



HORIZONS



Staying Connected.

During challenging times like these, staying connected is as important as ever for our human community and wildlife habitats.

Left, during pandemic-era plantings, masked volunteers work in smaller groups and comply with COVID recommendations.

CONTENTS

3 Rs of 2020

A message from the Executive Director.

PAGE 02

River Connections

New ways to connect with the river.

PAGE 03

Partner Connections

Pandemic impacts funding streams.

PAGE 04

Landowner Connections

Assisting landowners gives us a sense of purpose.

PAGE 05

Backyard Invasives

Destructive plants worth knowing and removing.

PAGE 06

Virtual Salmon Watch

A 1-day field trip becomes a 6-week unit.

PAGE 07

Financial Report

Review the financial summary for Fiscal Year 2019-2020.

PAGE 08

Unaware that a pandemic was about to befall us, nearly 60 high school students planted 650 native plants at the OSU Oak Creek Center for Urban Horticulture in January. SevenOaks Native Nursery donated big leaf maple, Oregon ash, red-osier dogwood, black hawthorn, choke cherry, twinberry, and clustered wild rose. It was a wonderful, cold, winter day grounded in partnerships, hope, and the purpose to improve streamside habitat, essential for maintaining connectivity.



A Special Invitation

We hope you will join us at our annual meeting on January 11. We'll celebrate our Conservation Neighbors and learn how to support birds from ornithologist and BSWCD guest blogger, Lauren Pharr. [RSVP here: fb.me/e/bC83ri6lk](https://fb.me/e/bC83ri6lk)

Monday, January 11, 6:00 - 7:00 PM [via Zoom](#)

HOLLY CROSSON

3 Rs of 2020: Reflection, Resilience, Resolve



Starting with Little Things

Love the earth like a mole,
 fur-near. Nearsighted,
 hold close the clods, their fine-print
 headlines.
 Pat them with soft hands —
 Like spades, but pink and loving; they
 break rock, nudge giants aside,
 affable plow.
 Fields are to touch:
 each day nuzzle your way.
 Tomorrow the world.

—William Stafford



2020 has been a year like no other. Amidst unprecedented challenges of a global pandemic, raging wildfires, a changing climate, and divisive public discourse on race and equity, it has been heartwarming to see our resilient community come together; neighbor helping neighbor, everyone reaching out to connect in new ways; listening to gain understanding of a different perspective.

Despite our office closure to the public back in March due to COVID-19, the District immediately rose to the challenge and created new ways of providing service. Staff commitment to keeping in touch, reaching out, and maintaining programs and outreach was truly inspirational.

When people ask me to reflect on what makes Benton SWCD unique, I believe it is the way we unite people, place, and public service to co-create a thriving community with you even when the going gets tough. Benton SWCD is proud to be part of a family of Oregon Special Districts that address common needs in local communities. Though you may not be familiar with the term, you have probably relied on a Special District for services at one time or another. Think fire protection, emergency medical response, libraries, water supply, hospital services, parks, road maintenance, and more. Like other types of Special Districts in Oregon, your local Soil and Water Conservation District connects you with activities,

resources, and services that make life better (think clean water, productive soil, and healthy natural habitats).

We do not require a membership for you to get involved. We serve all residents of Benton County whether you live rurally, in an urban area, or anywhere in between, and whether you own an acre or a hundred acres, or don't own any land at all. We work with both public and private sectors and have scores of dedicated partners that collaborate with us on projects big and small. Everyone is welcome!

Four full-time District staff dedicate nearly 90% of their time directly connecting with you to offer technical assistance, educational resources, and in some cases funding for your conservation projects. As you read about program accomplishments in this report, think about how each positive step we take together to steward the land adds up to big change! Please contact us to let us know how we can improve. Do you have a creative solution to a conservation conundrum? Can you help connect us to an individual or group we haven't worked with before who has some great ideas to share or problems to solve? Come to us with questions, or answers! The challenges that have beset us in 2020 have only garnered our resolve that we must join forces to restore health to the landscapes that our community so deeply relies upon to thrive.

Connecting to the Willamette River



One of my happiest days this summer was a Sunday in August. The weather was in the high 90's and we needed to get out of the heat and the house. So we turned to the Willamette River as a cold water refuge. We put our canoe in the river at Peoria and floated down to Corvallis – stopping and swimming along the way. While COVID has made us question large groups of people, that day along the river I saw more people than I had seen the rest of the summer combined. Families and friends were appropriately spread out along the entire reach of the river, reconnecting to the river and utilizing it to revive their own health and sanity. It was a side of Benton County I had never seen laid out like that...People from all cultures, locations, and walks of life taking refuge from the heat in the cool of the Willamette.

