Palouse Pulse

Quarterly newsletter of Palouse Conservation District · Fall 2019

Local solutions for your conservation goals

PALOUSE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

YEAR-TO-DATE

48

cost share agreements signed by landowners

$515,672

in cost share assistance to landowners

13,523

Acres of conservation practices implemented

5,000+

Trees planted

Photo credit Loren Negron

Volunteers Get Dirty for Conservation

Rain didn't deter dedicated volunteers from rolling up their sleeves and installing plants along Paradise Creek for Orca Recovery Day on October 19th, a statewide campaign to address water quality issues and salmon habitat for Southern Resident Orcas. Plantings along Paradise Creek will stabilize the bank and develop a vegetative buffer to improve water quality caused by soil sediment, agricultural runoff and stormwater pollution. While orca and salmon never reach Paradise Creek because of the mighty Palouse Falls, our water flows downstream, flowing through salmon habitat and eventually meeting up with the Pacific Ocean. Across the Pacific Northwest, **1,500 volunteers** across the state participated in **restoring 33 acres**, **picking up 5,737 pounds of trash**, and **planting 16,791 native plants.** Local partners included Snake River Salmon Recovery Board, Department of Ecology, Department of Transportation, Whitman County Parks and Recreation, and One Tree Planted.

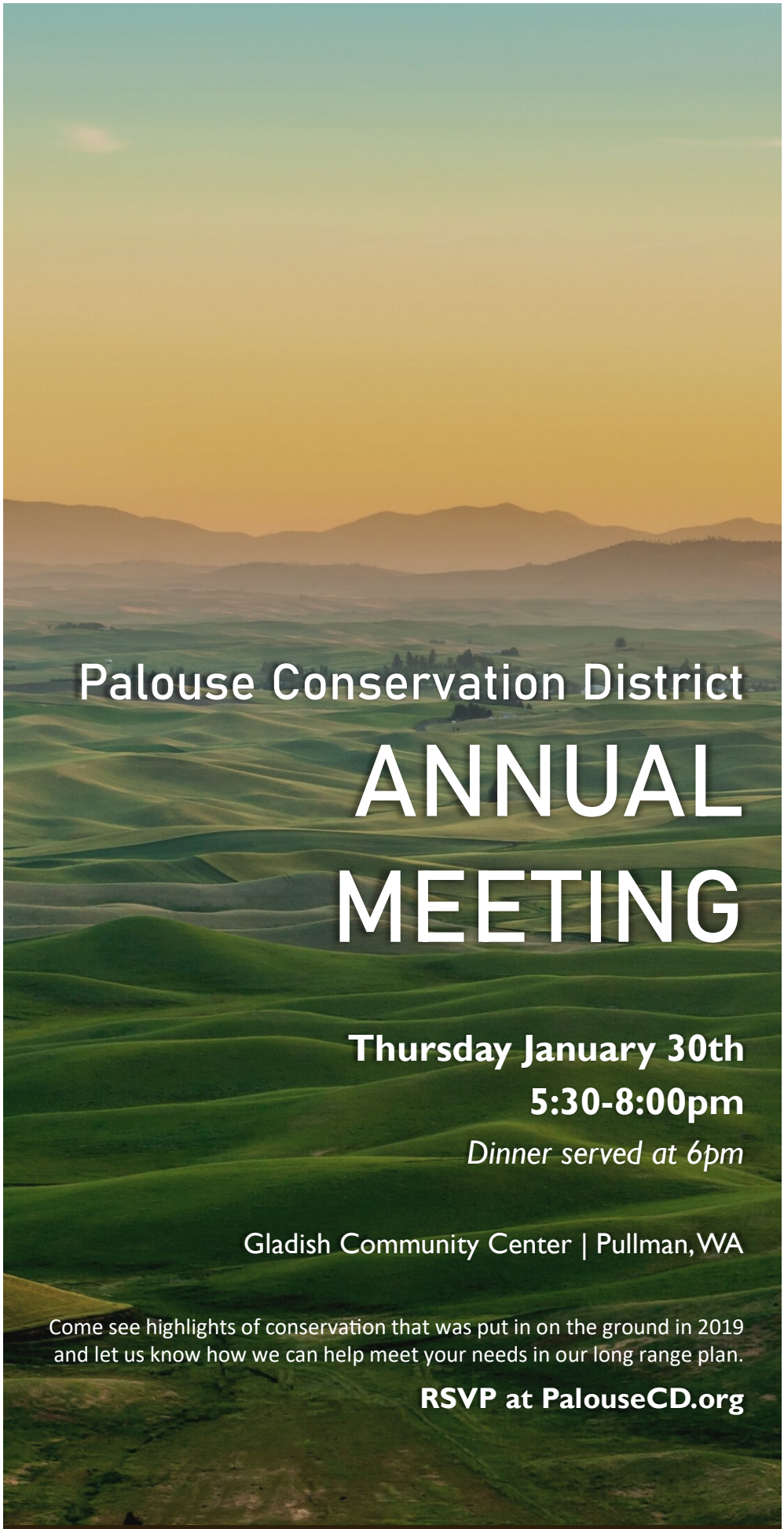
Huge thanks to the many volunteers that joined us for our planting events this fall. **212 volunteers** joined us to plant over **2,000 native trees and shrubs** throughout the Palouse. Thank you to all our partners and community members who have made this past season such a success. We couldn't have done it without you! **If you are interested in finding out how you can get involved or more about our programs, head to PalouseCD.org or give us a call.**

