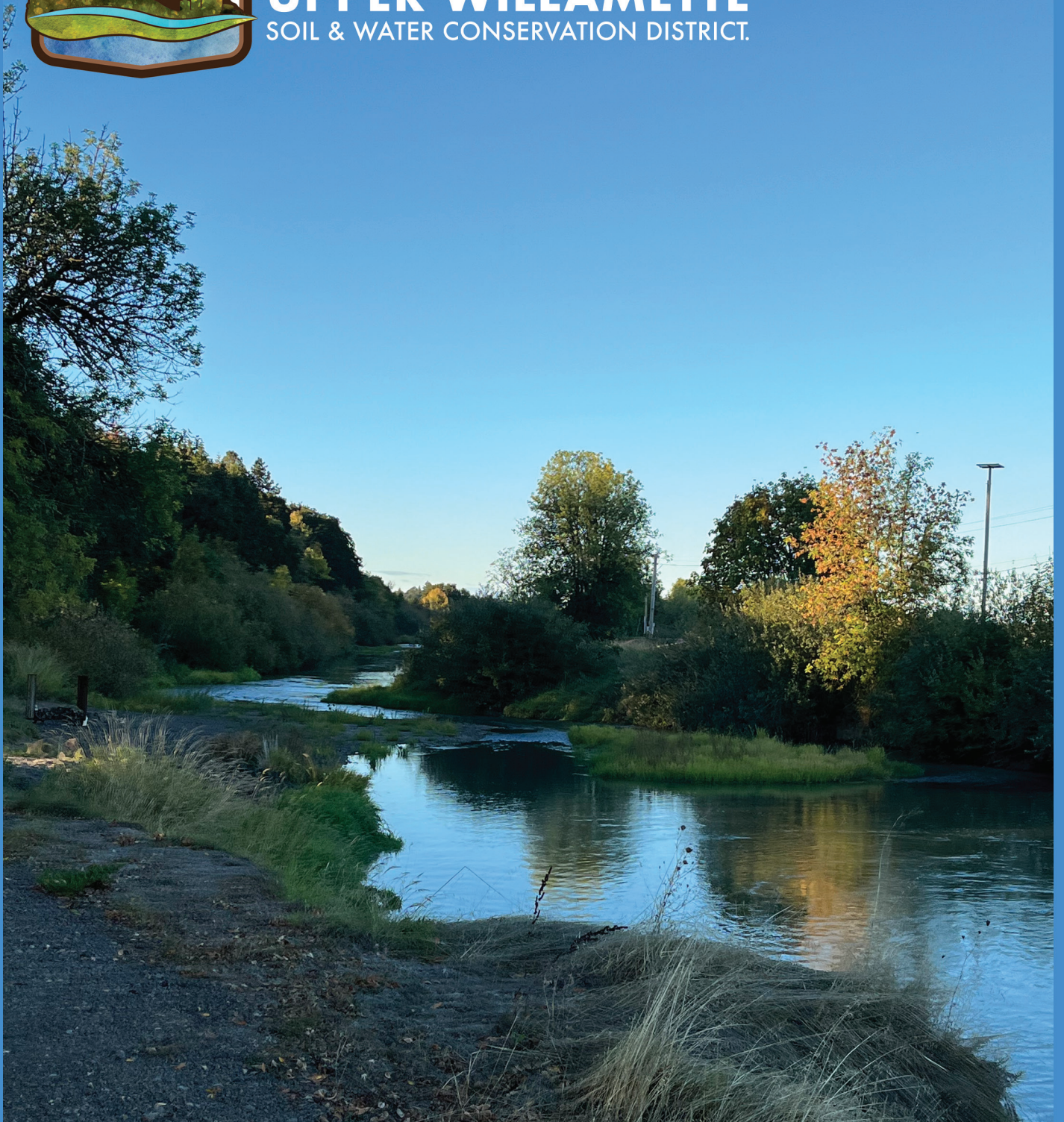




**UPPER WILLAMETTE**  
SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT.



*Annual Report*  
2024 - 2025



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**UPPER WILLAMETTE**  
SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## The View from the Board Chair:

**It is an honor and pleasure** for me as the new Board Chair to report to our constituents what is happening with their soil and water conservation district. This annual report provides a snapshot of some of the accomplishments in the 2024-2025 Year for the Upper Willamette SWCD as we pursue our mission toward healthy soils, clean water, natural resource conservation, local food security, fire resiliency, and neighborhood sustainability.

