

East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District

Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2020/2021



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Water color drawings brought to you by Jon Wagner, Weeds Specialist and inventive illustrator.



Letter from the Executive Director

Since EMSWCD was established in 1950, things have changed a lot in our region. We have become much more urbanized, the climate crisis and its impact on soil and water health shows up in devastating ways more profoundly each year – from fires and drought to record breaking temperatures and flooding, to name just the most palpable.

The conservation work that EMSWCD engages in with farmers, urban dwellers and everyone in between helps strengthen where we live to better withstand hotter temperatures and keep streams and rivers cool to protect wildlife, fish and people.

In recent years, there has been a reckoning of sorts regarding Oregon’s disgraceful history as it relates to access to land and the generational impact it has had on historically marginalized communities in our district. This reckoning is creating an opportunity for EMSWCD to

reconsider what we do, who we engage with and why, and who benefits from our efforts. This can often be a somber and challenging change for organizations like ours, which is comprised of mostly white people serving mostly white landowners. But we are staying in this place of discomfort and working hard to do better and keep pushing. There is much to do.

Toward these ends and more, this year has seen us launch an extensive staff-led strategic planning process that is creating space for us to fundamentally reconsider who we are, what we do and how we do it to create a more resilient and livable future for everyone in our district. We’re excited to create this next chapter for EMSWCD, ensuring that it continues its legacy of providing value to the taxpayers who entrust us with these dollars.

Nancy J Hamilton
Executive Director

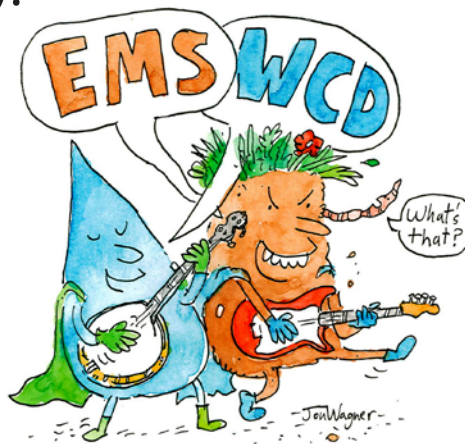
About EMSWCD

Mission: We help people care for land and water.

Vision: Our lands and waters are healthy and sustain farms, forests, wildlife, and communities.

Broad Strategic Goals:

1. Protect and improve water quality and quantity.
2. Protect and improve soil quality and quantity.
3. Protect and improve natural habitats.
4. Protect agricultural lands.
5. Increase the sustainability of agriculture.
6. Provide equitable access to nature.



The Kinds of Problems We Tackle

- Invasive weeds get out of control
- Stream temperatures are too warm
- Fewer farmers are farming
- Water runoff & erosion impacts soil & water quality
- Ag land is not being adequately protected
- Not enough people have access to nature
- Urban core is getting warmer and more polluted
- Inequities relative to marginalized communities throughout the district are getting worse



Funding

EMSWCD MONEY: Where does it come from, where does it go?

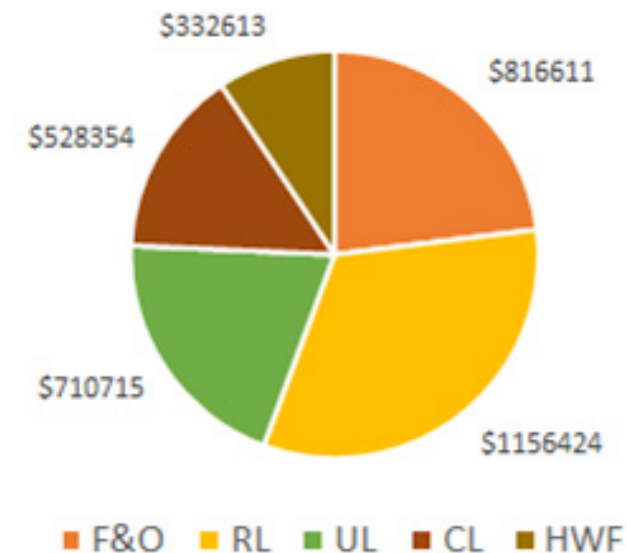
Every year, EMSWCD receives \$0.10 per \$1000 of assessed value of property from all residents in Multnomah County east of the Willamette River (this includes landowners, homeowners, renters, businesses, etc.).

