Gilliam County Soil & Water Conservation District

Quarterly Newsletter

Fall 2026 • Covering August – November



Rebuilding After the 2026 Wildfires

More than 116,000 acres burned in Gilliam County this summer. Here's how neighbors are recovering.

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Rebuilding After the 2026 Wildfires

Fire by the numbers, hay/feed, grass seed, and virtual fencing.



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Beavers Return to Thirtymile Creek

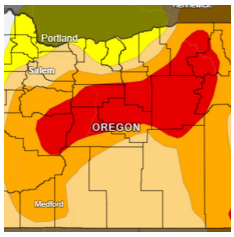
An 82-mile survey and a 25-year plan to help beavers settle and spread.



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Restoring Lower Thirtymile Creek

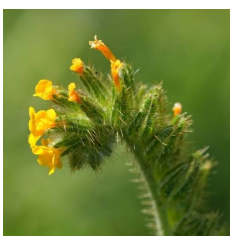
Designs and low-tech restoration for ten miles of key steelhead water.



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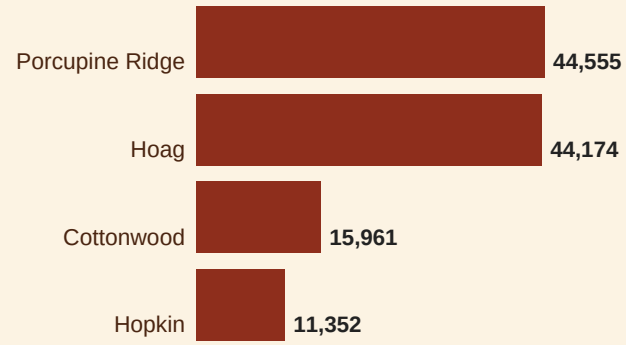
Rebuilding After the 2026 Wildfires

Gilliam County comes together after a tough fire season

This July, wildfires burned more than **116,000 acres** of Gilliam County. Most of it was the rangeland, pasture, and CRP that local families depend on, and our neighbors have been working hard ever since to get that ground back on its feet.

116,041 ACRES BURNED	**108** LANDOWNERS
372 TAX PARCELS	**4** MAJOR FIRES

Burned acres by fire



Based on county tax lots and official NIFC fire perimeters as of July 26, 2026.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

While the fires were still burning, the District sat down with The Ford Family Foundation, NRCS, FSA, OSU Extension, and other partners to line up help for producers. Hay, feed, fencing, water, grazing, and reseeding were at the top of the list.

Partners were also connected with the **Oregon Disaster Funders Network**, a group of more than 60 charitable funders that can respond to documented needs, whether for a single ranch or a whole community. Clear records and strong local teamwork help those requests move faster.



Bulldozer lines cut across burned ground in the Hoag Fire near Rock Creek. Photo by K'Lynn Lane.

THE FIRST WEEK

July 20 – District, Watershed Council, FSA, NRCS, OSU Extension, and The Ford Family Foundation meet to coordinate the response.

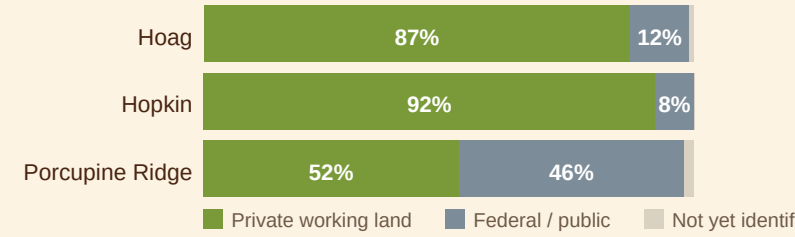
July 21 – The Gilliam SWCD printed large maps with tax lots, started planning landowner calls, looked into grass seed for seeding dozer fire lines this fall, and gathered virtual fence quotes for ranchers hit hardest by the fire.

July 22 – The District completes a parcel-level impact summary for the county, FSA, NRCS, and funders.

Whose Land Burned?

The Hoag and Hopkin fires burned almost entirely on private working lands. Porcupine Ridge split nearly evenly between private ground and federal land, so its recovery takes close coordination between neighbors and public land managers.