After living through a pandemic, the Holiday Farm Fire, supply chain shortages, bird flu impacts and now the loss of federal partners and funding, it has become clear that we are doing the right thing by investing the money you provide us back into our region and communities so we can collectively thrive no matter what life throws at us. You will see examples of this throughout this report. Examples about how the District leverages our resources with outside funding and work closely with our local partners so we can accomplish more together and have a larger community impact.



Fiscal Year 2025 had a couple of important milestones for the UWSWCD. This represents the first year that the District was fully staffed and implementing our Grant and conservation technical assistance programs at full capacity. It was also a year of leadership change for the UWSWCD with a new Board Chair and District Manager, and four newly elected Board members. I am proud to serve and work with the highly talented staff at the UWSWCD and our thoughtful community-minded Board.

I encourage readers to go beyond this report and visit our website at <https://uwsacd.org> to see how our work supports sustainable agriculture and local food production, recovering from wildfire while preparing for a future with fire on the landscape, reconnecting rivers with their floodplains, and outdoor education so our children can see firsthand the natural wonders of the place we call home. I hope that as you learn more about your local soil and water conservation district you will want to become more involved through volunteering, serving on our Board, participating in our Board and Committee meetings, and/or collaborating with us to increase our collective impact for the betterment of our region. Thank you for your support and I am honored to represent you as Board Chair.

Karl Morgenstern  
Director at Large, Board Chair

*Clean water, healthy soil,*

## *From the District Manager*

### **Dear Community Members and Partners,**

As we reflect on the past year, it's evident that change and transition have shaped our journey in remarkable ways! From the very beginning, we embraced a sense of momentum, exploring exciting new program ideas, launching innovative grant initiatives, and expanding our plans for collaboration with community partners.

While we navigated the year, we faced obstacles and had to adjust plans. Each challenge became a learning experience, strengthening our resilience in a changing political landscape. The Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District (UWSWCD) continues to thrive, thanks to our dedicated staff and board members.

Building strong, meaningful relationships is central to our role as stewards of these beautiful Kalapuyan Illahe lands. Robin Wall-Kimmerer, from her book "The Service Berry," invites us to reflect on our relationship with the natural world. By shifting our perspectives from mere extraction to one of reciprocity and connection, we unlock the potential for transformative change. She eloquently states, "To name the world as a gift is to feel your membership in a web of reciprocity." This powerful reminder encourages us to honor the earth, which generously provides for us, urging us to embrace our responsibility in caring for it. By nurturing gratitude and engaging with one another and nature, we deepen our understanding of this invaluable relationship.

We are thrilled to share the incredible achievements of the UWSWCD from July 2024 to June 2025! This year, we are proud to announce that we distributed over \$1.1 million in grant funding to empower our conservation partners and uplift our community.

Our staff provided vital services, from helping residents learn how to manage invasive vegetation and the importance of native plants to guiding them in regenerative farming and on-farm conservation practices, all aimed at protecting waterways, increasing healthy soils, and thriving wildlife habitats. We continued to be dedicated to the Pure Water Partners (PWP) and recovery efforts following the Holiday Farm Fire, helping landowners restore riparian lands, protect drinking water, and support wildlife. We also committed



staff and resources to the Upper Willamette Stewardship Network's Working Lands Program and the Oregon Department of Agriculture's scope of work, promoting regenerative farming and empowering landowners to steward their lands and safeguard water quality.

Our commitment to diversity and inclusion is exemplified through our new DEIJ plan, which reaffirms our dedication to serving all members of our community.

