June 2013

Kittitas County Conservation District

Serving Landowners in Kittitas County Since 1942

Office location:
607 E Mountain View Avenue
Ellensburg, WA 98926 Phone: (509) 925-8585 ext. 4 Fax: (509) 925-8591 Website: www.kccd.net

Volume X Issue II

Wildfire Restoration Update

Our Taylor Bridge Fire restoration efforts have continued throughout the winter and will culminate June 1st. Of the 106 landowners who requested assistance, 65 have agreements for projects such as hazard tree removal, erosion barriers, and aerial/broadcast seeding of native grasses using funding from NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) and WCC (Washington Conservation Commission).

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program was a voluntary program for interested landowners who fell within the priority areas of the Taylor Bridge Fire perimeter. Those areas included the forested lands, particularly where burn intensities were high, and steep slopes where erosion potential was the greatest. EWP required that the erosion or hazard trees posed a specific threat to life or property. So only those lands where erosion or hazard trees were a direct threat to a home site, roads and driveways, and utilities, etc. were eligible for assistance.

Nearly 70% of the properties assessed did qualify for some level of assistance, although only about 60% actually entered into agreements with the District. Approximately $600,000 will be spent on those agreements. The projects that have been or are planned to be completed by the first of June include 1,000 acres of reseeding, 2,000 hazard trees, 80 acres of forest slash treatment, 12,000 linear feet of log and straw erosion control structures and 3 culvert replacements.

Straw wattles placed on a dozer line in an area heavily burned in the Lookout Mt area. Grass is growing well in much of the scorched landscape.

Vegetation is beginning to recover along Hart Road. Straw wattles were placed along steep slopes to help control erosion.

Kittitas County Conservation District

Board of Supervisors

Mark Moore - Chair (Elected - term expires in 2016)
Lynn Brown - Vice Chair (Appointed - term expires in 2014)
Jeff Brunson - Auditor (Elected - term expires in 2015)
Bill Boyum - Member (Appointed - term expires in 2016)
Ron Gibb - Member (Elected - term expires in 2014)

District Staff

Anna Lael - District Manager
Sara Leist - Financial Manager
Suzanne Wade - GIS Specialist
Mark Crowley - Resource Technician II
Ryan Roberts - District Engineer
Sherry Swanson - Project Manager
Brent Dixon - Resource Technician

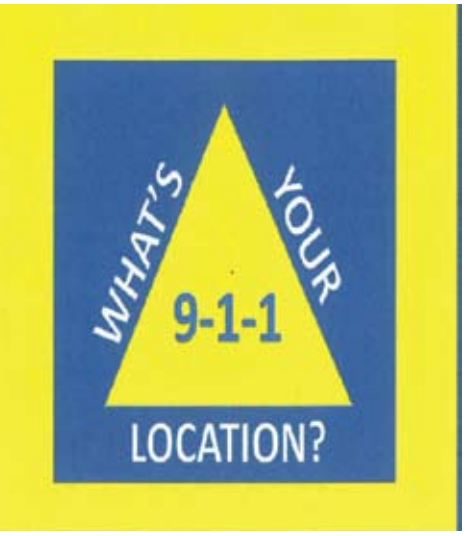
Board meetings are generally held on the second Thursday of each month. The schedule for the year:

June	**7:00 AM**
July	**7:00 AM**
August	**7:00 AM**
September	**7:00 AM**
October	**7:00 AM**
November	**1:00 PM**
December	**1:00 PM**

Meeting notices are also posted on the KCCD web page and at the KCCD office. Additional special meetings are occasionally held throughout the year. For more information or to receive e-mail notifications of meetings, contact Anna or Sara at 925-8585 ext 4 or sara-leist@conservewa.net.

Know Your Location

Call 9-1-1 whenever you need emergency help from police, fire or emergency medical personnel. Identify yourself as a cellular (cell) phone caller. Be ready to provide your cell phone number and the exact location where help is needed. Cell phone 9-1-1 calls do not automatically provide your location. 9-1-1 needs to know where the emergency is before help can be sent.



