

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee for the record:

I am Mel Omeg, cherry grower from Wasco County, a member of the SWCC, elected officer of OACD Board and Chair of the Wasco SWCD. What is most important: I am a farmer dedicated to conservation.

The senate bills before you helps fund- SWCD Districts, Watershed Councils and land trusts which are dedicated to providing conservation and restoration throughout Oregon. Today, what has changed is the building of relationships and trust between these three organizations.

10 years ago in most counties the SWCDs and Watersheds operated in their own realm often suspicious of the other's work and motives, each with their own budget, staff, and competing for community support and volunteers. There was much discussion and competition for tax dollars. Very little cooperation existed between the two in many counties.

What has brought about this change?

Limited tax dollars, tighter budgets, and a recognition from OWEB and ODA's leadership that partnering and collaboration between these three organizations will provide a greater conservation impact throughout the state. Even more important I have observed first hand a positive change in attitude in many SWCD districts and watersheds between their boards, managers, employees and especially volunteers. The realization that collaboration by forging relationships with local knowledge and resources will better serve all who are dedicated to conservation.

To list a few examples of collaboration I have observed this past year that are representative of what is happening:

- Nestucca/Neskowin Watershed council has representation from Tillamook SWCD on their council.
- Hood River SWCD has watershed representation on their Dist. board.
- Yamhill and Clackamas SWCD- has Watershed representatives on their board.
- Wasco has 5 watersheds and all are well represented on the SWCD board each has an elected director or associate director. Wasco has a very close working relationship with the OWEB staff.
- Sherman County SWCD is working with the OWEB staff to earn a capacity grant to fund a watershed coordinator.
- Joint planning for an annual convention between OACD and the Network of Watershed Councils.

Two examples of partnering:

1. Wasco Soil and Water Conservation District collaborating with The Dalles Watershed discovered a dangerous level of e-coli in a creek running through The Dalles where children often play. DEQ provided the supportive critical testing. The location of the source was a joint effort of the SWCD and watershed. DEQ provided the technical assistance. The SWCD led the request to the city, county and state to solve the problem.
2. The Columbia Land Trust acquired property on the Mill Creek ridge. Noxious weeds were identified on their land. Wasco SWCD provided a participating grant and technical assistance to help the Land Trust solve the problem.

OWEB and ODA leadership have been very supportive of and encouraged this cooperation. These are examples where more conservation efforts have been achieved with tax dollars.