

THE CONSERVATIONIST

JACKSON SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT
NEWSLETTER

FALL 2005

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2

Fifteen Acres and A Rural Lifestyle

By Margaret Meierhenry, FARRM Member

After 27 years on our property the choice to move was difficult. When you love the quiet of the country and the view of mountains and fields, it is a difficult decision to leave the land and move into town. We named the farm Whoop N Holler: we wanted our children freedom to enjoy themselves without neighbors too close by. So, what does one do with fifteen acres when health issues become a concern and age has caught up with us. It was time to rethink how we could change the operation and make things easier to handle without expending as much time and energy, but continue to live where we enjoy the rural life.

Rotational grazing the past four years has turned into a success story for our family and it might be the answer for other small acreage landowners. We have twelve acres of permanent pasture and over the years the fields were hayed. We stored some bales, feeding our own animals, or sold to customers from the barn and directly out of the field. The project was a family affair—doing our own cutting, raking, baling and hauling, but in later years we went to custom haying. It takes a lot of energy lifting bales and we're too small an operation to have a bale loader. It became increasingly frustrating to rely upon others for when to cut the grass or pick up bales. Randy White with Jackson SWCD came to the rescue! Rotational grazing along with improving the pasture was the answer.

We decided it was easier to have cattle “mow” the grass for us. Rotational grazing involves pasture management, taking time to observe how the grass is growing in the pasture and doing things to keep it healthy. Our first step, was to get a current soil sample and improve soil conditions where it was needed in the pasture. Adding trace minerals is as important as continually adding nitrogen to help the grass grow. The Grange Co-op's fertilizer division offers help on taking a soil sample to send to the lab.

Then we divided the fields into smaller pastures or paddocks so that we could rotate the cattle. We made temporary fences with a single strand electric wire and half-inch rebar rods (4 feet long) driven into the ground using a homemade pounder (length of 1 inch pipe with a pipe cap attached at one end). Yellow tapes tied to the wire warn the cattle, and they soon learn to stay away. This system of fencing is low cost and simple to install or take down. I use a five-gallon bucket to carry the essential tools for moving the fences or for adding new wire for cross-fencing a smaller section of the paddock. Having everything in one place is energy efficient and saves time.

I rotate the animals through the paddocks when the grass is a mid-leg calf height (10 to 12 inches), and move them onto the next paddock when it is ‘mowed’ to ankle height (three to 4 inches). I keep a calendar of the rotation and let each paddocks that have been grazed have a resting period of several weeks depending on the time of year. The grass re-grows fast in the spring, but slower with hot summer temperatures and the cool fall nights. The idea behind rotational grazing *(continue on page 5)*

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Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District is your gateway to natural resource assistance. Board members and staff work with the Natural Resource Conservation Service to ensure educational and on-the-ground technical assistance opportunities take place which help the landowners of Jackson County.

Chair's Corner

By Barbara Niedermeyer



The fall season is approaching, with that the irrigation season is coming to an end.

We have several projects planned within the district. Our staff is working hard to meet the needs of the patrons and also keeping up with needed reports. The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts will be holding their annual conference in No-

ember at Newport. Some of us will be attending the convention and looking forward to learning new and different ways to help our district grow.

It is with deep regret to announce that one of our board members has given his resignation. Walt Fitzgerald has given many years of service to the district and has been very beneficial. We extend our best wishes to Walt in his future endeavors.

There are some requirements that go with the position of being a board member, but if you or someone you know is interested in serving on the board please contact Linda Town at the SWCD office. (541-734-3143) or e-mail her at linda.town@or.nacdnet.net

Until next time,
Have a Koala-ity Day !!

New SWCD Staff Member



Diane Miller is the new **Fiscal Officer** for the Soil & Water Conservation District of Jackson County. With more than 15 years of computer background that includes data entry, word processing and bookkeeping, Diane will be responsible for financial documentation of all district business operations. She can be found in the office Tuesdays and Thursdays, fulfilling the new part-time position.

