

Little Weiser River tour demonstrates landowner conservation accomplishments  
Wendy Green, Adams Soil and Water Conservation District

There is less sediment flowing down the Little Weiser River today and more acres of pasture and hay ground staying put, thanks to the stream bank restoration efforts of local landowners.

The Adams Soil and Water Conservation District hosted a tour of restoration sites on September 10<sup>th</sup> to show interested landowners and state and federal agencies what has been accomplished.

“We are wrapping up the second phase of a nearly decade-long project to reduce bank loss along the Little Weiser River,” explained Julie Burkhardt, chair of the Adams SWCD. “Over the last eight years, landowners have voluntarily implemented best management practices to stop bank loss and reduce the sediment load in the Little Weiser by an estimated 1,812 tons per year so far.”

When the last Phase 2 projects are completed by the end of this year, the total sediment reduction should be well over 2,000 tons a year.

Funding for the project is provided by congress under Section 319 of the Clean Water Act. The grant, administered by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, covers up to sixty percent of the cost of BMPs. The landowners’ share of the cost can take the form of in-kind contributions, including labor, use of personal equipment, and plant material or large rock. In fact, the more hands-on the landowner is, the greater the non-cash or in-kind contribution.

Tour participants looked at several ways to protect their land along the river, including riparian fencing, rock barbs, and willow plantings.

Bill Lillibridge, engineer with the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission, worked with landowners to design the best options for their particular situations. He explained how rock barbs work.

“Rock barbs with willow plantings act like speed bumps to slow the current along the stream’s edge,” said Lillibridge. “The slower water allows deposition of fine material along the bank, giving woody plants a place to establish. These woody plants, with their extensive root systems, provide the long-term protection for the banks.”

Restoring miles of riverbank requires cooperation not only among landowners and the ASWCD, but involves partner agencies like the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Idaho Department of Water Resources and the US Army Corps of Engineers.

In-stream work requires permits from two of those agencies, while other partners provide engineering and technical support. Agency representatives voiced their support for the improvements they saw on the tour.

“The on-the-ground results of what you’ve been able to accomplish with the funding you’ve received were impressive,” said Dave Pisarski, 319 program coordinator with Idaho DEQ. “It’s always satisfying to see first-hand the outcomes we get a few years after these projects are successfully completed. In this case, you certainly did not disappoint, as the results of your efforts were readily apparent.”

Over the past six years, Royce and Pan Schwenkfelder of Cambridge have participated in the 319 project to protect several stretches of the Little Weiser through their ranch. They have been pleased with the positive results.

“It is encouraging to see the agency folks beginning to understand that landowners do actually care about the river and the erosion that occurs every year,” said Royce Schwenkfelder. “Willingness on their part to get landowners timely permitting, the engineering needed, and not make the process quite so painful is appreciated. Landowners are getting on board and connecting projects into something that can make a difference in the long term. I would encourage more folks to get involved and see how this process can help them.”

Recently the Adams SWCD was awarded funding for Phase 1 of the Upper Weiser Restoration project. This project will encompass the upper reaches of the Weiser River, from the Fruitvale area downstream to about Goodrich Creek near the county line.

“It may take several phases of grant funding to address all the areas of concern for landowners along this stretch of the Weiser River,” said Burkhardt. “The District will start by assisting landowners who have already contacted us. However, we encourage any Weiser River landowners to get in touch with us. We’ll work with landowners as we have funding and engineering available.”

Burkhardt noted that river restoration is a long-term process that won’t be accomplished in a year or two.

“In fact, the District is considering applying for Phase 3 funding for the Little Weiser,” she said. “Any landowners on the Little Weiser who are interested in future stream bank work should contact the District soon. If there is sufficient interest and need, the District could submit another grant application by next summer.”

If you are interested in learning more about stream bank restoration, contact the Adams Soil and Water Conservation District at 253-4668 or [aswd@ctcweb.net](mailto:aswd@ctcweb.net).