

## SWCD highlights of 1995-1996

The mission and purpose of the Morrow Soil and Water Conservation District is to conserve, protect and develop the land and natural resources of Morrow County for the economic and environmental benefit of the people of the county.

### Watershed Health:

\*Assessments were completed for 30% of watershed sub-basins.

\*Rock Creek Watershed landowners were contacted concerning project interest in 13 high priority areas. Two LTAs are in progress.

\*A Morrow County Education Partnership was developed with county teachers for the purpose of expanding the natural resources curriculum for county students.

\*The Irrigon Park Erosion Project was named a high priority by the district and was also approved as a RC&D measure. Survey, design and cost estimates were completed.

\*Construction was completed on the Damon and Willow Creek GWEB grant projects.

\*Photo monitoring was completed on Lefevre Prairie and Boyd Willow Creek projects.

\*Coordinated Resource Management Planning (CRMP) was used in the district.

\*The District was an active participant in the NRCS Strategic Plan.

\*Board and Staff participated in and assisted with state association and area meetings.

\*Conducted a spring tree seedling give-a-way, distributing 4,876 pine, fir and spruce seedlings to interested persons.

\*The District was successful in receiving funding for an Oregon Youth Conservation Corps. Six area youth were hired to complete conservation projects. This was a joint effort with the Willow Creek Park District.

\*A hydroseeding project was completed on the Irrigon Greenway.

\*District Manager attended a week-long Riparian Restoration and Monitoring Workshop.

\*Board and Staff participated in Experiment Station Field Day, Umatilla/Morrow Weed Tour, Lower Umatilla Basin meetings, Umatilla Basin Watershed Council meetings.

\*Board and Staff assisted with selection of County Conservation Farmer of the Year for 1996, who was also selected as the State Conservation Farm of the Year.

\*Staff assistance was provided for planning and conducting

Morrow County Conservation Tour and Town & Country Day.

### District Operations:

\*Regular meetings were held with the public informed on date, time and location.

\*Prepared annual budget and attended County Budget Hearing.

\*A new computer system was purchased to allow the district to be informed and active in new technology.

\*Board and staff actively participated in local, area and state meetings including NRCS Basin Team and Resource Conservation & Development in order to provide local input on conservation issues.

\*District Manager is a member of the OACD District Capacity Training Team.

\*Annual dues were paid to national, state and local organizations to support the conservation effort.

\*The committee system is used in order to involve the entire board and associate directors. District committees include personnel, legislative, RC&D, budget and education.

\*The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Evaluation form was used to measure district activities and effectiveness.

\*Stan Kemp was selected as the 1996 Outstanding Cooperator and was entered into the state Goodyear contest.

### Resource activities

#### with other agencies:

\*A contract with the Umatilla Depot Activity to monitor resources is being conducted.

\*The District provides office

clerical assistance to NRCS in exchange for office space for District staff.

### Weed Control:

\*The District Board acts as the Weed Advisory Board.

\*Puncturevine projects were conducted with the cities of Boardman and Irrigon and the

West Extension Irrigation District.

\*A program of CRP spot checks was started to check for "A" list weeds in CRP stands.

\*A three-county Regional Strategies grant approved for control and public education concerning skeletonweed.

## Landowner tag preference program

Attention landowners: If your property is currently registered with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife for the landowner preference program, you should have recently received the 1997 Landowner Preference Tag Distribution forms.

You do not need to re-register your property unless the ownership or acreage has changed. If you need to re-register, contact the Heppner office of ODFW.

To receive controlled hunt LOP tags for the 1997 hunting seasons, you need to:

1. Fill out and mail in the Tag Distribution forms (yellow). For each hunt series, you will need to complete the requested information. The first page is for buck deer, the second page is for controlled elk, the third page is for antlerless antelope, the fourth page is for antlerless deer and the last page is not needed for any hunts in this area.

2. Be sure to list all eligible applicants, including the registered owner of the property. Send the completed form (s) to the address listed on the lower, right-hand corner of each page by May 15, 1997.

3. All people listed on the Tag Distribution form must apply for their tags by May 15, 1997 and list the appropriate hunt number as their first choice and also list the appropriate hunt number as their Landowner Preference choice.

If you have any questions regarding the landowner preference registration process, please contact the Heppner office of ODFW at 676-5230.

## Area youth benefit from OYCC



The Morrow SWCD, in partnership with the Willow Creek Park District, received a grant in the amount of \$9105 to conduct repairs and improvements to hiking trails and improve the area around Willow Creek Dam and other areas of the county.

Corey Ehrmantraut, Brandi Marshall, Toni Kemp, Beth Cookston, Phillip Spicerkuhn and team leader Bill Schlaich were hired June 16 with funds made available by the Oregon Youth Conservation Corps through the Commission on Children and Families.

The crew began their six-week employment by building an addition to the existing hiking trails around Willow Creek Lake, painted the foot bridge, signs,

picnic tables and dock and pulled weeds around the lake. The crew assisted the Historical Society with tree plantings around the wishing well/fountain at the Fairgrounds. They also tore out paneled walls in the boys dorm at the Fairgrounds and replaced them with sheet rock donated by Marlett Homes of Hermiston. Another project at the Fairgrounds included removing the old carpeting on the grandstand steps and removing weeds along the State Highway. The crew also located, marked and mapped yellow starthistle locations along Rhea Creek and in CRP.

