

Wheeler County Riparian Buffers

Annual Report 2003 - 2004

January 2006

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Wheeler County Riparian Buffers

**Annual Report;
May 1, 2003 – April 30, 2004**

**Contract 9478
Project No. 2002-034-00**

**Prepared by:
Will Homer
Riparian Buffer Specialist
Wheeler SWCD**

Number of Contacts Made:

I have contacted 35 landowners in Wheeler County. Of the 35 contacts 12 have resulted in meeting on their property to discuss available options. Included an article in the Annual Report and Wheeler SWCD newsletter mailed to 550 landowners. Contacts are primarily through networking with others here in the office as well as working closely with the NRCS office.

Number of Contracts Negotiated:

This Project has produced five riparian buffers within the past contract year. Each has greater meaning to the landowner than simply a buffer. In most cases the buffer is providing the landowner with improved grazing management and/or more reliable water source for livestock. Landowners also feel the enhanced wildlife habitat is a bonus to the program.

Contracts Approved by Farm Services:**Lake Creek:**

Project #1

Total Stream Miles: 2.95 miles

Acreage: 62.7 acres

Buffer: both sides of stream

Average Width (one side): 99'

Estimated Volume of Water Restored: .03 cfs

Endangered Species Affected: Summer Steelhead

Note: This project is a joint effort between FSA & ODFW to remove livestock from a substantial reach of Lake Creek. In the spring of 2003 ODFW technicians counted over 30 redds in this 3 mile reach.

West Fork Butte Creek Tributary:

Project #2

Total Stream Miles: .57 miles*

Acreage: 5.5 acres

Buffer: both sides of stream

Average Width (one side): 40'

Estimated Volume of Water Restored: N/A

Endangered Species Affected: Summer Steelhead

Note: This project allows the landowner better pasture utilization and removes livestock from a portion of stream known to harbor fish each spring.

Bridge Creek Tributary:

Project #3

Total Stream Miles: 1.04 miles (5,500')

Acreage: 30 acres

Buffer: both sides of stream

Average Width (one side): 119'

Estimated Volume of Water Restored: N/A

Endangered Species Affected: Summer Steelhead

Note: This project is a joint effort between OWEB, NRCS, and the FSA. It is one part of a much larger livestock water distribution project. The landowner saw the opportunity to gain cost share for the larger project and remove livestock from a stream damaged in the 1996 floods. Riparian planting and livestock removal should assist the natural healing process of the stream.

West Branch of Bridge Creek:

Project #4

Total Stream Miles: .95 miles (5,000')

Acreage: 9.8 acres

Buffer: both sides of stream

Average Width (one side): 43'

Estimated Volume of Water Restored: N/A

Endangered Species Affected: Summer Steelhead

Note: Project is restoring plant diversity to a previous OWEB buffer project. The landowner had previously volunteered fencing stream reach. The site has begun the recovery process but the natural vegetation is limited to a monoculture of coyote willow. The riparian planting of this program will boost plant diversity.

Kahler Creek Tributary:

Project #5

Total Stream Miles: 1.14 miles (6,000')

Acreage: 15 acres

Buffer: both sides of stream

Average Width (one side): 55'

Estimated Volume of Water Restored: N/A

Endangered Species Affected: Summer Steelhead

Note: Project is in conjunction with NRCS EQIP funding to provide landowner with better livestock management. Riparian Buffer will act as cross fencing and add an offsite water supply for both fish and wildlife use. Project area was devastated in 1996 by wildfire. This project should reintroduce riparian seedstock to the area.

Summary of BPA Contribution vs. USDA / Landowner Projected Costs

BPA Contribution

Wheeler SWCD Riparian Buffer Planner Position \$ **67,440**

USDA / Farm Services Agency by contract:

1. Lake Creek	Riparian Planting	\$ 63,000	
	Fencing	\$ 75,000	
	Incentive Payments	\$ 14,000	
	Land Lease	\$ 87,000	
			\$ 239,000
2. Butte Creek Tributary	Riparian Planting	\$ 10,000	
	Fencing	\$ 7,500	
	Incentive Payments	\$ 4,500	
	Water Developments	\$ 10,500	
	Land Lease	\$ 2,900	
			\$ 32,400
3. Bridge Creek Tributary	Riparian Planting	\$ 10,000	
	Fencing	\$ 7,500	
	Incentive Payments	\$ 5,600	
	Land Lease	\$ 20,000	
			\$ 43,100
4. West Branch of Bridge Creek	Riparian Planting	\$ 14,000	
	Incentive Payments	\$ 3,500	
	Land Lease	\$ 9,900	
			\$ 27,400
5. Kahler Creek Tributary	Riparian Seeding	\$ 1,000	
	Fencing	\$ 13,800	
	Water Developments	\$ 6,000	
	Incentive Payments	\$ 5,200	
	Land Lease	\$ 12,500	
			\$ 38,500
Total USDA Investment			\$ 380,400

Summary of Accomplishments

Total Landowners Contacted: 35
Total Acres Enrolled: 123
Total Stream Miles Protected: 6.65

Other Accomplishments:

I took part in the John Day Subbasin Planning process and was able to offer assistance into the inventory items related to Wheeler County. I was often the only local representative able to attend the meetings.

I assisted the Wheeler SWCD in writing a successful OWEB grant to remove 110 acres of junipers for watershed restoration, range rehabilitation, and economic development. One partner in the project is a manufacturer that uses juniper as their primary construction material. The goal is to create a pilot project that may grow into a self sustaining industry within the county. I also assisted in writing a small grant to improve water usage in the Muddy Creek watershed.

I assisted with the Pine Creek Conservation Area "Twilight Tour" as well as the Wheeler SWCD "Annual Meeting and Dinner". Both events were successful in getting information out about our riparian buffer program.

Facilitate office training and utilization of advanced GIS technology and mapping.

Problems Encountered During Contract Year

The NRCS Cultural Resources Review process has ground to a halt. It takes 6 months to get initial results from the Portland offices. Nearly all requests require site surveys that delay the process even further.

The Farm Services Agency is not user friendly when it comes to the CREP program. The program has not been designed to fit everyone along a steelhead stream. Crop/Field designations often negate or complicate CREP eligibility along qualifying streams. I spend a great deal of time mediating between FSA and the landowner.

I have lost one interested landowner specifically to the fears related to the Oregon Department of State Lands "Navigability" study.

Outlook for Contract Year 3

I am currently working on a project area that will encompass nearly six miles of steelhead habitat. It is located in the critical Bridge Creek watershed. Another is nearly three miles in the Mountain Creek Watershed. Both projects will take great steps in improving fish habitat. Both are on Steelhead streams. Further out I am working with two landowners for projects in the Butte Creek watershed that will be highly visible and will likely gain the attention of many more landowners. Like all previous projects, there is a great deal of work in future projects in massaging the landowner into feeling comfortable with the riparian buffer program. The potential to do great things with this program is huge in Wheeler County. Continuing outreach and education efforts will help the process.