Plant Sale a Success

The 16th Annual Roy & Marge Bach Memorial Conservation Plant Sale was a great success! We filled over 140 orders (including pre-orders and walk-in's) with nearly 6,000 trees and shrubs. A big thank you to our volunteers (Darlene Carlton, Jonelle Bull, Ken Titus, Crystal Kossow, Mel Shenyer and all the Master Gardeners).

Each year, hundreds of elementary school students across Kittitas County benefit from the proceeds of the Plant Sale. The proceeds are used to fund activities from planting trees and shrubs on school property, to buying science kits, to field trips highlighting local and regional natural resources. Over the years, funds have been provided to individual teachers and classes as well as for other broader groups. Other examples of approved applications include the Ag Appreciation Day bus costs, support for 5th Grade Camp, a project on Lake Easton to clean up and provide garbage receptacles for fishing line, Wheat Week, Water on Wheels and support for the Earth-Day mini unit at Mt. Stuart Elementary. Contact Sara 509 925-8585 ext 4 if you are an educator and want to learn more about applying for a grant.

The KCCD named the plant sale in honor of Roy & Marge Bach. Roy was an avid outdoorsman and friend of the KCCD. Marge was the KCCD secretary for 30 years, retiring in 2000. After Marge's retirement, she continued to volunteer each year to help with the plant sale. The KCCD continues to receive donations in their honor to the Plant Sale fund.

KCCD Special Assessment

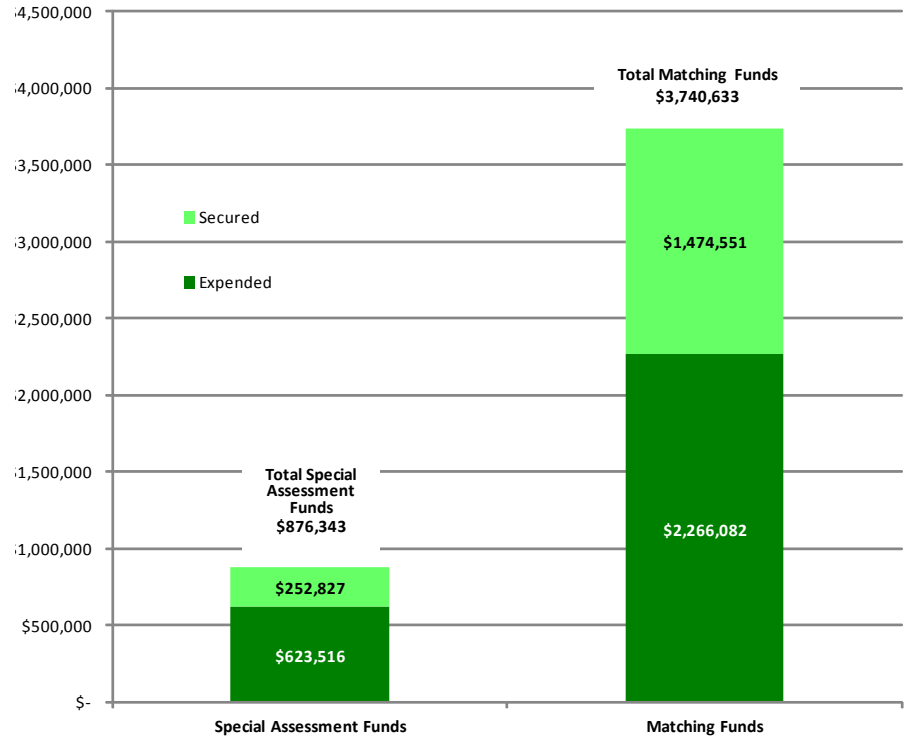
By establishing a dedicated fund through a special assessment to support services, landowners within the District are able to rely on the District to provide answers and technical advice for local natural resource concerns. Funds raised by the assessment have allowed the District to offer technical assistance, financial assistance, and educational opportunities to private landowners at no charge.

