



Palouse News

Farmed Smart Sustainable Agriculture Program Set to Launch!

Farmed Smart sustainable agriculture certification is a brand new program developed by the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association (PNDSA) and a conservation farming technical stakeholder committee with representation from universities, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), conservation districts, Department of Ecology and producers. The program aims to certify producers who are using sustainable production practices on their farms while providing clear understanding of the environmental, social and economic benefits of direct seed cropping systems. The certification follows six initiatives: water quality, air quality, soil health, wildlife habitat, energy conservation and economic viability. The requirements for certification include meeting a minimum Soil Tillage Intensity Rating (STIR); using precision application techniques for nutrients and chemicals; implementing riparian buffers along waterways; maintaining crop residue; maintaining a positive Soil Conditioning Index; implementing diverse crop rotations; providing cover and food sources for wildlife; reducing fossil fuel usage; and being a current PNDSA member to access educational and networking opportunities.

The Farmed Smart program will create public awareness of the environmentally responsible practices growers are using to produce crops. Producers benefit from Farmed Smart certification by receiving regulatory assurance for utilizing Best Management Practices to meet water quality standards, with the goal of achieving access to value-added markets for sustainably produced commodities.

Currently, two dryland crop producers have been certified Farmed Smart. Many more growers have expressed interest, and several are already getting under way with the certification process. Producers begin Farmed Smart certification by filling out the application found on the PNDSA website (directseed.org) and emailing it to pndsa@directseed.org or mailing it to: PNDSA, PO Box 5, Colton, WA 99113. Growers who meet minimum requirements will be sent a pre-certification checklist to begin preparing for a farm visit. An auditor will conduct a farm interview and visit, and the producer will then be notified of the certification decision.



Growers who don't currently meet the Farmed Smart standards for direct seeding, precision application or riparian buffers, and are interested in becoming certified have the option of applying for cost share assistance through the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) or through other cost share programs. Signups for this year's RCPP cost share have closed, and the next signup will reopen in the fall. For more information on Farmed Smart certification, please contact Tami Stubbs (TamiS@palousecd.org; 509-332-4101 ext. 111) or the PNDSA (pndsa@directseed.org). For more information on cost share assistance, please contact Tami Stubbs, Jake Clements (JakeC@palousecd.org; 509-332-4101 ext. 2) or Patrick Rahilly (PatrickH@palousecd.org; 509-332-4101 ext. 3).

Whitman County Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)

Whitman County's Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) Watershed Work planning process is getting underway. VSP is an optional, incentive-based program created as an alternative approach for counties to protect critical areas on agricultural lands. Counties "opting-in" to VSP will develop a Work Plan as an alternate method of meeting the Washington State Growth Management Act's (GMA) critical areas protection requirements while enhancing the viability of agriculture. VSP is supported by the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC), Washington State Farm Bureau and many others.

Twenty eight counties have "opted in" to the VSP, including Whitman County. Whitman County has recently formed its Watershed Group, which includes a broad representation of key watershed stakeholders and who is responsible for developing the Work Plan for the County.

The Work Group will be meeting regularly throughout the year to develop the Work Plan, supported by the Palouse Conservation District, Palouse-Rock Lake Conservation District, Whitman Conservation District, Pine Creek Conservation District, Whitman County, and Anchor QEA (consultant).

Members of the public are welcome to attend any of these meetings to be a part of the process. 2016 meetings will be held on:

April 7

June 2

July 7

September 1

October 6

November 3

December 1

Watershed Group regular meeting location and time:

3:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Whitman County Public Works Auditorium

310 N Main St, Colfax, WA 99111

Watershed Group Members:

Name	Affiliation
Alan Thompson	Whitman County Planner
Art Swannack	Whitman County Commissioner
David Lange	Whitman Conservation District
David L Swannack	Agriculture
Jeff Pittmann	Whitman County Farm Bureau
Joan Folwell	Palouse Prairie Foundation
John Pearson	Agriculture
John Stuhlmiller (Primary) Evan Sheffels (Alternate)	Washington State Farm Bureau
Jon Jones	Agriculture, former Department of Ecology Staff
Kim Weerts	Whitman County Cattlemen's Association
Larry Cochran	Palouse Conservation District
Nancy Belsby	Whitman County Water Conservancy Board
Tracy Ericksen	Agriculture

For more information and to stay involved:

Contact Alan Thomson with Whitman County at Alan.Thomson@co.whitman.wa.us, or Brad Johnson with Palouse CD at BradleyJ@palousecd.org.

