

# *Celebrating 25 Years* *of the* **Conservation Reserve Program**

## CRP — On the Ground

### CREP Project

Saves Streams  
Walla Walla Co.



Grass Filter Strip  
Protects Peone  
Creek,  
Spokane Co.



### CRP Creates

Wildlife Park  
Spokane Co.



### CRP Provides

Farm Balance  
Whitman Co.



### CREP Preserves

Family Lifestyle in  
Whatcom Co.



### Business Grows

with CRP in  
Whitman Co.



*Spokane County CRP—Photo by Patrick Lewis*

## **McLams' Grass Filter Strip Protects Peone Creek**

Sometimes the most productive soil can also be the most problematic. Lou and Ed McLam raise wheat on farm land along Peone Creek, flowing through scenic Peone Prairie, north of Spokane, Washington. The rich, dark soil along the creek produced high yields but the highly erosive nature of the soil combined with steep slopes often resulted in mud sliding into the creek. The area was visible to traffic traveling across Peone Prairie to Mt. Spokane and Green Bluff. Concerned about the appearance and the very real loss of soil into the creek, the McLams planted nine acres of land along the creek into a grass filter strip as part of the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Continuous CRP is part of the overall Conservation Reserve Program. Similar to General CRP, landowners voluntarily change the vegetation from an annual crop to a long-term, resource-conserving vegetative cover to improve the quality of water and air, control soil erosion and enhance wildlife habitat. Continuous CRP differs from General CRP in that it targets environmentally sensitive land which is then devoted to specific conservation practices. The land may be enrolled in CRP at any time under a continuous

signup process. Offers are automatically accepted provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements.

On the south side of Peone Creek, the area used to flood almost every year washing away topsoil and depositing a mess for the McLams to clean up each year before farming, stated Randy Primmer, Farm Service Agency Spokane County Executive Director. With the grass cover in place, the topsoil was saved and the grass stand filtered out the sediments that were in the creek when the flat floods, explained Primmer. The grass filter strip helped to absorb nutrients and other items that may be flowing down the stream if it did not have the buffer.

The McLams, who farm 1,200 acres, recently renewed their 10-year CRP contract on the nine acres adjacent to Peone Creek for another ten years. The land, which extends at least 25 feet from the streambank and follows a draw up a hill, has a grass cover of Timothy and brome grass mix. "We had to choose a mix that tolerates water well," said Lou McLam. "We had to reseed twice to get it to take," she added, explaining that the soil was often wet.

Once the vegetative cover was established it required continual maintenance. McLam explained that it is a misperception that a landowner can establish a CRP cover and then just leave it for ten years. "The biggest challenge is weed control," she said citing their battle with Canadian thistle.

The CRP land's proximity to a stream reduces the chemical options the McLams have to control weeds. "We have to go in and clip them down," explained McLam.

The Peone Prairie farmers did achieve their objective of preventing mud from flowing into the creek. They also noticed an added benefit - more wildlife in the area. "We've always had deer but now there's more birds nesting. The ducks and geese love it," exclaimed McLam.