Board Members Past and Present

Without the support, time, and dedication of our Board members, the GRMW could not function. We would like to recognize and give a big thanks to everyone who has been involved in the development and operation of the GRMW. Below is a list of current and past Board members and alternates from June 3, 1992, to the present date.

Karen Antell
**Tim Bailey*
Sharon Beck
Carrie Bingaman
Mack Birkmaier
Ellen Bishop
Paul Boehne
Cass Botts
Don Bryson
Anna Cavinato
Rod Childers
**Allen Childs*
Rick Christian
Larry Christman
**Norm Cimon*
Steve Clements
Dale Counsell
**Larry Cribbs*
Nancy Dake
Rob Davis
Jim Dawson
Bruce Dunn
**Bruce Eddy*
Steve Ellis
Craig Ely
Ryan Falk
Joel Frank
***MiKayla Frei*
Alanna French
**Katie Frenyea*
Rick George
Jeff Hammes
Gene Hardy
Gary Hathaway
**Daryl Hawes*
**Mike Hayward*
Sarah Hendrickson
John Howard
**Bill Howell*
Loren Hughes
Arleigh Isley
Bud Jones
Ira Jones
**Jim Lauman*
Lisa Mahon
**Laura Mahrt*
Jeannie Mallory
Dick Markley
**Steve McClure*
**Joe McCormack*
Mike McNamara
Bob Messinger
Meg Mitchell
Paul Morehead
**Larry Nall*
Bill Oberteuffer
Jeff Oveson
Bob Rainville
Suzanne Rainville
Bob Richmond
Jimmy Roberts
Susan Roberts
Sam Royce
Paul Rudd
Jennifer Schemm
Brad Smith
***Emily Spang*
**Ted Taylor*
Craig Thompson
Melanie Tromp van Holst
Barbara Walker
Cynthia Warnock
Kurt Wiedenmann
Karyn Wood
Pat Wortman
**Jeff Yanke*
Jack Yearout
**Dave Yost*
Jeff Zakel

From June 3, 1992 to Present

**Current Board Members and Alternates*
*** Current Student Board Members*

This newsletter is funded by the Bonneville Power Administration and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

Grande Ronde Model Watershed

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Margaret McGladrey,
Ripples Editor
grmw.ripples.editor@gmail.com

Ripples in the Grande Ronde

Summer 2012

RIVERS UNITING NEIGHBORS·QUARTERLY NEWS FROM THE GRANDE RONDE MODEL WATERSHED

GRMW Celebrates 20 Years

Editorial: Looking Back, Glancing Ahead

by Jeff Oveson,
GRMW Executive Direcor

Twenty years seems like a long time, but not in the context of the anthropogenic influences on the natural world around us. The 20-year existence of the Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) has taken place during a time in which those of us who live in the Grande Ronde and Imnaha sub-basins have not only experienced positive changes in the physical health of our watersheds but also witnessed a change in attitude toward our natural resources.

The first 150 years following European settlement in northeastern Oregon revolved around gaining social, political, and physical control of the land and the abundant natural resources associated with it. Meadows were drained, beavers were trapped, grasslands were plowed, and timber was harvested. Cities emerged, roads and railroads were built, communication systems were established, county lines within new state boundaries were drawn, and rules were written. A good deal of this activity was done in the interest of utilizing natural resources and building an economy that could support all of the roads, schools, cities, churches, businesses, and families that sprouted up across the region.

It's hard to say exactly when our ancestors began to realize the natural resources that were the foundation of our local society would not be available in endless supply. "Sustainable" is a common word in the vernacular of today's natural resources discussions, but it's clear that in the early part of the 1900s, people had not considered what might happen if essential natural resources, such as water, timber, and soil, were depleted to the extent that the species dependent on them could no longer survive. Maybe our ancestors didn't recognize the dependence of the human species on the sustainable management of natural resources or the importance of humans coexisting with other species to life in northeastern Oregon. Although we don't know when the inhabitants of this region first realized that utilization of natural resources depended on the maintenance of these resources, the infamous Dust Bowl of the 1920s and 1930s and the near-extirpation of the iconic American Bison demonstrated that humans had the capacity not only to utilize natural resources but also to endanger them and therefore needed to assume responsibility for their long-term management and preservation.

