

Oregon Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
May 12, 2005
Portland, Oregon

Members Present:

Co-Chairs: Bob Graham, **NRCS State Conservationist**, Larry Frey, **FSA State Director**; **NRCS:** Dianne Guidry, Bill White, Cec Cullison, Meta Boyer, Dave Dishman, Tom Makowski, **NRCS Leadership Development Program Participants:** Sara Magenheimer, Sandra Fife, Kristie Coelsch, Lorraine Vogt, Amy Wilson (mentor); **FSA:** Lois Loop; **Farm Service Agency State Committee:** Sam Asai and Daulton Straus; **Defenders of Wildlife:** Cheryl Hummon and Amaroq Weiss; **Habitat Joint Venture:** Bruce Taylor; **Oregon Department of Forestry:** Mike Barsotti; **Oregon Tilth:** Pete Gonzalves; **Oregon Wheat Growers League:** Tammy Dennee and Tim Holtz; **Oregon Department of Agriculture:** Larry Ojua; **Oregon Small Woodlands Association:** John Poppino; **NRCS West National Technology Support Center:** Stephanie Aschmann; **Columbia Plateau Conservation Research Center:** Dan Long; **Farwest Agribusiness Association:** Scott McKinnie; **Oregon Department of Forestry:** Mike Barsotti; **US Forest Service:** Ray Abriel; **Oregon Cattlemen's Association:** Kevin Westfall; **Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board:** Tom Byler

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Larry Frey – Pleased to see the number of members present at this OTAC meeting. Thanked Bob Graham for hosting the meeting at the new NRCS state office location. Provided an update on several programs and mentioned that Lois will be giving an update later in the meeting.

Bob Graham - Thanked everyone for finding our new NRCS State Office. Our agency is in the midst of the Conservation Security Program and today we will be giving you an update on CSP, as well as our Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program and working on a formula for the national distribution of funds. Bob stated he is on the national CTA team and Ron Alvarado is here to lead a discussion, and then OTAC's input will be provided to the national team next week in Texas. The subcommittee on methane digesters had a good work session and will give you an update at this meeting. Conservation Partnership Initiative grants were awarded just this morning and Dianne Guidry will give an update.

OTAC January Minutes - Approved as written.

Meeting Dates - August 9 and November 9, 2005 will be the next meeting dates for the OTAC committee. The location will be determined

at a later date. From the last meeting we had everyone fill out a questionnaire and here is a list of the future topics.

Future OTAC Topics

- Conservation Security Program (CSP)
 - Update on 2004 Signup
 - Update on 2005 Signup
 - Final Rule Language
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP):
 - Results of comment period
- Options for using federal conservation programs to help implement high priorities in the State “comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy”
- 2007 Farm Bill
 - What should be retained from 2002
 - What should be added
- Database interface between FSA, NRCS, and Risk Management
- E-Government:
 - How to serve growers without internet access
- Cellulose Digesters
- Oregon Tilth presentation by Pete Gonzalves

Conservation Security Program (CSP) Update for FY 05 and FY06 - Bill White and Meta Boyer

To date, 50 percent of the Tier 3 applications received nationally have come from Oregon. Please help get the word to producers to attend the CSP workshop in their areas; with this great cross-section in this room we can get the word out about these workshops. Producers should complete information and documentation prior to attending a self-assessment workshop. Three of our areas are getting huge numbers of applications, and NRCS will be detailing other area employees into the busy watershed areas as needed; workload is being tracked daily. Outreach efforts included direct mailings sent out through the ag statistics service; ‘word of mouth’ through your organizations is critical to making this process work.

CSP Technology Update - Russ Hatz

Enhancement activities and update will be presented at the next meeting. Signups opened on March 28 and will run through May 27, 2005; check the NRCS web site for the latest updates (www.nrcs.usda.gov.) Interim final rules posted for comment through July 25. Subcommittee met and identified priorities and factors to consider; this would utilize the basin work group. Digitized soils are going to be a challenge in some areas. Each basin submitted a list last year and projected an eight-year rotation. NRCS is working across state

lines in several of this year's watersheds. Nationally, NRCS has submitted a planned estimate to accelerate and digitize these soils. Currently, in order for a watershed to be eligible to participate in CSP, 100 percent of the soils must be digitized. Oregon is still working on completing the west side of the state, and mapping will be focused on the next potential locations for CSP watersheds. Cooperative agreements must be in place in order to digitize the federal lands that checker board the landscape with private lands; Tillamook will be digitized this next spring. The next round of CSP watershed recommendations are due to NRCS National Headquarters (NHQ) in June; NHQ will make the final decision.

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) – Ron Alvarado

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Program is the foundation of NRCS' activities. Over the years, it has been used to accomplish many things; however, there is a need to emphasize both priorities and accountability for this program. As part of meeting this requirement, NRCS is developing a process for determining CTA allocations.

The discussion resulted in the following comments from OTAC members:

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Shorter waiting lists!
- Supply closer to demand
- Staff able to identify high priority needs and provide assistance (not reactive)
- Measurement of increased assistance (Number of conservation plans)

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR ORGANIZATION ABOUT CTA; WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE NRCS CONSIDER?