For FY 20-21, that totaled \$5.3 million in revenue.

The remainder of the budget consists of two special capital funds for grants and land easements and acquisitions, along with an annual contingency fund.

For FY 20-21, program expenditures were 10.8% under budget.

\$\$ used for Program Operational Expenditures



Total EMSWCD Budget
FY20-21 = \$15.1million

Expenditures by Program FY 20-21

Finance and Operations:

\$816,611

Rural Lands:

\$1,156,424

Urban Lands:

\$710,715

Conservation Legacy:

\$528,354

Headwaters Farm:

\$332,613

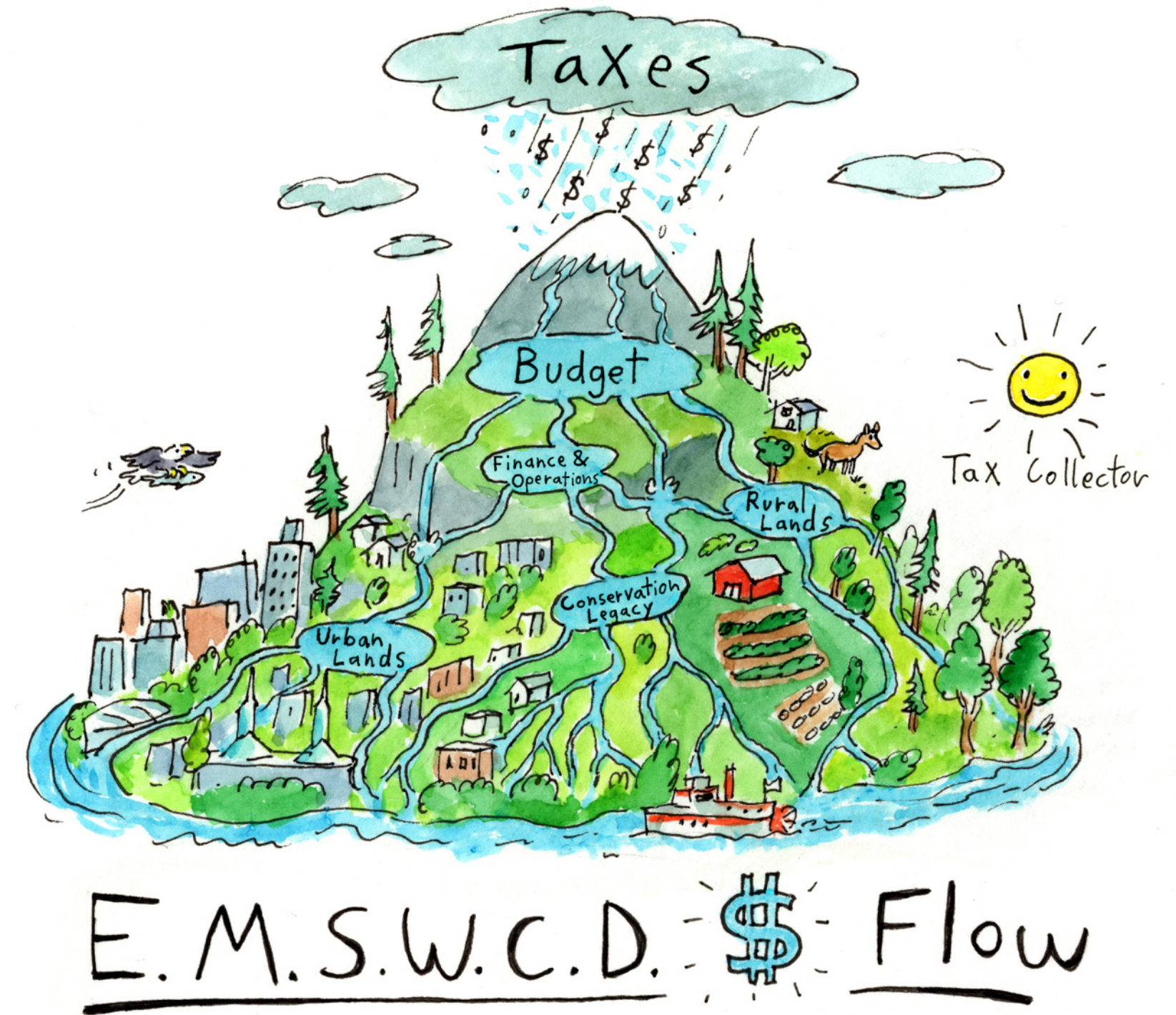
Capital Funds

Land Conservation Fund:

\$7.4M

Grants Fund:

\$1.4M



Restoration

Cool, Happy Salmon

Did you know that warm water is considered a pollutant? It's true, one of the pollutants regulated by DEQ (Department of Environmental Quality) is temperature because warm water is harmful to salmon and can even be lethal. It also has many negative impacts on water quality and other wildlife.

As streamside forests were removed to make way for our homes, farms, and businesses, it led to much more direct sun hitting our local streams and warming them. Unfortunately, many of our local streams are too warm for the populations of coho, steelhead, Chinook, and chum salmon that live here.

So, what are we doing about it? We're putting those forests back! Since 2009, we've worked with over 200 landowners to plant forests of native trees and shrubs along their streams throughout Gresham, Corbett, Springdale, and Troutdale. This year marked a big milestone for us, as we

planted our 500,000th plant. **That's half a million trees and shrubs shading creeks and reducing stream temperatures.**

But the benefits don't stop at temperature. Streamside forests filter the water running through them, removing pollutants before they reach the creek. As the forest returns to its natural state, wildlife that rely on it for home, food, and shelter from predators begin to return. As the trees grow old and fall in the creek or drop their branches, the fallen debris creates deep pools that salmon are drawn to for the cool water and hiding spots. The fallen leaves are also food for bugs, which in turn provide food for fish, and so on up the food chain. Streamside forests also make our communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change, including mitigating the impacts of both flooding and drought. [Learn more about StreamCare.](#)



Benefits of StreamCare



Weed removal



Clean water



Beauty



Erosion prevention



Wildlife habitat



Cool water



Protection

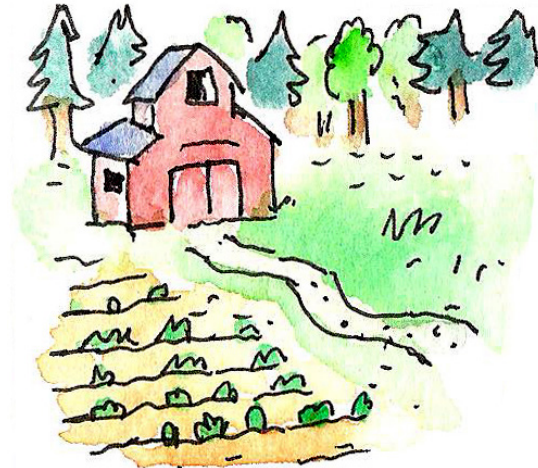
The Future of Farmland

As cities grow, so do their impacts on the surrounding countryside. While Oregon has strong land use protections, they can't ensure that farmland stays in production. The amount of farmland in Multnomah County being actively farmed fell by 4,548 acres between 2012 – 2017. That's 2 ½ acres a day! At the same time, the average cost of farmland per acre increased by a whopping 75%. Values like these make it nearly impossible for beginning and disadvantaged farmers to acquire farmland of their own. Without meaningful solutions to these problems, the future of farming in our region is at risk.

That's where we come in. We are purchasing farms and working farmland easements to make sure that land remains available, productive, more affordable, and sustainably farmed. **This year we bought a 50-acre farm and a 20-acre working farmland easement, protecting an additional 70 acres of land in our district.**

While this farmland protection work can help sustain a strong rural economy, urban residents also benefit by getting access to locally produced farm products like salad greens and berries, as well as plants for their yards. And the soil, water, and habitat protections on our farm projects help protect the natural resources we all enjoy.