Wallowa and Union Counties, the political boundaries of which approximate the watershed boundaries of the Grande Ronde and Imnaha sub-basins, are very small parts of much larger and more powerful political syntheses: the State of Oregon and the United States of America. The discrepancy between local interests and federal legislative and judicial authority is often magnified when decisions come from Salem and Washington, D.C. that seem to be reached without due consideration of local communities. Staffed with well-meaning people who often lack roots in agrarian communities and will soon move on to different positions in different locales, federal and state agencies are in the position to interpret and implement policies after years of legal and legislative wrangling in halls far removed from the people whose lives they will most directly affect.

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

Whether they are right, wrong, or indifferent, local communities are compelled to coalesce and develop their own visions and identify their own intrepid leaders if they are to have any say whatsoever in the management of the landscape in which their towns, farms, factories, and citizens are located. Regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with the work of the GRMW, it is indisputable that the roots of the organization reflect the goals of local leaders who believed (and still believe) in their collective vision and who recognized (and continue to recognize) the value of a local vision developed in collaborative style with partners from all walks of life, with all political leanings, and with a variety of interests in the natural resources of the region. Historic and unprecedented when it was first initiated in 1992, this coalescence remains the foundation of GRMW.

After growing up in Wallowa County and having experienced city, corporate, and rural ranch life, I've been a part of this social experiment called the Grande Ronde Model Watershed Program for 12 years. I've witnessed the GRMW Board of Directors change, grow, shrink, bend, struggle, argue, resolve, grow again, broaden, and fight to maintain its identity in the honest pursuit of the "greater good." Time after time, I have watched GRMW Board members put aside their own political and social interests for the good of the program and the resources it works to sustain. Time after time, I've wished that Congress could behave a lot more like the GRMW Board.

After 20 years and thousands of hours working with private landowners, local contractors, and some really good natural resources partners who truly value our communities, it is more evident than ever that the people and resources of this great region need and deserve to be represented by the fortitude and vision of a group like the GRMW Board. All of the regulations in the world cannot clean up rivers or restore fish populations. The imagination, passion, and collaboration of the people who live on and love this land will be the driving force behind building a future that sustains people and resources alike. It's those qualities that built the GRMW, have kept it in operation, and will drive its mission in the next 20 years.

I'd like to name all of the people who had the imagination and the courage to build the GRMW, all those who sat through endless meetings and debates, and all those who spoke out on behalf of local self-governance, but I would inevitably omit key characters, so please let me suggest that you read through the variety of articles elsewhere in this issue of the "Ripples" to get an idea of who they are and how they have shaped the first 20 years of the GRMW's history.

ABOVE: The members of the GRMW staff. Back row, from left to right: Coby Menton, Monitoring Coordinator; Mason Bailie, Database Manager; Jeff Oveson, Executive Director; Jesse Steele, Field Biologist; Lyle Kuchenbecker, Project Planner. Front row, from left to right: Mary Estes, Office and Fiscal Manager; Leigh Collins, Public Involvement/Education Coordinator; Heather Hall, Receptionist.

20 Years of Habitat Restoration in the Grande Ronde

277 miles of stream channel and streambank treated

15,840 acres of "mixed" habitat treated

340 miles of exclosure fencing and cross-fencing control

3,333 acres of riparian habitat treated

184 miles of road improvements or relocations

23,301 acres of upland habitat treated

454 livestock water developments for off-stream watering

82 fish passage improvement sites

From the Project Partner

Ken Bierly

Deputy Director,
Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

In mid-March 2012, I attended a conference sponsored by the Bonneville Environmental Foundation for the model watersheds with which they have worked during the past decade. The conference was held at a local Oregon McMenamin's restaurant. While sampling one or two of the ales and stouts during the evening before the meetings, we were welcomed by Angus Duncan, who quoted wise people, read poetry, and talked about the program. In his talk, he mentioned the formative significance of the Grand Ronde Model Watershed Program in building his understanding and commitment to the idea of model watersheds.

Following a night of good conversation, Columbia River sturgeon, and pints of local porter, we had the opportunity to hear panelists from around the Pacific Northwest talk about their experiences. During a presentation by Sue Ireland of the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, a critical player named Patty Perry was mentioned. After following up with the speaker, I determined that it was the same Patty Perry who I had met in 1996 with Pat Wortman in the Oregon Capitol cafeteria. As I left the meeting, I reflected on the importance of the Grand Ronde Model Watershed Program and the leadership for watershed restoration efforts in Oregon and the Northwest that has come from Wallowa and Union Counties.