Visit the WSCC's VSP website: <http://scc.wa.gov/voluntary-stewardship-program/>

Attend an upcoming Watershed Workgroup meeting

Remnant Palouse Prairie Inventory Continues This Spring!

The Palouse prairie remnant surveys will begin again starting this spring. We are visiting potential Palouse prairie remnants throughout Whitman County to survey for native plants and assess the condition of existing native plant communities. Palouse prairie, the native grassland ecosystem composed of bunchgrasses mixed with numerous herb and shrub species, is found in eastern Washington (Whitman County mostly) and adjacent Idaho. Almost all of this ecosystem was converted to agricultural use by the early 20th century making it one of the rarest ecosystems in the US: less than 1% remains. Most of these remnants are small (<5 acres) and privately owned. Currently, the biggest threat to the remaining prairie remnants is invasive weeds. The Palouse Conservation District is surveying as many prairie remnants as we can. These remnants are represented by land that has never been “tilled or drilled”, that is, never been in crops and is not CRP land. These surveys provide a better understanding of the state of Palouse prairie in Whitman County and can identify parcels that would benefit from active weed management.



Last summer (2015), 188 acres of potential remnant Palouse prairie was surveyed. Of these, 132 acres were found to be in what is called the “converted uplands” condition – that is, no recognizable native plant community exists anymore. About 33 acres had enough intact native plant community to be assigned to the A or B condition which have the most intact native plant communities. We have completed botanical surveys for roughly a third of the potential remnants that we were given permission to visit. We will be completing the rest of the surveys this spring and summer. We can always use more sites and are happy to add them into our surveying efforts.

If you have a Palouse prairie remnant you would like included in our surveys or are interested in native plants of the Palouse please contact **James Riser** at the Palouse Conservation District: botanist@palousecd.org

Palouse Conservation District's Annual Surplus Tree and Shrub Sale



Mark your calendar! The Palouse Conservation District Annual Surplus Plant Sale is just around the corner. The event will take place on Friday April 1st from 9am - 4:30pm and Saturday April 2nd from 9am - 1:00pm at the Palouse Conservation District office located at 1300 NE Henley Ct. in Pullman.

Overstocked conservation trees, shrubs, and willows will be available for purchase at a great price on the days of the plant sale.

District staff will be available on site to help answer any questions you may have. Whatever the size of planting project you have in mind, the Districts are available to help develop a plan which will include proper plants, materials, and labor to help make it more successful.

The surplus tree sale will include a limited number of plants - so come early!

Reminder: If you ordered plants during the pre-sale, your plants will be available for pick up during the Annual Surplus Plant Sale.

Visit www.palousecd.org for Full Color Pictures & Descriptions of ALL Seedlings For Sale

Important CREP Update

Palouse CD Stream Miles for CREP



— CREP Eligible Stream

Highlighted stream watersheds may be eligible for some CREP practices.

As you may be aware, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Pilot Program for the Palouse has been enrolling acres of riparian buffers into CRP on a continuous rolling basis. CREP is a great program for not only improving and protecting water quality but also for increasing wildlife habitat, especially for aquatic species and those that rely on streamside and wetland areas. CREP provides a soil rental rate for 10-15 years to install and maintain buffers on streams and waterways on eligible streams and can be applied to crop, hay, and even marginal pasture ground. In addition to the annual rental payment the program pays for site prep, plants and planting, livestock fencing and offsite watering facilities if needed. CREP also provides funding for ongoing site maintenance to help things like weed control, irrigation, and to aid in plant establishment for the first 5 years. The Palouse CD staff will be available throughout the life of the contract to provide technical assistance and guidance. The minimum buffer width is currently 35' from the ordinary high watermark of the stream to a maximum average of 180'. Starting on **April 1st the minimum buffer width will increase to 50'** to better address wildlife resource concerns. If you would like to take advantage of the narrower buffer width please contact Randy Stevens at the Palouse CD office soon. The major focus of the program is on forested stream buffers that include the planting of trees and shrubs. The District has other programs and funding opportunities that help with bank stabilization, stream buffers, and livestock. CREP also provides enhancements and buffers for wetland areas if that is something you would like to look into. Call the PCD office for more details!



