

A Little Farm Gets Some Big Changes

Owners reap benefits of cooperation



Aerial view of the Burt property

Introduction

Your farm may be of the “hobby” variety – one that is run more for recreational purposes than as a business – but the state of Washington still requires you to meet water quality standards on your property. The Department of Ecology is ready to help you make that happen.

Problem

In late 2011, Ecology received an anonymous complaint about runoff from just such a farm sitting on an unnamed tributary of Deep Creek in north Spokane County. This area is part of the Deep Creek/Coulee Creek watershed that is covered by the Spokane River Total Daily Maximum Load, or TMDL. The

complaint was made by someone who reported what appeared to be polluted surface water – “a mess” – on the 14-acre property.

Martyn Quinn and Jon Jones (now retired), from the Watershed Unit of Ecology’s Spokane Water Quality office, and Dan Ross from the Spokane Conservation District (SCD) visited the site and met with property owners Leonard and Eva Burt in January 2012. At the time of the visit, the Burts were housing three horses, three donkeys, six goats, a miniature pony, a wallaroo, and various free-range poultry on their farm. During the assessment, Quinn, Jones, and Ross found:

- Areas with multiple drainage issues were contributing to mud build-up and a potential for manure to move into the riparian area.
- The water supply for livestock consisted of bathtubs on uneven, poorly draining surfaces which created mud build-up.
- Although the riparian area was fenced, some sections needed repair or replacement.
- Some pasture areas were overgrazed.
- There was a designated livestock crossing over the creek, but it lacked protections such as good drainage or a bridge.

Proposal Details

The SCD then submitted to Ecology and the Burts a livestock impact assessment with a proposal for best management practices (BMPs). The proposal included:

- The installation of better drainage systems to problem areas.
- Adequate off-site livestock watering points.
- An area for dry manure storage.
- Renovation of the riparian fencing.
- Restoration of overgrazed pastures by allowing a resting period of one year with no livestock access, selective tree removal, and appropriate plantings.

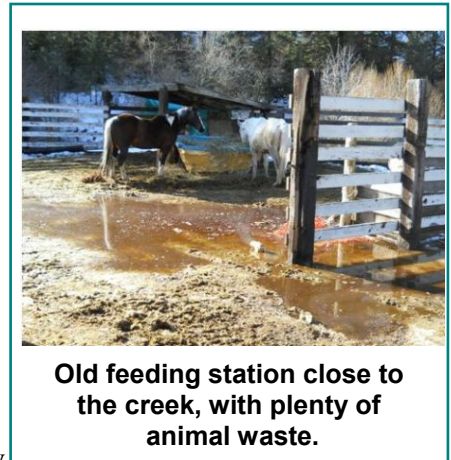


- Establishing a more efficient stream crossing, including gates

The landowners were amenable to the SCD’s recommendations. They understood the importance of taking these steps to protect the Deep Creek/Coulee Creek watershed and were willing to work with Ecology to meet the required standards.

Milestones and Outcomes

In early 2013, work began after all necessary paperwork and permitting was completed. Off-site watering points with solar-powered pumps were installed for livestock, and fencing along the creek was improved. The SCD also built a winter feeding and manure storage area with adequate drainage, and added plantings to the fenced riparian buffer area to improve protection against runoff. Concrete and other construction debris had been dumped in the past inside the riparian area on the site; this was removed and replaced with vegetation that will increase stability, provide shade, habitat, and runoff protection.



Old feeding station close to the creek, with plenty of animal waste.

In December 2013, two years after receiving the initial complaint, Ecology signed off on the implemented best management practices (BMPs) and pronounced the project complete. Both the SCD and the property owners were satisfied with the results. The Burts had gone into the project with the objectives of increasing chore efficiency and improving animal health, which were achieved. They agreed to provide ongoing maintenance and adhere to a “small acreage farm plan” supplied by the SCD. There will be occasional visits by Ecology staff to ensure that water quality standards continue to be met.



Happy horses with a new solar-powered watering point in the background.

Partners

Ecology thanks Leonard and Eva Burt for their cooperation and for being receptive to the recommendations from the SCD. Thanks also to Daniel Ross of the SCD for his valuable contributions to the project.

Funding

The SCD had no available grant funds to cover the project. At that point, Ecology staff stepped in: they applied for, and received, direct implementation funds (DIF) from the state in the amount of \$60,850. These funds DIF are furnished by money that has been awarded by Washington State’s Centennial Grants and Clean Water Act Section 319 Federal Grants, and then returned or not used by the grantees. These funds covered 100 percent of the costs associated with the Burt project.

For more information

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