- Closer tie between ARS/NRCS (ARS can provide technology/tools)
- Technical assistance backlog and landowners getting the assistance they need
- High percentage of CSP Tier 3 sign-ups!
- Certification of private consultants/employment of private sector
- Challenges of TSP – Certification/return on investment of time.
- Need to address state-specific programs/needs: e.g., CREP, ESA
- Demand for programs/assistance

Since there has not been a CTA program allocation process in the past, NRCS formed a national team to develop an allocation formula for use nationwide. Bob Graham, Oregon NRCS State Conservationist, is one of 10 State Conservationists from various states on this team; input from this discussion will be provided to the national team for consideration.

Any additional comments or suggestions should be sent to Ron at ron.alvarado@or.usda.gov by May 18th.

Working Lunch Presentation by Cheryl Hummon and Amaroq Weiss, Defenders of Wildlife – Predator Deterrence Practices on Ranch Lands

Wolves and grizzly bears and other predators are slowly reclaiming parts of their former ranges in the lower 48 states and elsewhere in North America. Occasionally, these carnivores may prey on livestock or cause other problems. ‘*Defenders of Wildlife*’ believes that the same public that seeks more room for predators has a responsibility to help resolve conflicts associated with the recovery of these animals. Since 1998, *Defenders* has sponsored 112 projects totaling more than \$420,000. Programs help share financial burden, increase human tolerance, keep livestock alive, conserve endangered and threatened species and also develop understanding and communication

Northern Rockies and SW Wolf Recovery programs are ongoing and have been extended to Oregon and other states. There have been over 200 unconfirmed sightings since 1998. Three Idaho wolves were confirmed in Oregon between 1999 and 2000.

The Oregon Wolf Plan includes separate population goals, listed status, 3-phased adaptive management, translocation, special status mammal classification, and state/private funded compensation/proactive trust funds.

In Montana, NRCS authorized the use of EQIP funding for predator-deterrent related activities, allocating \$100,000 dollars in 2005.

Subgroup Question: What are some logical reasonable practices to adapt to this?

- EQIP – Predator
- Subcommittee
 - Predator/livestock
 - Other broader, multiple species issues
- Pandora’s Box?
 - (Cougars, etc – Damage by elk, etc, moving to other areas)
- Assistance to producers
 - Targeting to those not participating in the past
 - Compliance with state water quality and other regulations
- States investing in CREWP / other program
 - (More CTA to match states investments)

Subcommittee on Predator, EQIP, Conservation Issues:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Phone</u>	<u>E-Mail</u>
Dan Long	541 278 4391	Call
Kevin Westfall	503 361 8941	kevin@orcattle.net
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Cheryl Hummon	503 697 3222	chummon@defenders.org
Amaroq Wiess	541 552 9653	awiess@defenders.org
Or Laura Jones		

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) - Lois Loop

Thousands of comments were submitted on CRP. FSA is in the process of summarizing those comments and will provide an update to OTAC as soon as all feedback has been documented.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – Bill White

Program Managers have been meeting through teleconferences and e-mails and will have a formal meeting taking place within the next month. Oregon will be piloting new EQIP application and ranking tools, with full implementation scheduled for November 2005.

OTAC Sub-Committee on EQIP - Application evaluation and ranking tool pilot implementation process:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Phone</u>	<u>E-Mail</u>
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Methane Digesters – Dave Dishman

At the January 2005 OTAC meeting, a subcommittee was formed to review the possibility of providing limited EQIP funds for methane digesters. An overview of the subcommittee's work was provided:

Environmental Benefits from a Digester System

- Reduced odor levels by 90 percent or more.
- Environmental benefits from reduced nutrients; organic nitrogen is converted to ammonium
- Reduced bacterial/pathogens
- Co-generation and energy cost reduction
- Final products such as soil amendments and organic-based fertilizer.

Digester Costs

- One of the barriers to the use of anaerobic digesters and methane recovery systems is the overall cost of the system and subsequent required rate of return on investment.
- System costs have ranged from \$350,000 to \$500,000 for a dairy operation.
- Engineering and design are around \$30,000 per system.

Digester Cost Offsets

- Power grid inter-tie
- Sale of solids
- On-farm energy costs (heating barns, etc.)
- Avoidance of litigation costs due to urban infringement and odor issues.

The digester sub-committee recommended that starting in fiscal year 2006, if funds were available, EQIP would be used to assist with the implementation of methane digesters in Oregon. The recommended cost share amount was \$80,000 maximum per digester with the total for Oregon of \$240,000 per fiscal year.

The full OTAC membership discussed the recommendation. Oregon NRCS will now establish rating and ranking criteria for methane digesters. Then, after the FY06 EQIP budget is allocated, a determination will be made whether funds are available for cost sharing on this technology. If there are adequate EQIP funds, this practice will be made available for landowners to use in Oregon through the first EQIP sign-up in 2006.

Meeting adjourned at 3pm.