

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021



Benton Soil and Water
CONSERVATION DISTRICT



EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Conservation for short- and long-term resilience.



IN THIS REPORT

- P.3 Operational Preparedness
- P.6 Adaptiveness of Weeds
- P.7 Resilience of the Oak
- P.8 Planting for the Future
- P.9 Responsive to Community
- P.10 Financial Report
- P. 11 Annual Meeting

RESILIENCE

of Land and People

During Fiscal Year 2020-2021, pandemic, valley-wide wildfires, extreme heat, and drought became prominent features of life in the Willamette Valley. In response to these disasters, Benton SWCD has adapted our focus, our programs, our office space, and how we connect. Our ability to adapt, or resilience, is in many ways a product of our preparedness. This is true for organizations and for nature. In this report, we share some of the ways we prepare for and respond to adversity at Benton SWCD, in the community, and in the natural world.

OPERATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

An Unsung Hero in Managing Risk

In the early years of my conservation career I was a biologist who spent most of my days in rivers, lakes, riparian areas, and wetlands to monitor and restore habitat and water quality. Our crew wore T-shirts that read "Field Biologists Have More Fun!"

My work-related "getting dirty in the field" days are comparatively numbered now, but my guess is that our field staff would say that statement still rings true. The success of Benton SWCD's Conservation Programs is due to our intrepid and knowledgeable staff who put in countless hours of hard work (and fun!) on the water, in the outdoor classroom, and on the land, in good weather and bad. This exciting, relevant, and highly visible work is what attracts community members to engage in conservation projects with us so we can achieve our mission.

If our Conservation Programs are the District's shining Gold Star, then our Operational Programs are the unsung heroes of preparedness. Though they aren't in the limelight and are pretty much under the radar altogether (except at Board meetings), these programs help prevent all manner of potential disasters, from employee injury and legal challenges to cyber-attacks and fraud. In fact, when you don't hear about them that usually means they are serving their function and we're doing our risk management jobs well!

Operational risk management proactively seeks to protect our organization by eliminating or minimizing risk. The benefits are significant. When we identify, assess, and mitigate risk, we:

- can achieve strategic objectives;
- ensure continuity of operations in the event of disruption;
- gain the confidence and trust of taxpayers, funders, partners, and customers;
- build financial resilience.

HOLLY CROSSON

Executive Director



*"We're doing our
risk management
jobs well!"*

HOLLY CROSSON

Executive Director

*53.6% of accidents occur in the home.**

27.5% of accidents occur in public spaces like playgrounds, parks, and community pools.

9.1% of accidents occur at work.

OPERATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

Continued

Below are some examples of the operational areas that we focus on to keep our employees and organization healthy, strong, working efficiently, and averting situations that could spell disaster.

Health and Safety includes developing and implementing emergency procedures and health/safety policies; holding monthly safety meetings; conducting OSHA inspections and compliance; providing regular training opportunities; offering employee health/ life/ disability insurance; being covered by Workers Comp insurance; and providing staff with an Employee Assistance Program that covers work/family/life resources, legal consultation, financial coaching, identity theft services, life coaching, wellbeing tools, and more.

Financial includes our annual municipal audit conducted by a certified CPA registered with the Oregon Secretary of State; preparing our annual budget which is approved by a 14-member Budget Committee comprised of 50% community members; instituting strict internal controls, segregation of duties, and procedures that protect our fiscal resources; monthly Treasurer/Board review of financial statements; and short- and long-term contingency planning and financial forecasting.

Information Security includes using technology, training, and Best Practices to protect confidential and sensitive information, and to keep our Network and computer systems safe from unauthorized access and cyberattacks; creating backup logs with offsite storage; automating procedures to reduce chance of error; and providing guidance on the use of social media platforms and tools.

Legal includes ensuring that we comply with federal and state employment laws, government ethics laws, public records and public meeting law, public contracting rules and procedures, and more.

*Statistics from National Security Council.



OPERATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

Continued

In the nine years I've worked with the District we have had no employee injuries (and thus no Workers Comp claims), high marks on our annual audits, no incidents that have compromised data or financial resources, and have met the Special Districts Association of Oregon's Best Practices guidelines that qualify us to receive a 10% discount on our liability insurance. These accomplishments don't make the front page of the newspaper or get highlighted at our Annual Meeting, but they are no less important than our well-known events and programs.

