

## Carlton Complex Recovery: How Have We Helped?

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### Upcoming Events

Okanogan County Fair  
September 10-13

Okanogan Harvest Festival  
October 3

IRIS Summit  
(Waterville)  
November 12

Okanogan CD continues to play a key role in protecting and restoring natural resources after the fire. Thanks to substantial funding from the Washington Conservation Commission and Supplemental Budget funds from the Washington State Legislature, our staff have completed a significant amount of work on the ground to assist individuals and communities impacted by Washington State's largest wildfire. We've worked with over 20 partner organizations to deal with this unprecedented disaster.



Assessing soil burn severity and erosion potential, September 2014.

### 200+ Site Visits Since August 2014

Conservation District staff from Okanogan County and around the state visited individual properties to assess hazards and damage, and collect information for assistance funding requests. They also coordinated visits and assistance with 25+ other agencies and organizations, to connect landowners with any relevant resource available.

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### Plant Sale 2016: Bulk Orders Only

For over 25 years, our annual native plant sale has been a big part of our mission to serve landowners in Okanogan County. Unfortunately, even with our best efforts, the plant sale has always lost money. In light of this fact, and with our ever-increasing workload, we have made the difficult decision to phase out the plant sale. **For 2016, we will only take orders for bulk quantities of plants;** typically bundles of 50 or 100 individual stems. Please visit our website for species availability, prices, and an order form: [www.okanogancd.org/plant-sale](http://www.okanogancd.org/plant-sale)

**Deadline for bulk plant orders is November 30, 2015.**

# Last Chance for Free Pump Screens

**Time is running out...if you irrigate from the Okanogan River or Lake Osoyoos, you need to act now!**

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the US Department of Fish and Wildlife have pump screen regulations to keep tiny threatened and endangered fish species from being injured by screens or sucked into irrigation pipes. **Irrigators who don't have fish-friendly screens risk being fined for each day that an intake fails to meet requirements.** The Okanogan Conservation District can get you the right fish screen, but only for a limited time.

So far, we've helped irrigators install 83 new screens at no cost to them. Approximately 45 to 50 fish-friendly screens still need to be installed. You can get a free screen and avoid the unpleasantness of fines, but you must contact us as soon as possible! If you wait, you may miss out and have to carry the entire cost of a new screen yourself.

If you are an irrigator who pumps water from the Okanogan River or Lake Osoyoos, and you are uncertain if you have a pump screen that protects fish, please contact Bob Clark at 509.422.0855 ext. 104, or [bob@okanogand.org](mailto:bob@okanogand.org) to schedule a site visit to look at your system.



A set-up like this puts an irrigator at risk of regulatory action from WDFW.

## Manager's Note...

*Bob Clark, Acting District Manager*

As you can see by this newsletter, we're helping landowners with a wide variety of natural resources issues, and often improving their bottom line. A big focus continues to be assistance to landowners affected by the Carlton Complex Fire. Unfortunately, the state legislature did not provide additional funding to help us address the ongoing needs of these landowners; however, the Washington State Conservation Commission has stepped up to support this important work through the end of 2015. We are working hard to find more funding to deal with the impacts of this unprecedented disaster. Furthermore, our staff continue to help homeowners be better prepared for wildfire through Firewise assessments and educational opportunities.

There is life beyond the Carlton Complex Fire, as evidenced by work we are doing with cover crops and soil health, water quality issues, pump screen replacements, and wildlife planning. If you have a natural resource concern or issue, please contact the Okanogan Conservation District—we may be able to help you. At the very least, we'll point you in the right direction to someone who can provide assistance!

# New Staff at the District

We are excited to welcome four new staff to the Okanogan Conservation District. Each of them brings a dedication to conserving natural resources, a commitment to working cooperatively with landowners, and a great sense of humor. We took the risk of hiring two graduates from rival local high schools; so far, they have kept the Omak-Okanogan Backyard Brawl on the gridiron and out of the office!

## **Allisa Carlson, Wildlife Conservation Planner**

Allisa has a Bachelor's of Landscape Architecture from the University of Washington. She grew up in western Montana on a small sheep farm and spent much of her youth in the surrounding mountains and forests. She has experience with habitat restoration design, vegetation inventories, rural community planning, GIS, and scenery management. Allisa is a graduate of the Seattle Audubon Master Birder Program and is an active member of the Okanogan Trails Mule Deer Foundation. Allisa currently works with landowners on improving and maintaining wildlife habitat.



