



WEST MULTNOMAH
Soil & Water Conservation District

Spring 2015 Newsletter

What native plants are you putting in your garden?

Save Sturgeon Lake

Oregon Wildlife and West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District are pleased to announce that recent gifts to the Save Sturgeon Lake campaign have eclipsed their fundraising goal of \$1.665 million dollars. These funds, along with prior pledges of \$ 1 million from Bonneville Power Administration, \$300,000 from Multnomah County, and \$100,000 from Metro to the Conservation District, mean that the match requirement for a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers program has been met and the Corps will contribute an additional \$5 million dollars to fund a project to reconnect Sturgeon Lake, on Sauvie Island, to the Columbia River via the Dairy Creek channel. The total estimated cost of this project is \$6.665 million dollars.



The Save Sturgeon Lake campaign (www.savesturgeonlake.org) was initiated in July 2014 by Oregon Wildlife to assist the Conservation District in meeting the Corps program match. With today's announcement, the Save Sturgeon Lake campaign will shift its focus to raising funds for unanticipated construction costs and the long-term maintenance and operation of the Dairy Creek channel. The Conservation District is the local project sponsor of the Sturgeon Lake project and, as part of their agreement with the Corps, has made a 50-year commitment to the operation and

maintenance of the channel.

"We are thrilled to work with West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District to help raise the funds needed to ensure that this critically important project gets implemented" said Tim Greseth, Executive Director of Oregon Wildlife.

A major grant of \$200,000 from the Wessinger Foundation in honor of William W. Wessinger was of vital success to reaching the private fund-raising goal. Wessinger Foundation trustee Henry Wessinger said, "Dad loved the time he spent birding and bicycling on Sauvie Island. Protecting Sturgeon Lake by reconnecting the water channel

to the Columbia River is a project that he would have thought was very important to accomplish.”

Other large donations, secured by Oregon Wildlife and the Conservation District, pushed the campaign over the top:

- Tim Boyle, through Ducks Unlimited, \$20,000
- King Family Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation, \$15,000
- The RH Parker/United Foundation, \$10,000
- Anonymous Donor, \$10,000

Ducks Unlimited has also pledged \$10,000 to the project in each of the next two years.

Sauvie Island is the largest island in the Columbia River and one of the largest river islands in North America. Sturgeon Lake, on Sauvie Island, is the largest lake on a river island anywhere in the United States. This unique habitat is a key stopover and critical link in the Pacific flyway for hundreds of thousands of migratory birds each year.

To donate, go to www.savesturgeonlake.org!

School Garden Installed

On one of the first warm sunny days of the year in March, 5th graders from Markham School in Southwest Portland finally got to put their shovels in the ground. The students hoped to plant a diverse native habitat garden as their lasting legacy gift before moving on to middle school. In the weeks leading up to planting day, they carefully studied the qualities of different native plants, and chose ones that could provide food, shelter, and beauty for the birds, pollinators, and people who share the space. Students were happy to hear that they would be able to plant their first choice, wild strawberry.

Before heading out to plant, WMSWCD Education Coordinator Laura Taylor talked with



kids about all the benefits that native plants provide, especially to pollinators and birds. Taylor says, “The students’ knowledge and understanding of pollinators and their essential role in our food supply was truly impressive. And these kids really get that in order to receive it is also important to give back.” As they started to dig, they discovered things in the soil like large roots 35 feet away from the nearest tree, nuts buried by squirrels, and of course worms! Kids worked together, had fun and discovered new things about their natural

world. As they tucked the last few plants into the soil and stood back to admire the beautiful garden, the class cheered “Thank you!” for the plants, knowledge, and help West Multnomah SWCD provided.

The 5th graders’ next adventure is to introduce stingless native Orchard Mason bees to their garden with the help of a knowledgeable bee enthusiast. The hands-on learning opportunities are a result of the dedication and passion of teacher Jane Harold who

integrated science, language, math and art lessons into the project and recruited the support of teachers, parents, and principal. Students will be able to return to the garden to see how it has grown, but their true legacy will be the seeds of inspiration they plant in the hearts of future students.