Our team works behind the scenes every day to keep ever-present risks at bay. Many thanks to our Board and staff for their diligence! I would especially like to call out the efforts of Linda Lovett (Operations Manager), and Jerry Paul (Board Director and Treasurer), for their substantial role in keeping our organization Always Prepared!

Our team works behind the scenes every day to keep ever-present risks at bay.

HOLLY CROSSON

Executive Director

SAFETY CHECKLIST

- Review insurance needs semi-annually to ensure adequate coverage.
- Consider cybersecurity insurance to cover cyber threats.
- Inspect fire extinguisher/ carbon monoxide detector monthly.
- Regularly restock/freshen first aid kits.
- Store large and heavy objects on lower shelves.
- Take a first aid training.
- Anchor shelves taller than 5 feet to the wall.
- Use step stools for reaching high places.
- Maintain chimneys/HVAC system annually.
- Post evacuation plans and emergency procedures in a visible location.

MICHAEL AHR

**Natural Resources Conservation
Program Manager**

ADAPTIVENESS

of Invasive Weeds



Healthy Oblong Spurge (*Euphorbia oblongata*) on an otherwise dry site.

As ecologists working in a warming climate, we are increasingly asked how our conservation projects will perform in the future. The questions are coming from agencies that fund our work and the farmers and woodland managers who ponder which plants can handle drier and hotter conditions. The summer of 2021 featured almost no rain and several days above 90 degrees including a “heat dome” in June with the highest temperatures ever recorded in our area.

As the coordinator of both the Invasive Species Program and the Willamette Mainstem Cooperative, I’ve been thinking about these events and how they affect the invasive weeds we target for control. Late in the summer I visited our hottest oblong spurge site, which is an oak woodland on Vineyard Mountain. Our control work has been effective, yet there were still seedlings popping up that looked perfectly healthy while surrounding native vegetation had wilted. On the Willamette River, we surveyed at water levels much lower than previous years and found yellow floating heart and Ludwigia growing in new places.

Conclusion: invasive weeds are resilient! The ability of these weeds to adapt may give them an advantage in our warming landscape, and is a big reason why we have identified them as problematic. Luckily we have great partners in Benton County working with us to control these weeds and plan for the future.



Invasive Ludwigia with native wapato and dry Oregon ash along the river.

22

river miles
surveyed in 2020

RESILIENCE

of the Oregon White Oak

I have a tremendous appreciation for oak trees, which stems from walks in the oak woodlands, barrens and savannas in my home state of Wisconsin. My favorite is the Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), which is the most fire tolerant of the native midwestern oaks. We are beginning to understand the important role fire plays to provide habitat resiliency to climate change. In midwestern and northwestern regions, intentional fires were used to maintain the structure and diversity of the understory species, improving berry and fruit producing species, and preventing encroachment by competitors sensitive to fire.

Over many years, fire suppression has degraded oak habitats and created a tinder box in an increasingly drier climate with more frequent wildfires. We have been working with Benton County residents for several years to improve these imperiled habitats, providing funding through Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board grants and Natural Resources Conservation Service Federal Farm Programs.

Removing invading Douglas-fir and shrubby and non-native species is important to the health of the Oregon Oak woodlands and savannas. A restoration tool called prescribed burn is being reintroduced as a method to control competing vegetation in these endangered oak ecosystems. A prescribed fire, or controlled burn, differs from a wildfire in that, they are set after consideration of safety of people and property, weather conditions and habitat management objectives. In addition to meeting management objectives, controlled burns reduce the risk of uncontrolled and destructive wildfires.

We are working closely with Oregon State University Forestry & Natural Resources Extension Fire Program to develop a series of webinars and workshops to assist Benton County residents in the use of prescribed burning as a tool for habitat management, and wildfire risk reduction, and landscape preparation for climate change impacts.

DONNA SCHMITZ

Resource Conservationist

“Have you ever wondered why a thick crust of corky bark covers the whole tree, even to the smallest twigs? This cork is armor. Bur oaks were the shock troops sent by the invading forest to storm the prairie; fire is what they had to fight...”

Aldo Leopold
A Sand County Almanac

Below: Before and after oak release at Crestmont Land Trust.



2015



2021

PLANTING FOR THE FUTURE!