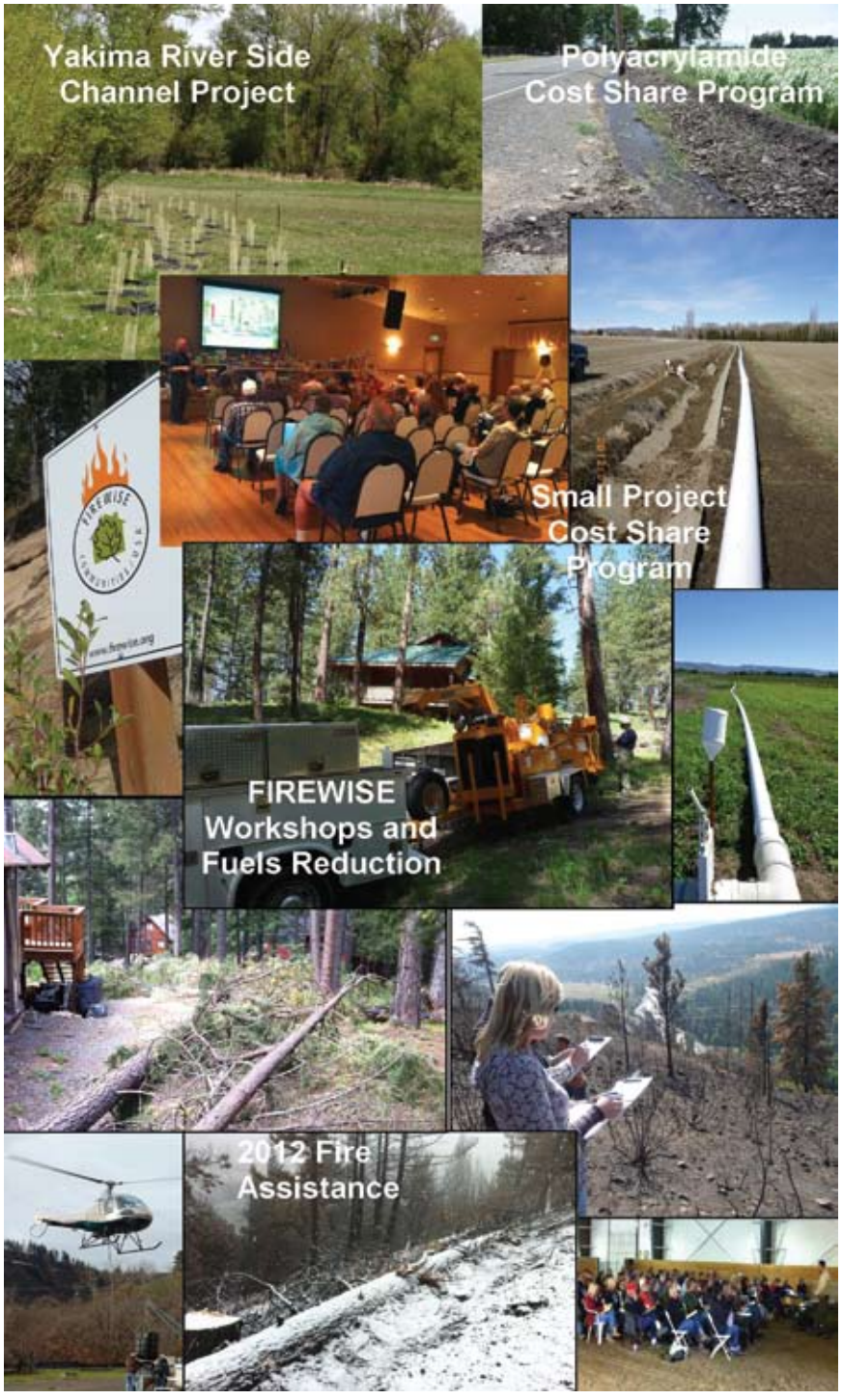
In addition, funds raised by this assessment have been instrumental in leveraging additional monies from various sources. District staff continually research and apply for funds to implement projects and programs developed through landowner contacts and partnering efforts.

Specifically, these additional funds make it possible for the District to offer financial assistance to private landowners working to implement resource related projects. Examples include funding for small project cost share applications, funding for spring development and improvement projects, fuels reduction projects, as well as PAM (erosion control) cost share. These are just a few of the many projects that the special assessment allows the District to offer.

To date, the Special Assessment has leveraged an average of $4.27 for every dollar of the Assessment funds collected. See the graphic below of leveraged funds, both those already expended and those secured for future projects and activities.

