



## SOUTH FORK JOHN DAY WATERSHED COUNCIL 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

The South Fork John Day Watershed Council is a non-regulatory and non-governmental non-profit that works with private landowners and public land managers in the South Fork John Day River watershed. Our services are available to all landowners and land managers in the watershed and are entirely voluntary.

The Council's mission is to maintain and enhance the health of the South Fork John Day River watershed and the long-term economic stability of the region, foster a better understanding of the multiple resources, represent broad and diverse geographies and interests, and work collaboratively to carry out voluntary watershed restoration activities.

### Board of Directors

- Joanne Keerins, Alternate: Mike Keerins (Keerins Century Ranch) – Council Chair
- Phil St. Clair, Alternate: Kristy St. Clair (Rocking 9 Ranch) – Vice Chair
- Scott Hess (Jackass Creek Ranch) – Treasurer
- M.T. Anderson (Double R Ranch & High Desert Cattle Company) – Director
- Richard Nelson, Alternate: Micah Wilson (Izee Ranch) – Director
- Jeff Maben (Rockpile Ranch & Western Juniper Alliance) – Director
- Amy Charette (Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs) – Director
- Russ Powell, Alternate: Pam Powell (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife) – Director
- Kyle Sullivan (Grant Soil and Water Conservation District) – Associate Director
- Justin Rodgers (Bureau of Land Management) – Associate Director

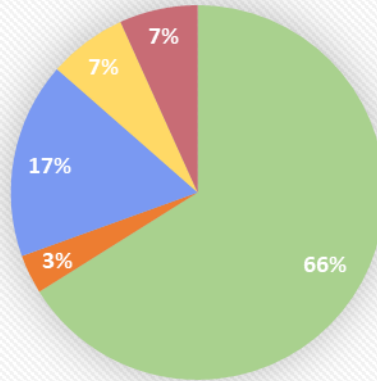
**Staff**      Amy Stiner – Executive Director                      Hannah Latzo – Program Assistant

**Contact Information:** 150 East Main Street, Ste 102, John Day, Oregon, (541) 620-5739, [astiner@outlook.com](mailto:astiner@outlook.com)

