



Conservation in Washington: Powered by People

GRANT COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT - ENGAGING CITIZENS WITH WILDLIFE THROUGH OTHELLO SANDHILL CRANE FESTIVAL

The Othello Sandhill Crane Festival began in 1998 to highlight the spring return of Sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis*) to the Columbia Basin in Washington State. In 2003, Grant County Conservation District stepped up to keep the festival alive and vibrant by taking on the role of festival coordinator. Today, the festival continues to be a huge success.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS Coordination of the Sandhill Crane Festival requires volunteer help throughout the year. Grant County Conservation District (GCCD) has reached out to locals and partners to help fill the many roles required to run the event. GCCD gained support from the City of Othello, Othello School District, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Bureau of Reclamation, and many others. On the day of the festival, GCCD provides over 400 volunteers. GCCD also coordinates the meetings, vendors, logistics, speaker talks and needs, agricultural guides, and outreach and marketing, among many other duties.



CELEBRATING SUCCESS The Othello Sandhill Crane Festival provides an opportunity for GCCD to showcase good stewards of agriculture and how they contribute to wildlife. Agriculture is an important part of avian life in the Columbia Basin. Sandhill cranes feast on leftover corn from fall harvest, and other crops provide forage for many other species. The diversity of wildlife in the region is matched only by the diversity of the crops.



Festival attendees make a stop to observe wildlife on their tour.

The three-day event offers a variety of entertaining, educational, and memorable activities for the whole family. The festival includes guided tours, live birds, lectures, vendors, food courts, and children activities. On Saturday, the main day of the festival, six lectures are offered every hour by experts in their fields. Talks have included Crop Biotechnology, Pollinators of the Shrub-Steppe, Greater Sage Grouse, Ice Age Floods and the Channeled Scablands, Drones in Agriculture, Wolves in Washington, and many more. In 2014, festival attendance grew to its highest level yet—1,600 people attended, over half of whom purchased seats on guided tours.

“All that I attended was fun, educational and professionally presented,” said Elaine Thorne, a festival attendee from Spokane. “From the tour guides to the lectures, we had a wonderful experience. I am spreading the word about your Festival to others and will attend next year.”