The whole notion of asking people who live on the land to help address national issues of water quality and endangered species has been an experiment in how to mix mandates with incentives. We have learned many lessons from our experiments with model watersheds during the last 20 years. As the Grand Ronde Model Watershed turns 20, some reflection might be in order, and as reflection seems to be the prerogative of elders, I will take that prerogative to reflect on some of what I have learned my years of involvement with the Grande Ronde Model Watershed.

People Make the Difference

As I look back, the progress we have made has been led by individuals who were able to look to the future and see a role for themselves and their friends in that future. Individuals have made a big difference. Pat Wortman reached out to the Nez Perce tribe and opened a dialogue that led to the development of the Nez Perce Tribe/Wallowa County Salmon Habitat Recovery Plan. The genius of that plan was placing the community at the center instead of at the sidelines of the conversation about what the future could hold. Although there was risk, there was also an opportunity to show a new way to address problems and approach the future with hope rather than fear.

Ken Bierly with granddaughter Sophia

We Don't Have to Agree on Everything, Just the Things We Choose to Do

One of the values of the Grand Ronde Model Watershed is using public and other funds to conduct projects that are agreed to or at least not opposed by the group. The GRMW brings people together to find opportunities for watershed improvement and have a conversation about local issues. The GRMW is unique and brings together a broad range of people with different interests and goals, and the GRMW respects the differences yet allows common interests to be pursued.

Keeping it Local is Critical

The Snake River Salmon Recovery Plan was drafted in 1995, and a new version (471 pages!) is under development now. These efforts have only shallow roots in the community and can only be effective if their goals and outcomes are rooted in the local effort. The significant body of work completed by the Grand Ronde Model Watershed speaks for itself. The ability to focus on issues that address the needs of the community as well as the needs of salmon is the hallmark of the local effort and the downfall of the top-down approach pursued by others. The 2010 effort was developed closer to the local community, but it was led from the outside-in rather than from the community.

Keeping On is Critical

I used to have a poster that pictured vultures watching two guys crawl across the desert with the caption: "Patience my ass, I'm going to kill something." The sentiment tells more about me than the Grand Ronde Model Watershed. I have learned that patience while watching the wisdom of those who say you have to go slow to go fast. The council requires patience and commitment. Few marriages last 20 years nowadays, and the GRMW should be proud of its ability to have the patience needed to last for the long term.

Fish Online!

www.grmw.org

- Adult salmon counts at the dams
- Snake River Basin stream flows
- Snow and precipitation reports
- Habitat enhancement projects
- Meetings, activities, and events
- Past issues of *Ripples* and more!

Grande Ronde Model Watershed

Upcoming Board Meetings

The public is welcome to attend

- Tuesday, August 28: 5:00 p.m.
  Riverside Park
  3501 N. Spruce Street
  La Grande, Oregon
- Tuesday, October 23: 5:00 p.m.
  Wallowa Community Center
  204 East Second Street
  Wallowa, Oregon

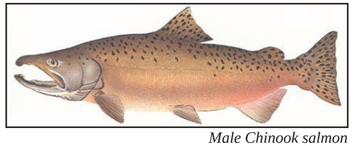
Meeting dates are subject to change. Please call 541-663-0570 to confirm. Thank you!

The Evolution of Habitat Restoration in the Grande Ronde Basin

By Lyle Kuchenbecker, GRMW Project Planner

This year, the Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) will celebrate its 20th anniversary of coordinating fish habitat restoration efforts in the Grande Ronde Basin. In 1992, Governor Barbara Roberts designated the Grande Ronde as Oregon's Model Watershed program, one of three such programs in the Northwest. The GRMW area included the Wallowa River and Imnaha River watersheds. The original idea that provided the basis for the GRMW's foundation was that habitat restoration activities should be pursued with a cooperative, locally based, bottom-up, voluntary approach. With the support of the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, the Union and Wallowa County governments appointed a Model Watershed Board representing natural resources management agencies, American Indian tribes, and both environmental and industry interests. The program also had strong financial support from the Bonneville Power Administration through its Fish and Wildlife Program, which was charged with undertaking habitat restoration projects to mitigate the effects of the Columbia River hydropower system on salmon and steelhead populations.

Habitat restoration became increasingly urgent with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing of spring Chinook salmon in 1992 and summer steelhead in 1997. In 1994, the State of Oregon, through the Governor's Watershed Enhancement Board (later renamed the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board), created the Oregon Watershed Health Program to jump-start habitat restoration work in the Grande Ronde Basin. For the next two years, GRMW staff and others worked cooperatively with the Oregon Watershed Health Program's field team to begin implementing restoration projects.