Invasive Weeds

Weed Watchers Spring 2015

Twenty-four new “weed watchers” were trained at District-led workshops in SW Portland, Skyline and Scappoose! High priority and secondary priority invasive weed



species were the focus this year, as well as a few “watch species” to monitor. High priority weeds include giant hogweed, false brome and orange hawkweed and secondary weeds include spurge laurel and knotweed. Weed watcher trainings are held by community and agency partners across the Portland Metro area to train citizens in identification and reporting of priority noxious weeds. Plant specimens of many of the species covered are

on display to assist with identification. A few additional training dates will be held by our partners in May. Check our website for listings of future workshops and more information on invasive weeds. Special thanks to City of Portland-Bureau of Environmental Services, Skyline Ridge Neighbors, Scappoose Bay Watershed Council, Columbia SWCD, Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc and Tualatin SWCD for assistance in delivering this year’s weed watcher workshops.

Garlic mustard: Mid-season Update

Over 100 garlic mustard sites have been surveyed and controlled by District staff and contractor crews so far this year. The number of plants continues to decline drastically at most sites; however, a couple problem sites continue to have high densities. Infestations were scattered across 17 gross acres; with a total plant cover of less than 3 net acres. The next steps include controlling remaining known infestations and further increasing our outreach footprint to broaden our survey area. Funding of the Portland Garlic Mustard Control project is due to an Oregon State Weed Board Grant through the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.

Stormwater Solutions for Slopes

If you live in Portland’s west hills, you probably don’t want to disconnect your downspout and build a rain garden due to your steep slopes and poorly draining soils. But there are many other things you can do to reduce runoff, erosion and non-point source pollution!

Please consider the following ideas:

- Plant a tree (or two or three!)

- Restore your soils – amend damage and degraded soils and replant
- Depave – remove unnecessary impervious surfaces and restore the landscape
- Install planters – place potted planters on underused hardscapes
- Porous walkways – create pathways that can manage some stormwater runoff

We have informational videos and fact sheets that show how to implement these practices and further explain why we recommend them on challenging stormwater sites at <http://www.wmswcd.org/content.cfm/What-We-Do/Urban-Programs/FHHOA-DEQ>.

Timing Work On Your Land

It's hard to remember to be proactive. Calling a repair company in the dead of winter after the heater stops working doesn't result in a very timely house call. Sometimes the best time to call for help is in the off-season.

Here at WMSWCD, we get lots of calls during the spring from landowners who have great project ideas, but there's one catch...they want to begin immediately! That's a challenge for us because we need time to come out to your site, assess the issues you're dealing with and work with you on a conservation plan. We're excited to offer financial assistance to high priority projects, but need to know about them at the right time in our budgeting process. Seasonal conditions also affect when to use certain management techniques, such as not mowing down your blackberry during primary bird nesting season.

Rather than asking landowners to call us during a specific window of time, we encourage them to call us anytime, but to be patient of the process. Some things to consider:

- Our fiscal year runs from July 1-June 30, but staff budgets are submitted before March and mostly completed by July 1st.
- Summer and fall are great times for field work! It's great to come out to a property to gather information on vegetation and wildlife during the summer and tie up any loose ends in the fall. A conservation plan can be created in the late fall or winter, and after approval, a draft budget is written (which will inform our program budget requests).
- Primary bird nesting season - In our area, many species of birds are nesting in the shrub layer from mid-April to mid-August. Sometimes activities such as mowing or herbicide treatment has to happen during this time frame, but it should be avoided when possible. WMSWCD will try to honor this time frame. We've had success "mowing" smaller patches of blackberry with a crew using chainsaws in late March and following up with treatment in the fall.
- Stream or wetland projects are tough to plan. It's best if staff can see the site in the winter (when it's wet) and the summer (when it's dry). Familiarity with the site at these two extremes informs what we plan and implement to restore them.