TERESA MATTESON
Resource Conservationist

Take deep-down action for resilience preparedness at home.

REGENERATIVE GARDEN IN CENTRAL PARK

This year, BSWCD and the WVRLC worked with the City of Corvallis Parks and Recreation Department to install a regenerative demonstration garden of native and non-native plants in Central Park. We invite you to visit the Regenerative Garden often, it is on Monroe Avenue, across the street from the library main entrance. Witness how the plants grow and fill in the plot. Imagine the resilience-building actions taking place underground.

Learn more about regenerative landscaping and the WVRLC at bentonswcd.org/regen/.

Regenerative soil management is an option for every plot of land: agricultural, rural, and urban. One of BSWCD's soil health efforts supports the Willamette Valley Regenerative Landscape Coalition (WVRLC). This group of landscape professionals volunteer to provide education to help residential land managers understand how the selection and planting of site-appropriate plants can improve soil health. The basic concepts of regenerative management are actions that land managers can take for future benefit.

One important concept is to plant more plants that create a dense leaf canopy for maximum sunlight capture. Through photosynthesis, plant leaves convert atmospheric carbon dioxide into plant tissue and simple carbon substances that plants release into the soil (exudates). The soil around the sugar-squirting roots provides the perfect habitat for tiny soil creatures that are the base of the soil food web. They drive the recycling of detritus, release plant-available nutrients, and create pools of carbon underground. The soil structure opens so water can move into the soil instead of run off. Soil pores take in, store, and clean water, mitigate against drought and flooding, and improve ground and surface water quality.

It is difficult to fathom the importance of this unseen, under-appreciated symbiotic network between plants and the living soil community that is vital to our survival.



October 2020, WVRLC members install the Regenerative Garden; from left, Mike Peters, Owen Dell, Signe Danler, Jeff Ard, Erik Swartzendruber.

RESPONSIVE

to Community Needs and Interests

The District's programs and communications are responsive to the needs and interests of the community we serve. When community members express interest in a conservation topic, we respond with new offerings and modify existing efforts. Here are some examples of how we respond.

Native Plant Sale

Last winter, during the height of the pandemic, it felt more important than ever to get native plants into the hands - and lands - of our customers. As Audrey Hepburn once said, "To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow," and what better way to practice hope than to grow native plants? Our pandemic makeover included a transition to a drive-through pick-up event at Davis Family Farm. Russell Davis and Betsy Miller graciously offered the use of their greenhouse, retail shop, and parking area for over a week, which allowed us to fill all the orders in advance and spread out the volunteer shifts to maintain proper safety practices.

During a normal year, customers arrive and work with volunteers to fill their orders in a process that takes a total of five hours. This year, volunteers spent 7 days filling 348 orders, and pick-ups took three days. At the end of the event, we donated the 162 unsold plants to North Santiam Watershed Council for distribution to victims of the Beachie Creek Fire and will do so again in 2022.

Information Sharing

We have also been responsive in the content we share via our blog and e-news. After the wildfire season of 2020, we made use of the District's information-sharing role to help our community prepare for natural disasters.

Getting prepared doesn't happen overnight; to guide community members through the process, we featured a 12-part emergency preparedness series by local expert Pam Wilson, a Benton County Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteer. In service of their local community, CERT volunteers learn how to prepare for a wide range of disasters. Are you prepared? Find out by reading the series at bentonswcd.org/author/pamwilson/.

HEATH KEIRSTEAD

Communications & Community Engagement Manager



Plant Sale volunteer Diane Arney fills customer orders.



