



BENTON SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

2022-2023 Annual Report





making



connections



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Annual Report Theme: *Making Connections*

There are numerous examples of mutualistic relationships, also known as symbiosis, in nature. In fact, it seems everywhere you look, there are organisms feeding on, pollinating, harvesting, or otherwise benefiting from close relationships with each other. Some of these relationships are so complex and so highly evolved that the parties involved literally cannot survive without one another.

It's much the same with soil and water conservation. Relationships are the key to success. Sometimes we must build these from scratch. It can be a slow, delicate process, but the reward is great.

Benton Soil and Water Conservation District has been fortunate to create mutually-beneficial relationships over the decades with people from all walks of life – farmers, ranchers, educators, scientists, gardeners, and many others.

This edition of our Annual Report features articles by our staff highlighting some of the connections we made in the last fiscal year. We've learned a lot from all of these partners, and hope that in return, the resources we provide them will contribute to their success and to conservation in our county.

Sara Roberts
Communications and Community
Engagement Coordinator, BSWCD

Spotlight on 2023–2027 Strategic Theme:

Collaborative Leadership



We will work with our partners to strategically leverage our specific organizational strengths in pursuit of shared goals.



A Message from Our Executive Director



Small Investment, Big Impact: How Your Engagement with Benton SWCD Influences Your Community's Future

By Holly Crosson

In this time of instant gratification and fast-paced change, it can be daunting to know how to make a lasting impact for the causes you believe in. How does one even start? The visionary teacher and entrepreneur, Eckhart Tolle, said "The power for creating a better future is contained in the present moment. You create a good future by creating a good present."

In our 67th year of conservation and stewardship in Benton County, we would like to thank everyone who has been a part of our longstanding efforts to protect, restore, and enhance the resilience of the land and waters we all call home. Your investment of time, no matter how small, is crucial to our success as an organization. For those who are just becoming familiar with who we are and what we do, we invite you to pick your passion and get involved!

In the pages of this FY2023 Annual Report, you'll hear from staff about the ways they engaged with community members last fiscal year and how those actions have collaboratively shaped the future by addressing a need, improving habitat, and yes, even changing lives.

What better time to make a commitment to create positive change than right now?

This is your Call to Action! Here are some easy ways to invest in your community's future:



Work with other enthusiastic volunteers at our Native Plant Sale on Saturday, February 24th at the Benton County Fairgrounds. Help distribute customer orders of native plants that will restore and improve wildlife habitat in Benton County!



Interested in being a steward of the District's financial resources? Submit an application to the Board of Directors to serve on our Budget Committee!



Sign up for our monthly E-News to find out about fun and informative events, workshops, and timely conservation news!



Consider joining our Board as an Associate Director!

Learn about these opportunities and others at: bentonswcd.org/volunteer

Impact By the Numbers

July 2022–June 2023

Natural Resource Conservation

940

acres of conservation activity

58

site visits

108,746

grant dollars secured

Natural resource conservation activities included soil health assessments, riparian restoration, oak savannah restoration, wet prairie restoration, invasive species removal, and native species plantings.

Education and Outreach

152

volunteers

650

students

16

community events and workshops

Education and Outreach activities included K-12 programs, partner and community events, our Annual Meeting, farmer and landowner workshops, invasive weed pulls, and our two Native Plant Sales.

Pulling Together to Protect Our Rivers

By Michael Ahr, Natural Resource Conservation Program Manager

Controlling invasive weeds in Benton County is a community exercise. Land managers, urban residents, and local organizations all contribute time and energy to removing invasive weeds and educating each other on the impacts. In July of 2022, the Benton County community showed their love for the Willamette River at our two “Paddle and Pull” events. A total of 32 volunteers paddled several miles of the Willamette River by kayak and canoe in search of aquatic invasive species. They were joined by staff from Benton Soil and Water Conservation District, Willamette Riverkeeper, and the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department.



On July 15, 2022, 13 people set out from Michael’s Landing to pull *Ludwigia* (Uruguayan water primrose) and Parrots Feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*) at both Tripp Island and Lower Kiger Island. The *Ludwigia* patch at Lower Kiger Island has been present for years, but thanks to our annual Paddle and Pull events, the patch size has greatly diminished over the last few years and reduced the need to use herbicides in this area.