Board of Supervisors

LARRY COCHRAN, Chair
CHRIS HEITSTUMAN, Vice-Chair
MARY COLLINS
SHILO SPROUSE
SHERYL HAGEN-ZAKARISON

Palouse CD Staff

ALISON CROWLEY
AmeriCorps Education/Outreach & Restoration Technician
ANTHONY HATCHER
Conservation Coordinator
BRADLEY JOHNSON
Middle Snake Watershed Manager/VSP
CAILIN O'MALLEY
Conservation Intern
DREW SCHULDT
Conservation Coordinator
EMMA SQUIRES
Field Crew Lead
GARRETT LACIVITIA
Conservation Planner
HOLLAND JUST
Operations Coordinator
JAMES HART
AmeriCorps Education/Outreach & Restoration Technician
JENNIFER BOIE
Director
JESSICA SELF
Grants & Development Manager
JODI PROUT
Education & Outreach Coordinator
LAURA HEINSE
Conservation Partnership Manager
NICK HARRIS
Research & Monitoring Technician
RANDY STEVENS
Conservation Coordinator
RYAN BOYLAN
Research & Monitoring Coordinator
SHELLEY SCOTT
Finance Coordinator
STEPHANIE HARPER
Conservation Coordinator
TAMI STUBBS
Conservation Coordinator
ZACK CARTER
Conservation Planner



Wetlands: If You Build It, They Will Come

STEPHANIE HARPER, CONSERVATION COORDINATOR

In a region where dryland agriculture dominates the landscape, we don't hear the word wetland very often. In fact, most landowners and construction companies throughout the country consider "wetland" to be a bad word. This is most likely due to the fact that wetlands are federally regulated ecosystems and require permits and planning when working in or around a wetland. Ultimately wetlands can be seen as the bad guys because of their ability to increase project costs and slow construction. However, avoiding impacts to these ecosystems can have large overall benefits to the landscape. Before we get to benefits, let's back up. What is a wetland? A wetland is an area on the landscape that has enough water during the year to support wetland plants (like cattails, sedges, and rushes) and wet soil characteristics.

But why should we care about wetlands on the Palouse? While the Palouse region has made major advances in conservation tillage over the years to reduce the amount of soil loss and runoff of agricultural fields, soil erosion continues to be a widespread issue. Wetlands are very efficient at filtering and trapping sediments that runoff high hillslopes. Wetlands in the Palouse can help improve water quality by preventing soil and nutrients from entering streams. Additionally, wetlands can help stabilize streambanks due to the living roots of wetland plants. These living roots help hold soil in place and ultimately strengthen streambanks. Lastly, wetlands have a high amount of biodiversity, from plants, to bugs, to animals and everything in between. Wetlands support biodiversity because it is ideal habitat for many species.

By now you might be thinking, wetlands sound cool but we don't have any wetlands on the Palouse. The good news is that we do have wetlands! The number of wetlands we see today is only a fraction of the wetlands that have occurred historically within this region. There could have been wet meadows scattered throughout Palouse prairie or wetlands could have lined the banks of streams as they twist and turned through the deep valleys of the Palouse hills. Today, a lot of the wetlands we see are seasonal wetlands which means they occur in the wet spring months and slowly dry out during the hot summer months. Some of the wetlands we see in our district are relatively small. Even within these wetlands, we have observed birds, frogs, snakes, muskrats, and even a moose. As they say, if you build it, they will come.

If you are interested in more information on wetlands or wetland restoration benefits, please contact Stephanie Harper at StephanieH@PalouseCD.org or 332-4101 x117.

Wetland Benefits

Clean Water

Wetlands are nature's water filters. Plants, animals and bacteria help clean our water.