Kittitas County Conservation District
Special Assessment Funding Summary 2007 to 2012





Keep up with current activities! Follow our blog

http://kittitascd.blogspot.com/

or follow us on Facebook!

Kittitas County and Local Fire Departments Announce Program to Save Lives & Property During a Wildfire

Kittitas County and our local Fire Districts are launching a new program designed to teach individuals who live in high risk wildfire areas how to best prepare themselves and their properties against wildland fire threats. The **Ready, Set Go! Program** works collaboratively with existing defensible space education tools, such as Firewise, and provides the tools for our firefighters to educate individuals on preparedness, situational awareness when a fire starts and to go early for the safety of your family and responding firefighters.

The Ready, Set, Go! program is the result of a nation-wide discussion on how to protect homes and lives in what the fire service calls the Wildland-Urban-Interface – where development meets natural vegetation – and the Ember Zone, an area where the wind driven ember fall-out from a wildland fire can threaten property and lives.

Ready, Set, Go! is a three step process that allows firefighters to teach homeowners to create their own Action Plan of getting their property wildfire prepped and ready long before a fire is upon you; get set to depart from one's home; and to understand the role of evacuation in our area. This process significantly increases the safety of the homeowner and family and allows the firefighters to best do their job of extinguishing the fire, thus increasing the chance of saving homes and loves ones.

Follow the simple steps of the program below.

- **Ready** – Take personal responsibility and prepare long before the threat of a wildfire so your home is ready in case of a fire. Create defensible space by clearing brush away from your home. Use fire-resistant landscaping and harden your home with fire-safe construction measures. Assemble emergency supplies and belongings in a safe spot. Make sure all residents residing within the home are on the same page, plan escape routes.
- **Set** – Act immediately. Pack your vehicle with your emergency items. Stay abreast of the latest news, both reported by news crews and your local fire department for updated information on the fire.
- **Go** – Leave early! Following your Action Plan makes you prepared at this step of the process. Firefighters are now able to best maneuver the wildfire and ensuring you and your family's safety.

Don't let the first time you educate yourself on Wildland fire be in the aftermath, join with us and be a part of the Wildland fire solution today!

Contributed by Brenda Larsen, Kittitas County Fire Marshall

Manastash Reach Assessment

The Manastash Reach Assessment Project is nearing completion. This project was initiated last year in response to the flood events in 2011 and the need for a better understanding of the conditions in the creek and the possibilities to address flood hazards and fish habitat. Through winter and into this spring, a group of landowners have met to review the work of the consultants and the list of potential projects that address both flood and habitat concerns. Existing habitat and flood/erosion hazard conditions were assessed in the early phase of this project, and are documented in the *Watershed and Reach Scale Investigation of Existing Conditions* (Herrera and WSE 2012). Critical factors affecting both habitat quality and flood and erosion hazards were:

- Hydrology – lack of base flow in a portion of the system during the summer months
- Riparian and floodplain vegetation – lack of healthy vegetation in the streamside (riparian) zone

These related factors lead to many of the habitat deficiencies observed in lower Manastash Creek. In addition, lack of vegetation increases rates of bank erosion, channel movement, and sediment transport during extreme flood events.

The next step is completion of a "Corridor Plan" which consists of a focused strategy and a list of viable projects that can be cooperatively implemented to improve aquatic habitat and reduce the impacts of flooding and erosion along Manastash Creek. The consultants divided the creek into 21 reaches and proposed a variety of projects or actions in each of those reaches to address the most critical factors. Those projects and actions are currently being prioritized and will be presented one more time to the Landowner and Technical Committees before the resulting "Corridor Plan" is finalized. The project opportunities include everything from irrigation efficiencies improvements in the delivery and on-farm systems (to benefit instream flow in the dry reach), to instream habitat projects, to removal of fish passage barriers. Anyone interested in reviewing the proposed actions or the existing conditions report can access those documents at http://www.kccd.net/ManastashReach.htm.

Yakima Tributary Access & Habitat Program Update

For more than a decade, the Yakima Tributary Access & Habitat Program (YTAHP), has worked to install fish screens on irrigation diversions, remove fish passage barriers and improve habitat. The Kittitas County Conservation District and the North Yakima Conservation District have been the primary entities completing this work with landowners in our respective areas.

