

The Umpqua Post

[Wanted: Tax base](#)

By Alex Powers, Staff Writer

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***New measure could appear on the 2012 ballot***

A local conservation district will seek a tax levy in two years.

Umpqua Soil and Water Conservation District manager Rhonda Black said the nonprofit special district will seek to become a taxing entity in the 2012 general election.

Black said soil and water conservation districts throughout the state have opted to become tax districts as grant funding becomes more unreliable.

“It makes it hard for us to provide the services we need to provide, just based on grants,” she said.

Conservation districts in Oregon often raise funds to improve water quality, or plan farms. Services are available to landowners, typically farmers.

USWCD has relied on grants as its only revenue since 2006, she said. Douglas County previously provided \$43,600 each year in O&C funding. But Oregon & California Railroad funds dried up, and the predictability of some grants is sketchy at best.

Black said funds not only pay for projects, but serve as seed money when applying for grants that require the district to match funds.

“It does limit us on some projects,” she said.

Some districts in Benton, Jackson, Sherman, Wasco and northern counties, including Multnomah, became tax districts after garnering approval from voters.

Black said those districts often operate as though the tax levy funds don't exist, using the money as a safety net or “seed” money for grant applications.

“It (taxes) definitely saves the day, if you need them,” she said.

The district will apply to Douglas County to have the issue put on the 2012 ballot. Then voters in the 600,000-square-acre district, which covers the Douglas County panhandle, will approve or reject the measure.