



South Fork John Day Watershed Council

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Subject: SB 21

The South Fork of the John Day River flows northward from its headwaters in the Ochoco and Aldrich Mountains and enters the mainstem of the John Day River at Dayville, OR. The South Fork John Day Watershed Council (SFJWC or Council) territory is located almost entirely within Grant County, Oregon. In its entirety, the South Fork subbasin drains approximately 607 square miles. The SFJDR has been classified as a high priority area for wildlife habitat through ODFW's Mule Deer Initiative specifically the Murderers Creek Wildlife Management Unit. The Oregon Conservation Strategy lists the South Fork Conservation Opportunity Area, outlining the importance of wildlife habitat in the watershed. ODFW's Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area is within the SFJDR Watershed. The Wildlife Area was acquired in 1972 to protect and enhance winter habitat for the upper John Day River, Aldrich Mountains, and eastern Ochoco Mountains mule deer populations.

Exotic annual grasses have invaded large areas and altered the landscape of the South Fork John Day Watershed as well as many other areas of the Intermountain West in North America. Such invasion has reduced ecosystem goods and services including forage and habitat for wild and domestic ungulates. Reduced biodiversity and increased fine fuel loads at annual grass invaded sites promotes more frequent and expansive fires, and decreases resistance to invasion and resilience to disturbance, promoting post-fire reinvasion by annual grasses.

Annual grass invasion alters ecosystem goods and services in ways that decrease both ecological and societal worth. Losses in quality of habitat and forage reduce use by wildlife and livestock. Annual grasses alter fire regimes in ways that promote the persistence and expansion of annual grass dominated plant communities, and threaten public and private property, and safety.

The Council has worked closely with the Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area (PWSWA) in efforts to improve wildlife habitat. We have partnered with the PWSWA, and secured funding through the Bella Vista Foundation, to begin studies with Oregon State University on best strategies moving forward for the control of invasive annual grasses. The PWSWA is also working with neighboring private landowners, and Grant Soil and Water Conservation District Weed treatment program, treating 1500 acres of annual grasses with aerial application of herbicides followed by re-seeding the ground to promote perennial species.

We recommend lawmakers pass Senate Bill 21, allowing the Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area to continue to prioritize the reduction of invasive annual grasses. We would also urge lawmakers to encourage all public land agencies (Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management) to prioritize treatment of their annual grass populations. The effort to eradicate these grasses must be statewide, spanning all ownerships.

Sincerely,

Joanne Keerins
Council Chair