On July 30, 19 people set out from Crystal Lake Boat Ramp to pull Parrots Feather and *Ludwigia* in the East Channel, which is a historic channel of the Willamette River that flows through Linn county and reconnects to the Willamette mainstem just south of downtown Corvallis. About a ½ mile of the East Channel is easily accessible by canoe and kayak. Our volunteers pulled 100% of the *Ludwigia* and Parrots Feather they saw on this trip!



For more than a decade, Benton SWCD has focused on controlling aquatic invasive weeds on the Willamette River. Each year, Benton SWCD successfully secures grant funding for this work. The volunteers that work in these sites make a huge impact to lessen the threat of invasive weeds in our reach, and to learn about the ecology of the river. The Willamette River has been a community gathering place for thousands of years, and that spirit continues today!

Building Connections in Kings Valley

By Donna Schmitz, Resource Conservationist

The most successful habitat restoration projects begin with a curious landowner who discovers an intriguing piece of land, researches its potential, and has the commitment to implement a long-term project. The Mitchell Oak Woodland and Savannah Restoration Project is on its way to being one of those success stories.

The 146-acre Mitchell property is located in Kings Valley within the Upper Luckiamute River watershed. Prior to European settlement in the mid 1800s, the Luckiamute (**Lakmiut**) band of **Kalapuya (Calapooia) Indians** lived along the Luckiamute River and its tributaries. To maintain the foods and materials they relied on, the Luckiamute people intensively managed the landscape by burning to remove competing plants and encourage the plants they used.

Our first task was to identify historical vegetation patterns at this site. A GIS habitat data layer was developed using land survey data recorded by surveyors between 1851 and 1910. This data layer was then overlaid with tax lot information. The results showed that the property was historically **upland prairie** with **oak savanna** habitat to the north.

Next, site visits were conducted to assess existing natural resources. The original oaks that occupied the site were very widely-spaced, large-diameter trees surrounded by native grasses and forbs. The current forest cover is a mosaic of white oak, Douglas fir, and grass-dominated openings surrounded by pastures. The mixed woodlands that dominate the site replaced centuries of savanna and prairie conditions fostered by indigenous burning and homesteader grazing.

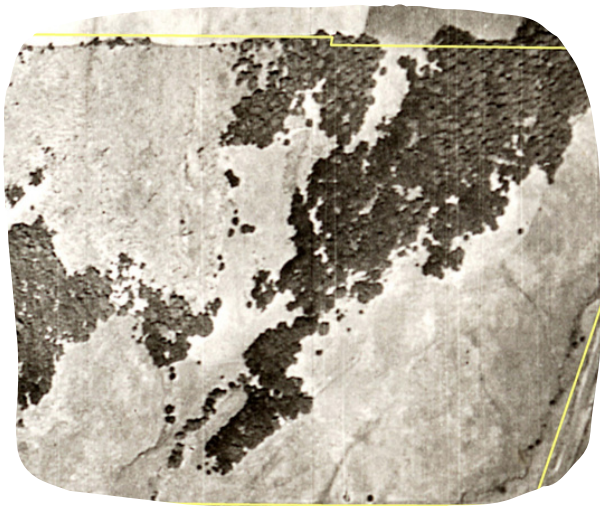
With our help, the Mitchells enrolled in the **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Oak Woodland and Prairie Restoration Implementation Strategy**. This program funds oak woodland and savanna restoration in Benton, Linn, and Lane counties. We also worked with the landowner to secure an **Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB)** grant and funding from **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**. Prescribed grazing principles to mimic historic fire regimes in restored prairie will be used to enhance native habitats for the endangered **Taylor's Checkerspot butterfly** and **Oregon Vesper Sparrow**.



Taylor's Checkerspot
(*Euphydryas editha taylori*)



Vesper Sparrow
(*Pooecetes gramineus affinis*)



1942 aerial photo of the Mitchell property, showing large open prairie spaces



2021 - prior to restoration activities



2023 - expanded open prairie space after removal of Douglas firs and competing oaks

[continued] Past land management practices have resulted in a lack of native plant diversity and competition between the remaining oaks for survival. To address these concerns, management actions we have taken in the last year includes releasing oaks from overtopping Douglas firs, increasing the upland prairie, and site preparation for planting native grasses and forbs. Livestock watering facilities have also been installed, and cattle are now managed in a rotational grazing method to reduce pressure on vegetation.

Kings Valley is also home to other habitat restoration projects on both private and public lands. **Bezell Memorial Forest** is directly across Highway 228, and the **J2E River to Ridge Project** is one mile to the north. Within this area over five miles of riparian buffers have been installed, fish passage has been restored, and numerous stream restoration projects have been implemented. Many of these projects are thanks to the **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program**.