## **Zach Day, Natural Resource Technician**

Zach graduated from Omak High School in 2010 and earned a BS in Wildlife Ecology from Washington State University in 2014. He has experience in wildland firefighting, forestry, and forest engineering. He spent some time volunteering for the NRCS, and working with the DNR in the Okanogan and Methow Valleys. Zach is currently working with landowners who have been affected by the 2014 Carlton Complex fire.



## **Amy Martin, Conservation Planner**

Amy has a B.S. and M.S. in Natural Resource Science with a focus on aquatic resources from Washington State University. Amy's experience includes monitoring and assessing stream and lake water quality, aquatic habitat and riparian condition. She is also skilled with GIS and has written and managed several successful grants. At the District she develops water quality improvement projects.



## **Mindy Widell, Natural Resource Technician**

Mindy graduated from Okanogan High School in 2009. She earned a B.A. in Geography, with a minor in geology and a certificate in Geographical Information Systems (GIS) from Eastern Washington University in 2014. She has worked on GIS projects for the Department of Ecology and the Geology Department at EWU. Mindy is currently working with landowners who were affected by the 2014 Carlton Complex fire.



# Ecology Class Creates Signs for Trail

Ecology of the Okanogan is a joint effort by the Okanogan Conservation District, Okanogan High School and the Colville Confederated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Department. This year-long science elective taught by Kathleen Ferguson began in the 2013-2014 school year.

Students in the class work with fisheries biologists on a habitat restoration/salmon recovery effort on Woody Island, just south of downtown Okanogan. The restoration work provides context for the rest of the course, which focuses on ecological principles and specific components of local ecosystems.

Numerous natural resource professionals and local landowners are involved, providing presentations, training, and field trips to help students understand the impacts of land use, water use, and fire on the health of the Okanogan River watershed.

One of the goals of the class is to increase community awareness of collaborative natural resource conservation in the Okanogan area. For the past two years, students in the class have been designing interpretive signs for the trail system on Woody Island. In the spring of 2015, the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board provided funding to take these designs from the sketchbook and into reality. With the help of Okanogan High School art teacher Dan Brown, and graphic designer Jenn Tate from Earth and Sky Studios in Twisp, we developed handsome graphics that tell the story of the salmon in the side channels along the Okanogan River. With the support of the City of Okanogan, we plan to install the signs in early September. So come take a walk, bring your binoculars, and check out the new signs telling you all about the restoration of Woody Island's side channels!

Students learned what makes a good interpretive sign and created 3-second, 30-second, and 3-minute messages.



The Woody Island Trail is a hidden gem in Okanogan, and great for birding. Students from Okanogan High School built the 3 mile trail.

# Photo Contest: Be In Our Calendar!

## Calling all photographers!

We want your best shots of the Okanogan, whether it's scenery, wildlife, people at work, people at play...let's see what you love best about Okanogan County! We'd like to have photos from all seasons featured. Send us your highest-resolution digital photos and you might find your image featured in our 2016 Seasons of Conservation Calendar! Email your submission(s) to [kirsten@okanogancd.org](mailto:kirsten@okanogancd.org) by **October 31, 2015**. If your photo is selected, you'll receive three free copies of the calendar edition.



## Okanogan County Fair is September 10-13, 2015

### Come check out our Conservation Photo Booth!

Maybe you've seen them at weddings or other events— you gather your friends, put on some silly hats, and get a picture to remember the good time you had. We thought it would be fun to have one at the fair this year! Stop by our booth in the Agriplex for a free photo session— you can share it on Facebook or send it to yourself via email. We'll provide the Okanogan County backdrops and props, you show up with the friends and the smiles! We'll also have:

**Kids Activities:** Scavenger hunt, soil experiments, and more. Kids can earn stickers from our new Washington State Symbols sticker collection!

**Program Information and Conservation Planning Advice:** Our conservation planning staff will be on hand to answer your questions about all sorts of natural resource concerns.

**75th Anniversary Retrospective:** Come see how we've contributed to the community over the years. We'll have displays on our achievements for the past decade for you to explore.

# Carlton Complex: How Have We Helped?

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## Erosion Threat Assessment & Reduction Team

Many people have heard of US Forest Service “BAER” Teams (Burned Area Emergency Response), but did you know that until 2014, there was no such thing as a BAER team for non-federal lands? Given that state and private lands made up 66% of the total land burned in the Carlton Complex, Okanogan CD pushed to develop a team to fill that need. We coordinated the multi-agency effort to map burn intensity and make recommendations to reduce the risk of flooding and soil erosion caused by the fire. 11 different agencies (local, state, and federal) contributed team members to the effort. It was a herculean effort of 12-hour days for two straight weeks, both in the field and in the office. A summary of the State & Private BAER final report can be found at [www.okanogancd.org/Carlton](http://www.okanogancd.org/Carlton), along with the soil burn intensity map.