Share of burned acres by ownership, Hoag, Hopkin, and Porcupine Ridge fires



Mapping the Damage

Good recovery starts with good information. Staff mapped every burned parcel, documented dozer lines and visible damage, and called landowners along the fire lines to ask about fence losses, damaged water systems, pasture, and access. That inventory helps the District put help where it is needed most and gives funders the records they require.



Flames race across a ridge above sagebrush rangeland this July.

Rebuilding After the 2026 Wildfires Continued...

Hay for Hungry Herds

When the fires took out pasture and stored feed, hay became the most urgent need. Donated hay was coordinated through Oregon Cattle Women and its network, working with OSU Extension, the District, and local producers. Partners also looked at protein tubs and other supplemental feed for operations that needed more than hay alone.

Moving that much hay takes planning. Before loads went out, partners worked through questions like:

- How many head of cows are in need of feed right now?
- What hay type and bale size does the operation need?
- Does the ranch have equipment to unload big bales?
- Where can hay be staged near Arlington and other hard-hit areas?

Answering those questions up front kept hay from sitting in the wrong place and got it to the families who needed it most.





Hay loaded and on the move to help feed livestock after the fires.



Stacking donated hay for delivery to producers.

Getting Grass Seed on the Ground

Burned rangeland and freshly bladed dozer lines are wide open to erosion and to invasive weeds like cheatgrass, rush skeletonweed, and tarweed. Getting perennial grass back on that ground is one of the best defenses.

The trouble is timing. Traditional programs often deliver funding too late to buy seed for the fall and winter planting window. So the District chose to move fast and put dollars straight into seed, buying locally where it could.

HOW THE SEED PLAN CAME TOGETHER

1. Measure the need. Staff used satellite imagery to map dozer lines across the county, **144 miles** in all, and estimated the acres needing treatment and the areas most at risk for weeds.

2. Price it out. Seed prices and recommended application rates were used to estimate the cost per mile of dozer line.

3. Talk with landowners. Staff talked with landowners about where to put out seed so it would be most useful.

4. Give it out. Seed is allocated to affected private landowners in 50-pound bags, with every participating landowner receiving at least one bag. Federal land is handled by public land managers.

Tips for Seeding Burned Ground

- Seed dozer lines and bare, disturbed spots first. They are the most likely to erode and grow weeds.
- Plant before winter so snow and rain can work the seed into the soil.
- Give seeded ground rest from grazing so young plants can take hold. Virtual fencing can help with that (see next page).
- Walk your seeded areas next spring and call us if weeds show up.



A semi load of hay arrives for fire-affected ranches.

Rebuilding After the 2026 Wildfires Continued...

Virtual Fencing: A Fence Where There Isn't One

Miles of fence burned this summer, and rebuilding it takes time and money. In the meantime, cattle still need to be kept off highways, away from neighbors, and off freshly seeded ground. That is where the District's virtual fencing program comes in.

Instead of posts and wire, virtual fencing uses GPS collars on livestock and boundaries drawn on a map. Base stations and towers keep the collars connected, and the District has several base stations, including mobile units that can be moved where they're needed.

HOW IT WORKS

Draw the line. Pasture boundaries are set on a computer or phone, with no posts to set.

Collar the herd. Each animal wears a GPS collar that knows where the boundary is.

Cattle learn fast. When an animal nears the line, the collar gives a sound cue, followed by a mild pulse if it keeps going. Most cattle learn to turn at the sound.

Move pastures with a click. Boundaries can be shifted as grass recovers, without building new fence.

Why It Helps After a Fire

- Holds cattle while permanent fences are rebuilt.
- Keeps livestock off burned and newly seeded ground so it can recover.
- Lets producers rotate grazing on the pasture that's left.



Unloading hay at a ranch after the fires.

Getting Set Up

The District's virtual fencing program is open to smaller operations too. Producers join as part of the larger District program, so there's no separate minimum herd size. Equipment is loaned through a simple one-year use agreement and stays District property. After producers receive their equipment and set it in the sun to charge, District staff and the virtual fence team walk them through getting started.