The District's main purpose in applying for OYCC funds is to further natural resource and conservation awareness of our local youth.

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## 1996 elk season observations

During the 1996 elk seasons, hunters were confronted with a "new" approach to bull elk hunting in Northeast Oregon. While the standard two season framework was maintained, bag limits for the seasons changed dramatically. All tags issued for the first season were issued through the controlled hunt drawing process and included 800 either sex tags and 1000 spike only tags. Second season bull tags were unlimited, could be purchased at all point of sale machines and were valid for spikes only.

The "new elk hunting strategies" were developed in response to low postseason bull ratios in most big game management units in Northeast Oregon. In November 1994, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Commissioners directed the agency to develop a plan to increase the postseason bull to cow ratios to address biological requirements of elk as identified in the Oregon Elk Plan. The new strategies were created after obtaining input from 34 public meetings, 8,000 questionnaires, two Regional working groups, comprised of landowners, hunters, other agency personnel and agricultural producers. The final elk strategies were developed using the public input and the following guidelines as directed by ODFW Commissioners:

1. Increase post-season bull ratios.
2. Maintain management objective population levels.

### Grazing/haying open

July 1 and was set at a rate of 25% of the annual rental rate per acre.

Participants agreed to a haying or grazing plan written by the NRCS and signed an agreement for terms and conditions.

Livestock growers in Morrow

3. Maintain hunter opportunity.

4. Continue to address elk damage problems.

After completion of the elk seasons, the following observations were made: 1) Elk hunters in general, understood the need for the regulations. 2) Either sex tag holders experienced approximately 50% success, with 60% of the harvest being antlerless elk. 3) First season spike only hunters experienced approximately 25% success. 4) Second season spike hunters had approximately 10% success. Final success levels will be available in April, after the annual statewide hunter surveys are completed.

With most hunters understanding the need for the new elk seasons, very few complaints were received. In addition, very few problems were reported or seen involving illegal kills. However, a few hunters stated some frustrations after finally seeing the "big bull" and not being able to shoot it because they had a spike only tag!

While completing the annual deer counts, several branched-antlered bulls were observed and it appears there are more bulls left than normal. Elk composition counts will be done in February to determine the actual ratios of bulls to cows. The results of these counts will be used to help determine tag numbers for the 1997 elk seasons.

The current plan regarding the new elk strategies is to maintain the existing season for at least three years before any major changes are implemented.

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County responded to this program by grazing or haying 8,200 acres.

Overall, the program was well received in Morrow County and provided benefits to the livestock growers as well as the introduced grasses & native grasses in the CRP stands.

## Morrow and Umatilla EQIP Proposal

In 1986, the Oregon State Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) discovered nitrate levels up to eight times the federal drinking water limit in test wells in the Lower Umatilla Basin (LUB) area. Through further testing, they concluded that the problem needed to be addressed, and in 1990 designated the areas around Boardman and Irrigon as a Groundwater Management Area (GMA).

Since 1990, the DEQ has monitored and studied the groundwater and organized local action committees. They have recommended that there be changes in the agricultural practices within the groundwater management area. With this background, Morrow Soil and Water Conservation District in cooperation with Umatilla County Soil and Water Conservation District and the local Natural Resources Conservation Service offices have submitted a request for Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funding for a priority area in the LUB. The area proposed for EQIP funding has the highest nitrate levels reported in the DEQ study. The proposed area covers about 15,000 acres and involves eight major agricultural enterprises and 25 small farming operations.

In their proposal, the Morrow and Umatilla County SWCDs requested funding for conservation practices that would assist in reducing the groundwater nitrate levels. These conservation practices developed with the Morrow and Umatilla County SWCDs are proposed in the form of Best Management Practices (BMP) for the LUB GMA. The EQIP proposal suggests that some of the BMPs will include irrigation water management, soil and water sampling, nutrient management, precision farming

techniques, crop rotations, improved conservation tillage systems and the use of agroforestry to utilize excess nutrients in the groundwater. Creation of wetlands as nutrient sumps may also be a possibility.

In requesting the EQIP funding, the Morrow and Umatilla County SWCDs have echoed the goals of the LUB GMA Agriculture Subcommittee. The first goal is to seek solutions that will eventually bring the level of nitrate in the groundwater to the acceptable standard as defined by EPA. The second goal is the commitment to maintain a viable economy in the area while reducing the loading of nitrate to the groundwater. The Morrow and Umatilla County SWCDs believe that by using EQIP funding to implement BMPS, the reduction of nitrates would be accelerated in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area.

## A friend of conservation passes away

The District received news that a long-time friend of conservation in Morrow County passed away recently. Tom Wilson, former CCC planner and the first District Conservationist with the Soil Conservation Service in Morrow County, died December 14, 1996 at Sandpoint, Idaho. Mr. Wilson held the position of District Conservationist in the Heppner office for 19 years. He first came to the Heppner area as the Civilian Conservation Corp planner in the late 1930s. Our sympathy is with his wife, Irene, and the rest of the family.

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