The Mitchell restoration project has contributed to this growing wildlife corridor in Kings Valley, which in turn is part of a vibrant network of natural spaces in Benton County and beyond. Dedicated land stewards like the Mitchells are making a measurable difference for wildlife and habitat, and we're honored to be a part of their journey.

Tools of Engagement

By Teresa Matteson, Resource Conservationist

Benton SWCD is a conservation network hub. We distribute information, provide services, and help find funding for landowner projects large and small. Our work brings together a wealth of experience and a rich group of partners to support conservation opportunities.

When engaged stakeholders understand the value of the work, and willingly adopt practical changes that will help them and their land, voluntary conservation outshines mandatory regulations. Lives improve when people save time and energy and reduce expenses. Conservation practices help our environment and support healthy lifestyles while providing clean air, fresh water, resilient soils, and abundant wildlife.

Together with our staff and Board, we dream up new services and define processes. To turn our dreams into real, on-the-ground projects, we must engage a diversity of Benton County partners: landowners, farmers, educators, students, gardeners, volunteers, and soil, water, wildlife, and native plant enthusiasts. Stakeholder engagement thrives when each person is allowed to embrace conservation on their own terms. Our challenge as a Conservation District is to find common ground that addresses each stakeholder's needs.

Soil health assessment is my favorite tool of engagement. I work with landowners to pull soil samples, submit them to the **Oregon State University Soil Health Lab**, analyze the results, and discuss options for improvement at follow-up meetings. These activities build the foundation for a soil-minded community strengthened by mutual interest, science-based knowledge, and respect. Healthy relationships are the key to success.



ABOVE: Certified Soil Classifier meets with farmer in cover crop field. BELOW: Andy Gallagher of Red Hill Soils collects a soil core for study.



[continued] Over the past two years, a Technical Assistance grant from the **Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board** has allowed us to provide free soil health tests to twelve farmers in or near the **Southern Willamette Valley Groundwater Management Area (GWMA)**. We conducted testing in 30 fields, comprising around 750 acres. This land represents a spectrum of local cropping systems: short-term perennial tall fescue in a rotation with beans, squash, and wheat; pasture converted to market vegetables; row crops; blueberry and hazelnut orchards; and other seed, grain, and cover crops. The project also funded soil classification consultations by **Red Hill Soils**.

An important part of this project was community outreach. On May 4, 2023, we packed the Long Timber Brewing Company conference room in Monroe with a diverse group of 35 partners and audience members: farmers, researchers, agency staff, BSWCD members, students, and crop advisors. This was our first-ever Benton County Agricultural Soil Health Meeting, and each participant was a vital member of our growing soil-minded community.

We attribute the strong event attendance to the location – near the heart of the project area – and to the presence of well-respected presenters discussing topics of interest to the farming community. Presentation topics included tile drainage and greenhouse gas emissions; forage seed and cereal impacts on carbon stocks; vole damage in grass fields; and more. The Soil Health Trailer from **NRCS** was also present, demonstrating differences in water capture and runoff from five different natural and managed soil systems.

The Willamette Valley has amazingly fertile, productive soils. Benton County farmers control invasive weeds, ward off damaging pests, conserve water and energy, heed market trends, and manage home and business finances, all while looking toward the next generation. Even under the weight of these obligations, these project farmers said yes to yet another request. They listened to my pitch, signed agreements, let us dig holes in their fields, and attended meetings. It is an honor to work with Benton County’s good dirt and our mindful, hardworking, innovative neighbors who farm the land.



Theresa Brehm of Natural Resources Conservation Service uses a rainfall simulator to discuss managing land for soil health.

Benton SWCD was recently awarded an Oregon Department of Agriculture Support Grant to continue our soil health work through June 2025. This new funding allows us to expand the priority area beyond the GWMA, throughout Benton County.

Granting Environmental Awareness

By Sara Roberts, Community Engagement Coordinator

Each year, Benton SWCD offers a Youth Conservation Education grant program to K-12 teachers and informal educators working in Benton County, Oregon (including Corvallis, Philomath, Monroe, Kings Valley, Blodgett, and Alsea). Educators apply for up to \$500 to support efforts that benefit students and the environment of Benton County. Grantees use these funds for a variety of purposes including classroom materials, learning tools, field trips, and more.