Virtual fencing isn't the right fit everywhere. It depends on the livestock, cell and radio coverage, a place to train animals, and what equipment is available, so give us a call to talk it through.

Other Help for Fences & Grazing

- **FSA** is the first call for disaster-related fencing and emergency conservation needs.
- **Emergency grazing on eligible CRP** is available in qualifying wildfire and drought situations with FSA approval.
- **NRCS** can help with fencing, reseeding, and livestock water through its regular programs. This is longer-term help, not emergency funding.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

Snap photos of damage before you repair it.

Call FSA about grazing, fencing, and disaster programs: **541-901-8040**.

Let us know what you need, whether hay, seed, fencing, or water: **541-384-2672**.

Keep an eye out next spring for weeds on burned ground and dozer lines.

All assistance depends on program eligibility and available funding.

Looking Ahead

Recovery will take years. Coming seasons will focus on fence and water repair, pasture recovery, weed control, and healing burned slopes and streams. Thank you to every partner, neighbor, and landowner who pitched in this summer. Recovery takes all of us!

Beavers Return to Thirtymile Creek

2025 OCRF Thirtymile Watershed Beaver Recovery and Resiliency Program

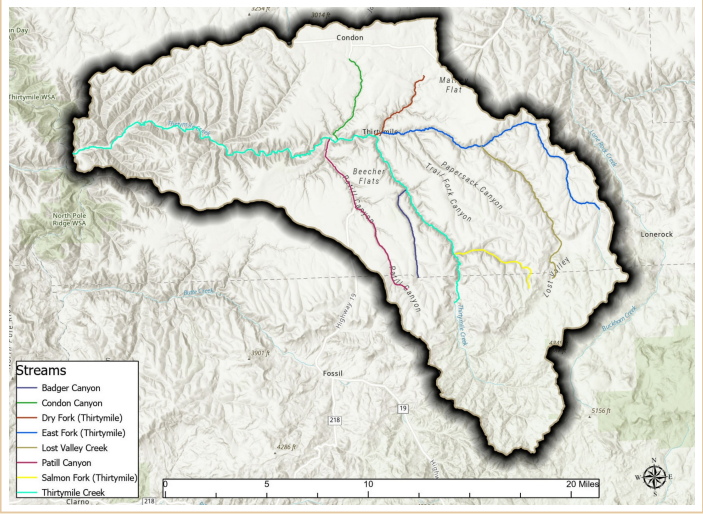
After two decades of restoration work by local landowners and partners, beavers are back and raising families in parts of Thirtymile Creek. A project funded by the **Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF)** set out to learn where they are living, what is holding them back, and how to help them spread.

82 STREAM MILES SURVEYED	**30** LANDOWNERS INVOLVED
329 STREAM REACHES SCORED	**25** YEAR RESTORATION ROADMAP

A Long History

Beavers have shaped the John Day country for millions of years. Fossils found near Dayville date back roughly 7 million years. Their dams helped build the wet meadows, floodplain soils, and streamside plants of this landscape.

Over the past 200 years, trapping and changing land use took beavers out of most of the 270-square-mile Thirtymile basin. Without them, streams cut down, floodplains dried out, and the creek became less able to hold water through drought.



The Thirtymile Creek watershed and the main streams surveyed.



A survey crew records beaver sign along Thirtymile Creek in November 2025.



A beaver dam at one of Thirtymile Creek's settlement sites.

Why Beavers?

Thirtymile Creek is a key spawning stream for wild summer steelhead in the lower John Day River. Low summer flows and warm water are the biggest problems for young fish. Beaver dams help by holding water on the land, keeping pools full, and creating cool, wet refuges during drought and fire.

Where Beavers Are Living Now

In November 2025, crews with Western Beavers Cooperative walked about 82 miles of Thirtymile Creek and seven tributaries, with help from 30 private landowners. They found beavers settled at **9 locations** along about 3.5 miles of the main creek.

- Trail cameras at eight sites caught adults, first-year kits, and second-year young, proof that families are raising babies.
- Most families moved in within the last one to three years. The site where Patill Canyon meets Thirtymile is the oldest and may be sending young out to start new homes.
- Beavers are exploring widely. About a third of surveyed reaches showed some sign of use, but only 14 had current activity.
- Spring high water can top dams and dens, and some stretches dry up in summer, so these young families are still fragile.