We also work with partners to make sure everyone can access nature. The benefits of being in nature lead to healthier and happier communities, yet not everyone has the same access to parks and natural areas. In the City of Portland, neighborhoods of color have 61% less park space than white neighborhoods, and low-income neighborhoods have 60% less than high-income neighborhoods. Last year we partnered with the City of Gresham and Metro to purchase the Shaull property, an urban forest in the heart of Gresham. Projects like this help bring the benefits of nature to all members of our community. Learn more about [Working Farmland Protection](#).



Farmland in Multnomah County was reduced by 4,548 acres between 2012 – 2017. That's 2 ½ acres a day!

70 Acres

Innovation

Artificial Intelligence on the Farm

Summer drought, high temperatures, and increased water demand have added stress to a water supply system that was already stretched to its limit. How can we be more efficient with the water we have as the threat of climate change looms large?

The folks over at Verna Jean Nursery in Gresham have some ideas. They are always looking for ways to improve efficiency on their 10-acre nursery, so when they came to us with the idea of incorporating smart technology into their irrigation system, we were excited to be a part of it. They received funding through our CLIP cost share program (Conservation Landowner Incentive Program) to cover 75% of the cost of the project.

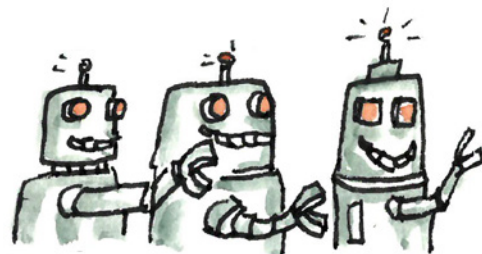
How it works: Irrigation is complex. Soil moisture, weather, water pressure-- all these things need to be considered in order to make an informed decision about where and how much to water.

Verna Jean Nursery installed a sensor-based control system that can respond to information in real-time to make smarter irrigation decisions. It stores information in the cloud and sends it directly to your phone. "It essentially takes the guesswork out of irrigation water management" – Aaron Guffey, Senior Conservationist for EMSWCD.

With greater control, comes greater efficiency. Farmers can avoid overwatering, which saves money, energy, and water by only using what they need. For example, **this project will save at least 326,000 gal of water per year.** Technologies like this are going to be even more important moving forward, as we try to do more with less water. And we are happy to follow the lead of our growers as they bring this type of water-saving innovation to their farms.

This is just one example of what can be accomplished through our CLIP cost share program when we work in partnership with farmers.

CLIP grants provide financial cost-share assistance to private rural landowners and land managers who are working with EMSWCD. Urban projects on private properties with springs, creeks, wetlands, or other water bodies are also eligible. The CLIP program provides up to 75% cost-share with a typical application granting up to \$10,000. [Learn more about CLIP.](#)



"It essentially takes the guesswork out of irrigation water management"
– Aaron Guffey

Demonstration

Safe Schools for Salmon

As we all know, Multnomah County sees almost 45 inches of rain every year, but have you ever wondered what happens to all this rain when it hits the ground? If you're at the Saturday Market, you might see it fall straight into the Willamette or down the drains in the street. If you're at Mount Hood Community College though, you might notice the rain hitting the huge parking lots and see stormwater washing down into Beaver Creek or Kelly Creek. The parking lots at MHCC are impervious



Mount Hood Community College became the first community college in the nation to get Salmon Safe Certification after this project.

surfaces, which don't absorb rainfall, heat up more than areas that have vegetation, and hold oils and debris from cars and people that then wash into the creeks during a rainstorm. The creeks then become warmer and polluted, which in turn puts wildlife habitats at risk – especially the salmon that live there!

To combat this, EMSWCD teamed up with MHCC, the Sandy River Basin Watershed Council, the City of Gresham, Metro Regional Gov., Spirit Mountain Community Fund, and other community partners to create the Mt. Hood Community College Clean Water Retrofit project. This project has been going strong for five years.

The project consists of removing large chunks of asphalt/concrete from the MHCC parking lots and replacing it with patches of rain gardens and drywells where water can safely and slowly flow in, get absorbed, cleaned, and filtered by the soil and plants, and then continue running into the creeks. By adding this process into

the stormwater's journey, the creeks don't fill as fast, and the debris and oils are caught before they can reach the creeks. In fact, **this process at MHCC treats 8 million gallons of dirty stormwater and keeps 8000 pounds of pollutants out of the creeks each year.**



Depave is a nonprofit that works with communities to remove excess pavement and replace it with urban green space.

