

Flashback to 2009

CONNECT 2009

**Step back in time ten years and enter...
the CONNECT ZONE!**

summarized by Lisa Kilders Clackamas SWCD

This is the 10th Anniversary of CONNECT, so to commemorate the event, I sat down to interview three individuals, Larry Ojua and Karla Sanders (both formerly with Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA)) and John McDonald (Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD)). Ten years ago they took the initiative to pull together the support and agreement needed to hold the first CONNECT conference. Here is their story...

It might have been over coffee or perhaps the result of a long road trip when Larry, John, and Karla started talking about a need. That need was training for the state's soil and water conservation districts.



Karla Sanders

Those first conversations spurred additional conversations with numerous partners. Sometimes the conversations were more persuasion than discussion, but in the end, the partners agreed to support a statewide training event.

Putting the Pieces Together

It was becoming increasingly clear that the Districts

OCEAN's Mission Statement

"OCEAN provides a statewide network for education, resources, partnerships, and professional development making better employees and stronger districts."

needed something like CONNECT. John recalled a growing discontent among employees attending the OACD annual meeting. The training provided at the meeting was not geared toward staff.

There was also confusion among OACD board members about what training they should offer at the annual meeting. Neither the OACD board nor District staff were happy.

In reality, OACD did not have the capacity to provide the type of training that was needed. Larry, John, Karla, and Heather Rickenbach (ODA) along with other partners began crafting a plan.



Larry Ojua

To that end, Larry made a pitch to the Soil and Water Conservation Commission to support Operations Reviews as a means to gather information and assist Districts. These reviews were conducted by ODA staff, Karla Sanders.

Karla's work with Districts across the state helped identify District interests and priority training needs. This information helped secure support from the Commission and was useful in gaining support from other partners.

"Ten years ago we had the perfect storm of District growth, partner support, and a clear need to push for an event like CONNECT" -Larry Ojua

Once the Commission was on board, John worked hard to get buy-in for the event from OACD. The training had to be useful, productive, and affordable. Then OACD turned to yet another partner for support.

OACD had a good relationship with the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB). This

continued

connection paved the way for conversations with OWEB that led to the granting of capacity building support funds for the event. The pieces were starting to fall into place.

What did Districts think of the idea?

Many District thought this was a good idea, but some were concerned that the event would be a place for staff to tell tales or form a union.



John McDonald

Skepticism from some Directors only made John work harder to show that the District needs were growing. Districts were beginning to pass local tax measures and hire new employees. Technical and administrative staff were being hired to complete work on grants and other projects

In the end, John did a great job of calming the feelings of distrust and convincing Districts to support the proposed training through CONNECT.

What was the most difficult hurdle?

Securing the financing and convincing all Districts to participate was a hurdle. This event would cost the Districts time and money. It even required some Districts to close their doors for a couple of days when it was a one or two person office.

That was a huge commitment and required the Districts to have faith that staff would bring back something of value. It was similar to the fear you have when you throw a party...what if no one comes!

“OCEAN had the leadership, vibrancy, and passion to make this happen. Gaining acceptance was the largest hurdle, and OCEAN had the drive to get us there.” -John McDonald

CONNECT needed a strong turnout. Good participation was necessary as networking was one of the main objectives of the event. We wanted to empower District staff to feel they were important and should be invested in.

To reach this goal they enlisted the Oregon Conservation Education and Assistance Network (OCEAN) to help them generate excitement and participation at the District level.

How was the first CONNECT funded?

Funds were cobbled together from partnering organizations with some dedicated money from ODA to provide opportunities to do training on Senate Bill 1010 and the Agricultural Water Quality Plans and Rules.

It was not a lot of money. Total Capacity Funds budgeted for Connect 2009 was \$17,500 plus the \$5,500 collected at registration.

Registration cost was \$50 per SWCD employee, including lodging and food.

Budget for the first CONNECT

Facility	\$16,000
Speaker Honoraria	\$3,150
Supplies	\$2,250
Printing (before cheap USB drives)	\$1,500
Total	\$22,900

Still, it was a shoestring budget, and one of the hardest things to do was to find a venue they could afford. Larry and Karla visited several sites across the state to find a place to hold CONNECT.

Larry laughed, “It is tough to go out and tell a facility that you need a place that will hold 100 people, provide X number of meals, and include meeting space. Oh, and by the way, we have \$12.” It wasn’t far from the truth!

Finally, they were successful in finding a small retreat center in Canby Oregon called Canby Grove.

Tell me a favorite or most memorable moment.

Karla remembers that she was so stressed out that she drove into Ken Diebel’s jeep (an ODA vehicle) in the parking lot. Not her favorite moment, but surely memorable!

Larry remembers meeting several new District employees who had been recently hired. It was really cool to see the Districts growing. There was a whole new group of people coming to be a part of the District family. It was exactly the right time to start CONNECT!

He was also pleased that the Conservation Commission was excited to hear the good reports.

The most memorable moment for John was the first meal. The excitement and festive mood were almost celebratory. He said, “It was a feeling of, look what we have done!”

CONNECT 2009 Thank You

SESSION CHAMPIONS

(These people made CONNECT 2009 possible.)

Jeremy Baker
Larry Ojua
Jackie Hastings
Ken Diebel
Jean Fike
Autumn Bryant
Randy White
Gary Whitney
Karla Sanders
Rick Gruen

ADDITIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

(These people also helped plan the event.)

Marty Suter
Sophia Glenn
Russ Hatz
Pedro Ramos
Luca DeStefanis
Denise Troxell

ADDITIONAL VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS

(These people pitched in when and where needed.)

Jason Kehrberg
Lisa Reiley
Judy Marsh
Anne Friend
Heather Rickenbach
Renita McNaughtan

SPECIAL THANKS

(These people came through when we needed them most.)

Katy Coba
Merilee McDowell
Josie Reid
Sara Magenheimer
Jill Rees
Luanne Richey
John McDonald
The staff of Canby Grove

SPONSORS

(The Soil and Water Conservation Commission encouraged and supported this event.)

Doug Krahmer
Dan Logan
Marilyn Rice
Tim Kerns
Barbara Boyer
Mel Omeg

*As always, with an event of this size, we have forgotten to thank someone.
CONNECT 2009 could never have occurred without the support of district employees and each of their partners.
Whether you supported CONNECT 2009 by planning, presenting, or participating, we thank you.*

CONNECT 2018

Salute

Donors are Highly Appreciated

CONNECT planners have been hard at work turning over every stone to find funding support to hold this incredible training event!

Ambassador- \$10,000 or greater

- Oregon Conservation Partnership
- Oregon Natural Resources Conservation Service

Lunch Sponsor - \$2,000

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- Northwest Watershed Restoration, LLC
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Friend of OCEAN - \$500

- Idaho Power Company

Scholarship Sponsor - \$100

- Confluence Consulting



Contact an OCEAN board member if you have ideas for next year's sponsors!

Some Things NEVER Change!

Have you updated your District's Info?

Getting contact information and a current list of district employees and board directors has always been a difficult task.

It seems as soon as a list of all district contacts is compiled and distributed it is out of date.

The solution is to have everyone update their own District list of employees and board directors.

Thanks to Jason Faucera, this is possible!

The District Database is available on the OCEAN website. Jason also produced "how to" videos to help us enter data.



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Check out the "how-to" videos on the OCEAN vimeo channel! <https://vimeo.com/album/2225279>