Thirtymile Creek, where beavers are beginning to return.

Beavers Return to Thirtymile Creek Continued...

The Missing Ingredient: Food

Thirtymile has plenty of room for beavers. What it lacks is enough willow, cottonwood, and other woody plants for families to eat and build with year after year.

82 MILES SURVEYED

64 MILES WITH ROOM FOR BEAVERS

52 MILES WITH WATER, TOO

3.5 MILES WITH ENOUGH FOOD

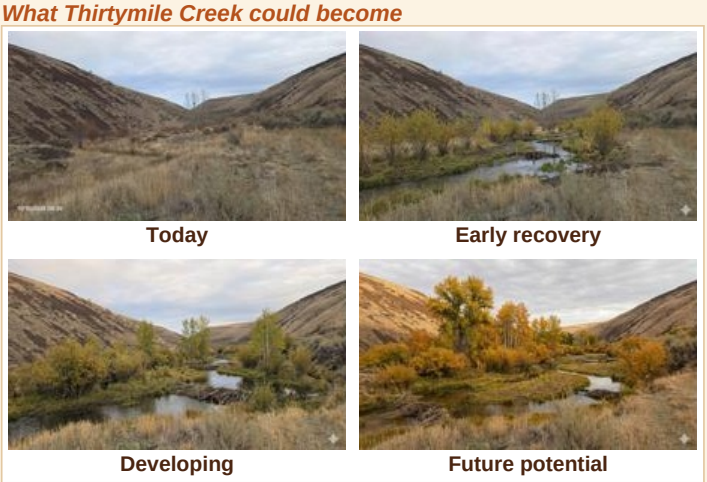
That 3.5 miles, about **4% of the surveyed creek**, lines up exactly with where beavers have settled. The biggest reasons woody plants struggle are:

- Heavy browsing on young shoots in parts of the creek.
- Streams cut off from their floodplains, leaving banks too dry.
- Competition from reed canarygrass, alder, and hawthorn.

Past Work Is Paying Off

Beavers have settled where landowners and the District have already invested in riparian fencing, CREP plantings, instream structures, and better grazing, and where landowners are willing to share the creek.

What Thirtymile Creek could become



Project illustrations of how one site could change as willows return and beavers settle in. These are visualizations, not photos of actual results.

A 25-Year Roadmap

The new **Beaver Strongholds Action Plan** lays out where and when to plant, protect, and restore. The plan builds from the core: protect the families already here first, then improve nearby habitat so their young can move out and settle.

	Years 1–5	Years 6–15	Years 16–25	Total
Creek stretches	13	13	9	**35**
Stream miles	21.75	17.75	10.75	**50.25**
Woody plantings	135,761	149,805	67,100	**352,666**

Planting numbers are planning targets, not completed work.

The first five years (2027–2031) pair new willow and cottonwood plantings with work already planned, like riparian fencing, instream structures, and weed removal.

TRACKING PROGRESS

An **interactive web map** shows beaver activity, habitat conditions, and restoration priorities across the watershed.

A **long-term monitoring plan** will check beaver families and habitat every other year, measured against the November 2025 survey.

Generational Work

Recovery here will unfold over decades, across generations of beavers and the people who care for this creek. The goal isn't to bring beavers in. It is to get the land ready so the beavers already returning can stay, raise families, and spread on their own.