Students and community members participated in the creation of plans for the space, the removal of asphalt at partner Depave's volunteer event, the planting of the new rain gardens, and creating educational signs for the surrounding areas. This project aims to make the water safe for salmon as they return to the creek and to provide an avenue for teaching MHCC students and the community about the importance of, and how to be, good environmental stewards.

What's All The Construction About?

We're Depaving The Way For Salmon!

6 reasons Why being Salmon Safe is great!

- 1 Beaver Creek and the Sandy River will be cleaner and safer for people and fish
- 2 MHCC is the first Salmon Safe certified community college, enhancing our sustainability
- 3 Rain gardens will filter polluted parking lot runoff before it reaches the river
- 4 One billion gallons of water treated over 30 years
- 5 Campus will be prettier!
- 6 These projects are attracting community investment to MHCC

Funded By:



In Partnership With:



Adaptation

Reimagining the Possible During COVID

While we had all hoped things would be back to “normal” by now after COVID-19 turned our worlds upside down last fiscal year, we eventually came to terms with the fact that nothing was going back to “normal” any time soon. Instead, we have focused on imagining a “new normal.” When COVID first hit, we scrambled and shifted much of what had always been “in-person” to the now commonplace “virtual” format - from meetings to workshops to events. The outcomes of those early-day changes were something we never could have expected. Our engagement and attendance numbers went UP and we were able to reach people who had been beyond our reach in the past.

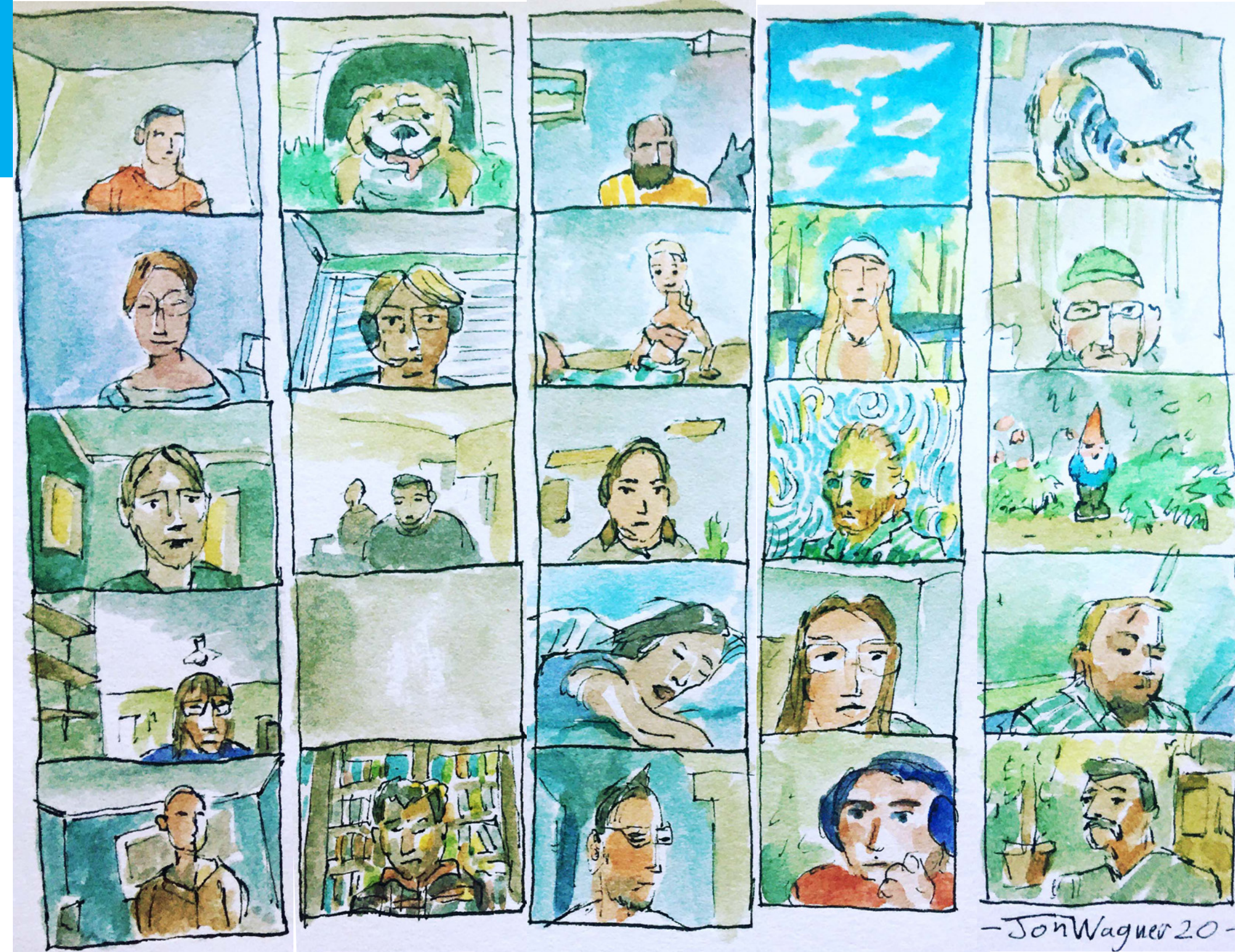
Here's how that happened:
During this fiscal year, we doubled
down on virtual and recorded webinars
that could be watched from home,
whenever you'd like. Here's what one