So, there's actually never a bad time to contact us, but there may be limitations on when we can start. Sometimes a little money left in our program budgets allow us to

make a quick turnaround, but don't count on it. It's never too early to start discussing ideas with us. Advance warning allows us to start the planning process, gather information, contact contractors, make a budget request for the project, and seek other forms of funding, if necessary.

WMSWCD Fire Safe Program

West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District is developing a new program to help residents in the Tualatin Mountains make their homes more "fire safe." What makes a home fire safe? Some strategies that WMSWCD can help with include:

- Clearing flammable vegetation within 30 feet of the home. A bigger cushion is needed if the vegetation is highly flammable or especially dense.
- Pruning or removing trees that have branches hanging over the roof of the house. Leaves and twigs in the gutters can be an ignition source.
- Planting fire-resistant plants. Some of our natives are known to be low in volatile oils and also shed dead branches regularly. These plants are safer to have near the home, and can also offer great habitat to wildlife.



WMSWCD is offering up to \$2,500 to the highest ranked projects that reduce wildfire risk. Priority will be given to projects where landowners can provide matching resources and projects that remove invasive species and plant diverse, fire-resistant species to improve habitat. Interested homeowners can contact Forest Conservationist Michael Ahr at 503-238-4775 extension 109 or michael@wmswcd.org for an application to the program.

Every year we hear stories of Pacific Northwest homes damaged by wildfire. In September 2014 a 150 acre wildfire in Corvallis forced 200 homes to be evacuated. Later that month a wildfire burned more than 5,000 acres near Estacada; again evacuating several homes. These are areas in western Oregon where we're unaccustomed to wildfires in our "backyards." Climate models suggest that western Oregon will become hotter and somewhat drier in future decades which will increase fire danger. Beginning projects now that improve fire safe zones around your home will pay off in the future.

The Four Principles of Soil Health

You probably already know the importance of soil; it produces the food and fiber that help societies flourish. It's no coincidence that the most powerful countries are also blessed with the most productive soils. However the key to keeping soil productive is not fertilizer; it's **soil health**.

Good health means that the soil soaks up and holds water. Healthy soil provides “free” nutrients to plants. Soils with good health also help combat pests and disease by providing predators and antibiotics. And soil health is as easy as following these four principles:

1. Keep it covered
2. Limit disturbance
3. Keep a living root in the soil AND
4. Diversify to benefit microorganisms

Keep it covered – By keeping the surface of the soil covered, either with mulches or plants, you keep a buffer between the harsh elements above the surface and the ecosystem below. Wind and rain can erode bare soil or create a crust that prevents water infiltration. Soil cover prevents evaporation and keeps lower temperatures in the root zone and therefore more productive.

Limit Disturbance – Rototilling, plowing, digging and other soil disturbances destroy soil structure. Structure is important to maintain water and air flow through the soil. Plants eat, drink and even breathe through their roots so allowing water and air to move freely is essential. Roots also find their way through cracks and pores rather than pushing through the soil. Additionally good structure can take years to create, so the less the clock is reset on structure building the more productive and healthy the soil.

Keep a living root – Plant roots are the keystone for the ecosystem below ground. Plants secrete sugars that provide food and energy for soil microorganisms. They also build structure and hold soil in place by “cementing” particles together. When roots grow and die, small air pockets are left that allow for better flow of water and air.

Diversify to benefit microorganisms – Plants have as many different characteristics below ground as they do above. For instance, radishes have large taproots which leave a large pore after they die. Grasses often have deep roots - 6 feet or more! Legumes like clover, peas, and vetch literally take nitrogen from the air and bring it down into the soil for plants to use. Furthermore, when all these roots are alive they provide different foods and environments in the soil and diversify the community of organisms in the soil. The more diversity, the better the chances are that if a pest or disease shows up there will be something to eat or infect it.

For more information on soil health and how to improve it, contact Rural Conservationist Scott Gall (scott@wmswcd.org) or call the OSU Extension Master Gardeners hotline 503-445-4608.

Check out our website to learn more seasonally friendly tips and let us know how if we can help you care for your land,

Dick Springer

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WMSWCD District Manager