



Douglas County, WA

P.O. Box 398
203 South Rainier St.
Waterville, WA 98858

(509) 888-6372

www.fostercreekcd.org

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Snow on a rose hip (*Rosa woodsii*) in front of a Douglas hawthorn tree (*Crataegus douglasii*).

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Residue: What is the big fuss?

Residue. A common term found throughout cropland management. Resource management places emphasis on the importance of residue in crop fields, but what exactly are the benefits? For starters, a raindrop the size of a housefly falls at approximately 20 mph. This raindrop can cause erosion solely by the force of the impact. Residue limits “splash erosion” and increases water retention in the soil, which in turn produces healthier, more vigorous crops. Second, residue aids in the soil surface’s protection from the sun’s rays and the drying effects of wind by reducing the evaporation rate. In a sense, residue acts as a shield from solar radiation during hot days and as a blanket during cooler nights. This translates to less water being lost to evaporation and more water being secured for crop production through infiltration. Last, our soils are alive with constant activity from a diversity of organisms. Residue increases this biological activity for such organisms as earthworms, fungi, burrowing mammals, and insects because the residue acts as both a food source and habitat cover from predators. In turn, these beneficial organisms may produce additional soil pores and even attack crop pests. An increase in soil pores may result in improved oxidation, infiltration, and better root establishment for crops. In sum, leaving residue stands for longer periods of time and reducing tillage operations, such as a Direct Seed method, may just be the key to increasing crop yields. For more information on soil health practices and benefits, contact a Foster Creek CD staff member today!



Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)



The Douglas County Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) work group has been working hard over the past few months. The work group has completed a draft of the county-wide VSP work plan. In January, Aaron Rosenblum, Douglas County VSP coordinator, went to Olympia to present the draft of the work plan to the state technical panel during an informal review. The technical panel has provided feedback to the work group which is now being incorporated into the work plan.

The end is now in sight for completing the work plan. Once final feedback and comments are incorporated into the work plan, and the work group all agrees, the plan will be submitted to the state technical panel for its formal review. The review process typically takes 2-3 months. Once the work plan is approved by the technical panel, VSP will move into the implementation phase. More information and details about VSP implementation will be coming soon! For more information, please contact VSP coordinator Aaron Rosenblum at 509-423-5990 or arosenblum@fostercreekcd.org, or visit the VSP webpage at <http://www.fostercreekcd.org/programs/voluntary-stewardship-program/>.

Salmon in the Classroom



Eyed Chinook salmon eggs (photo by O.Schilling, 1/4/18)

and gravel. Each school received 250 eyed salmon eggs in early January, which started hatching not long after. For 6-8 weeks, the salmon live off of yolk sacs and are called alevin. Once their yolk is used up they are referred to as fry, and need to be fed frequently. During this time, teachers and students monitor the water quality in the tank regularly to ensure the fish stay healthy.

Participating teachers incorporate the water cycle, salmon life cycle and water quality education into their curriculum throughout the year. Participating classrooms have the opportunity for several guest lectures from FCCD and Wells Hatchery, and even a fish dissection, courtesy of the Cascade Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group. The program will wrap up in late April with a field trip to release the fish into the Columbia River, then a tour of the Rocky Reach Dam.

This winter, FCCD brought Chinook salmon into Waterville and Mansfield Schools as part of WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife’s School Cooperative Program. FCCD partnered with the Wells Fish Hatchery, Trout Unlimited and WA Department of Ecology for funding and setup of 55 gallon tanks complete with chillers, filters, aerators, bubble wands



Chinook salmon alevin (photo by O.Schilling, 2/12/18)

Soil Health Growers Panel at Annual Meeting

Foster Creek Conservation District hosted the FCCD and South Douglas Conservation District Annual Meeting this year on Tuesday, February 13, 2018 at the Waterville Fairgrounds. The grower panel discussion focused on soil health, and featured producers Jesse Brunner, Seth Walker, Douglas Poole and Dan Cavadini, as well as Mike Nester with Ag Enterprise