In Kittitas County, our work has been a cooperative effort with the Yakama Nation, the Kittitas Conservation Trust, and the Mid-Columbia Regional Fisheries Enhancement Group who are or have worked with private landowners on various streams throughout the County to install fish screens, remove passage barriers or improve habitat. All of these entities are part of the YTAHP Core Team, as is the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife where YTAHP funds a full-time staff person to assist the project sponsors with permits needed for on-the-ground projects. YTAHP funding is provided by the Bonneville Power Administration and managed by the South Central Washington Resource Conservation and Development Council. Together we are a collaborative group with significant technical expertise.

Crew assembles a new linear sprinkler irrigation system on a farm along Parke Creek. The sprinkler system is part of an effort to install fish screens on irrigation diversions and remove passage barriers. Similar projects on planned on Caribou Creek, Cooke Creek and other locations on Parke Creek in the coming years.

In the last 10 years, the YTAHP Core Team has completed projects that provided fish screens for a cumulative 190 cubic feet per second (CFS) in irrigation water diversions and removed fish passage barriers allowing access into more than 200 miles of streams in the upper Yakima River watersheds. In Kittitas County, the projects have been focused in the Teanaway River, Swauk Creek, Taneum Creek, Manastash Creek and the lower reaches of all the smaller streams from Dry Creek across the Kittitas Valley to Cherry Creek. The projects range in size from small fish screen installations on pump diversions to large projects separating the Ellensburg Water Company Canal from creeks that it intersects. Often the fish screens installations are paired with on-farm improvements including new sprinkler systems. In the next 5 years, dozens more projects are proposed. Most are similar with fish screen and on-farm efficiency improvements, as well as the either the removal of old structures or rebuilding them to incorporate a fish ladder.

YTAHP was formed in direct response to the listing of mid-Columbia Summer Steelhead as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act that occurred in the late 1990's. Local irrigators were very concerned about the possibility that they could be stopped from diverting their irrigation water because of the lack of fish screens meeting the criteria of the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife. So the initial focus of the program was to assist the irrigators to become compliant with the fish screen requirements. While that is still the focus, projects are now developed with a wider view of the stream and the agricultural operations and other streamside activities in order to put together more comprehensive projects that assist the landowner with more than just a fish screen.

YTAHP Core Team Members

- Kittitas County Conservation District
- North Yakima Conservation District
- Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
- South Central Washington Resource Conservation & Development Council
- Yakama Nation
- US Fish & Wildlife Service
- Mid-Columbia Regional Fisheries Enhancement Group
- Kittitas Conservation Trust
- Yakima Basin Joint Board
- Washington Water Trust

Prescribed Grazing to Limit Wildfire

Tip Hudson, WSU Extension regional rangeland & livestock specialist

The shrub-steppe, grassland, and dry pine forests of Eastern Washington are naturally prone to fire. Nearly ideal conditions exist every year for fire. There are some ecological benefits to fire. Fire will not go away, so we need to think about how to manage the risk rather than try to eliminate fire altogether. A multi-faceted approach to managing risk that incorporates prevention, fuels management, and strategic response is necessary. One of the common knee-jerk responses (by grazing advocates) to wildfire in range areas is that we need more grazing in order to limit the severity of range fires. The anti-grazing crowd is aghast at this ignorance and argues we need less grazing, especially on publicly-owned land. They're both right. The problem is more nuanced than just "grazing reduces fine fuels" and therefore grazing prevents or limits fire extent and intensity.

Humans can manage fire intensity by manipulating the kind and amount and continuity of vegetation. As a fine fuel management measure, grazing disturbs soil less than mechanical techniques for managing fuels, is less expensive, and is more environmentally friendly than herbicides.
However, areas with unhealthy plant communities, whether forests, shrub-steppe, or grassland, burn more frequently than the natural range of variability. Overstocked forests have stressed trees which are susceptible to disease and infestation, and eventually are characterized by large numbers of dead trees and ladder fuels, increasing the risk of a stand-replacing fire.