### Project Partners



## Project Type over 5 years



■ Restoration ■ Monitoring ■ Technical Assistance ■ Education ■ Council Support

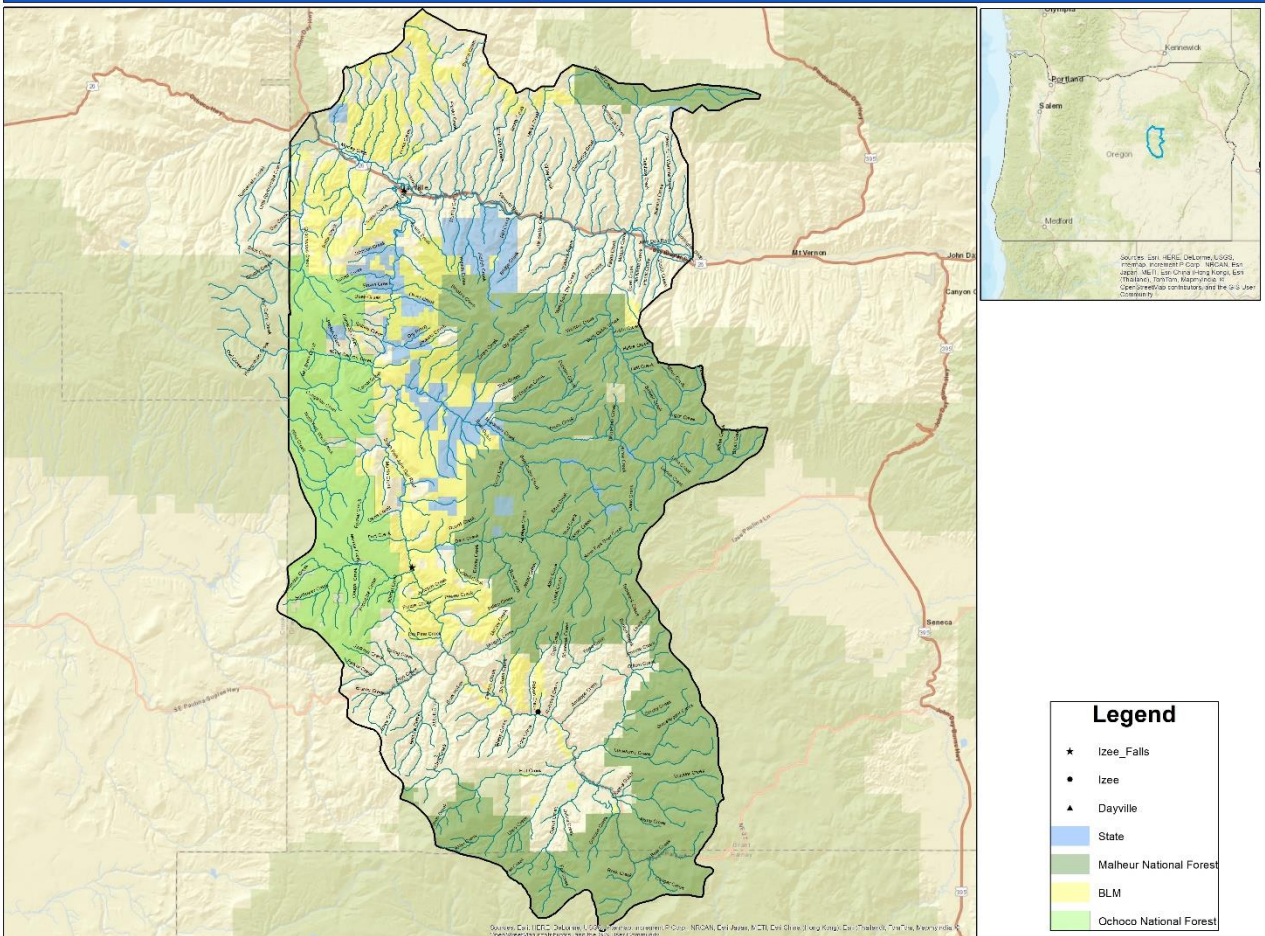
### Contractors Employed

- 16 Private Contracting Companies
- 15 different landowners

### Financials

- Total Spent: January 1<sup>st</sup> thru December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 - \$480,000
- Total Open Funding: \$3.2 million

### South Fork John Day Watershed Council Service Area



## **Completed Projects:**

### *Magic Lantern Upland Initiative*

Magic Lantern Creek is a tributary to the South Fork John Day River, located on the Rockpile Ranch, owned by Mike Phillips. The Rockpile Ranch was working with ODFW to enhance Mule Deer habitat in this area of the Murderers Creek Mule Deer Initiative, and Sustainable Northwest to remove over 150 acres of Western Juniper and supply this Juniper to a sawmill. OWEB funds were used to construct approximately 800 feet of a protective buck and pole fence, labor, and materials to install one upland water development, and contracted services to remove 246 acres of Juniper.



### *Murderers Creek Upland Water*

This project is located on the Malheur National Forest Service, Blue Mountain Ranger District, grazing allotments within the South Fork John Day Watershed. More specifically the Murderers creek allotment, which is broken into 12 pastures. The project is also located within the Murderers Creek Mule Deer Initiative area, and Murderers Creek Wild Horse Management Unit. OWEB funds allowed for the development of 7 of 17 off-channel water sources, strategically placed throughout 2 of the allotment pastures, across 14,000 acres. The permittee will develop 10, which was completed Summer 2020. Partners included in the project are the South Fork John Day Watershed Council, Malheur National Forest Service Range Department, and Grazing allotment permittee.



### *Wind Creek Assessment*

The Wind Creek Watershed is a tributary of the South Fork John Day River, located just downstream of Izee Falls. There are 32 stream miles in the Wind Creek Watershed, which includes 25 miles of critical Mid-Columbia Steelhead habitat stream. We requested support from OWEB to contract a restoration assessment for 15 miles of critical habitat in the Wind Creek watershed to assess current conditions and produce a prioritized restoration plan for aquatic and upland habitat, to advise the South Fork John Day CRMP efforts. We also requested support for contracted cultural surveys for 500 acres of Juniper Removal and to make a juniper prioritization model for all the South Fork John Day watershed.

