

SPRING  
2017

The Columbia SWCD presents:

# “The Dirt”

## What’s Next for the SWCD?

You might have noticed the Columbia SWCD has made some pretty big changes lately. Last year we really shook things up, hiring 3 new staff members and replacing 1, essentially doubling our staff size. With three Resource Conservationists on staff now, plus a new Restoration Ecologist we share with the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership, we are better able to take on large projects and assist residents of Columbia county with their natural resource concerns. So here’s what’s in store for us now:

**1) RCPP:** In early 2016 the Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District learned that it had been awarded a grant from the Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to pursue wildlife habitat and water quality projects in the Lower Columbia River Watershed. The partnership consists of county, state, federal agencies, the local watershed council, and youth corps. In combination, partners have allocated a total of over 8 million dollars for projects to be completed over the next 5 years. The goal by 2021 is to have accomplished the following projects under RCPP: 6 fish passage improvements, 4 floodplain restorations, 8 streambank stabilizations, and 7.5 miles of large woody debris installment, and the establishment of monitoring in key reaches. On-the-ground work for RCPP will commence this summer.

**2) ODA Strategic Implementation Areas:** On another front, the Columbia SWCD is partnering with the Upper Nehalem Watershed Council to assist landowners in the area with compliance of the Oregon Department of Agriculture’s agricultural water quality regulations. In 2015, ODA developed Strategic Implementation Areas where they wanted to focus education, outreach, and enforcement of water quality regulations in order to address priority water quality concerns. The Nehalem River in Columbia County is on the list of Strategic Implementation Areas. Consequently, the Columbia SWCD and local watershed council are assisting interested landowners with voluntary restoration projects including fence installation, plantings, and pasture management plans to preclude involvement by ODA.

**3) Native and Invasive Plant Program:** The Columbia SWCD has also overseen a Native and Invasive Plant Program for the last several years with the goal of eradicating harmful invasive species in target areas and restoring these areas with native plants. Students from the St. Helens H.S., Rainier H.S., and the Columbia River Youth Corps. participate in this program by propagating and growing native plants in greenhouses and performing plantings in the field. A secondary goal of this project is to be able to source all of the plants needed for our restoration projects from local nurseries and greenhouses. We are getting close to meeting that goal with a coordinated network of local growing operations.

**4) Better Meeting the Needs of Columbia County:** In addition to running these programs, staff is also available for site visits or to provide technical assistance. Between us and our partner NRCS staff we have expertise spanning many different areas including knowledge of fish life cycles and physiology, wetlands, rivers and streams, permitting, agricultural operations, forest management, and invasive species. We believe this diversity benefits us and the community we serve. We are very excited about the future of the SWCD and where we can go from here. If you have thoughts or questions for us please feel free to share them on our website or Facebook page. Your input is valuable to us. **Connect With Us and Share Your Thoughts!**

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# Get Involved

## Local Board Meetings:

### **Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District:**

3rd Wed. of the month at 7:30 p.m. at their office in Saint Helens

### **Scappoose Bay Watershed Council:**

1st Tue. of the month at 7:00 p.m. at their office in Scappoose

### **Lower Columbia River Watershed Council:**

2nd Tue. of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Columbia SWCD office

### **Upper Nehalem Watershed Council:**

4th Thur. of the month at 7:00 p.m. at Vernonia High School

## CSWCD STAFF

### **District Manager**

Kari Olsen-Hollander

### **Assistant District Manager**

Malyssa Legg

### **Senior Resource Conservationist**

Nathan Herr

### **Resource Conservationist**

Selene Keeney

### **Resource Conservationist**

Monica Blanchard

### **Outreach Coordinator/ Field Technician**

Crystalyn Bush

### **Office Assistant**

Jennifer Steinke

### **LCEP Field Restoration Ecologist**

Jenny Dezso

## NRCS STAFF

### **District Conservationist**

Don Mehlhoff

### **Program Support Tech**

Dee Robinson

### **Soil Conservationist**

Angela Reseland

## CSWCD BOARD

### **Chair:**

Craig Ellis

### **Vice Chair:**

Bill Eagle

### **Treasurer:**

Kay C. VanNatta

### **Secretary:**

Lona Pierce

### **Director:**

Dave Freytag

### **Director:**

Randy Bergman

### **Director:**

Jason Busch

## UP-COMING EVENTS

### **3/11/17 8:30 a.m.—1:30 p.m.: CCSWA Native Tree Sale; Pacific Pride in St. Helens**

Get native trees, shrubs, and ornamentals for great prices. Come early for the best selection.

### **3/23/17 5:30 p.m.— 7:30 p.m.: Pasture Management Class; SWCD Office**

Get advice from SWCD and OSU Extension staff on managing your pasture for optimal productivity and long-term health. RSVP to Crystalyn.bush@columbiaswcd.com. or call 503-397-4555.

### **4/1/17 1:00 p.m. — 4:00 p.m.: Nob Hill Work Party, Nob Hill Nature Park in St. Helens**

Help preserve Nob Hill Nature Park by volunteering a few hours to clean up trails and pull weeds.

### **3/1/17—5/11/17 9:00 a.m.—11:00 a.m.: Seed to Supper ; St. Helens, Scappoose, Rainier**

Free 6 week gardening courses for clients of the OR Food Bank or those on a limited income. Sign up on Eventbrite or contact Jenny Rudolph at OSU Extension (503-397-3462) for more information.

### **4/15/17 9:00 a.m. — 3:00 p.m.: SBWC Native Plant Sale; Scappoose High School**

Located at the nursery behind Scappoose High School. For a list of plants available check out their website or contact Amber at (503) 397-7904 or amber@scappoosebay-wc.org.