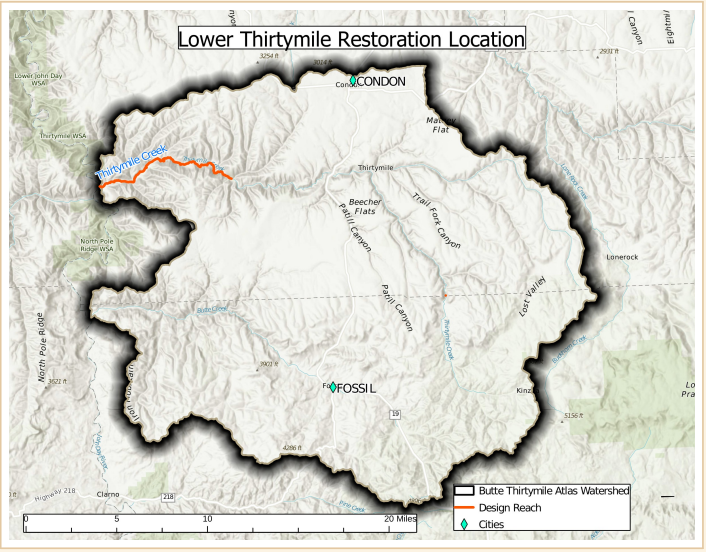
Sixth graders from Condon Elementary learn about beavers, forage, and beaver dam analogs.

Restoring Lower Thirtymile Creek

Lower Thirtymile Restoration Design and Implementation, Phase 1

The lowest ten miles of Thirtymile Creek, on public land managed by the BLM, are some of the most important steelhead water in the lower John Day. A multi-year partnership is now working to bring this stretch of creek back to life.

10 MILES OF CREEK IN THE DESIGN REACH	**3,500** FEET OF LOW-TECH RESTORATION PLANNED
150 ACRES OF WEED TREATMENT	**100** ACRES OF RANGE SEEDING

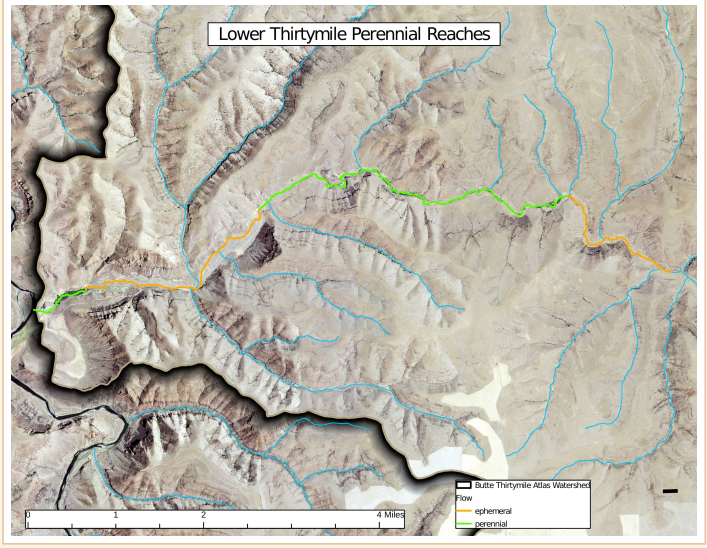


The design reach (orange) runs from the mouth of Thirtymile Creek about ten miles upstream.

The Problem

Over the last century, much of lower Thirtymile was straightened and pushed against the valley walls. The creek cut down into its bed, lost its pools and side channels, and now often runs low or dries up in summer, just when young steelhead need cool water most. At river mile 3.5, a long berm cuts the creek off from its floodplain.

During the 2021 and 2022 droughts, stretches of creek dried up for the first time in generations. The places that stayed wet were the ones holding water behind beaver dams and in deep pools.



Green shows stretches that flow year-round; orange shows stretches that dry up seasonally.

The Plan

Phase 1 of the **Lower Thirtymile Restoration Design and Implementation** project, funded with a $246,085 OWEB grant through the BLM's Good Neighbor Authority program, includes:

- **Restoration designs** for the whole reach, developed with the BLM, plus engineered designs for removing the berm at river mile 3.5.
- **Beaver dam analogs and post-assisted log structures** in the year-round stretches to slow water, build pools, and reconnect the floodplain.
- **Weed treatment and range seeding** on the surrounding uplands.

THE RESTORATION TOOLBOX

Beaver dam analogs: posts and woven branches that mimic a beaver dam.

Post-assisted log structures: wood pinned partway across the channel to create pools and shift flow.

Riparian planting: cottonwood and other plants, protected from browsing.

Berm removal: leveling old berms so the creek can spread onto its floodplain.