Clear Rivers

Wetlands capture phosphorus that would otherwise end up in our water ways, causing algae blooms.

Wildlife

Wetlands provide habitat for birds, animals, and plants.

Reduce Flooding

Wetlands are like giant sponges. During wet periods, wetlands absorb and store excess water.

Minimize Drought

During dry periods, wetlands help lessen the chances of drought by slowly releasing water.

Reduce Erosion

Wetlands trap sediments and reinforce soil.

Commodity Buffer Program

Program protects our waterways and keeps your farm profitable

ANTHONY HATCHER,
CONSERVATION COORDINATOR

Are you interested in planting a buffer along the streams, draws or wet areas of your farm? Do you have a buffer already installed for which you would be interested in receiving compensation? If so, PCD is currently accepting applications for the Commodity Buffer Program. The Commodity Buffer Program is unlike any other conservation initiative in the nation. Initially started by Spokane CD, the Commodity Buffer Program incentivizes producers to plant riparian buffers and take land out of crop production by compensating them for what the land is actually worth.

A customized price model based on the USDA Risk Management Agency's projected prices for the adjacent crop is used to compensate producers a similar commodity price per acre for what they would receive for cropping the buffer area taken out of production. **Payment rates change yearly based on the crop planted adjacent to the buffer with a guaranteed minimum payment of $200 per acre on eligible acres.** Required buffer widths are based on stream type and upland tillage practices with lower soil disturbance tillage practices having smaller width requirements. There flexibility in what producers can plant in the buffer including hay crops, native grasses, pollinator plantings, or full forest buffers. Once installed, the buffer can be hayed or grazed after July 1, as not to interfere during the critical nesting season.

To participate in the program, your operation must be in the Palouse River Watershed, maintain the installed buffer for three years, and meet the minimal buffer width based on tillage practice and stream type. Additionally, previously planted buffers also have to meet program requirements in order to be eligible. Sign up for the program is currently continuous. However, due to limited funding, is on a first come first serve basis and will be concluded once all funding is allocated.

To apply for the program or for more information, please contact Anthony Hatcher, AnthonyH@PalouseCD.org or 332-4101 x113.

No one knows your land better than you

Share your agricultural stewardship with the Voluntary Stewardship Program

BRADLEY JOHNSON, MIDDLE SNAKE WATERSHED MANAGER

The Whitman County Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) is interested in advocating for agriculture and wants to help you share your story of stewardship on your property. As an alternative to the Growth Management Act, VSP **is an innovative approach for reporting the protection of critical areas**, such as highly erodible lands, wetlands, frequently flooded areas, and fish and wild habitat, on agriculture lands. VSP works under the assumption that complex environmental problems can be solved through voluntary cooperation. The program hopes to demonstrate that voluntary stewardship works in Whitman County, while also **promoting the viability of agriculture**. Participating in VSP reduces regulation and maintains local control and more certainty, gives landowners more flexibility in solving problems, and promotes a positive image of agriculture. Many producers are taking action to help protect these areas, without realizing it. Stewardship strategies might include:

- Tillage management plan using a no till, direct seed or 1 pass system
- Pest management practice, including weed control
- Nutrient management practice: soil or plant tissue tests
- Managed grazing
- Range plantings
- Conservation crop rotation
- Cover crops
- Permanent conservation vegetative cover
- Planting vegetation to stabilize eroding land
- Grassed waterways or streambank protection
- Tree or shrub establishment
- Wildlife management in wetlands or upland habitat
- Hedgerow panting
- Livestock fencing

We need your help to tell the story that voluntary stewardship can protect critical areas. VSP is the story book. Landowners, farmers and ranchers are the story tellers. Any information you report will be reported at a watershed scale, keeping all landowner contact information private. You may choose to have your stewardship actions public or private but all personal information remains confidential.

Reporting is right at your fingertips! Share your story of stewardship at **WhitmanCountyVSP.com** or **call Bradley Johnson at 332-4101 x106**.

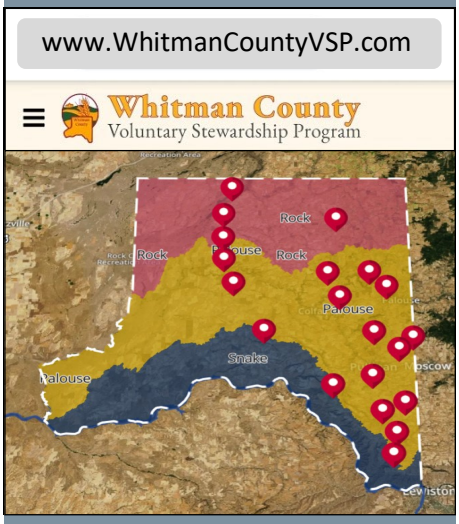
The Whitman County VSP Work Plan was adopted in 2017 by the VSP Work Group, which includes agriculture, environmental, and other stakeholders in Whitman County. The Work Group oversees the Work Plan implementation, which can be found at WhitmanCountyVSP.com.