When I think about the future of the Willamette River and how the Willamette Mainstem Cooperative (WMC) can continue to make a difference in river health, I think about how to ensure the river is a clean and safe place for people to connect to. We survey the entire Benton County reach of the river each year with our partners to watch for new invasive species, such as yellow floating heart, that threaten to dominate our waterways. We continue to work with landowners along the Willamette River to control aquatic invasives species that are already

present, which clog waterways, diminishing opportunities for recreation and habitat for native fishes and turtles. We plant native species such as wapato and yellow pond lily in our restoration areas to ensure that once the invasive species are gone, the native seeds will be there to thrive in their natural habitat. We also partner each year with Willamette Riverkeeper and Oregon Parks and Recreation Department for the Great Willamette Clean Up (pictured above) to remove trash from the river and riparian area along the Willamette in Corvallis.

This past year has highlighted the importance of people's connection to the river. When all our volunteer river events were cancelled, the WMC hosted a variety of virtual river events including a [Restoration Site Tour](#) and [Aquatic Plant Identification](#) course on [BSWCD's YouTube channel](#). We were amazed with the over 150 people who tuned in to learn more about what we are doing on the river. We also had volunteer groups go out on their own to hand pull invasive species from the river in lieu of our annual Paddle and Weed Pulls. Our volunteers stepped up to remove invasives from a site where restoration progress would otherwise have been lost.

We at Benton SWCD have known this for a long time, but this year really highlighted it – we need your help to care for the river – how can we help connect you?

Corridors Create Connections

Change in the mosaic of habitats in the Willamette Valley is due to habitat loss as a result of conversion of native habitats to agricultural crops, urbanization, introduction of invasive species, and the elimination of fire as a tool to control woody vegetation. Twelve percent of the remaining native prairie and oak savannas are in Benton County, mostly on privately-owned lands.

A small woodlands operation in the Upper Luckiamute watershed hosts a range of the habitats and resource concerns found in Benton County. A corridor of Oregon white oaks is being overtaken by Douglas-fir trees. Wetlands and a fragmented riparian corridor face pressure from invasive grasses and other weeds. The stream is incised and scoured to bedrock in many places. The floodplain is disconnected from the stream channel and a perched culvert blocks passage to cold-water refuge for native fish.

In November 2019, Benton SWCD, Luckiamute Watershed Council, Natural Resources Conservation Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service,

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the landowner submitted an application to Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to fund a “ridge to river” approach to enhance these important habitats that support an array of fish and wildlife. The review team gave it a favorable rating, but before the OWEB board met to allocate funds, the pandemic hit, the Lottery shut down, and OWEB was forced to put a hold on all funding. Eventually, it was determined that currently submitted projects would be funded - and our project was funded. Work began in July 2020 and we hope to have some tours in the near future.

Since 1999, the Oregon Constitution has dedicated 15% of net Oregon Lottery proceeds to a Parks and Natural Resources Fund. Many projects and state natural resource agencies are supported by this essential funding stream. However, a decrease in lottery income means reduced funding for future restoration projects and a reduction in staff at various agencies. In conclusion, buying a lottery ticket helps protect Oregon’s natural resources!



Connectivity: “the degree to which landscapes...allow species to move freely and ecological processes to function unimpeded.”

—U.N. Frontiers 2018/19

Incised stream bed where log structures placed will aggrade the channel bottom.

Connecting with Landowners



In response to COVID's threat, outdoor site visit precautions included social distancing and masks.

Even through the past year's hurdles of health concerns, lockdowns, and wildfire smoke, the primary challenge to conservation remains the same, finding a willing landowner. Determined to offer COVID-era site visits, we have exercised social distancing and shared masked-conversations as we hiked properties, discussed concerns, discovered benefits, and provided both written and verbal technical information. Albeit money pots to support on-the-ground conservation are fewer and shallower. But, during these challenging times, we continue to direct people to potential funding sources, in hopes that big-ticket issues can be addressed on realistic timelines.

How do we connect COVID-era farmers and ranchers with their soil? Just like any other time, with tools. I collect soil samples from a farmer's field and return in a couple of weeks with a lab report. This standard field practice, which is often ignored, opens the door to conversations, like what is pH and why is it important. I loan a farmer a bucket auger and watch as they discover what is in the top 6 – 8 inches of their soil, and deeper, down to five feet. What color is the soil? How does the texture change with depth? I loan a rancher a compaction tester so they physically feel, with their hands, arms, legs, and back, the amount of pressure needed for roots and water to move downward into and through their soil. These tools,

soil test, bucket auger, compaction tester, help landowners realize how the management of their soil and water supports their plants and animals, and ultimately their way of life.