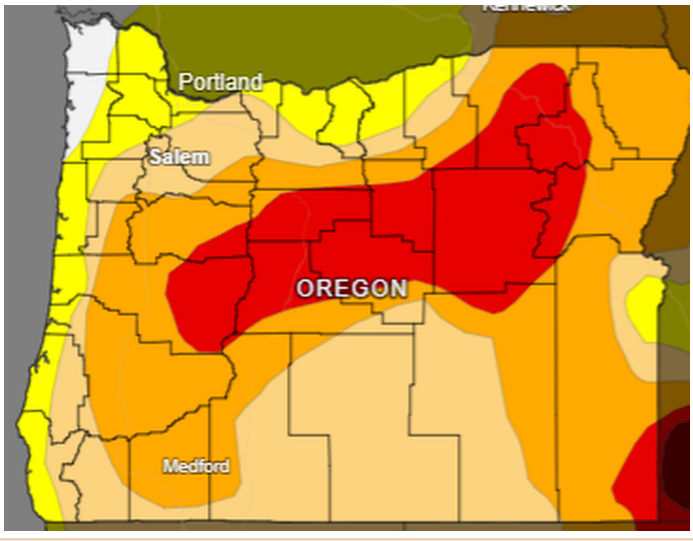
Partners include the Gilliam SWCD, Gilliam-East John Day Watershed Council, BLM, OWEB, ODFW, and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. The BLM will track results at eight monitoring sites.

Drought & Snowpack Report

Drought data valid Oct. 27, 2026 • SNOTEL data as of Oct. 29, 2026

U.S. Drought Monitor

Nearly nine-tenths of Oregon is in drought, about the same as in late July when the fires were burning. At the start of 2026, only about one-sixth of the state was.



Oregon drought map, data valid October 27, 2026 (NDMC, NOAA, USDA).

Drought Category	% of OR
D0 – Abnormally Dry	10.2%
D1 – Moderate Drought	30.7%
D2 – Severe Drought	37.5%
D3 – Extreme Drought	20.1%
D4 – Exceptional Drought	0.0%
Total in Drought (D1–D4)	**88.3%**

GILLIAM COUNTY SNAPSHOT

Drought emergency in effect. Governor Kotek declared a drought emergency for Gilliam County in June 2026.

Outlook: The National Weather Service in Pendleton expects drought to persist or develop across most of northeast Oregon through December 2026.



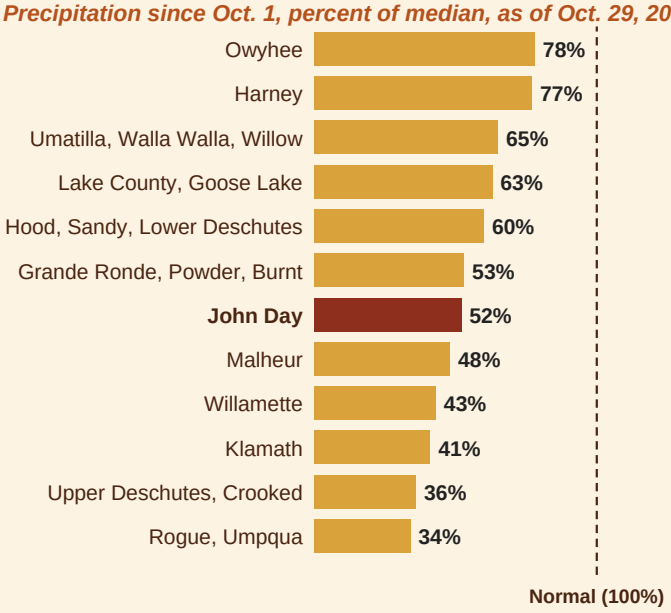
Smoke over dry wheat fields this summer. Drought and fire went hand in hand.

Snowpack

Snow in the Blue Mountains this winter will feed the John Day River and its tributaries next spring and summer. It is tracked at automated **SNOTEL** stations, which measure **snow water equivalent**: how many inches of water the snowpack would make if it all melted at once.

Little snow is normal for late October, so the better early sign is precipitation since October 1. It is running behind across most of Oregon, and the John Day Basin is at about half of normal.