WHITMAN COUNTY VSP
VOLUNTARY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM
Healthy landscapes, Strong farms

Reporting is right at your fingertips!

Share your stewardship at

WhitmanCountyVSP.com



All information will remain confidential

Looking to add more stewardship practices to your property?

We can help! Contact your local agency for assistance:

Palouse CD
Palouse Rock Lake CD
Pine Creek CD
Whitman CD
Cattlemen's Association

We are here to help meet your stewardship goals.

"Across North America, there are nearly 297 native species, but only eight of which are found in the West today…"

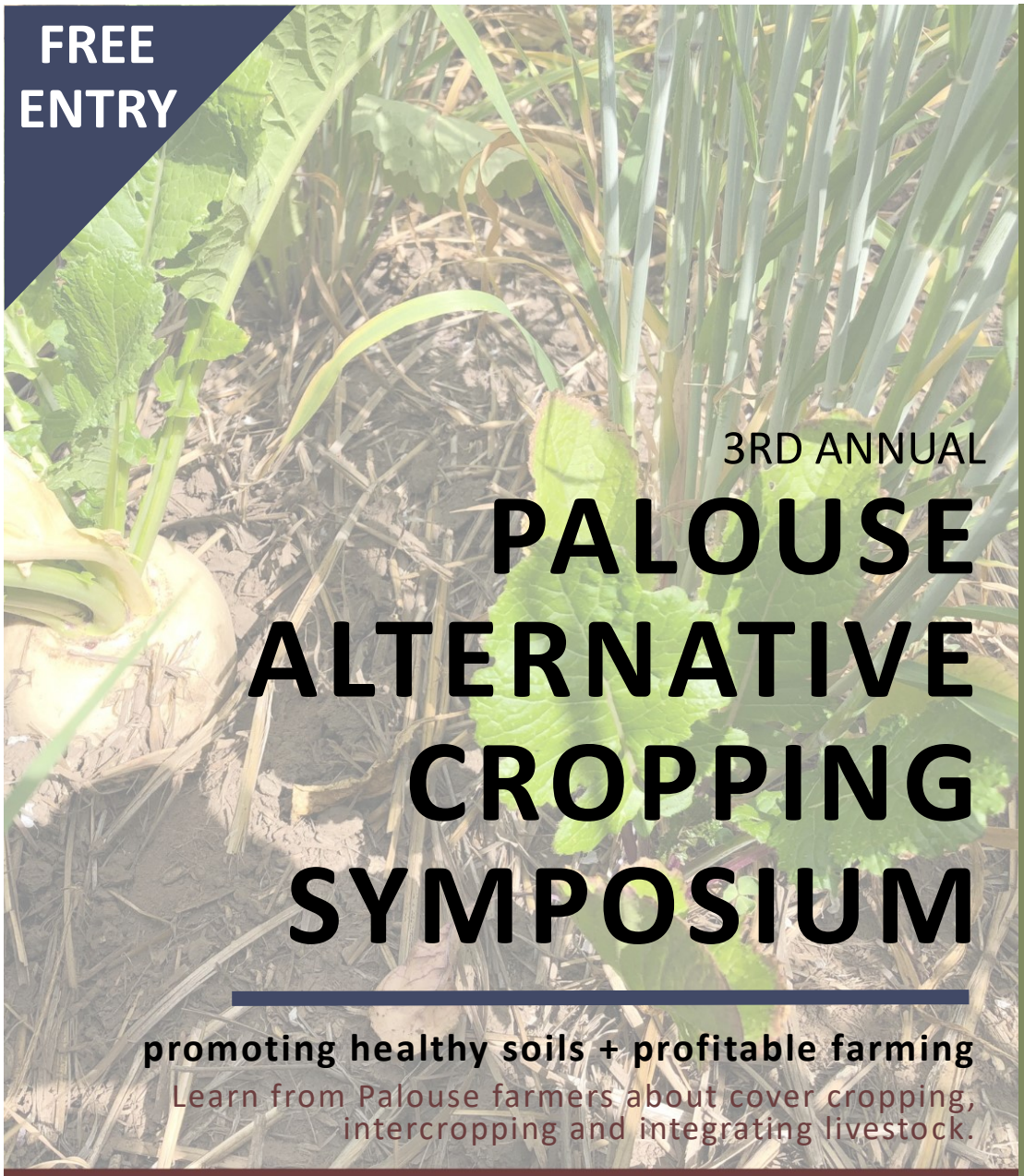
Strained Mussels

Discovering the Remaining Native Freshwater Mussels in the Pacific Northwest

NICHOLAS HARRIS, RESEARCH AND MONITORING TECHNICIAN

If you've lived near the coast, you're most likely familiar with mussels. These interesting mollusks not only live in the ocean, but possibly near your backyard. Freshwater mussels are a rare cousin to marine mussels and are found in many freshwater bodies, including rivers, streams, ponds, and lakes. Across North America, there are nearly 297 native species, but only eight of which are found in the West today. The reason for this low diversity is mainly due to past geologic activity. With major glaciation nearly 13,000 years ago, aquatic life was extremely challenged, making it difficult for freshwater mussels to thrive in these conditions. Today, we can find small populations of these creatures, but typically no more than one species in a given area. Although their numbers may be low, some freshwater mussels are among the longest-living animals on Earth. For example, Western Pearlshell (*Margaritifera falcata*) are capable of living over 100 years. However, over the course of their life, they may only move a few yards from the spot where they initially landed.

Mussels are able to remain sedentary by simply filter feeding in the same area for times on end but remaining in one location for long periods comes with many risks. When adverse conditions strike an ecosystem, many species are able to escape. Unfortunately, mussels are typically unable to relocate fast enough. Some mussels are able to survive these conditions, while others may perish. This allows for mussels to be used as a very effective monitor for biologists to determine long-term health for aquatic ecosystems. While mussels are great indicators for ecosystem health, mussel populations that decline due to adverse environmental conditions may have difficulty responding, possibly finding it impossible to recolonize. This is why conservation for freshwater mussels is extremely important, especially in the PNW. With limited diversity, it is important to be proactive in protecting the remaining species. Freshwater mussels are a surprisingly complex organism. By furthering research into these mollusks and spreading awareness, we may be able to see freshwater mussels for centuries to come.