Jackson

Soil and Water Conservation District

Staff: Randy White, NRS/District Manager
Linda Town, Administrative Secretary
Diane Miller, Fiscal Officer
Margaret Meierhenry, Newsletter Editor

Board of Directors:

Barbara Niedermeyer, Chair, Zone 2
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USDA

Natural Resource Conservation Service

Staff: Nicola Giardina, District Conservationist
Peter Winnick, Soil Conservationist
Suzy Liebenberg, Soil Conservationist
Bill Cronin, Irrigation Engineer

USDA, Farm Service Agency

Staff: Trent Luschen, County Executive Director
Diane Rabbe, Program Technician
Donna Finch, Program Technician

County Committee members:

LAA1 - Suzanne Ginet, Chairperson
LAA3 - Lori Mefford, Vice-chair
LAA2 - Mel Morris, Member

Tax Deductibility for Donations / Contributions

Please think of Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District (JSWCD) if you are interested in donating, gifting, granting, and/or bequeathing items, real or personal property, or monetary contributions for soil and water conservation efforts. Conservation Districts are political subdivisions of state government. IRS Code, **Section 170(c) (1)** states: Contributions or gifts to a state or any of its political subdivisions, i.e., conservation districts, are "charitable" contributions for tax purposes, and are, therefore, **tax deductible.** (See IRS Publication 526: Charitable Contributions).

JSWCD depends on funding from grants, donations, County Service Partners, and some State funds to implement, maintain, and/or support soil and water conservation efforts. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Contact **Linda Town (541) 734-3143. linda.town@or.nacdnet.net**

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

By Trent Luschen, County Executive Director --USDA Farm Service Agency

Farm Service Agency offers financial benefits with the **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)** to enhance riparian habitat and protect surface water quality and enhance wildlife on agricultural land. Participants receive rental payments and cost shares to dedicate portions of cropland or marginal pastureland to conservation practices for a 10 to 15 year contract.

Eligible Land Criteria:

- Offered acreage must be parallel or adjacent to streams or other waterways in an approved Agricultural Water Quality Management Plan area, or on tribal trust or reservation lands, or have (at least a historical) presence of a targeted species (list available). This includes most agricultural land in Jackson & Josephine Counties.
- Marginal pastureland may be planted to buffers or filter strips to address water quality problems. Wetland Restoration and Wetland Buffer practices are also available. Vegetation planned for buffers must be appropriate for soils and historic vegetation.
- Eligible wetland includes land that has been drained, dredged, filled, leveled, or otherwise manipulated, including any activity that resulted in impairing or reducing the flow, circulation, or reach of water, for agricultural use.

Restrictions:

- Land enrolled in CREP cannot be grazed, hayed, or harvested
- No in-stream work except livestock crossings and watering facilities. The participant must file all permits for in-stream work with the appropriate agencies.

Annual Base Rental Rates (per acre):

- Non-Irrigated Cropland –rental rates based on soil types: \$20 - \$58/acre
- Marginal Pastureland-rental rate based on stream type:
 - \$40/acre (Jackson Co.) \$46/acre (Josephine Co.) for a *seasonal* stream
 - \$48/acre (Jackson Co.) \$52/acre (Josephine Co.) for a *permanent* stream
- Irrigated Land (payable only if participant agrees to lease the appurtenant water rights to the State for in-stream use): \$80 to \$110/acre

Annual Payments (per acre, every year) example:

Total payment =	Rental Rate	+	Incentive	+	Maintenance
	(base)		(50% of base)		(Depending on practice needs)
	Marginal Pastureland		\$40 or \$48/acre		\$20-24 \$7, \$9 or \$10
	Irrigated Land		\$80 to \$110/acre		\$40-55 \$7, \$9 or \$10

PLUS: One-Time Incentive Payments:

- 1. Signup Incentive Payment (SIP)**
 - \$10 per full year of contract for each acre enrolled in the program.
- 2. Practice Incentive Payment (PIP)**
 - 40% of eligible costs – When all practices are completed the PIP will be paid based on eligible installed costs.
- 3. For having 50% of 5 miles of Stream bank enrolled (one or more participants)**
 - A one-time payment of 4 times the annual base rental rate per acre for each participant.
 - Cumulative Impact Bonuses are paid whenever a segment qualifies. If one owner enrolls one year, and his neighbor enrolls another year, and the total of enrolled stream length equals 50% of the stream bank in the five miles, both owners will receive the bonus for their acreage when owner 2 is approved.