In 2022-23, we were able to grant funds to six local educators, which included five classroom teachers and one community partner – the **Institute for Applied Ecology**. Grantee projects represented an exciting array of topics and pursuits including school gardens, Indigenous studies, stream surveys, and more. The stories below shared by some of our grantees demonstrate the enormous impact that even a small amount of funding can provide.

Corvallis Waldorf School planted an orchard of 10 apple trees, and learned about traditional basket-making from Stephanie Craig of **Kalapuya Weaving** including types of indigenous baskets and their purposes, the native plants used, processing cedar bark, and how to make tule cordage. Marta Capriles, the Agriculture teacher at the school, shared this: "The apple orchard became the 8th grade's gift to the school as our graduating class of 2023. Because we planted 10 trees and there were 10 students in our 1st grade class this year (each of whom has an 8th grade "buddy"), each apple tree was dedicated to one of our 1st grade students. *'It feels like a full circle that we planted trees for our buddies, and that they will take care of them in the future,'* wrote one 8th grade student in her final reflection of the year. Indeed, the 1st graders were thrilled by this gift from their 8th grade buddies and took on hand-watering the budding orchard with our previously-harvested rainwater towards the end of the school year." *[continued on next page]*



A student at Corvallis Waldorf School practices traditional tule cording techniques during an Indigenous basket weaving class sponsored by a BSWCD Conservation Education Grant.



Residents of Linn Benton Juvenile Detention Center look for birds in their backyard with Institute for Applied Ecology educators.

[continued]

The Institute for Applied Ecology used their funds to buy binoculars and lead a birding lesson at Linn Benton Juvenile Detention Center, including identifying birds by sight, helpful mnemonic devices, why males are usually brighter than females, and why birds have certain adaptations that allow them to survive in their environment. IAE has conducted similar lessons with students at the Juvenile Detention Center before, but through this grant, they were able to reinforce learning and build deeper understanding. Karen Hall, Ecological Education Program Director at IAE, says, “The students were glad to go outside and see the birds around the environment that they live in. Many students said they may have found a new interest in looking for birds.”

Philomath High School teachers purchased D-nets and led students in stream surveys in Newton Creek. PHS teacher Alice Eldridge shared this feedback: “Students were really engaged. They loved doing the work of collecting the samples and they were surprised to find a variety of macro-invertebrates. The stream surveys inspired discussions about stream quality, why they found what they found, and how their findings might vary if we visited different parts of the stream. One of the students mentioned that they were going to try this in the creek near their home.”

With their grant, Mountain View Elementary brought 72 students to a field trip at **SAGE Garden**, where they learned about food webs, searched for macro-invertebrates in the pond, and identified both native and invasive species. 3rd grade teacher Shannon Schreier says, “Our students had so much fun on this field trip. It was amazing to watch them enjoying nature and interacting with it.” After their field trip, students wrote, designed, and published a narrative photo-book about their experience, which BSWCD staff and Board greatly enjoyed reading!



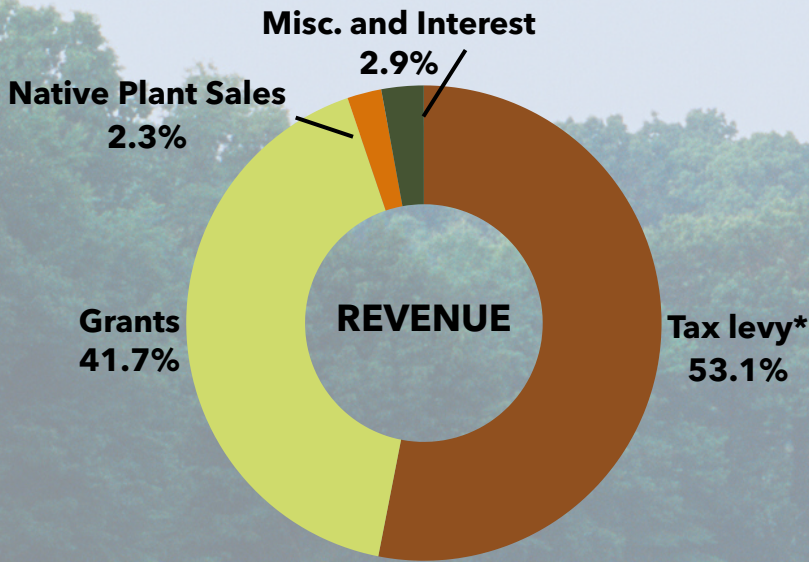
Mountain View students investigate pond life at SAGE gardens.

