



Transforming Watersheds

Tenmile Creek — Asotin County

The Place

Tenmile Creek is located in the furthest reaches of Washington's southeast corner. This is beautiful country, where clear and cold streams cut deeply through ancient basalt rock. Over geologic time, these streams have formed numerous spectacular desert canyons. Tenmile Creek is a perfect representative for the region. Beginning at the fringes of the Blue Mountains, it quickly drops over 2000 feet on its short journey to the Snake River. The canyon created by the creek provides habitat for a variety of wildlife including deer, elk, coyote, and many species of birds. Even cougar are known to frequent the area. Tenmile Creek is also home to threatened Snake River Steelhead trout.

The Effort

The Tenmile Creek canyon is important range for cattle. It also provides an excellent location for winter feeding. Feeding at the canyon's base protects livestock from harsh winter weather. Unfortunately, a century of these activities left the stream corridor in poor condition. Many of the trees were damaged or removed and stream banks trampled and overgrazed. The landowners in the Tenmile Creek watershed recognized these problems and took action, becoming some of the first in eastern Washington to install fencing to protect surface water from livestock impacts. Seeing the benefit to water quality and fish habitat, landowners stepped up their efforts in 2001. Working with the Asotin County Conservation District (ACCD) and Natural Resource Conservation Service staff (NRCS), over 20 miles of riparian fence were installed and thousands of native trees and shrubs were planted in the stream corridor.

Partnering For Clean Water

The Department of Ecology is using a unique collaborative approach to address livestock related water quality problems in eastern Washington. We are working to achieve clean rivers and streams in ways that also can improve the relationship and build trust between Ecology and the rural public.

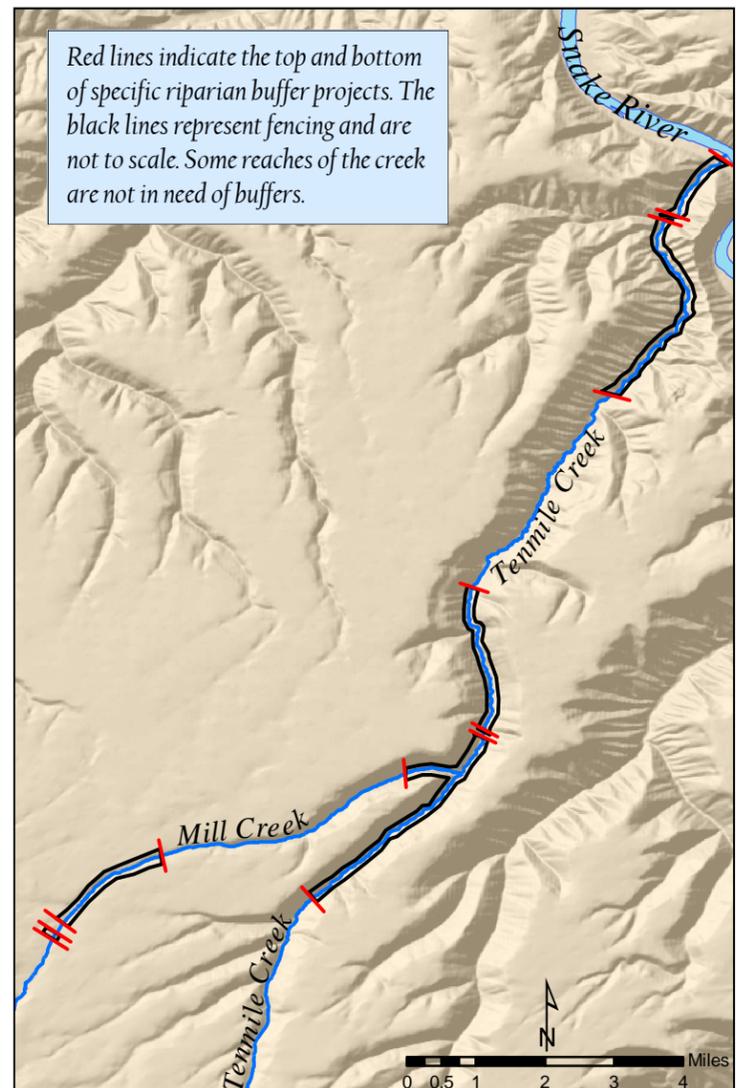
We team with conservation districts, local government, and landowners throughout eastern Washington to provide assistance where needed. We do not use a traditional regulatory process unless our collaborative efforts fail.

The result of this partnership has been the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) at hundreds of sites where water quality and fish habitat issues exist. Partners are using a strategy that recognizes the economic importance of livestock operations as well as the need to comply with state water quality law.

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The Results

Each year the benefits to water quality and fish habitat are more dramatic. Native cottonwood, alder, and willow trees are quickly returning to the stream banks. Grasses along the stream are healthier and more deeply rooted. Additionally, manure and exposed soil are no longer visible near the creek. Riparian buffers installed along the creek reduce erosion and sedimentation, keep the water cool, prevent polluted run-off from entering the creek, and improve fish and wildlife habitat. As more evidence of a healthy Tenmile Creek, Steelhead trout are returning to the creek to spawn in greater numbers than have been observed in several decades.



Riparian buffers installed on Tenmile Creek

The Future

ACCD recently began to monitor water quality in Tenmile Creek. Cheryl Sonnen, a resource technician for the conservation district, hopes the monitoring will demonstrate these projects are accomplishing their goal of improving water quality. Some additional management changes remain to be made in the watershed and landowners are continuing to focus on implementing best management practices that protect the stream corridor and improve water quality. A big change in the watershed is the adoption of direct seed technology. Direct seed is the practice of seeding a new crop into the standing stubble of a recently harvested crop without the traditional tillage of the ground. By doing so, soil erosion can be reduced by as much as 95 percent. This significantly reduces the volume of sediment washing into Tenmile Creek.

The People

Landowners installing riparian BMPs- R. Scheibe, K. Ausman, R. Luhn, D. Sangster, D. Weissenfels, C. Swank.

Technical and financial assistance provided by- ACCD staff (Brad Johnson, Cheryl Sonnen, Megan Stewart); Southeast District Engineer Lance Horning; Natural Resource Conservation Service, Asotin County (Courtney Smith, Jim Schroeder); Farm Service Agency, Asotin County.

A special thanks to the ACCD Board of Supervisors for their commitment to clean water and improved fish habitat!

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Tenmile Creek 2001 - Before



Tenmile Creek 2004 - After



Tenmile Creek 2001 - Before



Tenmile Creek 2004 - After

For additional information, please contact Chad Atkins at the Dept. of Ecology 509-329-3499 or Brad Johnson at the ACCD 509-758-8012.

If you need this information in an alternate format, contact us at 509-349-3455. If you are a person with a speech or hearing impairment, call 711 or 800-833-6388 for TTY.

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