Cost Share Rate: Cost share rates are 75% of eligible costs. 50% of the cost share comes from the Federal Government and 25% comes from the State.

Additional Information may be obtained from Jackson/ Josephine Farm Service Agency (FSA) Office, 573, Parsons Dr., Suite 101, Medford, OR 97501. Phone 541-776-4270, ext. 2 or visit the FSA website: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/or>

FARM AND RANCH RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Gamagrass-Warm Season Grass Project

By Larry Martin, FARRM Member

In 2001, we purchased 40 acres just west of Central Point and planned to bring out a few beef cows from our grass farm that we were selling in Iowa. On our 40 acres was a field that had been in alfalfa, but no longer had a viable stand. I had noticed that here in the Rogue Valley, the hay fields and pastures of cool season grasses struggled to maintain their growth in the heat of the summer. This was consistent with the growth patterns of cool season grasses that I had managed in the Midwest. This got me to wondering if a field of warm season grass might be a good complement to my existing fields of cool season grasses

My hands-on experience with warm season grasses was limited. I had planted one sizeable acreage of switchgrass for CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) on bottom ground on our Iowa farm in the mid-90's. I had also been on several farms in the Midwest that had established eastern gamagrass to be used as a forage in their cattle operations. I had been impressed with both the productivity and forage quality of eastern gamagrass and thought I could utilize it well in my management-intensive rotational grazing system.

I then called Dan Shepherd in Missouri, one of the largest producers of eastern gamagrass seed in the country, and asked him how he thought gamagrass would adapt to this area. We talked about how the cooler summer nights might reduce production compared to the Midwest. He also mentioned that he had filled a few small orders for gamagrass seed from Oregon, but was not aware of any sizeable plantings. I decided to proceed with trying to establish a field of gamagrass.

The seed was planted in early May of 2002. Because

gamagrass is not a very competitive plant as a seedling, chemical weed control is almost essential in the first year. No grazing or haying was done in the first year of establishment. It requires a good dose of patience from the producer as you try to get a stand of gamagrass established. A good stand consists of 2 to 3 plants per square yard and one plant per square yard is acceptable. In the first year after planting, my stand looked very thin and I wondered if it was going to amount to anything. In the second year, I cut the gamagrass in late June with the cutterbar set at about 8" and got a yield of about a ton per acre. No further haying or grazing was done in 2003.

In late March of 2004, I burned the entire field. I hayed the field in June and harvested over three ton of hay per acre. I then started to fence the field into roughly one acre paddocks and grazed a good portion of the field two times later that year. This year, most of the field was grazed 4 to 5 times in a rotational grazing system. Each paddock was grazed for about two days by a group of 20 cow-calf pairs and then rested and allowed to regrow for about 30 days. All cattle were removed by the end of August so the plants would have about 40 days of rest before the first killing frost. The production from each acre averaged about one cow-calf pair grazing for six months.

I did sprinkle irrigate the gamagrass during the initial year of establishment. In subsequent years, I have flood irrigated the field on about a 3 week interval. Because of its deep roots and heat tolerance, it does not show heat stress nearly as quickly as cool season grasses.

Although eastern gamagrass can produce high yields of quality hay, I have found it has some significant limitations for use in hay production. It does need to be cut at about a height of 8" so that you leave some leaf surface for regrowth. And each gamagrass plant will develop a large base as it matures which results in a field that is very rough to drive equipment over.

I have been pleased with the how my eastern gamagrass field has fit into my forage production system. It has completely filled the need for forage during the heat of the summer as the production from my cool season grasses decline. My cattle find the gamagrass to be palatable and they seem to perform as well grazing gamagrass as they do on my mixed cool season grass-legume paddocks.

Editors Note: We hope Larry will continue to let us know how well his pastures and cattle do in the next several years.



Charlie Boyer
11630 Agate Road
Eagle Point, Oregon
97524
541-826-9873
horseman@ccountry.net

**Pasture Management - Rural Land Planning - NEPA
Reviews - Hay &- Lamb Sales**

Fifteen Acres and A Rural Lifestyle

(Continued from page 1)

is to let the pasture have a resting period for grass recovery and re-growth. How many days the cattle stay in a paddock will depend on the size of the area and how many animals are grazing at one time. Cattle tend to eat the young ‘appetizing’ plants and leave the less tasty grass and weeds. When the good, nutritional grass has been mowed below two to 3 inches the pasture begins to decline and it takes longer for the grass to recover, making it easier for weeds to take over. The pay-off for using rotation grazing is healthy animals, healthy pastures, and a thick, non-eroding sod for good land conservation.

