

NRCS State Resource Assessment

Background

February 2011 – NRCS Oregon received National directive to complete a State Resource Assessment by June 1, 2011. April 2011 – Guidance on how to complete the Assessment – including both process and products expected.

Questions from around the country led to multiple Teleconferences to clarify the guidance. Given time frame, assessment was expected to be done at state, not field, level. Process was clearly intended to be a GIS-based assessment. NRCS Oregon started work in earnest on the Assessment mid-April. Assessment work was done by a team of 5 planners and GIS specialists in the state office.

Assessment Details

Per national guidance, there were thirty one resource concerns, in nine categories, on five land uses to be assessed.

The Resource Concerns were divided among categories (9) specified in the National Assessment guidance.

Land uses included:

- Crop land
- Pasture land
- Forest land
- Rangeland
- Other Associated Agricultural lands (e.g. riparian areas)

The nine major Resource Concern categories included:

- Soil Erosion
- Soil Quality Degradation
- Excess/Insufficient Water
- Water Quality Degradation
- Degraded Plant Condition
- Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife
- Livestock Production Limitation
- Inefficient Energy Use
- Air Quality Impacts

Oregon NRCS leadership prioritized 13 (out of the 31) resource concerns to be analyzed. There was at least one resource concern in each of the 9 categories above. The 13 resource concerns analyzed were:

- SOIL EROSION - Sheet, rill, and wind erosion
- SOIL QUALITY DEGRADATION - Organic Matter Depletion
- INSUFFICIENT WATER - Inefficient use of irrigation water
- WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION - Excess nutrients in surface and ground waters
- WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION - Excess pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications
- WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION - Excessive sediment in surface waters
- WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION - Elevated water temperature
- DEGRADED PLANT CONDITION - Excessive plant pest pressure
- DEGRADED PLANT CONDITION - Wildfire hazard, excessive biomass accumulation
- INADEQUATE HABITAT FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE - Habitat degradation
- LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION LIMITATION - Inadequate feed and forage
- INEFFICIENT ENERGY USE - Equipment and facilities
- AIRQUALITY IMPACTS - Objectionable odors

For each resource concern the NRCS team was tasked with developing, by land use, the Potential at Risk Acres across the state and the Acres Needing Treatment. The Oregon Leadership Team came up with Priority Treatment Acres (acres to be treated in the next three years with NRCS funding). They also determined the Priority Rankings for the 13 Resource Concerns, by the five land uses.

The final piece of the State Resource Assessment was to identify Priority Treatment Areas, where a majority of the Priority Treatment Acres would come from over the next three years. Priority Treatment Areas were defined as the Conservation Implementation Strategy Areas in Oregon NRCS' Strategic Approach to Conservation, AWEP and CCPI project areas, and many of our partner's priority areas (e.g. Willamette Wetlands Partnership Initiative, ODFW's Mule Deer Initiative management units, ODF's Communities at Risk, etc.).

Follow Up Considerations

The NRCS State Resource Assessment was a nationally driven process that did not account for all the work our partners are doing. For example, Potential Acres at Risk were typically overestimated (not sufficient time to refine our analyses) and acres having been treated were underestimated (because we did not subtract out acres our partners have treated – as specified by the national guidance).

Oregon NRCS would like to refine and extend our assessments to more accurately reflect conditions on the ground and to help us better understand the scope, scale, and cost of the needs out there.