Do you know an educator who could use funding? Encourage them to apply for this year’s Conservation Education grants at: bentonswcd.org/education-outreach

Financial Report

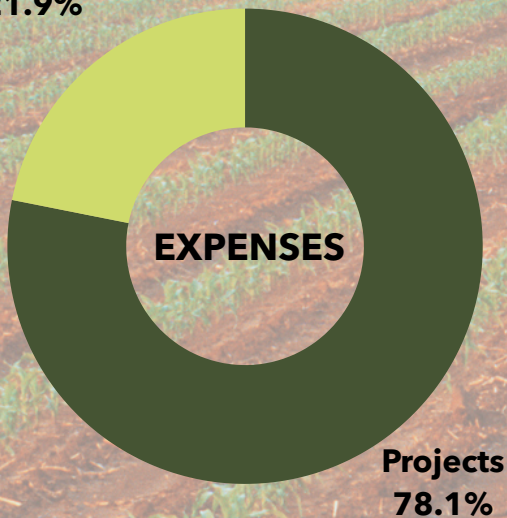
FY 2022-2023

All data is from audited financial information.



Revenue	
Tax levy*	499,674
Grants	392,786
Native Plant Sale	21,897
Misc. & Interest	27,091
TOTAL	941,448

Administration
21.9%



Expenses	
Projects	709,389
Administration	198,671
TOTAL	908,060

Net Change: + \$33,388

*\$.05 per \$1000 assessed property value

Remembering a Beloved Conservation Hero

Jerry Leroy Paul, BSWCD Board Director 2012–2023



Our long-time Zone 3 Board Director, Jerry Paul, passed away on July 20, 2023. Jerry's deep and lasting imprint on the District, and Benton County cannot be overstated. The words *public servant* could not have been more fitting for Jerry. Everything he did was with the residents of Benton County in mind (both human and wild residents, from native plants to local birds and bees). Jerry was prodigious in his talents and incredibly generous with the gifts of his time and knowledge. His passion, civic mindset, and infectious smile will be greatly missed by all of us at BSWCD and many, many others in our community.

In honor of Jerry's passion for native pollinators and their habitats, Benton SWCD has created a new annual community grant award: the *Jerry Paul Native Pollinator Conservation Grant*. These funds will be awarded to projects that create, restore, maintain, or promote native pollinator habitat in Benton County. More details and a call for proposals will be available in January 2024. We are currently accepting donations to contribute to this grant fund – **click here to donate!** For more information, contact Sara at sroberts@bentonswcd.org / 541-753-7208 ext. 205.



Benton Soil and Water
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

2024 Annual Meeting

January 16, 2024

6pm - 8pm

Corvallis Community Center

Doors open at 5:30pm for refreshments
and mingling

Guest Presentation:

Take a Walk on the Wild Side:

The remarkable wild bees of Benton County

Andony Melathopoulos,

Pollinator Health Extension Specialist

LEARN MORE AT: [BENTONSWCD.ORG/ANNUAL-MEETING](https://www.bentonswcd.org/annual-meeting)

Working to engage Benton County residents in the conservation and stewardship of natural resources for current and future generations



Benton Soil and Water
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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Board of Directors, FY22-23

Board Chair - Nate Johnson (At Large)

Zone 1 - David Barron

Zone 2 - Marcella Henkels

Zone 3 - Jerry Paul

Zone 4 - Greg Jones

Zone 5/Secretary - Kerry Hastings

Director At Large - Eliza Mason

Associate Directors - Aubrey Cloud,
Rana Foster

Directors Emeritus - Henry Storch,
Bob Morris

Current Board of Directors

Zone 1 - David Barron

Zone 2 - Marcella Henkels

Zone 3/Board Chair - Nate Johnson

Zone 4 - Greg Jones

Zone 5/Secretary - Kerry Hastings

At Large - Aubrey Cloud, Eliza Mason

Associate Director - Rana Foster

Directors Emeritus - Henry Storch,
Bob Morris

Full-Time and Seasonal Staff

Executive Director - Holly Crosson

Natural Resource Conservation
Program Manager - Michael Ahr

Resource Conservationist -
Teresa Matteson

Resource Conservationist -
Donna Schmitz

Communications and Community
Engagement Coordinator -
Sara Roberts

Operations Coordinator -
Candace Mackey

Conservation Technician -
Althea Bocys

SkillBridge Intern - Jacob Mead