Benson Creek residents kept a sense of humor after a double-whammy of fire and flood.

## 14 Emergency Rain Gauges Installed

Flash flooding is one of the largest potential threats to life and property after a fire. This became reality on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014, when a localized storm cell parked itself over the Finley Canyon area, dumping nearly an inch of rain within one hour. The storm caused three different stream courses to flood, with considerable damage to roads, homes, and other human infrastructure. Because Okanogan County is so far from the weather radar station in Spokane, it is difficult to get accurate forecasts with which to warn people of potential flash flood conditions. Okanogan CD worked with the National Weather Service (NWS) and the Department of Ecology to install 14 rapid-reporting rain gauges within the burn area. They are set to report continuously after they are triggered by rainfall, and will send a signal to the NWS if precipitation levels exceed .05 inches of rain in less than 5 minutes. Funding for the project came from the Buckhorn Gold Mine, part of a settlement with the Department of Ecology over water quality violations.

Rain gauge data and other weather resources can be found at [www.okanogancd/weather](http://www.okanogancd/weather).



This rain gauge will allow NWS to send out flash flood alerts to residents living in or near the burn scars.

# Carlton Complex: How Have We Helped?

## Flood Protection for Homes

One week after the fire's rapid run, Okanogan CD and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff started to identify homes at risk of flooding and debris flows. 43 structures were identified as "high risk". We gave each landowner the option to have a protective structure installed on their property at no cost to them, and provided emergency instructions to help them address the interim danger of flooding and mudflows. 17 landowners decided to participate in the Emergency Watershed Protection program. We then coordinated the installation of 13 protection structures by Allemandi Construction. The structures included compacted rock berms, driveable dips on roads, cement block barriers, and rock riprap for existing berms.



This home next to Texas Creek now has barriers in place to protect against floods.

## Reseeding for Erosion Control

Okanogan CD arranged the helicopter-applied seeding of nearly 2000 acres of land at high risk of erosion in the French Creek and Frazer-Beaver Creek watersheds. The mix of native and short-lived erosion control grasses helped jump start the revegetation of steep slopes above residences. The grass seed mix used in the project was intended to speed vegetation recovery by supplementing natural regrowth. The mix included a quick-germinating wheat-wheatgrass hybrid intended to tie erosive slopes together quickly and not persist longer than 2 years, and a native grass mix designed to establish more slowly and fill in the spaces left by the wheat hybrid after it declines. A total of 35 landowners participated.



Northwind Helicopters spent 4 days in March applying seed to burned slopes.

## Fencing in Critical Areas

We helped fund the rebuilding of nearly 12 miles of fencing, including protection of orchards from deer, protection of surface water from livestock access, and livestock fencing for private landowners unable to obtain assistance from other programs. We also coordinated the work of a Washington Conservation Corps crew, which has installed 3.5 additional miles of fencing to date.

## Weed Control

Okanogan CD received funding for the Okanogan County Weed Control Board to evaluate 63,000 acres owned by 550 different landowners for weed infestation. To date, 2,223 acres have been treated.

# A Passionate Champion of Soil

*“... for only rarely have we stood back and celebrated our soils as something beautiful, and perhaps even mysterious. For what other natural body, worldwide in its distribution, has so many interesting secrets to reveal to the patient observer?” - Les Molloy*

I love my job. I'm pretty sure that I find more joy and excitement from getting my hands dirty than a four year old playing in the mud. When you study soil, it doesn't take long to realize just how inextricably linked our life is to the soil. With all of its components, soil has an incredible ability to turn death into life, contaminants into food, and mud into water. It ranks up there with oxygen and water (both, by the way, are contained within the soil) in its necessity to our lives.

But we call soil “dirt”, and we treat it like dirt. We suffocate it with pavement, or tear apart its delicate structure to build shopping malls. In agriculture, we routinely mix it up, beating it to powder and concrete with routine passes of plows. We pour chemicals on the soil to kill the undesired plants and insects and then return to pour on nutrients to get the plants we want to grow. We wonder, after we've destroyed its structure and life, why our crop is sick and dying and why diseases grow rampantly. We treat it as nothing more than a medium for plant growth instead of seeking to understand the complex system in which it functions.