Male Chinook salmon

Projects During the First Decade

As in most other watersheds, settlement-era activities in the Grande Ronde Basin damaged habitat and native fish populations, although these activities were well-intended and pursued for the benefit of the area's population. Activities such as stream channelization, straightening and ditching, draining of wetlands, removal of wood from streams, and construction of draw-bottom roads heavily impacted riparian areas and aquatic habitat. Initially, habitat restoration projects were relatively small-scale, focusing on goals such as streambank stabilization, livestock management (fencing and water development), culvert replacement, and riparian planting.

These early projects were completed on private as well as public lands. An objective of most of the early projects on private lands was to complete habitat restoration work that also benefitted landowners. As time went on, landowners' early successes and positive experiences contributed to the recruitment of an ever-growing number of landowners to support habitat restoration projects.

ABOVE: Large constructed wood structures were installed in 2011 in the upper Grande Ronde River on National Forest lands. These structures introduce channel complexity for fish habitat, increase stream sinuosity, and allow the stream to scour pools at high flows. Structures consist of large logs with root wads that are pinned together with rebar to minimize risk of transport downstream. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Forest Service.

The Second Decade of Habitat Restoration

In the second decade of the GRMW's history, it became evident that although small-scale projects improved habitat and provided benefits to ESA-listed fish, more could be done at each project site to address multiple habitat issues and realize maximum benefits. More holistic, larger-scale projects that treated longer stream reaches were implemented in the past decade. These projects included channel reconstruction, elimination of draw-bottom roads, addition of large wood structures, and relocation of levees. Improvement of fish passage at road crossings and irrigation diversions continued to be a high priority, as the replacement of culverts with bridges and the installation of fish ladders at diversion dams provides immediate benefits.

Where landowners have been willing and on public lands, several channel reconstruction projects have constructed entirely new, more sinuous, and longer channels as well as filled in straightened channels or ditches. These projects also involve the installation of log structures, boulder additions, and intensive riparian planting. Although channel reconstruction projects are quite costly and require intensive planning and analysis of hydraulic functions, they provide more and much higher-quality aquatic and riparian habitat than the straightened channels ever could.

Over the course of many decades, roads were constructed in draw-bottoms because they were the easiest and least expensive locations in which to build roadways. However, roads in draw-bottoms are particularly problematic because they disconnect floodplains, increase sediment inputs, reduce riparian vegetation that is crucial to providing shade, and often impinge on the stream channel. Many miles of gravel draw-bottom roads have been removed and the roadbeds rehabilitated. In cases in which vehicle access is still needed, new roads have been constructed on ridgetops or at higher elevations on the slope.

Large wood in the form of whole trees, logs, and rootwads are an especially important component of healthy stream systems. Any stream angler knows that where there is more wood, there are deeper holes and more fish. For many years, wood in the channels and the large trees that are the source of this wood were removed from the systems. Intensive logging in riparian areas and the common practice of removing wood from the channels greatly diminished this important habitat component. Planting trees along streams would eventually provide a source of wood, but it would take many decades for the wood to end up in streams and benefit fish. Therefore, the goal of many projects has been to put wood in the form of either whole trees or constructed log complexes back into stream channels.

ABOVE: Many draw-bottom roads constructed decades ago have dramatically affected streams and riparian areas. In this case, the stream was straightened and all vegetation on one side was removed, resulting in less shade, an eroding streambank, and elevated sediment input to the stream from the road. This road on McIntyre Creek has since been obliterated and re-vegetated, and a replacement road has been constructed on the ridge to the west. Photo courtesy of U.S. Forest Service.

ABOVE: Prior to 2006, this area of End Creek was a channelized ditch, which is now barely visible in the center of the picture above and to the right of the meandering newly constructed channel. The old ditches were filled in with material excavated for the new channels. Reconstructed sinuous channels provide more habitat (longer reach), higher-quality habitat with more pools and wood structure, better riparian vegetation, and increased stream/floodplain connectivity. Photo courtesy of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Strong Partnerships for the Future of Fish

Along with many partners including the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Forest Service, the Union and Wallowa Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Oregon Department of Forestry, Union County Public Works, the Wallowa County Road Department, and Wallowa Resources, the GRMW has implemented hundreds of habitat restoration projects during the past 20 years. Although the primary funding sources for these projects have been the Bonneville Power Administration and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, the GRMW's partner organizations as well as landowners have shared the cost of the projects and provided in-kind contributions. Special thanks are due to the private landowners who have implemented projects. Without their participation and cooperation, habitat restoration on private lands could not have occurred.