Similarly, rangeland grazed improperly for enough time will cross an ecological threshold into a plant community dominated by sagebrush, cheatgrass and other annual grasses, and invasive weeds. Cheatgrass is of special concern because it dramatically affects the fire cycle, increasing the amount and continuity of fine fuels. Invasive annual grasses form dense carpets of fine stems and leaves which are easily ignited and allow fire to spread quickly. This generates an ecological snowball, where the increased cheatgrass increases fire frequency, which promotes more cheatgrass, more fire . . . you see the pattern. Sagebrush contains volatile oils that burn intensely. Rangeland with high shrub density tends to burn hotter provided there is sufficient ground to carry from one shrub canopy to the next.

WHAT IS PROPER GRAZING?

One must distinguish between tame pastures and rangelands with >20" effective annual precipitation and those with less, which is most of the non-irrigated land in lower Kittitas County.

Irrigated pasture is well-adapted to more frequent grazing events, with multiple grazing periods within the year. Within each grazing period, it is important to manage for one bite per plant.

Rangeland and dry forest with very little precipitation during the active growing season tolerates less frequent defoliation because the opportunity for regrowth is so low. Multiple grazing events in a given year tend to decrease the health of the plant community.

Grazing animals should be managed such that residual, or "stubble" height, is never less than 3-5" inches on rangeland and forest where the understory is dominated by bunchgrasses. There are limited carbohydrate stores in the base of the stems that are necessary for initiating growth in the spring.

At least one year out of three, grasses should be allowed to go to seed, with no grazing between May 1 & July 1. At lighter stocking rates, this may be accomplished even with annual late spring grazing since per-plant defoliation is typically ~50-60%, i.e., just under half of the seed stalks remain ungrazed every year.

Ranchers on range or dry forest should plan their stocking rate based on consuming 25% of the available forage (this is called the harvest coefficient). This will result in utilization of less than 50% on bunchgrasses. Research has shown that utilization rates of <40% increase the health of rangelands/dry forests.

The sort of improper grazing most commonly applied West-wide is grazing for the majority of the short growing season (April-June). A century of solid rangeland science has shown that bunchgrasses must be allowed to go to seed at least every other year. That does not necessarily mean bunchgrasses can't tolerate being grazed every year, but they require enough of the growing season after the grazing event to recover leaf tissue, root mass, and produce seed in the year they are allowed to produce seed. The recovery period, rather than the grazing period, is the key to avoiding overgrazing. Grazing animals which linger too long on a plant community and return too soon after the previous defoliation can cause a lot of problems.

Proper grazing can be a powerful tool to control those same invasive plants, often in combination with other methods as part of an integrated pest management approach. Proper grazing can improve the health of wildland ecosystems by maintaining grass vigor, facilitating nutrient cycling, increasing litter cover, and decreasing bare soil. The key is understanding how the timing, frequency, and intensity of grazing affects a plant community and associated ecosystem components.

There is good research on using grazing to manage fuel loads. But healthy, grazed rangelands can still burn. What we have to avoid at the outset of this discussion is the idea that heavy grazing, every year, everywhere, is the solution to fire on rangelands and dry forests. Targeted grazing executed properly is beneficial; as an ecological influence, it can have a net positive effect. Improper grazing is a negative effect and has the potential to create worse conditions that are more prone to frequent fire *(continued on page 7)*.

Program Update:

With the mission and motto of "Helping People Help the Land," the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides products and services that enable individuals to be good stewards of Kittitas County and the nation's soil, water and related natural resources on non-federal lands.

With the help of local NRCS staff, rural and forest landowners are better able to conserve, maintain, or improve their natural resources. As a result of NRCS technical and financial assistance, land managers and communities take a comprehensive approach to the use and protection of natural resources in rural, suburban, urban, and developing areas. The NRCS voluntary natural resources conservation programs in Washington state help people reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, manage forests, increase wildlife habitat and reduce damages caused by floods and other natural disasters.

The Environmental Quality and Incentives Program (EQIP) is the most popular program in Kittitas County and over 100 applications were submitted in 2012. Through EQIP, farmers may receive financial and technical assistance with structural and management conservation practices on agricultural, range, and forest land. NRCS administers EQIP based on locally identified natural resource needs consistent with national EQIP priorities. Local Work Groups (LWG) convened by the conservation districts provides advice to NRCS about priorities within their area. With this advice, NRCS evaluates applications for funding EQIP contracts consistent with these local, state and national priorities.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts have been obligated for 2013. Overall, the EQIP budget for the Big Bend Team (Kittitas, Grant, and Adams Counties) was less than the 2012 budget; however Kittitas County was successful at requesting an additional $92,000 that will fund five more projects than previously allocated.

