



State Legislative District #8, 16
Congressional District #4

Benton Conservation District

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Board Chair: Jack Clark

Other Accomplishments



Fifty-eight landowners participated in two workshops designed to educate small farm operators about a variety of natural resource topics.

Photo: Erin Hightower, BCD



Landowners Reg and Sheila said of their BCD-certified Heritage Garden, "I feel really good about the fact that we have beauty with so much less water."

Photo: Rachel Little, BCD



BCD, in partnership with Moon Farms, is conducting a stripper header demonstration project designed to reduce erosion and increase soil moisture.

Photo: Rachel Little, BCD

2016 Feature Accomplishment

Relieving state drought concern with local solutions and projects



Washington Conservation Corps member removes water stargrass.

Photo: Rachel Little, BCD

RESOURCE CHALLENGE The state drought caused many challenges. Water rationing forced landowners to selectively irrigate, and plants were lost. Low water levels allowed for explosive aquatic plant growth in the Yakima River, closing the salmon fishery, creating physical barriers to salmon migration, and smothering spawning habitat. During the warmest weather, aquatic plants consumed so much oxygen in the Yakima River that oxygen levels temporarily dropped below state water quality standards, almost to levels lethal to most aquatic organisms.

PROJECT SUMMARY AND RESULTS

Benton Conservation District (BCD) helped landowners reduce outdoor water use by providing demonstrations, online resources, five presentations, a tour, and 22 site visits. The Governor's drought declaration released Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) crews for drought relief, so the BCD recruited, trained, and supervised WCC crews and volunteers in the removal of 40 tons of aquatic plants from traditional salmon spawning areas. The harvested material was composted and marketed to agriculture producers for mulch and soil enrichment. BCD also developed a Master Streamkeeper Program, through which they recruited and trained volunteers to conduct water quality and aquatic plant monitoring.



Amy Fishburn, Master Streamkeeper Volunteer, tests water quality. Photo: Karen Sowers, Tapteal Greenway

KEY PARTNERS: State Conservation Commission; Columbia Basin Chapter of the WA Native Plant Society; WCC; State Departments of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife; Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group; Richland Rod & Gun Club; US Fish & Wildlife Service; Yakama Nation Fisheries; Benton PUD; S. Yakima Conservation District; Battelle/PNW National Laboratory; Kennewick, Richland, Prosser, Finley, and Sunnyside School Districts; Tapteal Greenway

More work to do!

- Continue implementation of a groundwater characterization project.
- Participate in the Benton County Voluntary Stewardship Program Workgroup and provide technical support.
- Partner with the City of Kennewick to establish a 19,250 square foot Heritage Garden at Hansen Park.