avid viewer thought of the switch:
“Please keep offering virtual learning
opportunities, even after the pandemic.
It is far more convenient and saves gas,
time, and the environment.”

Taking a page from our workshops playbook, we moved our 'Office Hours' online which allowed us to offer them more frequently and be more flexible about scheduling. Office hours provide a virtual space where farmers can come to us for counsel and planning advice. No two farmers are the same, so the one-on-one approach has provided a space for farmers to ask questions and receive advice specific to their operations. The result is more conservation practices being implemented on the ground and helping the farmers meet their conservation goals while we fulfill our mission of caring for land and water.

Perhaps the biggest change we had to make because of COVID was to cancel our annual Native Plant Sale, which has historically engaged hundreds

of plant buyers as well as hundreds of volunteers. With COVID-19 social distancing mandates, we found that holding this event in-person would not be feasible or safe for our staff or community. To stand in for the event until in-person is available again, we instead hosted EMSWCD's first Virtual Native Plant Swap group on Facebook! With just under 700 active members, the public was still able to receive their native plants in a safe and efficient way. As well, 500 native plants were provided for an Equitable Giving Circle (EGC) Event along with supporting educational material. These events allowed us to stay on-task with our goal of getting more native plants in the ground, as well as continuing to distribute information on best practices and naturescaping to the public.



Equity

Collective Learning

As we continue to prioritize equity, access, and inclusion in our work as a conservation district, we must also continue to focus on our own learning and growth as government employees, as individuals, and as members of our communities. Educating ourselves is a lifelong journey, but one that requires urgency and attention.

We have done this in a number of ways, including staff-wide training and workshops, a comprehensive action plan that will incorporate equity into everything we do, and a robust and dedicated Equity Team. But perhaps the most impactful has been through our small equity discussion groups.

The discussion groups each consist of 3-4 staff members that meet monthly to discuss different topics. Folks are provided with resources on the topic in preparation for the group discussion. To accommodate different learning styles, people can choose from resources that involve reading, listening, watching,

and doing. As a group we developed group agreements. These agreements provide us with guidance for having respectful conversations and a framework for holding ourselves and each other accountable.

After two years of focusing mostly on race, this year we started learning and discussing other identities that have been marginalized, starting with gender. We contracted with the YWCA to present workshops on gender

identity, gender discrimination, and sexual orientation.

Not only has collective learning provided us with the foundation we need to better meet the needs of the diverse communities we serve but has also increased staff's ability to have difficult conversations with one another in thoughtful, impactful ways. The result is improved internal communication, healthier relationships, and more empathy infused in our daily work.



What is equity?

