Conservation planning is at the heart of our mission to work collaboratively with land managers to care for natural resources in Okanogan County. Our planners can work with you to evaluate your property and assess various practices that you could implement to reach your conservation goals. It’s up to you whether to move forward with any of our recommendations, but if you want to take action, we can often help find funding to share the costs. Best of all, our planning services are free to anyone who has property within the Okanogan Conservation District boundaries (all of unincorporated Okanogan County, the Colville Reservation, and the city of Okanogan).

**The Conservation Planning Process:**

**Step One:** Think about which natural resources on your property are of most interest or concern. Our staff have expertise on a wide range of issues from wildlife to wildfire.  

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Financial Assistance for Your Firewise Goals.

These programs have strict deadlines: get in touch as soon as possible.

**50% COST SHARE FOR HOME HARDENING, UP TO $2000**

Practices that reduce ember intrusion and home ignition points are eligible, including new vents, screening for deck, porches, and vents, and installation of a non-flammable perimeter around the home. For details, contact Zach Day at 509-422-0855 x. 102 or email zach@okanogancd.org

**FOREST THINNING AND FIRE RECOVERY COST-SHARE**

Funding is limited and applications will be ranked in a competitive process. Contact Dawn Eisenbraun at 509-422-2750 ext. 105 and ask about the Joint Chiefs’ Initiative. You can also stop by the NRCS Field Office at 1251 S. 2nd Ave, Ste. 101 in Okanogan between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday-Friday.
Conservation Plans

Continued from Page 1

Step Two: Schedule a site visit to your property with one of our conservation planners to talk about your goals and concerns. During this initial walk-through, we’ll ask you about your dreams and ideas for your property, and have you take us around to observe the current conditions and identify any areas of particular interest like wetlands, forests, pastures, and farm land, or resource concerns like erosion, water quality, or wildlife habitat.

Step Three: We create a conservation plan specific to your property. The plan will outline specific conservation practices, also known as BMPs (best management practices). Depending on the complexity of your property or natural resource issues, additional site visits may be needed to create accurate maps and recommendations. A conservation plan can be narrow in focus; for example, on riparian areas only, or more comprehensive, to encompass a wide range of resources and goals. A full conservation plan has a value of $2,000, but if you are within the District boundaries, your plan is free of charge.

Step Four: Decide which conservation practices you’d like to implement. Remember, a conservation plan is not an obligation to do anything. However, if you decide you want to move forward on any of the recommendations, we can provide cost estimates. We can also work with you to find funding to offset costs. Acquiring new funds does take time: the grant writing process is typically between 12 and 36 months. Most of our cost-share agreements will pay up to 50% of practice costs. Water quality projects may receive up to 75% cost-share. A conservation plan is almost always required to be eligible for cost share funds. To get started, contact our office at 509-422-0855 and ask to speak to a conservation planner.

A Well-earned Retirement for Bob Clark

He’s pretty excited, but the rest of us are sad to lose a fabulous coworker and conservation planner to the wide open road of retirement! Bob has been with the Okanogan Conservation District since 2001. In his time as a Conservation Planner, and now as our Senior Conservation Planner, he led diverse projects from irrigation efficiency to riparian buffers to emergency flood control protection. If a project looked like it was going to be challenging, Bob was the one to be trusted with it. Throughout it all, he has been a mentor for other staff, a source of natural resource knowledge for landowners and partners, and a dedicated conservationist. On February 22, Bob was awarded the Norm McClure Lifetime Conservation Achievement Award for his enduring commitment to the principles and practices of voluntary natural resource conservation. Congratulations, and don’t forget to send us lots of postcards from your cross-country recumbent trike trip! We’ll miss you.
Like a lot of things this winter, most fire recovery projects have been frozen. But, through all of the cold and snow, we have been able to remain busy and productive. We’ve gotten a lot more familiar with our desks (more than we would like!) and have been using this seat time to make sure we have effective organizational systems to store all of the documents, contacts and data we have accumulated throughout the year. As one might imagine, working with several hundred landowners affected by the 2014 and 2015 wildfires has led to a lot of information that must be managed smartly.