7 days of order filling
3 days of order pick-ups



38 volunteers worked
60 volunteer shifts



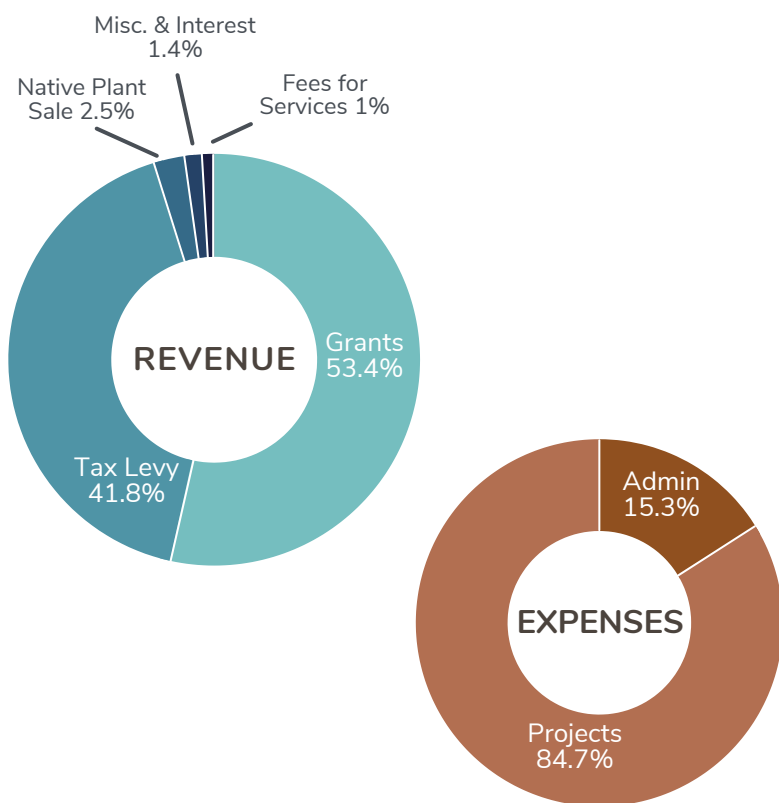
7,675 plants sold
162 plants donated



Pam Wilson (left) on a Salmon Watch trip with Maggie Livesay (retired, Extension).

FINANCIAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2020-2021



All data is from final audited financial information for FY 2020-21.

TAX LEVY

\$0.05 per \$1,000 assessed property value.

REVENUE	\$
Grants	590,985
Tax Levy	461,521
Native Plant Sale	27,491
Misc. & Interest	14,972
Fees for Services	10,608
Total Income	1,105,577

EXPENSES	\$
Projects	875,088
Admin	169,037
Total Expenses	1,044,125
Net Change in Fund Balances	72,603
Audit Adjustments*	(11,151)

*Audit adjustments include depreciation, compensated absences, & unavailable property tax revenue.



Native Plant Sale Volunteers enjoyed the sunshine on a bitter cold day.

\$61,452

total net position increase for FY21

MANAGEMENT FOR WILDFIRE

Please join us as we deepen our understanding of wildfire in the Willamette Valley.



BSWCD's Annual Meeting

FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021

**Monday, January 10
6:00-7:15 pm**

WITH GUEST SPEAKER AMANDA RAU

We invite you to our annual meeting featuring guest speaker Amanda Rau, OSU Extension's Fire Program Fire Specialist in the Willamette Valley and North Cascades.

Amanda will discuss:

- Fire use, exclusion, and suppression in the Willamette Valley.
- Past, current, and future conditions.
- New forest fuels management grant opportunity from OR Department of Forestry.
- Wildfire risk reduction management options.
- How to manage the landscape in the home ignition zone.

A VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM

TO JOIN: ZOOM.US | MEETING ID: 844 6825 0202 | PASSCODE: 640956

ANNUAL REPORT FOR FY 2020-2021 EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Conservation for short- and long-term resilience.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ZONE	FY 2020-21
1 - Northwest	Henry Storch
2 - Northeast	Faye Yoshihara (C)
3 - Central	Jerry Paul (T)
4 - Southwest	Grahm Trask (S)
5 - Southeast	Kerry Hastings
At large	Robert Morris (VC)
At large	Eliza Mason
Associate	Rana Foster
Associate	Marcella Henkels
Associate	Nathan Johnson

(C) = Chair, (VC) = Vice Chair,
(S)=Secretary, (T) = Treasurer

Current board roster available at:
bentonswcd.org/about/board-directors/

STAFF

MEMBER	POSITION
Holly Crosson	Executive Director
Michael Ahr	Natural Resources Conservation Program Manager
Donna Schmitz	Resource Conservationist II
Teresa Matteson	Resource Conservationist I
Linda Lovett	Operations Manager
Heath Keirstead	Communications & Community Engagement Manager

To contact staff, visit: bentonswcd.org/about/staff/



136 SW Washington Ave.
Suite 201
Corvallis, OR 97333
www.bentonswcd.org