

OWYHEE
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 11, 2026
LAC Members Present: Rod Frahm (Chair), Martin Andre, Vickie Price, and Charlie Barlow
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 SWCD and Owyhee WC	No.	Discussion
Events That Actively Engage Landowners	0	The focus has been in designing, securing funding, and implementation. Additionally, this is a rural community and local conservation entities already know the agricultural operations and priority needs.
Landowners Participating in Active Events	0	N/A
Landowners Provided Technical Assistance	36	Numerous technical assistance grants.
Site Visits	105	Numerous site visits before and after grant implementation.
Conservation Plans Written	1	
Funding Applications Submitted	31	
Funding Applications Awarded	31	

LAC DISCUSSION
Summary of Progress
- Owyhee Watershed Council (WC) secured \$86,000 in small grants to install 11,000 feet pipe, three measuring devices, and 5,000 feet electrical. Improved 470 acres irrigated agricultural lands. Converted 5,000 feet open ditch to pipe and 120 acres flood irrigation to sprinkler. - Owyhee WC secured \$553,000 in large grants to install 41,130 feet pipe, 10 pivots, two wheel lines, and 10 measuring devices. Converted 540 acres flood irrigation to sprinkler and 350 feet ditch to pipe. - Approximately 93 percent of fields were successfully converted to sprinkler in the Fletcher Gulch and Twilight areas and effectiveness monitoring demonstrated that these irrigation improvements significantly reduced nutrients and sediment inputs into surface streams in these areas.
Impediments
- Annual invasives, wildfires, and lack precipitation this winter will cause considerable immediate challenges for agriculture, but also for the region in general. - Conservation entities have recently encountered challenges with obtaining Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board large grant funding for priority agricultural water quality projects, such as converting high priority fields (e.g., adjacent to streams) from flood irrigation to sprinkler. - The Public Law 83-566 (PL-566) funding for Owyhee Irrigation District (OID) planning and design has identified the need for 65 projects that will cost \$2 billion. The PL-566 has funding for this scale of implementation, however there is a 20 percent match requirement, which is \$400 million. Raising even a fraction for that match funding seems unlikely.
Recommended Modifications and Adaptive Management
The LAC and meeting attendees support efforts to finalize the formation of Malheur Rangeland Partnership, which is a locally lead collaborative group of proactive agricultural landowners and local conservation entities, supported by technical advisors such as Oregon State University and ODA. Stakeholders associated with this group aim to develop a prioritization framework for streamlined landscape scale restoration and enhancement in Malheur County's sage-steppe landscapes. This partnership will likely be effective in helping to address impediments.

- OID would appreciate support in finding creative ways to find matching funds for needed infrastructure improvements, which will in turn improve on-farm operators' ability to more effectively and efficiently manage water resources for quantity and quality improvement. Agriculture is critical for the economy in this area, and the nation depends on the agricultural commodities grown here.

ODA COMPLIANCE ACTIVITIES								
Location	Cases		Site Visits	Agency Actions				
				Letter of Compliance		Pre-Enforcement Notification	Notice of Noncompliance	Civil Penalty
	New	Closed		Already in compliance	Brought into compliance			
Outside SIA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Within SIA	N/A*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Not Applicable