The most notable undertaking this winter has been the Hazard Tree Removal Project. This is a project that we presented to the Okanogan County Public Works Department to deal with fire-killed trees that may fall on area roadways. The goal is to fully fund the removal of hazard trees along six high priority roads that were identified by the county: Chiliwist, French Creek, Bill Shaw, Watson Draw, Davis Canyon, and North Star. Throughout this winter, Okanogan CD staff have been contacting property owners adjacent to the targeted roads to obtain their permission to remove the trees. As we received agreements from landowners, staff went into the field to map and mark hazard trees along properties whose owners wished to participate in the program.

It has been quite a learning experience and our lead for the project, Mindy Widell, has done a great job. The project will go out for a public bid from contractors in early March with work anticipated to begin this spring. As always, if you have any questions about this or other Okanogan CD programs, give us a call or send us an email.
Riparian Restoration: It’s for the Birds!

By Amy Martin, Conservation Planner

Riparian areas are the transition zones between water and the land. Riparian trees and shrubs provide crucial habitat for a variety of bird species. Red-tailed hawks, kestrels, and long-eared owls are riparian nesters that are beneficial predators, preying on small mammals and snakes. Warblers especially like buffaloberry for the beetles that live on the plant and are a favorite protein source. Blue elderberry, red osier dogwood, snowberry and serviceberry are other valuable habitat plants. Dense shrubs like hawthorn offers protective cover and ample material for nest builders, while snags (standing dead trees), and mature trees provide habitat for cavity nesters.

In February, several Okanogan CD staff participated in the Eastern Washington Riparian Planting Symposium, hosted by the Department of Ecology and Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board. The symposium included speakers who addressed the unique challenges and benefits of restoring riparian areas in the arid landscape of Eastern Washington. Limited water availability is one of the greatest challenges for new plantings, but the significant benefits from established riparian areas are often worth the extra effort needed to sustain plantings for the first few years.

Okanogan CD is working with several landowners to plan and implement over three miles of streambank riparian improvements in 2017 and 2018. Project partners include the Farm Service Agency, Washington State Department of Ecology, and the Colville Confederated Tribes.

If you’re interested in exploring the options for riparian improvements on your property, or to schedule a consultation with our water quality conservation planner, please contact Amy Martin at 509-422-0855 ext. 108 or amy@okanogancd.org.
 Conservation Education Going Strong

By Chelsea Trout, Conservation Educator

Hello! My name is Chelsea Trout, and I am Okanogan CD’s new Conservation Educator. I grew up in rural Pennsylvania on a few acres of forested land, where I spent my days hiking through the woods with field guides. I have a bachelor’s in environmental biology and a minor in Spanish from Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, and have worked in environmental education for almost 5 years. I recently finished a position with the National Park Service in Grand Coulee, serving as the Education Intern for Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area. I am excited to teach our community, especially our students, about conservation, and to keep learning about our ecosystems in Eastern Washington!

We are ready for a busy spring with our local schools. Okanogan CD will be hosting the North Central Washington Regional Envirothon this year on April 19th. Envirothon is a natural resource competition based on forestry, aquatic ecology, wildlife, soils, and a yearly changing current issue. We encourage our test makers to make their exams based on applied science, to give the kids a taste of what natural resource professionals do in the field.

In celebration of Earth Day (April 22), we will be leading activities for students at Chief Joseph Dam on April 20 and at the Confederation of Colville Tribes Pow Wow Grounds in Nespelem on April 21. May is also a busy month, as we will be presenting at the 6th grade camps for Okanogan, Omak, Brewster and Oroville School Districts to help students learn about local watersheds and what they can do to keep them healthy.

The Ecology of the Okanogan class at Okanogan High School continues to be a model of field-based learning and we are exploring more long-term field studies with schools in the county. We think experience is the best way to learn, so we want to get students out in the field doing real science. Keep an eye out for kids in your community getting outdoors!