[Data & Monitoring \(southforkjohnday.com\)](http://southforkjohnday.com)

### *Big Flat Pasture Enhancements*

The area known as Big Flat is in the southwestern corner of Grant County, in the Upper South Fork John Day River Watershed, on the Keerins Ranch. Big Flat is at the headwaters of many redband bearing streams, but closest to Flat Creek and Brisbois Creek. To continue efforts to enhance Flat Creek, and to enhance the habitat of Big Flat, mitigate the effects of Juniper, and provide critical water for wildlife and livestock, the Keerins's had a well installed, and are seeking assistance to develop a watering system from this well, and also to remove 219 acres of Western Juniper. To accompany the well and spring development and assist in providing improved habitat in the Big Flat pasture, we used OWEB support to remove 219 acres of Western Juniper. This will continue work occurring at the headwaters of Flat Creek on the Kee Property, OWEB grant: 218-6005.



### *Tobin Pasture Enhancement*

We requested OWEB funding to assist the Tobin's to install a riparian fence along their side of the river. The opposite side has a very steep embankment and is not accessible by livestock. The fence was approximately 2,112 feet long and incorporated two powder river panels to allow access to the stream and bridge in case of flooding.



### *Sawtooth Meadows Improvement*

The project lies within the Izee Allotment which is located approximately 33 miles northwest of Burns, Oregon and is positioned in both Grant and Harney Counties. The allotment consists of 18,444 acres of National Forest System lands administered by the Emigrant Creek Ranger District (Izee Allotment Management Plan). Sawtooth Meadows itself is in the lower portion of the allotment that includes an ephemeral stream Sawtooth Creek which partially flows through the project area. The IZ Ranch had requested to fence 1.0 mile and incorporate 11.1 acres of Sawtooth Meadows for a grazing exclusion.



### **Ongoing/New Projects:**

#### *Murderers Creek Ranch Enrichment*

The Murderers Creek watershed covers approximately 84,962 acres and is a tributary to the South Fork John Day River in Grant County, Oregon. The project area is located about 3 miles upstream of the confluence with the South Fork John Day River and extends another 2.5 miles along Murderers Creek. The property within the project area is owned by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Murderers Creek is the largest of the 5 tributaries used by steelhead and therefore is unbelievably valuable to sustaining or increasing steelhead production. It is also one of the most important tributaries for spawning and is used by about 59% of steelhead that enter the SF John Day River (MCWA, 1997). We proposed to add large wood structures to establish beaver habitat, improve fish cover, increase sediment retention, and expand the floodplain. Earth moving work will include removing existing berms, rock rip rap and forming pilot channels to increase floodplain activation. In addition, we will enhance riparian habitat through expanded fencing, plantings and preventing establishment of non-natives. Partners for the project include ODF&W Wildlife Area, ODF&W District Office, CTWS, BOR & SFJDWC.



*Tex Creek Restoration*

This project is on the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife property on Tex Creek, a tributary of Murderers Creek. This project is a result of the South Fork John Day Passage Barrier Inventory, performed by retired ODFW District Fish Biologist Jeff Neal, and funded by OWEB, grant # 216-6031. The passage barrier inventory identified a dry channel at the mouth of Tex Creek which occurs only between July 1 and the return of substantial fall rains each year. 1,850 feet of dry channel results. The following project objectives were identified: Trap and retain fine sediments to slow surface water to subsurface water exchange processes; Improve floodplain connectivity and frequency of inundation; Retain stream water at the surface and maintain connected perennial flow and fish passage to the extent feasible; Disperse hydrologic energy to reduce stream velocities and shear stress, and facilitate hyporheic exchange and groundwater storage; Increase the large wood (LWD) component in Tex Creek, including LWD placements in pools to increase habitat complexity and cover; and Increase riparian extent and function with site-appropriate native vegetation.



*Johnson-Tunnel Creek Juniper Removal*

The Johnson-Tunnel Creek Juniper Removal project is located just South of the town of Dayville, Oregon on the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area. PWSWA is currently working to improve winter range conditions for the Johnson Creek watershed by contracting 80 acres of Juniper removal, and ODFW themselves have removed 10 acres through their District Juniper Cutting program. Johnson Creek and Tunnel Creek are important mule deer habitat areas due to their Cottonwood and Aspen galleries, numerous groundwater dependent ecosystems or springs, and beneficial grasses and bitterbrush. We requested OWEB funding to continue cutting 500 acres of Juniper to compliment ODFW's 90 acres.



