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## PCEI project focuses on water quality

*By Megan Doyle, Daily News staff writer*

There are a few changes happening at Robinson Park east of Moscow. The banks of the South Fork of the Palouse River are getting a face lift, plants are being planted, and the field near the river is being leveled off.

“The main purpose is to improve water quality,” said Tracy Brown, a volunteer with the Palouse-Clearwater Environmental Institute.

The goal is to have the plants and grasses being planted along the banks filter water entering the stream, resulting in the stream having less pollutants and lower temperatures. The vegetation and wider slopes also will add to the storage capacity of the river.

AmeriCorps volunteers working with PCEI have been at the Robinson Park site since earlier this month. Soil has been moved, making the slopes of the river wider and less sheer, grass seed has been planted on the slopes and a coconut fiber erosion control blanket placed on top.

“The creek looks so much nicer than it did before,” said Mike Danahy, an AmeriCorps volunteer working with PCEI. He has been laying down and placing the erosion control blanket with six inch long staples along the banks of both sides of the river through the park.

The blanket will keep the grass and plant seeds down, said Emily

Poor, also a volunteer with AmeriCorps.

“It’s specifically designed to stay there a long time,” Danahy said. The erosion control blanket will last about two years before it disintegrates.

There also are plans to plant larger vegetation, such as trees, at the park in the future.

“And then we’ll do some planting this fall, continue in the spring and next fall as well,” Brown said.

PCEI received an 18-month \$132,000 grant administered through the Department of Environmental Quality Clean Water Act for their project. PCEI is responsible for a 40 percent match, which can include volunteer labor. Latah County also has been involved by helping to develop a design and agreeing to be in charge of ongoing maintenance such as watering and weeding.

“They agreed they wanted to have the project done in the park,” Brown said about the county commissioners.

The park had many different aspects that needed work.

“We didn’t even have to pay any money,” said county commissioner Jack Nelson.

“The county has been very cooperative about giving us more space for the slopes,” Brown said. “A lot of the banks were 10 to 14 feet sheer,” which were both a safety concern and flood concern. The less severe banks also will allow park visitors to walk down the banks to get to the river. With sheer, narrow banks, water could quickly rise and spill over the banks.

“The water capacity that this channel can hold is pretty big,” Brown said.

One downside to the project is that a bridge crossing over the river has been taken out because the bank is now too wide to stabilize the previously constructed bridge. Brown is hopeful that another organization will contribute work and materials to restore the bridge.

Without input from PCEI the county would not have started the project at this time, Nelson said. PCEI’s expertise helped to recognize the issue was a larger problem than the county originally thought.

“It certainly wasn’t on our agenda or in our budget at this time to do something,” he said.

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