Growers Panel: (L-R) Jesse Brunner, Seth Walker, Douglas Poole, Dan Cavadini and Mike Nester with Ag Enterprise (photo by E.Hanwacker)

Supply, Inc. Dan Cavadini commented on the benefits of direct seed, saying that you don’t see dust storms around the area anymore. Seth Walker recommended assessing failures and learning lessons from them, stating, “sometimes your failure can be your greatest victory.” Douglas Poole emphasized that no-till is just a piece of the puzzle, and should be used alongside practices such as crop diversity and cover crops. Poole stated that the transition process to no-till can be rough, and producers should accept that it is a process, go gradually, and always keep learning and experimenting. Jesse Brunner said that no-till practices *will* work anywhere, but it won’t look the same from farm to farm, adding, “No-till is not a recipe, it’s a mindset.” From the audience, Wade Troutman added, “Everything is local. Every piece of dirt is very local – what’s important is to know your land. No-till has given me an opportunity to understand my ground further.” Addressing chemical use, Jesse Brunner said the best thing to do is to use less, smarter. Douglas Poole likened the effect of chemicals on the soil to a hangover, “The microbes bounce back, but we could avoid that altogether.” Poole would like to get the soil on his operation to a point where it is healthy enough to defend itself, which would eventually lead to a significant decrease of chemical inputs. [To read the full article, visit <http://www.fostercreekcd.org/news-events/newsletter-articles/>.]

Winter Water Quality Tip:

Wellness for your well: Northern Douglas County has a lot to offer its residents, but an excess of water is not one of those things. If you use well water, it's crucial to maintain that clean source of water. Not only is it recommended that you test your water for contaminants, but you should also be sure to keep up on maintenance. Preventive maintenance is less costly in the long run; schedule annual checkups and service any potential problems. Do you have any abandoned wells on your property? Abandoned wells not only pose an injury risk to people and wildlife, but they can also be a direct route of contamination to ground water. If you have an abandoned well, contact a licensed well driller to decommission it, and fill out the necessary forms on the WA Department of Ecology website: <https://ecology.wa.gov/Water-Shorelines/Water-supply/Wells/Information-for-drillers/Abandoned-wells>

Pygmy Rabbit Update



Recovery efforts for the Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit have experienced both highs and lows over the past year. Most notable was the 2017 Sutherland Canyon wildfire that severely impacted the Beezley Hills Recovery Area, one of three pygmy rabbit identified Recovery Areas in Douglas and Grant Counties. Fire damage was extensive; a complete loss of our most productive breeding enclosure, a large portion of the captive breeding population, and nearly half of the suitable habitat available to release rabbits into, all resulting in this area being less suitable as a recovery area for rabbits for the next couple of years. As a result, the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners are preparing to shift reintroduction efforts to Douglas County around Jameson Lake this coming spring/summer.

On the bright side, crews have been working this winter to survey the Recovery Areas to determine the distribution and size of the wild pygmy rabbit population. The population within the Sagebrush Flats Recovery Area is doing well and continues to grow and expand since release effort were completed in 2016. We have been surprised to see them make extensive use of mature CRP fields as they recolonize the landscape. Within the Beezley Hills Recovery Area, we continue to survey unburned habitat and believe a small number of rabbits are persisting there.

This past fall WDFW collaboratively worked with the Foster Creek Conservation District (FCCD) to reach out to out to landowners around Jameson Lake making them aware of the reintroduction plans and options available to them providing regulatory certainty for the continued operation of their farming practices.

If you have any questions or want additional information on Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit recovery efforts please contact Jon Gallie with WDFW at jon.gallie@dfw.wa.gov

If you have questions or concerns about regulatory tools available, please contact FCCD or WDFW Private Lands Biologists (509-754-4624)