

MALHEUR RIVER BASIN
Agricultural Water Quality Management Area
Biennial Review Report to the Board of Agriculture & ODA Director
Submitted by the Local Advisory Committee (LAC)



Meeting Date: March 10, 2026
LAC Members Present: Doug Maag, Jim Bentz, Marvin Remple, and Bill Romans
Reporting Timeframe: Calendar years 2023–2024

PROGRESS MEASUREMENT		
<i>This was a Light Review; quantitative details related to Measurable Objectives are not reported at Light Reviews.</i>		
Management Area-wide activities implemented by Malheur and Harney SWCDs and Malheur WC	No.	Description
Events That Actively Engage Landowners	3	Malheur Watershed Council (MWC) and Natural Resources Conservation Service hosted meeting to discuss new opportunities Vale Bench area landowners to convert flood to sprinkler irrigation. These funds complement the Piping Lateral Canals project in the Vale Bench (Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)). Juniper Cuts Bid Tour, Bid tours for Spring Development.
Landowners Participating in Active Events	18	Juniper cutting, spring and water development.
Landowners Provided Technical Assistance	120	Juniper cutting, spring and water development.
Site Visits	84	Juniper cutting, spring and water development.
Conservation Plans Written	12	
Funding Applications Submitted	41	
Funding Applications Awarded	23	Tire troughs for water and spring development.
Other	2	In 2024 MWC was awarded two grants to assist Vale Oregon Irrigation District (VOID) to pipe laterals 195, 192, 188, 185, and 176. This project is being funded by BOR (\$2,520,000) and OWRD (\$3,601,238.00). Project partners include VOID, MWC, BOR, and OWRD.

LAC DISCUSSION
Summary of Progress
- Agriculture has been very proactive to make progress toward improving water quality (and quantity). - This area has had lots of great positive cooperation among landowners, conservation entities, and government organizations. - Converting from flood/furrow to drip/sprinkler irrigation has and continues to show a reduction in nutrients (nitrogen and/or phosphorus) into waters of the state. Specifically, converting to drip irrigation has significantly reduced agricultural nitrogen inputs into groundwater. The NE Malheur Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) nitrates continue to show improvements. This was all done without regulations. Also, converting to drip/sprinkler has reduced nutrient and sediment inputs into surface waters from agricultural fields. - Agriculture and conservation entities have been coordinating efforts and systematically working through focal areas. Both Fletcher Gulch and Morgan Bench, past focal areas, have made significant improvements. Effectiveness monitoring in these focal areas has and continues to show improvements in the water column because of the agricultural practice and irrigation improvements that have been made. These same successful techniques are now being applied to the Willow Creek+ focal area.
Impediments
Even though agriculture has been proactive, lawmakers and agencies have recently added new regulatory requirements for agriculture (e.g. new Confined Animal Feeding Operations requirements related to water quantity and GWMA's). It is unclear how these additional regulatory requirements will help further agriculture's

goals for maintaining and improving water quality. However, they do create an additional burden for agriculture landowners and operators.

- LAC members are concerned that the new CAFO permit requirements for water supply plans, specifically new tracking and reporting data requirements as relates to livestock watering, has multiple problematic layers. They also expressed concern that this will likely lead to even more regulations down the road.
- LAC members noted that often state agency representatives write down concerns from Malheur LAC but do not seem to be respond to them.

Recommended Modifications and Adaptive Management

- Utilize monitoring data to report to lawmakers the responsible stewardship agricultural landowners are implementing (proactive vs. reactive).
- Find better ways to tell our story, from conservation and economic standpoint.
- Both bullet points above to support that more regulation is not the answer to water quality and quantity issues.
- Continue managing juniper and annual invasives, monitoring water quality, and making irrigation improvements for water quality and quantity.
- Review GWMA boundaries in relation to how it affects CAFOs.

ODA COMPLIANCE ACTIVITIES

Location	Cases		Site Visits	Agency Actions			
	New	Closed		Letter of Compliance	Pre-Enforcement Notification	Notice of Noncompliance	Civil Penalty
Outside SIA	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Within SIA	0	3	2	2	0	0	0