Our new Fire-Adapted Landscape Program aims to improve coordination and funding to make landscapes more resilient. We recognize the cultural and ecological importance of fire and work to uplift Indigenous knowledge in land stewardship. Events like "Burning to Heal" have strengthened our community and commitment to sustainability.

As we embark on a new strategic planning phase to finalize our plan by Spring 2026, we are confident that with your continued support, we will have a meaningful and long-term impact in our region.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Lily Leitermann  
District Manager

*support for local farms and farmers, fire-resilient landscapes, abundant wildlife habitat.*

## UWSWCD Grant Program Highlights

**In the 2025 fiscal year, UWSWCD provided over \$1.1 million in grant awards** to support conservation efforts within our District boundaries. Grants supported a wide range of projects aligned with our organization's strategic priorities, from habitat restoration projects in privately owned oak woodlands, to environmental education programs that introduce local youth to nature, to farmers markets serving rural communities. A full list of the 52 grant awards made in FY25 is available on our website.

The District offered five competitive funding opportunities this year: Conservation Impact grants, Environmental Education grants, Farmers Market grants, Land Steward grants, and Small Conservation grants. Recipients included nonprofit organizations, school districts, private landowners, and community-based organizations working with a qualified fiscal sponsor. To apply for grant funds, applicants provide detailed information about the planned public conservation benefits of their work, and in many cases must demonstrate a cost share or "match" contribution to qualify for a grant.

Once applications are received, a panel of volunteer reviewers evaluate the grant requests to assess their alignment with District priorities and potential conservation outcomes. This year, 23 reviewers contributed their time and content expertise to help us evaluate grant requests.

Examples of grants awarded in FY25 include:

**Marcola School District** received a grant to revitalize a student-run farm and introduce students to conservation practices such as soil testing, composting, water-wise gardening and habitat restoration, laying a foundation for future technical and conservation career-connected learning.

**South Willamette Prescribed Burn Association** received funding to build local capacity for prescribed fire by engaging community members in preparing for and carrying out burns, including three planned prescribed burns this year.

**Friends of Trees** received grant funding to improve neighborhood and backyard habitat by distributing native and drought-tolerant trees and bulbs to community members in Eugene and Springfield.

**Center for Rural Livelihoods** received grant funding to enhance oak habitat and reduce wildfire risk at their conservation property near Cottage Grove by thinning

conifers and providing milled lumber to SquareOne Villages for affordable housing projects.

**Westfir Oakridge Community Farmers Market** received support to sustain the weekly farmers market and host special programs including a seed and scion "share fair" and community seed library.

**Mt. Pisgah Arboretum** received funding to host their "Discovery Tours" which introduce thousands of students to nature through guided tours led by volunteer naturalists.

The District also provided over \$250,000 in grants through our role in the **Grow Lane County** partnership, which seeks to reduce rates of hunger and food insecurity in Lane County by investing in local farms, ranches and community garden programs. These funds were provided to the District by the **Lane Community Health Council**, and the District partners closely with **FOOD for Lane County** to ensure that more fresh, locally grown food is available to community members served by food pantries.

For more information on District grant opportunities, visit the grants page of our website: [uwsacd.org/grants](https://uwsacd.org/grants)

### *Grantee Spotlight: Building Capacity for Prescribed Fire with Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah*

**Since 1989, the Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah have steadfastly worked** to protect and steward both public and private lands throughout the 4,700-acre greater Mt. Pisgah area. Given staffing and budget limitations of Lane County Parks, the role of the nonprofit Friends has played an essential role in maintaining beloved trails, leading habitat restoration efforts, and helping 'to nurture and restore our connection to nature' in the treasured Howard Buford Recreation Area.

Along with maintaining a native plant nursery that produces over 130 locally native species and facilitating stewardship efforts to maintain and improve trails in the Park, the Friends are active partners in the Rivers to Ridges Burn Group. The "R2R" burn group works to facilitate collaborative planning and coordinate efforts to implement prescribed burns to improve habitat and reduce wildfire risk in our fire-adapted landscape.



In August of 2024, the Friends approached the Upper Willamette SWCD with a unique opportunity and funding need: the possibility of acquiring a used wildland fire engine to increase regional capacity for prescribed and ecological burning.