We chastise children for getting dirty, failing to realize what science can tell us: children who play in the soil are less likely to suffer colds and allergies as adults, not to mention the many other benefits that can be gained by playing outside such as increasing happiness and enhancing learning. For those who love to garden, getting your hands in the soil can improve serotonin levels, decreasing depression and reducing anxiety.

Recently, I spoke at an event about post-fire soils in the Carlton Complex burn area. While I'm generally composed in a work setting, I found myself becoming emotional while talking about the soil and its fragility and resilience. At first I was embarrassed by this, but then I realized that, in fact, I am very emotionally and physically tied to the soil. The food I eat, the air I breathe, the water I drink; all of it has been cycled through the soil. I spend my free time playing in my garden or hiking and camping in beautiful landscapes. And when I die, I hope to return to the soil I love, to be broken down by microbes and fungi, to be taken up by flowers, grass and trees, and continue to be a part of this incredible ecosystem.



Leslie Michel is the Okanogan Conservation District's soil scientist.



# Protect Our Waters From Noxious Weeds

*Anna Lyon, Okanogan County Noxious Weed Control Board*

The water bodies in Okanogan County include a lake and river that cross an international border, an inland saline lake, and myriad others that are home to a variety of fish, birds, and other wildlife. They offer a vast array of activities, such as fishing, boating, and swimming, while also providing water for agriculture. Noxious aquatic weeds are impacting these waters and can pose a safety concern for recreation as well as reducing habitat for fish and birds.

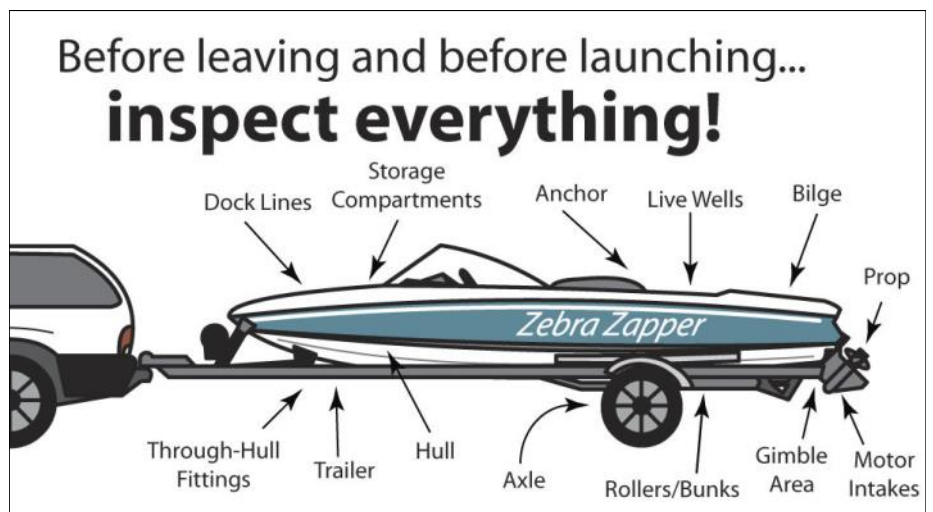


Looking for noxious aquatic weeds.

Last year the Department of Natural Resources provided funding to the Okanogan County Noxious Weed Control Board to conduct a wide-scale aquatic weed survey of the Columbia River from the Canadian border down to Wells Dam. It also covered a portion of the Spokane and Pend Oreille rivers, Curlew Lake, Lake Chelan, and the Columbia River to Rock Island, south of Wenatchee. Okanogan CD collaborated with this effort and contracted aquatic surveys of the Okanogan, Similkameen and Methow Rivers, along with 16 different lakes throughout Okanogan County.

The data was used to develop an Integrated Aquatic Vegetation Management Plan (IAVMP) for all of the waterbodies that were surveyed. The plan identifies noxious weeds found and describes various control measures. With the IAVMP in place, and a permit secured through Dept. of Ecology, we can begin controlling any aquatic or riparian noxious weeds that show up on these waterbodies, as funding allows. The IAVMP is available on the publication tab of our website and will be a work in progress as we add more lakes and survey data. Check it out at [www.okanogancounty.org/nw](http://www.okanogancounty.org/nw)