Whereas diversity refers to all the many ways that people differ, equity is about creating fair access, opportunity, and advancement for all those different people.

- ideal.com

The Agreements

1. Be mindful of privilege, power dynamics, unconscious bias, and missing perspectives.
2. Honor privacy (personal stories stay, learnings go).
3. Listen to understand.
4. Speak responsibly.
5. Make space/take space.
6. Acknowledge, accept, and work through mistakes.
7. Be willing to do things differently and/or experience discomfort.
8. Expect and accept non-closure.



Education

Creating Pathways to Conservation Careers

The environmental field is built on a history of racism and exclusion, resulting in a workforce that does not reflect the diversity of our communities. Because of this history, solutions require intentional approaches at all levels – education, access, training and development. Projects like the Community Habitat Restoration Project, funded by a 2020 Partners in Conservation grant at Leach Botanical Garden, provides opportunities for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) youth to get involved in conservation early on in their lives. This opens doors to new careers and job opportunities and fosters a sense of belonging in the conservation community.

Located in the heart of a diverse East Portland community, the Leach Garden provides access to nature and respite from the hustle and bustle of the city. While the project will restore five acres to healthy habitat, that is only the

beginning. The project's real intent is to create pathways to conservation careers involving mentorship, restoration, project evaluation, reporting, and working with community partners. How it works: Working with BIPOC-led partners including The Blueprint Foundation, African Youth & Community Organization and Wisdom of the Elders, youth are involved in activities ranging from designing and leading tours to plant propagation, site prep, planting native species, maintenance and monitoring. Recognizing the mental and emotional benefits of time outside in nature, they also created, led and participated in mindfulness and art-focused activities.

COVID-19 required a flexible and creative approach. Some things that had been nearly impossible before the pandemic – like in-person meetings – proved much easier on Zoom. More frequent meetings resulted in stronger relationships and enriched collaboration. Their train-the-trainer mentorship model, while not originally

planned, has proven so successful that partners anticipate incorporating it into future efforts. And videos, presentations, and stories about the project and partnerships have been widely circulated, raising the visibility of the project, gaining followers and awards, and opening doors to new opportunities for funding and support from both environmental and social justice organizations.

In their own words: “The Leach Garden ‘Back 5’ project site has become a training ground/resource for other organizations brought in through the relationships created within the original project partnership. This furthers our goals of equity and inclusion, collaboration and workforce/leadership training.”

[Learn more about our grants program.](#)



Development



HIP Grad Bought a Farm

About 60% of Oregon's farmland is expected to change hands over the next 20 years and farmers under the age of 30 only account for about 10% of all farmers in Multnomah County. Without younger people looking to start or continue running farms, and without equitable access to purchase farmland or start a farm, we can expect much of Multnomah County's farmlands to disappear over the coming decades. In order to combat this issue, future farmers need to have equitable access to learn about farm management and stewardship, and the resources necessary to run a working farm business. This is where our Headwaters Incubator Farm Program plays a part.

The Headwaters Incubator Farm Program (HIP) helps launch private farm businesses by providing experienced farmers with access to affordable farmland and agricultural resources, information on best management practices, and connections to local small-farm networks. HIP has graduated 15 farm businesses with an additional 17 in the program currently. Just under 90% of the

graduates continue to farm and sell at markets or source supplies within EMSWCD's district.

Justin Simms of Glasrai Farm is one HIP graduate who successfully leveraged the incubator to establish a viable farm business. In 2016, after years of growing on multiple rented urban lots, Justin began farming 1.5 acres of farmland at Headwaters Farm. The added efficiencies of producing on one central farm, in addition to HIP's support services and the built-in farm community helped him solve problems, bulk purchase, and learn farm-scale production.

Over the five years that Glasrai Farm was in HIP Justin saw his sales grow and markets galvanize. He experimented with different tools, scales of production, size of his labor crew and made additional investments in equipment and farm resources that were appropriate for his business, including an old John Deere tractor. As his farming skills, knowledge, and tools improved, Justin was able to find new efficiencies and production practices and bring larger quantities of produce to the St. Johns, Montavilla, and Portland State University farmers markets.