Despite the fact that there is much more to do to improve depressed steelhead and salmon populations, we have seen improvement in fish numbers and have hope for a bright future for fish in our area. Simply look to the Imnaha River, Lookingglass Creek, the Wallowa River, and Catherine Creek, all of which will have Chinook salmon sport fishing seasons for hatchery stocks this spring. For Catherine Creek, this is the first such season since 1978.

ABOVE: Steelhead jumping up a waterfall. Image courtesy of the Bonneville Power Administration.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF STATE LANDS

July 2012

RE: Looking Back 20 Years

Dear Grande Ronde Model Watershed staff, board members, and supporters,

First, I want to congratulate everyone involved in the Grande Ronde Model Watershed Program on reaching your 20th year of participating in one of Oregon's great experiments. I remember just like it was yesterday the day the Northwest Power Planning Council (now the Northwest Power and Conservation Council) selected the Grande Ronde watershed to be one of its model programs, and there was good reason for the Grande Ronde to be Oregon's model.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Oregonians were increasingly concerned about the decline of our storied salmonid populations. Petitions were filed to list several of our salmon populations as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), which resulted in ESA listings that affected every part of Oregon except for the very southeastern-most corner. Although listing species as threatened or endangered brings about new regulations intended to prevent further declines in population levels, it does not compel anyone to take actions that will lead to species recovery and ultimate delisting.

In 1990, a series of watershed workshops were held around the state, and one outcome of those workshops was a proposal to create a voluntary, local watershed program. Legislation was introduced late in the 1991 session to start the conversation about setting up such a program, and in 1993, the legislation was passed and provided significant funding to the Grande Ronde and South Coast watersheds to begin implementing the program. In the intervening year, the Northwest Power Planning Council amended its fish and wildlife program and recommended to create a model watershed program in each state, which brought additional resources to the Grande Ronde.

The Grande Ronde was considered critical to the recovery of Columbia River salmon and steelhead populations, as it had historically provided high-quality habitat and supported large numbers of wild fish. In order to recover salmon and steelhead populations, groups of concerned individuals must take action to address the many factors that lead to their decline, some of which are referred to as the "4 Hs" of salmon recovery: harvest, hatcheries, hydropower, and habitat. Although harvest, hatcheries, and hydropower operations were the responsibilities of state and federal agencies (or private power companies), no one had responsibility for improving habitat conditions.

Those of us who were involved in the early discussions about how to recover salmon recognized that to address habitat issues, local landowners would need to join efforts to restore fish habitat. We knew this work would not happen through traditional, top-down government programs. We needed to provide education, technical assistance, and funding to support a bottom-up approach that would allow local communities and landowners to lead the way.

Based on these convictions, the local watershed council program created under the 1993 legislation helped groups of local citizens come together to voluntarily assess their watershed conditions, identify habitat problems, and develop and implement locally based solutions. The Grande Ronde Watershed Council actually formed under the auspices of Wallowa and Union Counties before the legislation passed, as did a few other councils around the state. As a result, the Grande Ronde Model Watershed Program was and is a leader in the watershed movement in Oregon and the Northwest.

In 1996, the state began to develop a statewide salmon recovery plan (the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds), which the legislature approved and funded in 1997. At its core was an expectation that habitat is most effectively restored through voluntary local work led by watershed councils and soil and water conservation districts.

Today, there are more than 70 councils in Oregon, and the work they have accomplished represents a giant step toward the recovery of our ESA-listed fish populations. The work is not done, but we are starting to see fish populations rebound as the result of many actions by watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, and others at the local level. Removal of passage barriers, riparian restoration work, large wood projects, changes in irrigation methods, and thousands of other restoration projects have now been completed.