After reviewing a proposal explaining the conservation benefits and potential regional impact of the equipment, the District board voted to award a grant of \$25,000 to support the acquisition of the fire engine.

At the United Way Days of Caring volunteer day in September 2024, our board and staff completed a service project at the Friends native plant nursery and had the chance to see the engine in person.

The Friends Interim Executive Director Jason Blazar notes "Our fire engine, the Big Friendly 76, affords essential capacity in support of stewardship activities implemented during fire season as well as other times of the year when

we are actively engaged in prescribed fire. It packs a lot of water, up to 650 gallons of road, about 1.5 times the typical Wildland fire truck filling an important niche on the fire line. Not to mention, as a retired M1078 S&S military truck it turns heads everywhere it goes. It is a keen ambassador that draws attention to our R2R prescribed Burn collaboration. We appreciate our partnership with the Upper Willamette SWCD and are grateful for this investment in our practice."

Supporting regional prescribed fire capacity has emerged as a programmatic and funding priority for the District in recent years, and we are pleased to be able to support the efforts of the Friends of Buford Park & Mt. Pisgah, as well as numerous other organizations working in prescribed and ecological fire, including the Long Tom Watershed Council, EcoStudies Institute, South Willamette Prescribed Burn Association, and others.



*Members of the District's board and staff at the 2024 Day of Caring event at Buford Park's Native Plant Nursery with the Big Friendly 76.*



## *Pure Water Partners 2024-2025 in Review*

**The Pure Water Partners (PWP) is a collaboration of nonprofits and government organizations** dedicated to protecting water quality and fish and wildlife habitat in the McKenzie River watershed. Since its founding in 2014, the partnership has worked hand-in-hand with private landowners to protect and restore riparian areas that benefit water quality, and ecosystem health for the benefit of human and natural communities.

After the Holiday Farm Fire in 2020, the PWP pivoted to meet a new challenge—helping landowners recover from the devastating impacts of the fire. This post-fire restoration work was primarily carried out by the McKenzie Watershed Council, Eugene Water and Electric Board (EWEB), the McKenzie River Trust, and the Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District.

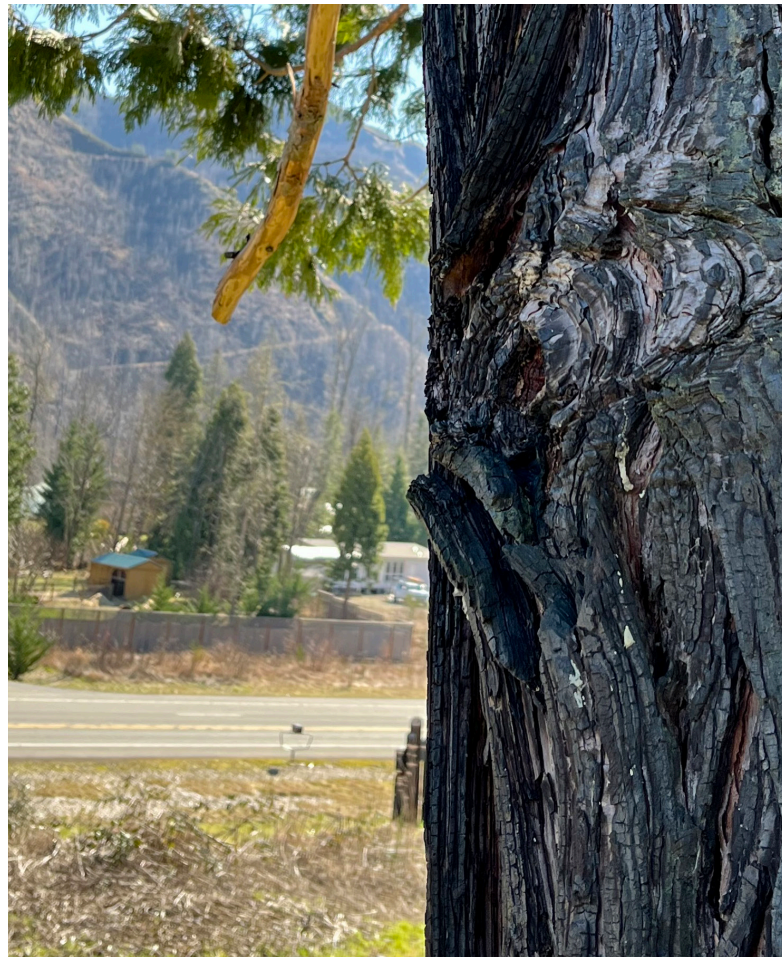
The PWP provided erosion control, fuels management, and large-scale replanting efforts along the McKenzie and its tributaries. This work was made possible thanks to funding from EWEB and disaster recovery grants from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB).