Precipitation since Oct. 1, percent of median, as of Oct. 29, 2026



LOOKING BACK AT LAST WINTER

By March 1, 2026, Oregon's snowpack was the **second lowest in the 46-year SNOTEL record**, and the John Day Basin sat at about **one-third of normal**. That thin snowpack helped set the stage for this year's drought and fire season.

Why It Matters Here

- Snowmelt keeps creeks flowing for fish, livestock, and irrigation into summer.
- A good snowpack helps burned ground green up and new seedings take hold.

For more information visit drought.gov, droughtmonitor.unl.edu, and the NRCS SNOTEL site at wcc.sc.egov.usda.gov

FSA & NRCS Updates & Deadlines

USDA Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service

Oregon Farm Service Agency (FSA)

USDA – Farm Service Agency, Gilliam County

DEADLINES

Fall Acreage Reporting	**Dec. 15, 2026**
Livestock Forage Program (LFP)	**Mar. 1, 2027**
Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP)	**Mar. 1, 2027**
Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP)	**Mar. 1, 2027**
Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)	
Fruits and Nuts	**Nov. 20, 2026**
Forage and Grazing Crops	**Nov. 30, 2026**
Vegetables	**Mar. 15, 2027**

WOLF NON-LETHAL PREVENTION GRANT NOW AVAILABLE

The **Gilliam County Wolf Depredation Advisory Committee** is accepting claim forms for cost reimbursement of non-lethal measures used to deter or prevent wolf depredation on private land. There has not yet been a documented wolf depredation in Gilliam County; this grant funds a proactive approach.

Claim forms: gilliamcountyor.gov/newslist.php. Please read the forms carefully.

Deadline: claim forms must be submitted by **November 15, 2026**. Grants will be awarded by the Committee in mid-December.

Submit to: anja.mundy@gilliamcountyor.gov, or mail to Gilliam County Wolf Depredation Advisory Committee, PO Box 427, Condon OR 97823.

*Want a copy of the Western Landowners Alliance **Oregon Producers Guide to Predator Attacks on Livestock**? Pick one up at the County Court office or email anja.mundy@gilliamcountyor.gov.*

SIGNUPS

Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)	**Nov. 2, 2026 – Jan. 4, 2027**
Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP)	**Nov. 30, 2026 – May 28, 2027**
2026 ARC/PLC Election and Enrollment	**Sept. 16 – Dec. 11, 2026**
Producers without an approved contract by December 11, 2026 will not be eligible for a 2026 ARC/PLC payment.	
2027 ARC/PLC Election and Enrollment	**Nov. 2, 2026 – Mar. 15, 2027**

OTHER ITEMS

Emergency grazing on CRP is available until **March 1, 2027** for producers affected by wildfires and drought. Call the office to get started on a grazing plan *before* turning out livestock.

County Committee LAA #3 ballots will be mailed **November 16, 2026**. The last day to turn in ballots is **December 7, 2026**.

NRCS DEADLINE

NRCS
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

The application deadline for **all NRCS programs** is **November 30, 2026**.

FSA
FARM SERVICE AGENCY

For more information on FSA programs, contact the Gilliam County FSA office at 541-901-8040.

Weed Watch: Fiddleneck

Amsinckia intermedia

Keep an eye out for fiddleneck in pastures, hayfields, and disturbed ground this spring. It is easy to spot once you know the curled flower head, and it matters because it can poison livestock when it ends up in hay.

PLANT FACTS

Annual that comes back from seed each year.

Hairy stems 1 to 2½ feet tall.

Oval-shaped (ovate) leaves covered in bristly hairs, up to about 2 inches long.

Small yellow flowers grouped along one side of the stem, which curls into a tight coil at the tip, like the neck of a fiddle.

Plant Identification

Fiddleneck is easiest to recognize by its flower head. The tip of each stem rolls up into a coil, and as the plant blooms, the coil slowly unrolls, with small yellow to orange flowers lined up along one side. Run a hand along the stem and you'll feel the stiff, bristly hairs that cover the whole plant.

It often shows up in early spring in grain fields, pastures, roadsides, and ground that has been disturbed, which makes this year's burned areas and dozer lines worth watching.