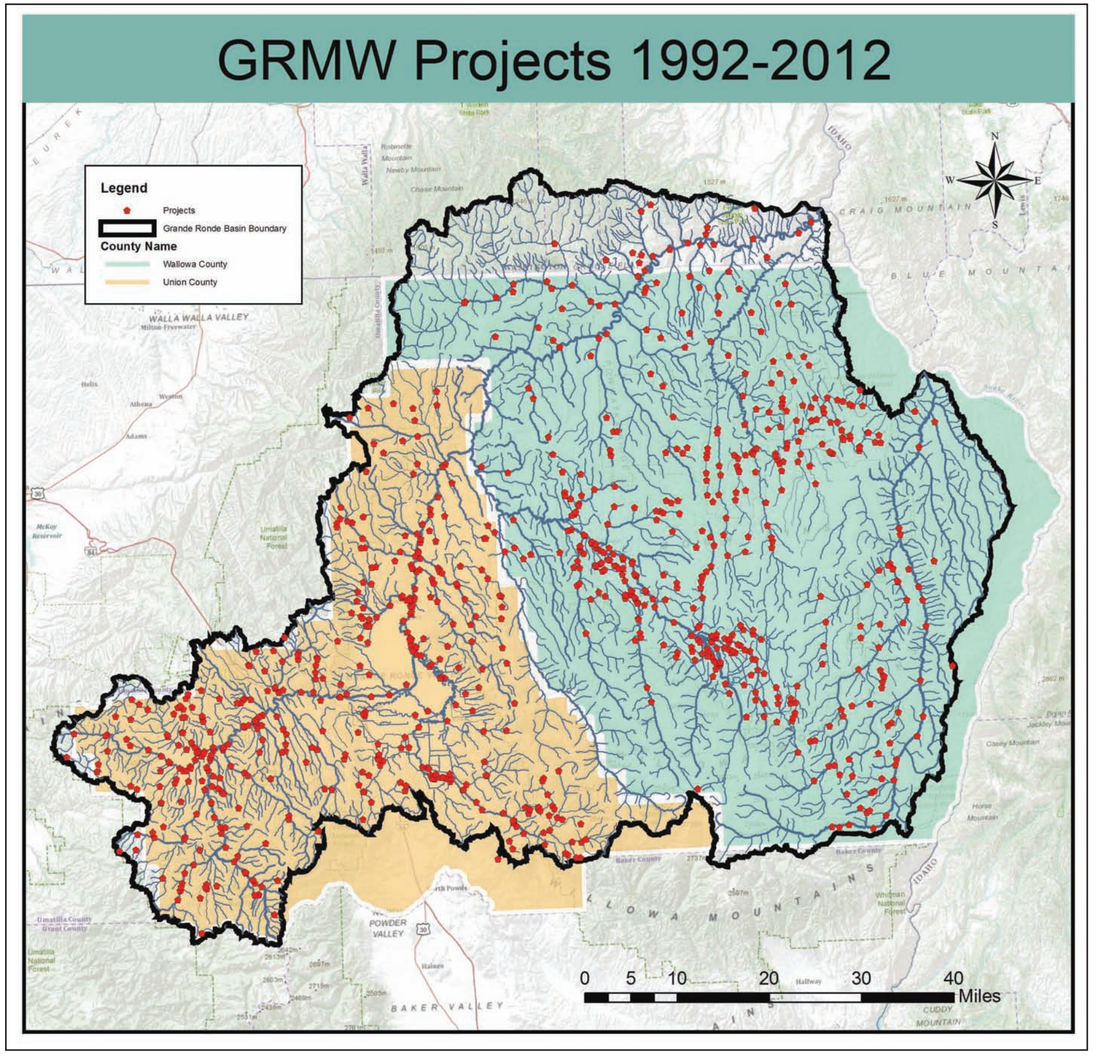
Everyone in the Grande Ronde watershed should be proud of what they have achieved during the past 20 years, and I encourage you to stay the course until the job is done. One day, I hope to see our fish populations restored so that the generations who come after us can enjoy the rewards of our work. For me, the watershed council program is an example of how democracy can work successfully at the local level.

Again, congratulations as you celebrate 20 years of success!

Sincerely,

Louise Solliday

Louise Solliday, currently Director of the Oregon Department of State Lands, served as the Governor's Watershed Advisor from 1996-2000.



Map and article by Mason Bailie, GRMW Database Manager

In 1996, the Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) developed a database to track all watershed restoration projects implemented in the Grande Ronde Basin since 1980. Also used to generate the map above, the GRMW restoration project database includes information about project costs, cooperators, locations, goals and objectives, monitoring, and details about the work completed. In addition to serving as a tool to better manage and report on projects funded through the GRMW, the database is used to fulfill a wide variety of data requests.

Here are a few examples of how the database has been used:

- The project database was used extensively in the Grande Ronde Sub-basin Plan.
- The GRMW database is the source of all information about Grande Ronde and Imnaha sub-basin projects reported in the Oregon Plan Biennial Report.
- Data derived from the GRMW database was used by researchers examining salmonid populations and habitat restoration activities.
- Data summaries and maps created from the database have been provided to project partners in the basin and interested parties throughout Oregon and beyond.