Education on the Palouse



Our Outreach and Natural Resource Specialist, Hannah Liss, has been hard at work visiting local elementary schools as the regional Wheat Week and Water on Wheels educator. Since the start of the 2015-2016 school year, 61 classrooms within 10 various Whitman and Asotin County schools have taken advantage of these free educational opportunities. Over 1,390 students have been educated on topics stressing the importance of water conservation, soil health, habitat availability, best management farming practices and more! We would like to thank all participating teachers for taking advantage of this wonderful opportunity to introduce natural resource conservation concepts to our local youth while fulfilling Washington State Learning Standards. The Palouse Conservation District looks forward to strengthening connections within our wonderful community and continually strives to promote a healthier environment for all.

First Salmon Recovery Project in Whitman County

The Palouse Conservation District Board of Supervisors just approved a contract for a grant for the first salmon recovery project in Whitman County. The project, in partnership with Whitman County Public Works, will replace a culvert fish barrier with a bridge in Steptoe Creek- a steelhead bearing Snake River Tributary. This project will open up 3 miles of critical spawning habitat for steelhead aiding in the restoration of the population. Many thanks to the WA Recreation and Conservation Office and Salmon Recovery Funding Board for awarding this grant!

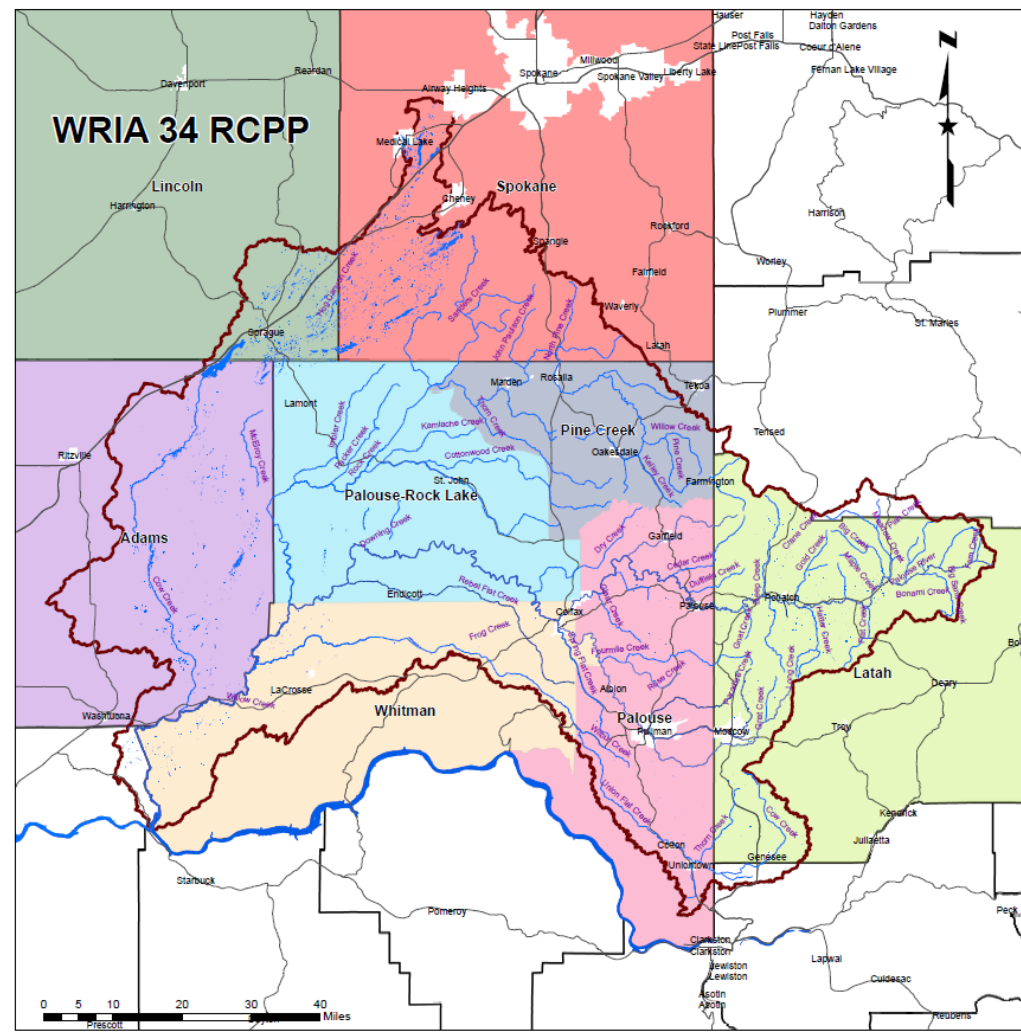
Upcoming Volunteer Events

Spring is upon us and we are very excited to get on the ground and get projects rolling! We have seven volunteer events coming up in the next month with involvement of over 150 students! Various clubs and organizations from Washington State University and the University of Idaho have scheduled events with us. The WSU Biology Club, Environmental Science Alliance, Tree Planting Club, and Circle K International along with the UI Society for Conservation Biology and Spokane Service Team's YouthBuild members have all signed up for events. Members of the Greek community are also getting involved; the United Greek Association, Kappa Delta Chi and Alpha Gamma Delta sororities and Alpha Tau Omega fraternity have all pledged a significant amount of volunteers!

Volunteers will be fully immersed in the planting process and will leave the event with experience in proper planting techniques, watering, spraying animal repellent, installing tree tubes and weed fabric and will leave with working knowledge of how a restoration project is conducted.

Thank you to all previous and upcoming volunteers! Projects wouldn't be possible without you! To find out more information about volunteering with us, come visit our booth at the 2016 WSU Earth Day Fair on April 22nd from 10 am to 2:30 pm at the Glen Terrell Mall or contact Bryana Cope (bryanac@palousecd.org; (509)332-4101 x 10).