Starting in late spring, I visited with five farmers and collected 14 soil samples. Crops included: small diversified farms producing mostly row crops, one that grows commercial flowers, and a pasture grazing operation. Soil assessments help growers plan their crops and reduce production challenges and frustrations while saving labor, time, and money. From February 2019 through February 2020, I worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Tangent Field office to certify backlogged Environmental Quality Incentive Program practices. In Benton County, practices were certified for 11 landowners who worked in four land use categories: Hazelnut Production, Oak Restoration, Organic Small Farms, and Pasture. We assisted with the certification of 11 categories of practices on 482 acres and 13,981 linear feet of fence and hedgerow. Our work helped NRCS distribute payments of \$258,513 to Benton County landowners.

Indeed, the services we provide benefit landowners and the land. In turn, the work gives us a sense of purpose, especially during these challenging times. Thank you, willing landowners!

Coordinated Control of Invasives



Oblong Spurge (*Euphorbia oblongata*)



Italian Arum (*Arum italicum*)

This year most of us spent more time at home than we had in a while. While at home, we got to see the way our yards change throughout the seasons, and what bird, wildlife, and plant species share our homes with us. In March, when the Governor first issued a Stay at Home order, I remember being so pleased to see the camas (*Camassia quamash*) starting to pop up and brighten the rainy days. At the same time, I also saw my backyard nemesis... the invasive Italian arum (*Arum italicum*), making its presence known. We all had the opportunity to see the native and invasive plants that surround our homes, neighborhoods, and county as we spent time at home, and the Invasive Species Program was able to flourish under the new normal.

We hit the ground running with our "[Invasives in Your Backyard](#)" series this spring. What was originally supposed to be a "Town Hall" meeting to share with the community a new A-listed invasive species found in Benton County, oblong spurge (*Euphorbia oblongata*), turned into a series of three [webinars highlighting not only oblong spurge](#), but also other common and pesky invasive species found in your own backyard. These webinars described how to identify these plants, what their impacts are, and how to get rid of them. Overall, we had over 170 people view our webinars and learn about invasive species in their backyards! Wow! Our community was jumping at the opportunity to learn more about invasive species

and how to control them. And one of the best things? Since it was a webinar, if you missed it - you can still [go to our Facebook page and watch the video!](#)

Through our mostly virtual outreach, we were able to locate the largest known population of the A-listed noxious weed, oblong spurge, in the state of Oregon. We located a 1.5-acre oblong spurge infestation on private property and began controlling the population this spring. We also found another large population nearby that had escaped the landscaped area and was spreading to surrounding neighbors. Overall we connected with ten separate landowners to control oblong spurge on their properties this year.

This species is still out there – we found approximately three locations in 2019, then ten in 2020. Who knows what 2021 will bring, but as long as we're still staying close to home and walking through our neighborhoods, we can continue to help fight invasive species! Oblong spurge has oblong leaves with finely toothed edges, light greenish-yellow flower clusters, and stems with fine white hairs. Its milky sap may cause skin irritation. It forms large, dense colonies, and displaces native plants. Keep your eyes out – and contact office@bentonswcd.org if you see it!

Salmon Watch Goes Virtual

Salmon Watch has been a highlight of my year since 2003! We partner with Calapooia Watershed Council, South Santiam Watershed Council, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, Siuslaw National Forest, and more than fifty dedicated volunteers each year to introduce students in Linn and Benton Counties to the awe-inspiring journey of Pacific salmon. Many connections are made through this one-day field trip—connections between volunteers and students, students and salmon, natural resource practitioners and the communities we serve.

In the fall of 2019, BSWCD coordinated 15 field trips for 770 students from 14 schools with the help of 35 adult and at least 15 student volunteers. More than half the volunteers participated in multiple trips! Two trips were offered bilingually in English and Spanish. The weather last fall was unusually dry and sunny. I recall walking the trail to Seeley Creek with sunlight streaming down through the majestic trees and leaves wafting gently to the forest floor when a student from Garfield Elementary remarked to me on the natural beauty around us. These moments of

connection are why we continue the Salmon Watch program.