While you're enjoying your favorite body of water, be sure to do your part to stop the spread of invasive aquatic weeds. Learn the principle of "Clean, Drain, & Dry" before entering and after leaving the water. Learn to identify aquatic invasive species, and inspect your boats, trailers, and equipment for signs of aquatic hitchhikers, especially before moving equipment in or out of Washington State. For more information about aquatic invaders, please visit the Washington State Invasive Species Council website at . For more information about the surveys and ongoing control efforts, gives us a call at the Noxious Weed Office, 509-422-7165. [www.invasivespecies.wa.gov](http://www.invasivespecies.wa.gov)



# Fire Adapted Methow Valley

The Okanogan Conservation District is proud to announce that we have been selected to join the Washington Fire Adapted Communities (WAFAC) Learning Network. The philosophy is this: in a fire adapted community, we recognize that fire is a natural part of the ecosystem, and that since we've chosen to live here, we have responsibilities to prepare for fire and to make our homes, businesses, public lands, and support systems more resilient when fires happen.



There's a lot we can do to be ready for wildfire.

As part of the WAFAC Learning Network, we have committed to several outcomes, thanks to funding from the Bureau of Land Management. We'll be sharing our successes and challenges with other members of the network so that together, we can find solutions that work across landscapes and cultures. Although our current focus is on the Methow Valley, we feel that the lessons we learn will be applicable across Okanogan County. Here's what we'll be working on:

- Identifying the key people and organizations who can be leaders in creating a fire adapted Methow. We're already working with MethowReady to support neighborhood leaders.
- Educating builders, architects, and designers about fire adapted site building and remodeling.
- Supporting the business community's preparedness efforts, and investigating opportunities for start ups that can fill the need for fire adapted tasks like forest thinning, pruning, etc.
- Developing a "Landscaping in Fire Country" workshop for landowners and landscape professionals so that a beautiful landscape also means lower fire risk.

This is meant to be an evolving process that is responsive to the community. We welcome your input and participation! Call or email Kirsten Cook at 509-422-0855 ext. 103 or [kirsten@okanogand.org](mailto:kirsten@okanogand.org). We will continue our ongoing work to provide free wildfire risk assessments for individual properties, Firewise workshops for groups, and assistance to communities working towards Firewise Communities USA recognition. Contact us today for more information.



## Help Us Build a Wildfire-Ready Community!

As a recent recipient of a grant from the Methow Valley Fund, the Community Foundation of NCW is giving us an opportunity for additional funding! *Give Methow* is a new crowdfunding campaign that specifically supports organizations working in the Methow Valley. From **September 1<sup>st</sup> through the 30<sup>th</sup>** you can donate to [givemethow.org](http://givemethow.org) and help build a Fire Adapted Methow!

# Programs to Serve You



Okanogan CD works with landowners and managers to help them achieve their conservation goals. We provide voluntary, non-regulatory services free of charge, without discrimination, to those whose properties are within our boundaries. The Okanogan Conservation District encompasses most of Okanogan County, except for the incorporated areas of Winthrop, Twisp, Pateros, Brewster, Omak, Tonasket and Oroville. If you are in one of these incorporated areas, we would need special permission from your city government to work with you.



## Soil Health

Whether you are concerned about nutrient levels or erosion problems, or want to investigate innovative approaches to improving soil health, we will work with you to create a site-specific plan for your property.



## Irrigation Efficiency

Save water, save energy, and save money! Rebates and funding may be available for projects which conserve water and energy, or for those which also enhance instream flows for anadromous fish.



## Water Quality

Whether it's erosion control, riparian plantings, livestock watering or other projects on you mind, we can help. We often work with landowners to create custom solutions to water quality concerns, so let us know how we can help you.



## Firewise

Okanogan County is fire country, so it's a matter of when, not if, a wildfire will affect your property. We offer risk assessments for individual properties, and workshops for groups.

## Education

We offer K-12 programs to meet the needs of teachers with experiential learning inside and outside of the classroom. Adult learners can also contact us for custom programs or speakers for their next event. Education programs are offered to all regardless of Okanogan Conservation District boundaries.



## Wildlife

If you want to enhance wildlife habitat on your property, or need help balancing wildlife with other land uses, give us a call. We'll work with you to develop options like pollinator plantings, habitat structures, fence markers, and more.



1251 S. 2nd Avenue, Rm 102  
Okanogan, WA 98840

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# Okanogan Conservation District

[www.okanogancd.org](http://www.okanogancd.org)

Providing local leadership through educational, technical, and financial assistance to landowners to help them voluntarily conserve and enhance natural resources for over 75 years.

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