Before graduating from the five-year incubator program, Justin was able to purchase an 8-acre farm in Clackamas County. He now works that land to produce nutrient-dense mixed vegetables for local markets and model conservation farming practices that protect and enhance his farm's soil and water resources.

[Learn more about Headwaters Incubator Farm.](#)



Small Farm Innovation

Small and medium-sized farms can produce a lot of fruits and veggies. That said, the production scale of our farmers is still too small to warrant a major investment in conventional farm washing and packing equipment. Not to worry! Farmers are nothing if not creative and scrappy. Our veggie spinners are a great example! Once our HIP farmers harvest their greens, they're tossed into these washing machines (yes like for clothes!), that have been cleaned, gutted, and redesigned as super-sized salad spinners by some of our farmers and EMSWCD staff. Removing excess water gives the highly perishable crop a much longer shelf-life!

Partnerships

Because, of course, we didn't do it alone.

Grantees

Albina Cooperative Garden
Audubon Society of Portland/Columbia Land Trust
Camp E.L.S.O. Inc. (Experience Life Science Outdoors)
City of Gresham
Columbia Grange
Columbia Riverkeeper
Columbia Slough Watershed Council
Depave
Ecology in Classrooms and Outdoors
Friends of Nadaka Nature Park
Friends of Sellwood Community House
Friends of Zenger Farm
Gresham Barlow School District
Grow Portland
Growing Gardens
Home Builders Foundation
Human Access Project
Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO)
Johnson Creek Watershed Council
Kindness Farm
Latino Network
Leaven Community/Salt and Light Lutheran
Metropolitan Family Service
Multnomah County
Oliver P. Lent PTA
Oregon State University Extension
Our Happy Block with Calvary Lutheran Church
Our Village Gardens
Outgrowing Hunger
Parkrose Community United Church of Christ
Portland Area CSA Coalition
Portland Fruit Tree Project
Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center Inc.
Reparations and Earth Restoration Initiative
Rigler Elementary Padres Unidos PTA
ROSE Community Development
Sauvie Island Center
St Johns Swapnplay (Swap)
Urban Greenspaces Institute
Urban Nature Partners PDX

Vanport Placemaking Project
Verde
Wisdom of the Elder, Inc.
World of Salmon Council

Contractors

Adelante Mujeres.
Amy Whitworth
Appraisal and Consulting Group, LLC
Assessment Associates, Inc.
Capacity Building Partnerships, LLC
Catalysis, LLC
CBRE, Inc.
Celeste Searles-Mazzacano
Clackamas Community College.
Coalition of Communities of Color
Community Engagement Liaisons, PKS International
Deepculture.net & Black Futures Farm, Malcolm Hoover
Emma Browne Photography
First American Title of Oregon.
Sandy River Watershed Council
Native American Youth and family Association (NAYA)
G&P Obrist Excavating, LLC.
H&R Engineering
Harry Short, Mudjoy Farm
Jacob Rose
Jaime English
JLM, LLC
Lora Price
Lydia Cox
McCord, Construction, LLC.
Michelle E. Smith, Attorney at Law
Mosaic Ecology
New Theory Consulting
Oregon State University (OSU)
OTAK, Inc.
Pacific HR
Pacific Hydro-Geology, Inc.
Ping Khaw LLC
Schroeder Law Offices PC

Stamberger Outreach Consulting
Tax Supervising & Conservation Commission (TSCC)
YWCA

Partners

Adelante Mujeres
City of Gresham
City of Portland
City of Troutdale
Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District
Columbia Grange
Columbia Land Trust
Columbia Slough Watershed Council
Friends of Nadaka
Hood River Soil and Water Conservation District
June Key Delta House
Johnson Creek Interjurisdictional Committee
Metro
Mt. Hood Community College
Multnomah County
Multnomah County Drainage District
Multnomah County Farm Bureau
Multnomah County Transportation Division
Native American Youth and Family Association
Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods
Oregon Association of Nurseries, Mt. Hood Chapter
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Oregon State Department of Environmental Quality
Oregon State Parks
Oregon State University
OSU Master Gardeners
Outgrowing Hunger
People Places Things
Sandy River Watershed Council
Sandy River Basin Partners
Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District
US Forest Service Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area
Verde
Voz
West Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District