### *South Fork Cooperative Data Collection*

South Fork John Day Watershed Council (SFJDWC) requested funds to support community engagement, field data collection, and data analysis for Malheur National Forest's BARK project area and adjacent Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area (PWSWA) in the lower South Fork John Day watershed. SFJDWC, with guidance from Malheur National Forest and PWSWA managers, will use OWEB funds to gather vital stream and groundwater-dependent ecosystem data that both agencies are unable to collect with small staffing. SFJDWC will also use OWEB dollars to perform community outreach. Project partners are PWSWA, Malheur & Ochoco National Forests, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, Oregon Dept. of Forestry, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Natural Resources Conservation Service, private landowners, permittees, Dayville Grazing Association, Cummins Ditch Association & SFJDWC.



### *Upper South Fork John Day Riparian Vegetation*

Located along approximately 4 miles of the Upper South Fork of the John Day River, near the town of Izee in Grant County, this project installed high-density plantings along both sides of the river using site-appropriate riparian species in the form of bare root, cuttings, and container stock. It took place on the St. Clair and Izee Ranches. In addition to the planting, several sites have beaver analog posts installed to encourage beaver re-establishment.



### *Upper South Fork John Day Bioassessment*

This project is a continued monitoring effort to understand the effects of restoration on water quality. Funding began with DEQ 319 grant in 2001, and continued from funding through the Charlotte Martin Foundation, Western Native Trout Initiative, and again from DEQ 319.

### *Rockpile Ranch Big Game Enhancements*

The project area is located along the South Fork John Day River and Magic Lantern Creek on the Rockpile Ranch private property. Both focus areas are within the Murderers Creek Mule Deer Initiative. Our project plan is to manage both issues of juniper encroachment and invasive annual grasses to help improve wintering habitat for big game species around the Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area. We proposed to cut 155 acres of juniper in a medium-high priority area as found in our Juniper Prioritization in the South Fork John Day Watershed. We will also aeri ally spray for invasive grasses on 300 acres that has been treated either under this funding opportunity or OWEB/Access & Habitat funding then aeri ally seed native grasses and perform juniper maintenance on the same 300 acres near Magic Lantern Creek. Funding has been secured for this project through Partners for Fish and Wildlife.



### *Brisbois Aspen Health*

Brisbois Creek is located on the Keerins Ranch, near Izee, Oregon, in the Southwestern corner of Grant County. This project area continues from the previously funded OWEB grant #: 219-6015, Big Flat Juniper Removal, which included portions of the headwaters of Brisbois Creek for Juniper Removal. The NRCS Forest Health priority area has been identified as the Upper South Fork John Day region, and the Keerins Ranch has enrolled to have forest health practices in the Brisbois watershed. In between these Forest Health units there are many Aspen stands. These stands were identified in the South Fork John Day Watershed Council's Aspen Inventory as lacking overstory component and suffering from conifer encroachment. OWEB funds were requested to remove encroaching Western Juniper and Conifer from the Aspen stands, install wire cage enclosures for Aspen sucker protection, and install an upland water source.



## *RCPP*

The SFJDWC was awarded 1.7 million dollars through NRCS to complete restoration throughout the South Fork John Day Watershed. The goal of the project funding is to create a resilient, healthy watershed for agricultural producers, as well as fish, and wildlife, across all ownerships and to increase long term economic stability of agricultural producers. This will be met by providing financial assistance for privately owned lands to mirror restoration efforts occurring on all publicly managed lands in the watershed to increase beneficial habitat through; 1) removal of Western Juniper, 2) thinning overstocked forests, 3) protection & enhancement of Quaking Aspen, 4) providing reliable off-channel upland water, 5) strategic pasture rotation. We will also aid agricultural producers to improve the health and productivity of their rangelands by assisting in strategic planning of restoration actions, and comprehensive grazing planning.

