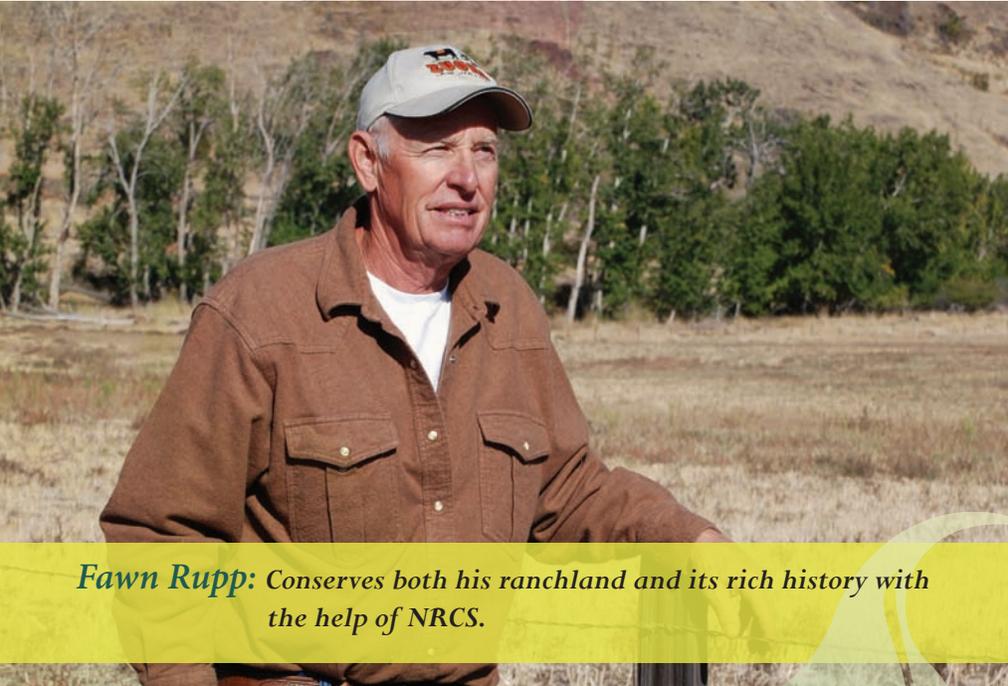


# O · R · E · G · O · N *Conservation* SHOWCASE



**Fawn Rupp:** Conserves both his ranchland and its rich history with the help of NRCS.

the soil and water health of his land along the east fork of Birch Creek in the Umatilla River basin. Fawn is participating in the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Agricultural Watershed Enhancement Program (AWEP) because he feels the project will protect Birch Creek and its fish habitat and will improve the productivity of his farmland.

In the Birch Creek AWEP, NRCS entered into a partnership with Umatilla Basin Watershed Council and four neighboring landowners. This is a watershed-wide effort to restore stream flow on 160 acres of land used for cow-calf operations, pasture, hay, alfalfa, peas and barley. The land geography shows a long and narrow ribbon of irrigated farmland skirting Birch Creek. The 120-mile watershed drains north from the steep ridges of the Blue Mountains and through flat plateaus, finally entering the Umatilla River southwest of Pendleton, Oregon. According to Tami Sasser, Executive Director of the Umatilla Basin Watershed Council, “The Birch Creek drainage area provides one of the strongest potential spawning habitats for ESA-listed summer steelhead in the Umatilla Basin.”

Loren Unruh, District Conservationist for NRCS, explains the reason for the successful result,

*Pilot Rock, Ore. —*

**F**awn Rupp kneels and gently pulls aside a tousled ryegrass to reveal three pioneer gravestones that lie prone in the fenced enclosure. “I didn’t know these were here when I bought this farm,” admits Fawn who purchased the land two years ago. “I found the markers when I worked up the field for the first time.” Since his discovery, Fawn has cleaned up the grave site and built the fence, protecting the legacy of pioneers who may have been part of the original homestead in the 1800s.

Fawn uses the same protective attitude to preserve the legacy of

*First-time  
user of  
NRCS programs  
values past;  
looks to  
future*



**Pump:** *The AWEF program enabled Rupp to install new, more efficient pumps on his land, saving both water and energy.*

“By partnering with the Umatilla Basin Watershed Council, we were able to target the AWEF program to Fawn and his neighbors to hopefully leave more water in the creek for the fish by making their irrigation systems more efficient.” NRCS and Fawn are sharing the cost to purchase and install a high-efficiency sprinkler pivot for his lower farm field. Fawn says, “We used to flood irrigate this field, so the efficiency will improve a lot.”

The AWEF program is helping Fawn help his land through the addition of efficient pumps and irrigation equipment, and by seeding the field with orchard grass. These enhancements will result in better irrigation water usage, less draw of power, and multiple cuttings of hay each year, fulfilling Fawn’s vision for the farm which is to “grow more hay; raise cattle and be more self-supporting.”

This is the first time Fawn has partnered with NRCS and his experience has been positive. “I recommend others work with NRCS as well. It’s been a help to me and financially, it’s been a boost.” In the past year, Fawn began

working with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and has leased the bottomland to develop fish habitat. “They have really improved the creek,” says Fawn.

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— Fawn Rupp

The grave markers aren’t the only sign of history in the area. According to Loren, Umatilla County was the site of a good deal of historical activity with the tribes. Loren explains, “They migrated to the John Day area, and evidently Birch Creek was a main avenue of travel, so we have a lot of activity here.” A source of Birch Creek is called Indian Lake, which involves some reservation lands. NRCS has procedures in place that protect treasures of heritage during project work. “We are very careful when doing any type of soil disturbance as there might be some sort of artifact there,” says Loren. NRCS involves a cultural resource specialist who works to preserve historical areas and provide alternatives so farmers can install their conservation practice while protecting historical artifacts.

NRCS

*Helping People Help the Land*



**Historic Site:** *NRCS works with Rupp to ensure this pioneer grave site and other historical sites are not disturbed in the process of implementing conservation practices.*