In the summer of 2025, PWP completed its OWEB-funded disaster recovery work. While the program is now pivoting back to its long-term mission of riparian protection and restoration, the scale of post-fire recovery is worth reflecting on:

- More than 300 landowners engaged in recovery efforts
- Restoration completed on 215 properties
- Nearly 1,000,000 native trees and shrubs planted on over 560 acres
- Ongoing support through invasive plant control and other plant establishment work

While the PWP's fire recovery work is coming to a close much remains to be done throughout the McKenzie River community, as homes and businesses continue to return.

These accomplishments were possible only because of the landowners who chose to engage with the program — often while rebuilding their homes, and communities. Together, we planted the foundations of tomorrow's riparian forests.









## *Regional Conservation Partnership Program 2024-2025*

**The Upper Willamette Soil & Water Conservation District** is working with Sustainable Northwest (SNW) and the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to help small forest landowners in the Holiday Farm Fire footprint. Through an Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA), partner organizations such as the UWSWCD, SNW, and other SWCDs receive NRCS funding to provide technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners to implement conservation and restoration practices.

Tatum VanHawkins, former Water Quality Conservation Specialist, worked on the landowner screening and selection process and began project planning before departing for the Benton SWCD in summer 2025. Meridith McClure, Restoration Specialist, took over project management for the five landowners selected in the screening process in June 2025.

Between July 2024 and June 30th, 2025, there have been 15 site visits across these five properties to assess the properties, meet with landowners, map treatment boundaries, and collect pre-treatment photopoints.

Approximately 250 acres will be treated across these five landowners' properties during the project period (2026-2027, with potential for extension through 2029).

Conservation practices include brush management treatment and removal for invasive species such as Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry, standing dead removal, woody debris treatment, site preparation, and tree and shrub planting.

Meridith is finalizing the last of the paperwork necessary to move forward with aggregating the landowners' contracts this fall, with the first treatments expected to begin in winter/spring 2026.



*Figure 1. Invasive Scotch broom in the foreground with standing dead trees in the background at a property slated for brush management treatment.*



*Figure 2. Invasive Himalayan blackberry in the foreground with standing dead and surviving trees in the background at a property slated for brush management treatment, site prep, and tree and shrub planting.*