A RISK TO LIVESTOCK

Fiddleneck can be **poisonous to livestock**, especially when it is baled into hay. Animals tend to avoid the bristly live plant, but in hay they can't sort it out. If you see fiddleneck in a field you plan to cut, deal with it before haying.

DID YOU KNOW?

The name **fiddleneck** comes from the coiled flower head, which looks like the scroll at the end of a violin's neck.



Fiddleneck in bloom, with bristly stems and leaves.





Flowers grow along one side of a stem that curls at the tip, like a fiddle's neck.

TAKE ACTION

Chemical control: 2,4-D works best, sprayed while plants are young and before they flower. Always read and follow the label.

Keep it out of hay: check hayfields before cutting and don't feed hay you know is contaminated.

Watch disturbed ground: check burned areas and dozer lines next spring and treat early, before plants go to seed.

Questions about weeds on your property? Contact the Gilliam SWCD office at 541-384-2672.

Meet the Watershed Coordinator

Kallyn Wilkins, Gilliam-East John Day Watershed Council



Kallyn Wilkins, GEJDWC Watershed Coordinator

This July, the Gilliam-East John Day Watershed Council welcomed **Kallyn Wilkins** as its new Watershed Coordinator. Kallyn works hand in hand with the Gilliam SWCD to help landowners, agencies, and partners plan and carry out projects that keep our creeks, rangelands, and working lands healthy.

What Does the Watershed Council Do?

The council covers all of Gilliam County, plus the upper reaches of Rock Creek and Thirtymile Creek that stretch into parts of Wheeler and Morrow Counties. Much of its work is funded through Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) small grants of up to $20,000, which help landowners get practical, on-the-ground projects done.

A Busy First Season

Kallyn hit the ground running. Within weeks of starting, she was helping with the wildfire response: reaching out to producers, documenting needs, and tracking down funding for grass seed and recovery work.

She is also growing the council's monitoring and mapping work. That includes training in QGIS and the Riverscapes QRiS tool to track how restoration projects change a stream over time, gathering data on Rock Creek's side canyons, and building a computer model of a Thirtymile Creek reach to see how beaver dam analogs slow water down and spread it out.

SAY HELLO

Have a project idea or a question about your creek or land? Kallyn would love to hear from you.

Email: watershedcouncil@gilliamswcd.gov

Phone: 541-384-2672



A beaver dam on Thirtymile Creek, one of the watersheds the council works in.

Gilliam Soil and Water Conservation District
Gilliam-East John Day Watershed Council
234 S Main
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Condon OR 97823

GILLIAM-EAST JOHN DAY WATERSHED COUNCIL

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Phone: 541.384.2672 ext. 111

GILLIAM SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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GEJDWC STAFF

Kallyn Wilkins, Watershed Coordinator
watershedcouncil@gilliamswcd.gov

2025 Council Representatives

Don Farrar, Chair, Hay Creek/Scott Canyon
Susie Anderson, Supervisor, Thirtymile Creek
Tom Campbell, Lonerock Creek
Ron Wilson, Rock Creek
J. W. Johnson, Ferry Canyon
Morris Weatherford, At Large
Herschel Lantis, At Large

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2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

At Large ~ Jordan Maley, Chair
Zone 3 ~ John Anderson, Vice-Chair
Zone 2 ~ Rich Harper, Sec/Treas.
Zone 1 ~ Chet Wilkins, Director
At Large ~ Doug Potter, Director

Meetings held on the third Monday of each month.

THE PURPOSE OF THE GILLIAM-EAST JOHN DAY WATERSHED COUNCIL IS TO ADDRESS WATERSHED MANAGEMENT ISSUES WITHIN THE DRAINAGE AND TO PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK FOR COORDINATION AND COOPERATION IN IMPLEMENTING WATERSHED ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMS.

Public Notice ORS 192—Meetings held the second Tuesday of the month.

TO PROMOTE THE WISE USE AND CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES WITHIN GILLIAM COUNTY

OWEB
Providing grants and services to citizen groups working to restore healthy watersheds in Oregon

Oregon Department of Agriculture