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Progress



The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is well underway, with lots of interest from landowners across 5 counties and 2 states in the Palouse watershed (WRIA 34). In the first year of RCPP, we had 52 applicants, with three times more requests for funding than funds available to get conservation on the ground in the watershed. The Partnership has ranked all applicants and is now moving into conservation planning with landowners. We are currently accepting applications for people interested in implementing riparian buffers and direct seed farming practices in 2017.

Although it's a developing process, Palouse Conservation District and our Partners are setting precedence for partnerships across the northwest. Palouse Watershed RCPP is a voluntary program directed through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

designed to benefit water quality, soil health, and habitat within the Palouse River Watershed. The program assists farmers and landowners through compensation in implementation of practices such as conservation tillage operations, streamside buffers, precision agriculture, and riparian restoration. We have funding available to assist landowners for the next five years. Applications are locally ranked within your Conservation District. Technical and financial assistance is provided by 18 cooperative partners working together to be your one-stop shop for conservation. RCPP has shown that through the diversity of knowledge, opinions, and teamwork, a new standard of conservation will be set.

For more information or to submit an application for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), please contact Jake Clements (JakeC@palousecd.org; 509-332-4101 ext. 2) or Laura Heinse (LauraH@palousecd.org; 509-332-4101 ext. 5).



Weed in the Spotlight

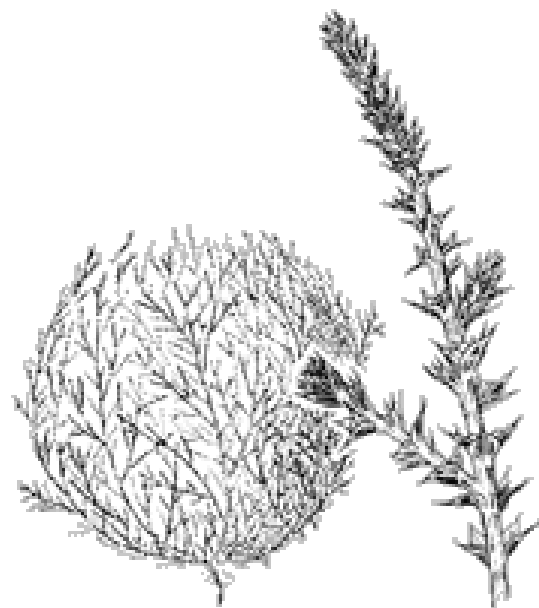
When you think of tumble weeds rolling across the plains or hanging up along fence lines you are probably picturing Russian Thistle. Russian Thistle was accidentally introduced to the US in contaminated flax seed from Russia, as the name implies. The small seeds contain a coil-like seedling that can germinate quickly in very dry conditions and tends to favor disturbed soils- making it well adapted to areas like Eastern Washington. The seedlings resemble a tuft of pine needles and the annual plant matures into a large ball-like form resembling a bush. Although most of the full grown plants are only a few feet in diameter, they can reach the size of small cars if conditions are ideal. The many stems are striped with a purple to reddish coloring and the inconspicuous flowers form along leaf axils next to a pair of leaf-like bracts tipped with spines. As the seeds mature the plant dries out turning a