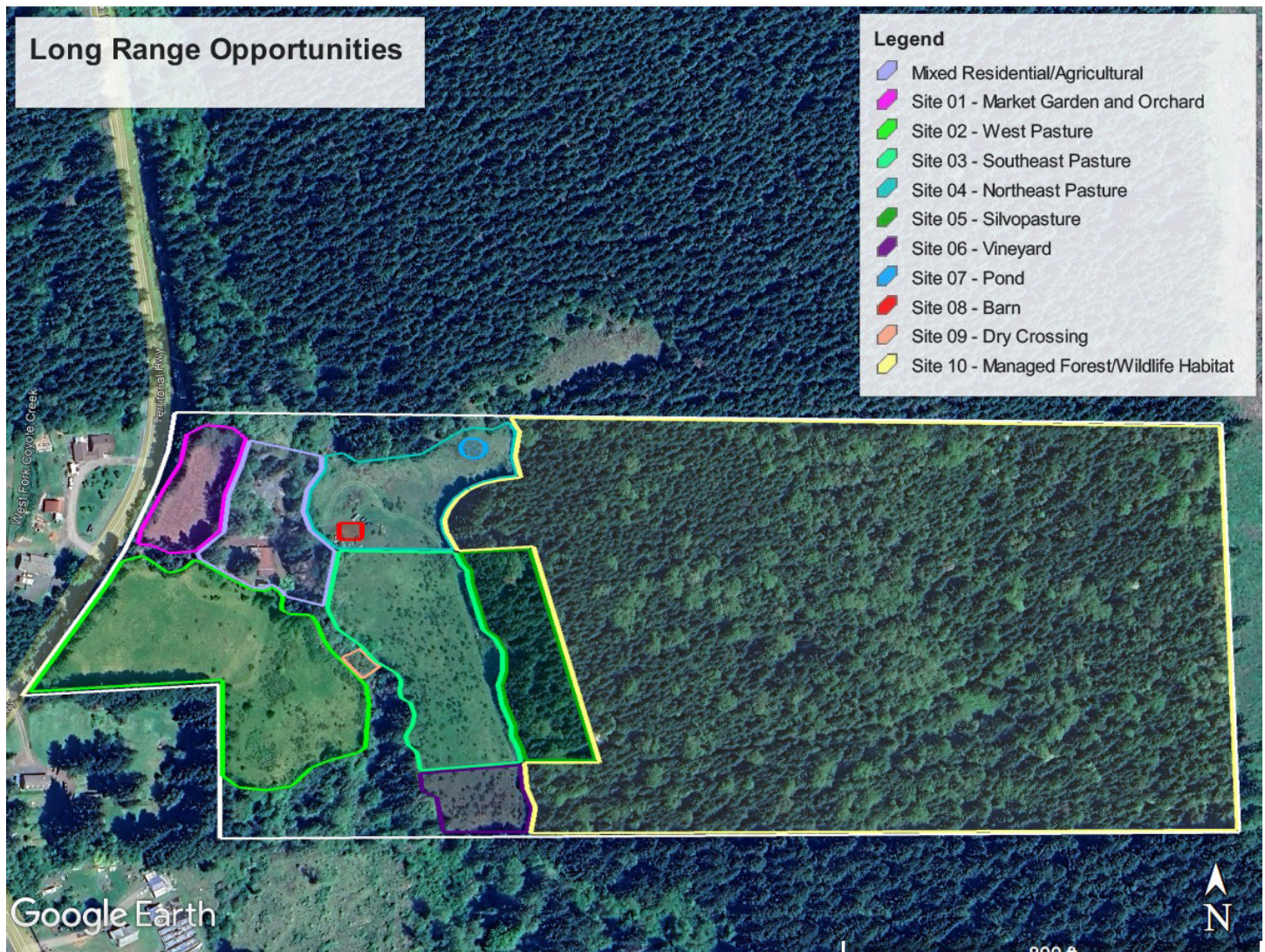
## Working Lands Update

In collaboration with the Upper Willamette Stewardship Network's Working Lands Program, the District has been providing technical assistance, grazing plans, and conservation plans to local farmers to help them transition into more regenerative land management.

One conservation plan completed this year was for a 37.4 acre farm in the Long Tom Watershed. This five-year guiding document focuses on utilizing pasture, forest, and livestock management practices that will reduce invasive species, restore native understory, pasture, and riparian species, protect waterways, and promote soil health on the property.

The plan guides the integrative management of small ruminants, poultry, and pigs in pastured and forested settings through adaptive grazing, leader-follower weed targeting, and native silvopasture establishment, allowing for an increase in locally available foods with an eye towards land restoration.

In addition, it aims to provide the framework for how to protect and restore approximately ¼ mile of Coyote Creek that bisects the farm through establishing a native riparian buffer zone and exclusion fencing for livestock.





## Living With Fire Film Festival

In March 2025, the **Upper Willamette Soil & Water Conservation District** partnered with **Encircle Films** to host *Burning to Heal*, a community film festival at the Art House in Eugene. The program brought together landowners, Tribal representatives, fire practitioners, and local residents for an evening dedicated to exploring our region's evolving relationship with fire.

