

## **Water Sustainability Report**

**April 1, 2024**

**Bow Creek Watershed Project, Lewis & Clark NRD**

**Application # 10079**

### **Progress up to April 1, 2024**

Since the project start date of September 18, 2023, the following progress has been made:

- The BCWP has hosted four workshops covering five days. September 22, 2023 a grazing workshop was held to highlight the benefits of implementing grazing management. A follow-up 2-day course was held March 22-23, 2024 where attendees learned in-depth processes of grazing planning and developed a custom plan for their operation. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January an evening workshop was held to discuss overcoming challenges with no-till and cover crops. A guest speaker shared their experience and talked through ideas that local producers brought up. In February a cover crop workshop was held and discussed the benefits of cover crops and management considerations. Attendees left with a cover crop pocket guide and a cover crop planning workshop developed by the BCWP coordinator.
- Two Mentor meetings were held, one in January and one in February 2023 to support the producers who are implementing conservation practices in the area. A guest speaker spoke to the mentor group in January and in February the group discussed growing alternative cash crops and different rotation that may be profitable. Producers who attended conferences and workshops outside the BCWP shared ideas they heard at other events. The best part of the mentor meetings was when producers shared phone numbers with each other, increasing the connections to each other.
- An initial meeting to discuss the next round of demo farms was held. NRD staff hosted an initial planning meeting with UNL Agro 405 instructor, UNL Soil Health Specialist, NRCS Soil Health Specialist, local NRCS conservation planner, and local farmers to discuss the difference between demonstration farms and on-farm research trails.
- Conservation Farm Signs were delivered to a few producers in watershed who are participating in the program. Some signs were installed by Myer Signs and other were installed by the farmer.
- Producer outreach for conservation contracts in the fall helped to increase the number of NRCS applications that were submitted for EQIP and CSP this year. The BCWP coordinator met personally with producers to complete NRCS applications and over the phone to provide information on how the BCWP incentivizes NRCS contracts.
- The TAC continues to meet on a regular basis 1-2 time per month to plan events and guide discussions. A list of collaborators for the soil health training curriculum was drafted and a very general draft of the program was created.
- UNL students developed four farm improvement plans for two farmers in the watershed (two plans for each farmer). In December the students presented the plans to the farmers, NRD staff, NRCS staff and other interested producers.

### **Activities Planned from now until next Annual Report April 1, 2025**

Once NRCS has offered conservation contracts (spring 2024), BCWP BMP contracts will be offered to eligible farmers.

Demonstration farms will start this spring. Soil testing and planning with producers will be ongoing. Summer Field Day- date TBD. This field day will include demonstrations using drones in crop fields as well as speakers on BMP implementation.

UNL students will visit in August (19th-21st possible dates) to meet with farmers interested in receiving technical support for farm improvement plans.

BCWP will support a SARE field day in fall 2024 to share the experience of two local farmers who were evaluating the benefits of two biological amendments on soil health.

One Soil Evaluation & Comprehensive Soil Health Management Plan will be conducted with a local producer. The BCWP Coordinator will teach the producer how to use these tools and support their use and implementation.

The BCWP Coordinator will meet with 10 producers to share information about the project, stream *E. coli* impairments, and resources available.

Four workshops to increase producer knowledge and confidence in implementing BMPs will be held in the watershed.

Two mentor meetings will be held.

Two to four meetings will be held with the curriculum planning team. A first draft of the curriculum will be 75% completed.

#### **Anticipated Cashflow for remainder of the project**

No funds have been used from the WSF budget through March 2024 because previous grant funds were available for activities. This leaves \$152,970 to be used for the next two years of the project. The first reimbursement request to WSF will be submitted in April 2024. We anticipate using all available funds over the next two years.

#### **Likelihood that benefits projected in application #10079 will be realized:**

At this point the project is on track to achieve the benefits projected in the application which include:

- Increase producer knowledge about environmental and agronomic benefits of BMPs
- Increase producer confidence in successfully implementing BMPs
- Increase producer networks of knowledge, resources, and technical assistance for BMP implementation
- BCWP will establish demonstration farms and host local education events including field days and workshops
- Facilitate mentoring groups to support successful adoption of BMPs
- Meet with up to 60 producers to discuss the BCWP incentive and education program
- Develop two soil health management plans with producers in the BCWP area
- Develop a soil health training curriculum for producers, crop advisors, agronomists, and other agriculture professionals.
- Incentive and education payment contracts will be offered to increase BMP implementation on 5,000 acres.