We continue to offer our stream table programs, and are excited to get the kids outside once it warms up. We offer stream table programs tied to erosion and catastrophic events, healthy riparian areas, and the water cycle and watersheds. We also have the ability to take students outside to study plants, learn where our food comes from, and study our streams and rivers. For more information about any of our programs, you can contact me at chelsea@okanogancd.org or Community Outreach Director Kirsten Cook at kirsten@okanogancd.org. Office phone: 509-422-0855.
Managing Rangelands for Wildlife

By Allisa Carlson, Conservation Planner

Grazing management greatly influences rangeland health. We enjoy diverse landscapes in the Okanogan, including rangelands that provide forage for cattle and habitat for wildlife. Prescribed grazing is a practice used by ranchers and conservation planners for the management of vegetation with grazing and/or browsing animals. It can achieve many objectives that benefit wildlife and livestock; including forage quantity, water quality, improved soil conditions, availability of cover, and reduction of fuel loads. The intensity, frequency, timing, and duration of grazing can be adjusted to meet desired objectives for plant and animal communities.

When working on a grazing plan with a conservation planner, an inventory is completed to determine plant species and production rates. Wildlife goals are also determined based on the species that are present. For instance, if deer require cover in a particular pasture during fawning, grazing could be delayed until later in the season. Grazing is also an important tool for weed control. Cattle can be used to target early annual grasses such as cheatgrass, while goats and sheep can target flowering invasive species, such as knapweed. This approach provides native plant species with a competitive advantage, which improves plant diversity for wildlife.

Components of a grazing plan with wildlife management objectives include targeted wildlife species, nesting/fawning dates, location/number of acres to be deferred each year, schedule for the year of deferment, and stocking rates that will allow proper forage utilization. If you’d like to discuss grazing management options with a conservation planner, please contact Allisa Carlson at 509-422-0855 ext. 111.

Are you experiencing flooding or other issues related to snowmelt and runoff? Please contact us; we may be able to help directly or refer you to other agencies with resources to assist. Call 509-422-0855 or email ocd@okanogancd.org.
Save Water Save Energy

By Amy Martin, Conservation Planner

Did you know that an improperly sized pump, leaky irrigation equipment, or unsound watering practices have the potential to increase your monthly power bills? With power costs rising, energy savings become more and more important. An irrigation system that has a leak 1/32nd of an inch in diameter (about the thickness of a dime) can waste about 6,300 gallons of water per month [1]. The Okanogan Conservation District and Okanogan PUD are working together to help promote efficient irrigation systems by providing financial rebates for certain irrigation equipment.

Here’s a quick rundown of what equipment is currently eligible for a rebate and what the refund is:

- Variable Frequency Drives (VFDs)—$60 per installed horsepower
- Irrigation Water Management (IWM)—$5.20 per acre per year
- Irrigation Hardware (sprinklers, pipes, regulators, drains, nozzles, and more)—$1.00-$4.00
- Freeze Resistant Stock Water Tanks—$165
- Pump Testing and Analysis—$50-$300

For more information, contact Okanogan CD (509-422-0855), or Okanogan PUD (509-422-8427).


Manager’s Note

By Craig Nelson, District Manager

Conservation planners are the heart of conservation districts in Washington State and beyond. These are the men and women with specialized training, skills, and knowledge, who work collaboratively with landowners to develop plans for conserving natural resources in a way that works best for the landowner. Put simply, they do what Districts are known for doing.

Our Senior Conservation Planner retired at the end of February. He had this position because he knew the process the best and he had the trust of co-workers to mentor them on the planning process and much more. His shoes will be extremely difficult to fill. Bob Clark said for many years that he couldn’t believe that he got paid to do this wonderful job. Well, this manager, Bob’s last professional boss, is going on the record to say thank you. Thanks for the many years of hard work, dedication to voluntary conservation, and an insatiable thirst for learning and teaching others. You are one of a kind and we will miss you. We wish you all the best.
Fire Season Will Be Here Soon!

Sign up now for a free Firewise Home Assessment.

Learn what you can do to reduce your risk from wildfires.

Contact Zach @ 509-422-0855 x. 102 or zach@okanogancd.org

www.okanogancd.org/firewise