The event featured three short films that highlighted different approaches to fire stewardship.

*Burning to Heal* (Spring Fed Media) documented recovery efforts following the Almeda Fire in southern Oregon, where landowners and community members are bringing fire back to the land in positive and healing ways.

*Cultural Burn at Smithfield Oaks: Re-Kindling a Relationship with Fire* (Polk Soil & Water Conservation District) followed the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde as they led a cultural burn in Polk County, reflecting on how cultural practices can restore both land and relationships.

The third film, *Ecological Burning—Prescribed Fire* (City of Eugene), showcased the role of prescribed fire in restoring habitat and maintaining public safety in the Willamette Valley.

The screenings were followed by a panel discussion featuring Joe Scott (Traditional Ecological Inquiry Program), Amanda Rau (Oregon Department of Forestry), and Paul Gordon (City of Eugene Parks and Open Space). Panelists shared perspectives on ecological, cultural, and community-based fire stewardship, emphasizing the importance of collaboration across agencies, Tribes, and local residents.

With a sold-out audience and strong community interest, *Burning to Heal* highlighted the need for both dialogue and action regarding how we coexist with fire. The festival not only raised awareness of the challenges and opportunities facing our region, but also celebrated the diverse knowledge systems and partnerships that are shaping a more resilient future.

From left, panelists Amanda Rau of the Oregon Department of Forestry, Paul Gordon of the City of Eugene Parks and Open Space, and Joe Scott of the Traditional Ecological Inquiry Program, with facilitator Ian Appow of the Upper Willamette Soil & Water Conservation District.





## Other Highlights



*The District's 2024 Celebration, held at Dorris Ranch.*



*A proposed culvert replacement on Bear Creek.*



*Helping to support local food, farms, and farmers.*



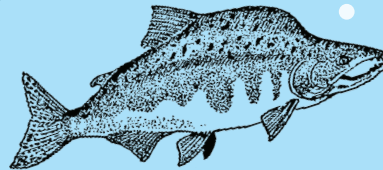
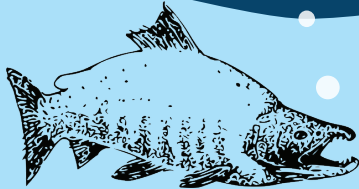
# 2024–2025 Financial Information\*

## EXPENDITURES:

Materials & Services:  
\$2,192,094.62

District Operations:  
\$1,071,327.43

Capital Outlay:  
\$6,419.96



## REVENUES:

Tax Levy: \$2,598,656.70

Service Contracts: \$221,473.85

State Funding: \$102,594.00

Other Income: \$417,489.73

Services: \$3,170.00

Federal Funding: \$9,352.60

Fiscal Year Beginning Balance: \$6,317,251.12

\*Unaudited

## Upper Willamette SWCD Staff

**Lily Leitermann**  
District Manager

**Daniel Dietz**  
Conservation Programs  
Manager

**Meridith McClure**  
Sr. Restoration Specialist

**Leslie Owens**  
Administrative Specialist

**Cricket DeLoe**  
Media & Outreach  
Specialist

**Jared Pruch**  
Grant Management  
Specialist

**Lark Theodore Articus**  
Working Lands  
Conservation Specialist

**Ian Appow**  
Fire Adapted Landscape  
Coordinator

## Upper Willamette SWCD Board of Directors

**Al Hrynshyn**  
Vice-Chair, Zone 1 Director

**Ben Larson**  
Treasurer,  
At Large 1 Director

**Gen Schaack**  
Secretary, Zone 2 Director

**Karl Morgenstern**  
Chair, At Large 2 Director

Open  
Zone 3 Director

**Morgen Spear**  
Associate Director

**Craig Marcus**  
Treasurer, Zone 4 Director

**Catherine Boucher**  
Associate Director

Open  
Zone 5 Director

**Ralph Perkins**  
Director Emeritus



**Upper Willamette Soil & Water Conservation District**

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