The local Environmental Quality Incentives Program awarded the following contract values per land use in 2013: cropland - $225,400 on more than 300 acres; rangeland - $55,200 on more than 6,000 acres; forest - $24,700 on more than 30 acres treating hazard fuels reduction and $18,200 across 230 acres for wildlife habitat enhancement on lands affected by the Taylor Bridge Wildfire; and irrigated pasture- $30,000 on 20 acres. In addition, three contracts were obligated through the EQIP special initiative programs (energy and high tunnel) in Kittitas County. *Contributed by Erin Kreutz, NRCS.*

(cont.) So what do we know from research about grazing for fire control? Most obviously, livestock eat fuel. Forage plants in the semi-arid Intermountain West, if eaten after grasses develop seedheads, often don't grow back until spring, leaving fewer pounds of fine fuel on the ground through the hot season. Grazing tends to be patchy, creating a mosaic of fuel loads and reducing the continuity of fine fuels. Stocking rate drives the density of grazed patches unless other tools are used to direct the grazing pattern, such as herding or temporary fencing.

Livestock are frequently used to create firebreaks, strips of land where vegetation has been removed or reduced uniformly. Firebreaks created by grazing animals confined by temporary fence are far more environmentally stable than those created by a dozer and will naturally revegetate without expensive rehabilitation treatments. However, they typically need to be wider since the vegetation cannot be taken down to bare soil. Sheep and goats are especially effective for firebreak maintenance because they are more easily herded, potentially graze shorter, and more readily consume brush as well as grass.

Greenstripping involves either controlled grazing of swaths of land to eliminate standing dead grass stems and weed carcasses or planting late-maturing plants that remain green into the fire season and managing these using livestock.

Grazing can be used effectively to control cheatgrass. Since they are dependent on seed production for reproduction, grazing in early spring dramatically reduces this fuel load while allowing perennial plants the majority of the growing season to expand root systems and grow with reduced competition from annual grass.

To summarize, improper grazing promotes plant communities that are more flammable and less productive and diverse than native or naturalized perennial species assemblages. Proper grazing maintains the vigor of those desirable plant communities. Targeted grazing can be used strategically to manage fuel loads, create fire breaks, and reduce the potential for catastrophic fire in rangelands particularly. We cannot, however, argue simplistically that grazing, without caveats, prevents wildfire. For more information and specific recommendations for targeted grazing for various landscape goals, visit http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/rx-grazing/.

100th Firewise Community in Washington State is in Cle Elum

Hidden Valley Vistas/Meadows became the recipient of the 100th Firewise Communities/USA® designation in Washington State.

After being evacuated and seeing the devastation of the Taylor Bridge Fire, landowner Carolyn Berglund contacted KCCD to find out what they could do as a community to better prepare for wildfire. KCCD provided Firewise assessments of homes in the community and came to a homeowner's meeting to discuss defensible space and Firewise. Firewise teaches people how to adapt to living with the threat of wildfire. Using the voluntary Firewise process, everyone in the community can work on defensible space around their homes, focusing on measures to take within the first 30 feet.

The Commissioner of Public Lands, Peter Goldmark presented the award to Berglund who accepted it on behalf of the community. Hidden Valley Vistas/Meadows is busy preparing for the roving chipper that KCCD offers to Firewise Communities. Berglund is proud of how the community was able to get together to address the issue of making their homes safer. "It gives us something to do that we can feel like we're being a good citizen in the community and a good neighbor to others around here".

From left to right: Anna Lael, KCCD District Manager, Russ Hobbs, Chief Fire District #7, Peter Goldmark, Commission of Public Lands, Carolyn Kelly, SCD District Manager, John Berglund, Homeowner, Carolyn Berglund, Homeowner, Jenny Hinderman, Firewise Program Coordinator, SCD, Suzanne Wade, Firewise Coordinator KCCD, Gary Marshall, National Firewise Advisor.

Inside:

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