximum cooperation with federal, state, county and private agencies in carrying out sound conservation programs throughout the area. The agencies that service the district include:

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