### *South Fork John Day/Prineville BLM Good Neighbor Authority*

The South Fork John Day Watershed Council and the Prineville BLM have been working closely for the last 6 years strategizing and planning different project areas that would benefit the watershed by relieving grazing and wildlife pressures on sensitive riparian areas. Through partnerships between the BLM and SFJDWC, we are planning to protect and enhance habitat through juniper/conifer thinning, fencing sensitive spring sources and aspen stands, and where feasible, develop off-channel water sources to provide high quality reliable upland water sources, which will attract cattle, feral horses, and other wildlife away from sensitive riparian areas.

### *Martin Creek Spring Development*

This project is located on Martin Creek on the Rockpile Ranch. OWEB funds will be used to develop a spring source near the top of the Martin Creek drainage. We will be running a pipeline from the spring into a 600 gallon trough downstream of the spring source in the uplands and then returning the overflow water right back into Martin Creek.



### *DEQ 319 Drone*

The project proposes to use unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) equipped with multispectral sensors to continuously monitor riparian vegetation throughout the John Day River Basin. Within this general project location, each project partner will have priority monitoring areas – Sherman SWCD will monitor their ODA focus area, lower Grass Valley Canyon; the North Fork John Day Watershed Council will monitor the North and Middle Fork of the John Day River in correspondence with their planned restoration projects; the South Fork John Day Watershed Council will monitor the South Fork of the John Day River and one third of the Upper mainstem; and Blue Mountain Land Trust will monitor the Upper mainstem, Reynolds Creek sub watershed and Bear Creek in the Bridge Creek Subwatershed.

### *Willits Habitat Improvements*

This project lies near Wiley Creek road next to Marks Creek, a tributary to the mainstem of the John Day River. OWEB funds will be used to develop a spring source on the property by gravity feeding the spring source with piping into two 8x12 1200-gallon water troughs for wildlife use. Overflow water from the troughs will be piped back into the drainage that eventually flows to Marks Creek. We are also going to cut approximately 6.5 acres of west facing juniper surrounding the spring source and drainage in hopes to free up more water and allow big game species food sources to thrive.



### *LiDaR*

OWEB funds were used to cover 60.5 square miles of a 1082 square mile Light Detection and Ranging (LiDaR) data collection in the upper John Day Basin. State and federal partners have secured lidar data on the National Forest and private lands to the North, East and West of the SFJDWC's acquisition area, but federal and state agencies are unable to fund collection on the land in between because of the checkerboard of ownerships. Closing this data gap will equip SFJDWC with vital topographical and vegetation data to plan, perform, and monitor landscape-scale restoration work. Partners include Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), US Geological Survey (USGS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), North Fork John Day Watershed Council (NFJDWC), Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), US Forest Service (USFS), and Department of Geology and Mineral Industries (DOGAMI).

### *Flat Creek Watershed Improvements*

With funding from OWEB and OWRD, this project will improve the function of two of the three Aldrich reservoirs, Roosevelt and Pinchot. We will update the delivery headgate for the Roosevelt Reservoir, and excavate the Pinchot Reservoir back to its permitted water holding capacity, making it capable of supplying irrigation water to a 40-acre Food Plot Field during the mid to late growing season, July-August. The current delivery system is a wheel line, and to improve water application efficiency this will be changed to a center pivot. ODFW will install a new fish screen and diversion, as well as provide the engineering, design, and cultural surveys for the project. The Flat Creek watershed has also been cleared of Juniper.



### *LSR (Landscape Scale Restoration)*

The goal of the South Fork John Day Partnership is to create resilient forests and wildlife habitat across 1143 acres of mixed ownership that holds big game winter range, critical steelhead habitat, recreation, and working forestlands. The Landscape Objectives and FAP priorities supported through this project work are: forests at risk of uncharacteristic wildfire; improve important forest ecosystems, improve critical upland and ESA-listed riparian habitat; create a resistant forest structure; enhance recreation and harvest benefits; build partnerships around landscape scale restoration. Deliverables are: draft Forest Restoration Action Plan; environmental literacy programming; upland forest restoration; and stakeholder meetings to encourage cooperation and increase cross-ownership forest restoration projects adjacent to restoration projects on federal lands. ODF, ODFW, and Malheur National Forest are project partners.