When we flood irrigate, the cattle are moved to the corrals or ‘sacrifice’ area, until the paddocks have dried some. This is also a good time to drag the paddocks the cattle have just finished grazing, spreading the manure over the field before the water arrives. This helps on fertilizing costs and eliminating nutrient runoff into the barrow ditch and eventually the Rogue River.

Each time the cattle are moved to a new paddock, flexible pipe provides water to a portable water tank that is moved using the tractor. By moving the water tank often, the grass and ground around the tank does not get over compacted. Salt is provided with each move as well.

I have found it convenient to pasture manage cattle (stockers) from March to November before the winter rains begin. Taking animals off wet pasture soils and placing them in well drained areas is one of the most important things to do, letting the pastures rest for the winter. Most grasses go dormant and the nutritional value is very low at this time anyway. We choose to graze cattle, but the system could work for sheep or goats with some fencing modifications.

Each year I have tried something new and have found that experimenting and changing things if they don’t work is part of the challenge. All farming takes time, but I find there is less energy expended using pasture management techniques and having the cattle ‘mow the grass’. Because of our new approach to caring for the fields, we have encouraged more wildlife to stay around and we have become better stewards of the land. Making the operation “work for us” has allowed us to continue to enjoy a wonderful rural lifestyle.

DID YOU KNOW.....


- **Jackson County** ranks 14th out of 36 in Oregon for cow/calf production and is in the top third of U.S. counties.
- **Jackson County** ranks 8th out of 36 for horses in Oregon and 188th out of 3,014 counties in the US
- **Jackson County** is 3rd in Oregon for fruits, tree nuts, and berries and is 66th out of 2,636 counties in the U.S.

(Taken from the 2002 Census of Agriculture.)




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Homeowners, renters and small businesses served by Pacific Power have three Blue Sky renewable energy options from which to choose. All three allow customers to support and buy cleaner energy from renewable resources such as wind, biomass and solar. Of the three Blue Sky options, the choice with the greatest benefits for Oregon's watersheds is the Blue Sky Habitat option. That's because a \$2.50 monthly contribution goes to The Nature Conservancy for projects in Oregon that restore fish habitat in Pacific Power's service area. These include riparian plantings, stream bank stabilization, barrier removal, and monitoring. At least 20 percent of the Habitat funds are granted by The Nature Conservancy to Oregon watershed councils or soil and water conservation districts to complete similar projects. Over 18,000 Pacific Power customers have already enrolled in one of these cleaner energy options:

Blue Sky Block: Customers buy wind energy in 100 kilowatt-hour (kwh) increments, called blocks, at \$1.95 per block. The charge is in addition to Basic Service charges, and it is the same amount each month. One 100 kwh block is about 10 percent of the average household's monthly electricity usage.

Blue Sky Usage: Customers buy a mix of wind, biomass and solar energy, based on the amount of electricity they use each month, for just under a penny more (\$.0078) per kwh. A customer using 1,000 kwh per month would pay \$7.80 more each month, and this would fluctuate with their electricity usage each month.

Blue Sky Habitat: The same as Blue Sky Usage, plus customers make a \$2.50 per month contribution to The Nature Conservancy for salmon habitat improvements in Oregon.

For more information about your renewable energy options, call Pacific Power at 1-800-769-3717 or visit www.pacificpower.net/bluesky. To learn more about The Nature Conservancy, visit www.nature.org/oregon. Submitted by Paige Prewett, Southern Oregon outreach consultant for Renewable Northwest Project, a Portland-based non-profit organization. www.RNP.org

If you have a potential project that could benefit from the funds described above in this article, please contact the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District at 541-734-3143.

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New Location!