FREE ENTRY

3RD ANNUAL

PALOUSE ALTERNATIVE CROPPING SYMPOSIUM

promoting healthy soils + profitable farming

Learn from Palouse farmers about cover cropping, intercropping and integrating livestock.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2020 10 AM—4PM

GLADISH COMMUNITY CENTER, VIEW ROOM
PULLMAN

RSVP BY FRIDAY FEBRUARY 21, 2020
AT PALOUSECD.ORG/SYMPOSIUM

PALOUSE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

WA STATE SOIL HEALTH COMMITTEE
your pathway to healthy soil

Cover Crop

Crop grown between cash crop rotations, grown primarily for non-market benefits. Benefits include:

- *Improved soil health*
- *Increased biomass*
- *Nutrient cycling*
- *Break up compaction*
- *Reduce erosion*
- *Forage for livestock*

Alternative Crop

Non-traditional crop grown for niche or alternative markets. Benefits include:

- *Diversified income*
- *Increased biodiversity*
- *Reduce weed and pest pressure*

Learn from Palouse farmers what they are trying to improve soil health while transitioning to profitable alternative options at this year's Symposium.

Local solutions for your conservation goals.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PULLMAN, WA
PERMIT NO.95

PALOUSE CONSERVATION DISTRICT
1615 NE Eastgate Blvd. Suite H
Pullman, WA 99163
(509) 332-4101
PalouseCD.org

Upcoming Events

December	**10**	**Palouse CD Board Meeting, 6pm** *Palouse CD Office, WSU Technology Park*
	10-11	**WSU Wheat Academy** smallgrains.wsu.edu, Pullman
January	**3**	**Palouse CD Tree Sale Pre-Orders Due**
	7	**3 Rivers Grazing Conference, 9am—4pm** *Williams Conference Center, Lewiston*
	7-8	**PNDSA Cropping Systems Conference** *Three River Convention Center, Kennewick*
	30	**Palouse CD Annual Meeting, 5:30—8pm** (Dinner at 6pm) *Gladish Community Center, Pullman*
February	**27**	**Palouse Alternative Cropping Symposium, 10am—4pm** *Gladish Community Center, Pullman*
April	**3**	**Palouse CD Tree Sale, 9am—4pm** *Palouse CD Office, WSU Technology Park*
	4	**Palouse CD Tree Sale, 10am—1pm** *Palouse CD Office, WSU Technology Park*

Pullman 5th graders learn about the Palouse watershed and stormwater pollution

Be a conservation hero! Sign-up for our enewsletter at PalouseCD.org