red color and breaks off from its tap root. It is then blown across the ground by the wind dropping seeds as it rolls. Each plant is capable of producing 250,000 seeds and traveling several miles.



© Al Schneider

Al Schneider, hosted by the USDA-NRCS
PLANTS Database



https://www.desertmuseum.org/books/nhsd_chenopodiaceae.php?print=y

There are several effective control methods for Russian thistle. Because it has a very short lived (<1 year) soil life the most effective method is to prevent flowering and seed production. This includes having a vigorous stand of desired vegetation and minimizing disturbance to the soil if possible. Several herbicides are available for control and are best applied when the plant is still in the seedling stage. As plants get larger various forms of tillage or mowing can be effective. Repeated mowing may be needed as the plant is very efficient in its use of water and can continue to grow long into the summer after other plants can no longer utilize water in the soil. Russian thistle will keep growing and flowering until it is killed off by a hard frost. It is important to control for it after harvest of crops and into the fall. There are a few moths available as a biocontrol agent that mine the stem and leaves of the growing plant. Burning is not recommended for control and can be dangerous if burning plants get picked up by wind.

Thank you for supporting our Annual Listening Session

The 2016 Annual Listening Session drew in 42 local community members offering excellent feedback regarding various programs and resources offered to Palouse Conservation District producers. We appreciated hearing from Palouse landowners and look forward to putting your suggestions and requests into action this upcoming year! We would like to offer up a BIG thank you to the following companies for their generous contributions in support of this year's Annual Listening Session: McGregor, Ackerman Heating and Air Conditioning, Busch Distributors, Wilbur Ellis, Uniontown Co-Op Seed, Pearson Fence and Farm, Galexis Technologies, Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association, Merry Cellars Winery and Vineyard, Daily Grind, Kea: Learn Birds Through Play, and Palouse-Clearwater Environmental Institute.



**Palouse Conservation District
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Pullman, WA 99163**

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Don't forget about the
Annual District Tree Sale!
(See inside for more details)

Friday, April 1st 9:00-4:30
Saturday, April 2nd 9:00-1:00

Be sure to visit our new webpage!

Though our webpage has undergone many changes,
our address remains the same! Take a peek at

www.palousecd.org

If you would like to switch to our e-newsletter, please
add your email address to our contact list by visiting
our webpage, calling the district, or sending an email
to palousecd@palousecd.org!

Cost-Share Available!

*Palouse Conservation District has cost-share
available for projects that improve soil health,
reduce erosion, improve grazing lands, establish or
enhance native vegetation, restore riparian areas,
improve wildlife habitat...*

***Protect valuable natural resources and
improve your land and/or operation***

Projects must meet NRCS standards and specs

**Call today to start a cost-share application
(509)332-4101**

The Board of Supervisors meets monthly on the
2nd Tuesday of each month (call or check our website for
meeting time/location)

Board of Supervisors

Larry Cochran, Chair (1990)

Chris Heitstuman (1998)

Keith Kopf (1997)

Mark Whitmore (1998)

Joan Folwell (2010)

Associate Board Members

Greg Jones (1992)

Dave Stout (2010)

District Staff

Jennifer Boie, Director

Laura Heinse, Conservation Partnership Manager

Bradley Johnson, WRIA 35 Watershed Planning and
Implementation Manager

Pam Furchtenicht, Administrative Coordinator

Patrick Rahily, Agricultural Resources Coordinator

Randy Stevens, CREP Coordinator

Tami Stubbs, Conservation Agriculture and Farmed Smart
Coordinator

Drew Schuldt, Natural Resource Coordinator

Jake Clements, Palouse Watershed Conservation Planner

Hannah Liss, Outreach and Natural Resource Specialist

Bryana Cope, AmeriCorps Member