By late summer 2020, it became clear that the beloved Salmon Watch field trip would not be possible this fall. Salmon Watch coordinators from Eugene to Portland began brainstorming ways to take this one-day field-based program virtual. Just a couple weeks before school was set to start, Corvallis School District asked me to serve as a community partner for the fifth grade teachers and develop a virtual six-week Salmon Watch unit.

I worked with recently-retired teacher, Mary Lynn Roush, to create a [shared online resource for Salmon Watch 2020](#), which includes videos, readings, worksheets, at-home experiments, and culminating student projects. This resource has been shared with Salmon Watch teachers across the state, along with [newly produced videos by our colleagues](#) in Eugene and just-released [Salmon Watch Streaming](#) video shorts by Freshwaters Illustrated.

Through the pandemic, we continue to foster Salmon Watch connections, albeit in new ways.

Benton SWCD Staff & Board

Earlier this month, Laura Brown left the District to coordinate restoration of the Lower Columbia River for Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife. After many years serving as an associate director, Mark Taratoot stepped down. We also bade farewell to Zone 5 director, Larry Lee. This fall we teamed up with OSU’s North American Youth Parliament for Water to create a new Student Associate Director position, and welcomed OSU senior Sierra Smith as the first student to serve in that position. We look forward to introducing more new board members in 2021.

Staff position	Staff person	Service Years
Executive Director	Holly Crosson	2013 -
Resource Conservationist II	Donna Schmitz	1999 -
Resource Conservationist I	Teresa Matteson	2004 -
Communications & Community Engagement Manager	Heath Keirstead	2006 -
River Restoration & Invasive Species Program Coordinator	Laura Brown	2018 - 2020
Operations Manager	Linda Lovett	2019 -
USDA-NRCS Benton/Linn	Amy Kaiser	2018 -

Zone	FY 2019-2020	2020-
1 - Northwest	Henry Storch	H. Storch
2 - Northeast	Faye Yoshihara, CHAIR	F. Yoshihara, CHAIR
3 - Central	Jerry Paul, TREASURER	J. Paul, TREASURER
4 - Southwest	Grahm Trask SECRETARY	G. Trask SECRETARY
5 - Southeast	Larry Lee	Vacant
At large	Robert Morris VICE CHAIR	R. Morris VICE CHAIR
	Eliza Mason	E. Mason
Associates	Rana Foster	R. Foster
	Mark Taratoot	Sierra Smith STUDENT ASSOC. DIR.

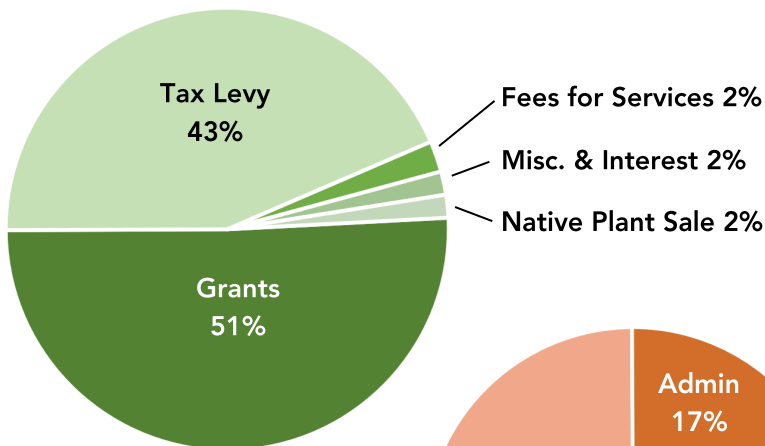


Benton Soil and Water
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

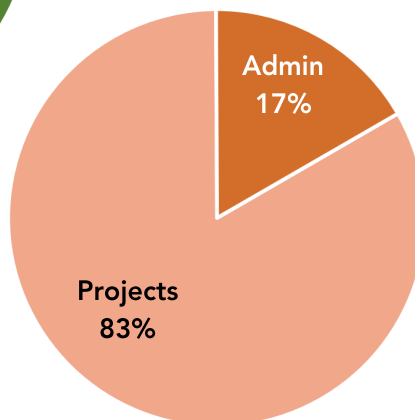
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Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Financial Report

All data is from final audited financial information for FY 2019-20.



Revenue (\$)	
Grants	521,921
Tax Levy*	448,195
Fees for Services	23,273
Misc. & Interest	17,492
Native Plant Sale	17,145
Total	\$1,028,026



Expenditures (\$)	
Admin	155,239
Projects	771,918
Total	\$927,157
Net Change	\$100,869

*Tax Levy \$0.05/\$1,000