Bull thistle - *Cirsium vulgare*

Growth Habit: Forb/herb
Duration: Biennial
U.S. Nativity: Introduced

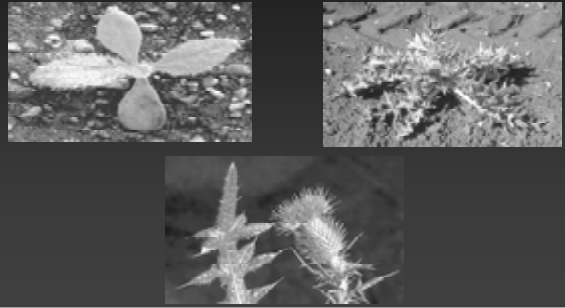


Bull thistle is an introduced species from Eurasia and is widely spread throughout North America. It is highly competitive in pastures, along roadsides, and disturbed sites. It flowers in the second year from July through September. The easiest way to distinguish Bull thistle from Canada thistle is examining the leaves. Bull thistle leaves are hairy on both the top and bottom; Canada thistle is not hairy on the top. Bracts of Canada thistle do not have prickly spines.

The photos are courtesy of the USDA-NRCS plant database: <http://plants.usda.gov/>

Bull thistle is a biennial (vegetative the first year and reproductive the second year) with stems 2 – 5 feet tall. First year leaves form rosettes that are lobed, hairy and prickly on the top and hairy underneath. Flowers, in the second year, are 1.5 to 2 inches wide, purple, and have spine tipped bracts. Seeds are topped with a circle of plume-like white hairs. Bull thistle can be controlled by cultivation the first year or prior to flowering the second year. Spraying, using the proper herbicide and following label directions are also effective.

Bull thistle - *Cirsium vulgare*



Corp Ranch



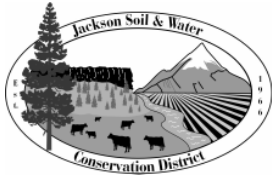
Viewed from on still Creek Road, still standing

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please call us at (541) 734-3143 or
e-mail linda.town@or.nacdnet.net

Jackson SWCD prohibits discrimination in its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Jackson SWCD is an equal opportunity employer.

So — What is FARRM ?

(Farm And Ranch Resource Management)— a group of people who meet once a month with the desire to learn more and improve their present farming or ranching operations. Folks who are new to farming or ranching learn from members who have been established for years. The group shares information about new products and innovative techniques and works as a community to help a member with special projects. The meetings alternate each month with an 8 am breakfast meeting at a local restaurant or an evening potluck (6 pm) at the USDA, Service Center conference room. Special speakers keep the group informed on a variety of current topics. Local tours visit operations of interest in the immediate area. A three day annual tour expands the opportunities to see livestock operations along with water and land conservation stewardship across the country. Demonstrations of new products and learning workshops are planned throughout the year.

If you need more information or are interested in obtaining help with your operation, contact **Randy White (Jackson SWCD/District Manager) at 541-734-3143**. The Jackson Soil & Water Conservation District (JSWCD) is located in the USDA Service Center at 573 Parsons Drive, Suite 102, Medford, OR
Check the calendar for the next meeting date and time.
The members of FARRM look forward to meeting you.

CONGRATULATIONS

**BOB AND JUDY LOZANO
JRL RANCH**

WINNERS OF THE OREGON ASSOCIATION OF
CONSERVATION DISTRICTS STATE WIDE
"2005 COOPERATOR OF THE YEAR"

AWARD AFTER COMPETING AGAINST OTHER BASINS
IN THE STATE.

THE AWARD WILL BE PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL OACD
MEETING ON NOVEMBER 15TH, NEWPORT, OREGON
WATCH FOR MORE DETAILS IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF
THE CONSERVATIONIST

◀— Mark Your Calendar —▶

FARRM Meetings:

- * **Potluck Night—November 17**, 6:00-9:00 pm, USDA Service Center Conference Room, 573 Parsons Drive, Medford—Speaker: Paige Prewett—SO Outreach Consultant, Renewable Northwest Project.
- * **Alternate Breakfast Meeting —December 15**, 8:00-10:00 am, Hungry Woodsman (Reston Hotel), 2260 Biddle Rd, Medford
- * **Annual FARRM Meeting—Potluck—January 19, 2006**, 6:00-9:00 pm JSWCD Conference Room
- ▼ **SWCD Annual Meeting—February 8, 2006**, 6:00 pm-9:00 pm, OSU Extension Auditorium