# Thoughts from the Staff

*What is it that gets you excited for spring?*

"I can't wait for March Madness and baseball. Go Giants!"

-Malyssa



"Spring means it's time to get the piglets weaned, the garden started, and the feeder pigs out on pasture. It also means I can stop cleaning stalls and feeding animals by headlamp! Woohoo!"

- Nathan



"I am excited for more sunlight, longer days, leaves returning to trees, and spring flowers."

- Selene



"I'm excited to visit our Batwater Station restoration site where we are interplanting 6,500 trees and shrubs this year.

Also, I am super excited to be welcoming a new member to the team .... baby Dezso will be here in March!"

- Jenny D.



"I look forward to opening windows, letting the sunshine in, and a little Spring Chinook fishing on the Columbia River."

- Kari



"I am excited to send the kids out to play with only one jacket, not have to thaw out the chickens' water every day, and no more puddles inside my house. I'm also excited to revamp the garden and try again this year. I'm hoping for greatness!"

- Crystalyn



## SCAPPOOSE SEWER LINE

In December 2015 heavy flows and flooding caused severe erosion along a stretch of S. Scappoose Creek behind Veterans Park. At the first site a sewer line runs alongside the creek several feet underground. During the storm significant portions of the streambank sloughed off exposing part of the pipe. City staff were extremely concerned about the potential for the exposed pipe to fail. In addition to this worrisome situation, the City of Scappoose faced numerous other costly repairs to infrastructure caused by the storm for which they were coordinating with FEMA. City Manager, Michael Sykes, said the City reached out to the Columbia SWCD for assistance on this particular project because of the District's expertise in natural resource project management, ability to assist with permitting, and a source of funding at a time when the City's dollars and staff were stretched thin.



Exposed sewer line during summer low flows.

The Columbia SWCD started sponsoring emergency repair projects under the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in early 2016. When District and NRCS staff saw the sewer line site it was quickly bumped up to the top of the priority list. Somewhere close to 10 feet of pipe was exposed and staff estimates that 15 to 18 feet of streambank was likely lost during the storm. The affected pipe is the main sewer line to the City's largest pump station. The Scappoose City Engineer notified all involved that the pipe would become structurally unsound and likely fail if 3 or more full segments were to be completely exposed. As you can see from the photo above, taken during the summer of 2016, staff was racing against a ticking clock. Failure of the pipe would result in raw sewage leaking into the creek, contaminating the water for people, fish, and other wildlife. To make matters worse, the creek is a source of potable water for the City, making this scenario even more disturbing.

S. Scappoose Creek also contains essential spawning ground for ESA listed Coho salmon. The creek is severely incised along this stretch which means that most adult salmon are just moving through on their way to upstream spawning grounds. In addition, the habitat quality along this stretch is quite poor. The creek lacks complexity essential for providing shelter and food to young salmon and the riparian area is completely devoid of native vegetation. However, the creek still hosts some juvenile salmonids in the late spring/early summer before the water temperature gets too high. The Columbia SWCD saw an opportunity to help the residents and City of Scappoose while doing some good for nature.



S. Scappoose Creek still close to bankful in March 2016. The channel is C-shaped at this location and heavily incised contributing to the generation of strong and concentrated erosive forces. The lack of a floodplain and vegetation also contributes to erosion.

# PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

The Columbia SWCD hired Lower Columbia Engineering to design the project and Aquatic Contracting LLC for the construction. The crew broke ground on September 22, 2016 and work was completed one week later. A roughened rock toe was installed beneath the exposed pipe to prevent undercutting. Crews then poured structural fill around the pipe and installed 3 to 5 foot boulders on top and around the area. The rock wall will dampen hydrologic forces against the bank and slow water velocity. Soil lifts were installed on top of the rock area to stabilize soil and promote the establishment of grass and other vegetation.

On the upstream part of the bend 8 large rootwads were installed in the bank. This structure incorporates a softer approach to bank stabilization and erosion control. It also has the benefit of providing valuable habitat for fish by creating shelter, shade, and food. The rootwads create ripples and hiding places, while the woody debris attracts insects which fall into the water and become food for young fish.

City Manager, Michael Sykes, notes that the City is grateful for the assistance of the Columbia SWCD and very pleased with the outcome of the project. He stated, "We look forward to doing other projects with the District and local watershed council that address other natural resource concerns." Specifically, he says, the City wants to pursue a plan to restore S. Scappoose Creek to a more natural state by addressing the creek's severe incision and by reestablishing a floodplain.



Completed sewer line project. Grass is beginning to take hold on the top of the bank just as water levels are rising again.

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[www.columbiaswcd.com](http://www.columbiaswcd.com)

### Ready ... Set ... Garden!

Whether you are a master gardener or just trying “not kill something” this year, all gardeners know spring means one thing: time to get digging! I’ve been starting seeds indoors for the last few years without a ton of success. I can get most of the seeds to germinate, but then they start to go leggy and droop or do poorly when transplanted. I will admit I probably don’t give them as much attention as they deserve. I have trouble finding a good source of natural light in the house that

lasts more than a few hours a day and sometimes my children overwater them. This year we have made the investment in a nice grow lamp and I will be starting them in larger pots in the hopes that my seeds will develop stronger roots and healthier shoots before they make the big trip to the garden. How do you start your seeds? If you have a creative tip or successful strategy for starting healthy plants please share them with us on our facebook page. One thing I have learned about gardening is you will never run out of things to learn. So let’s start a conversation and help each other meet our gardening goals...whatever they may be. Best wishes for a productive spring and happy digging!

