

**Wasco County Local Work Group Meeting/Partnership Meeting  
Cousin's Restaurant, The Dalles OR  
February 5, 2013**

**ATTENDEES:**

Pat Davis – Rock Creek Ditch Improvement Company  
Charlie Hanna – Producer/Wy'East RC&D  
David Jacobs – Oregon Department of Forestry  
Ron Graves – Wasco County Soil & Water Conservation District  
Ryan Bessette - Wasco County Soil & Water Conservation District  
Josh Thompson – Wasco County Soil & Water Conservation District  
Karen Lamson – Wasco County Soil & Water Conservation District  
Mary Beth Smith – Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Rebecca Briggs – Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Gerald Allison Jr. – Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Beau Sorenson – Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Joey Shearer – Wasco County Planning  
Mike Weidmann – Wasco County Planning  
Derrek Faber – Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Jason Seals – Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Mike Moore – Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

**MINUTES:**

Beau Sorenson, District Conservationist for the Wasco county Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the Local Work Group Meeting. Beau described the purpose of the meeting which was to provide information to the group about the priorities of Wasco county SWCD and the local NRCS and then to allow each agency person present to tell the group what their conservation priorities they have.

Beau described the history leading up to today's meeting beginning with a change in the federal register in 2010 that requires NRCS to hold a public local work group meeting. For the past 20 years, the local NRCS and the SWCD have hosted Neighborhood meetings throughout the county which do a great job of gaining public input but partners have not had a chance to tell NRCS what their priorities are. Beau handed out a flow chart that describes the role of the local workgroup in developing an NRCS long range plan and how it ties into funding decisions made by NRCS and the implementation of Conservation Implementation Strategies.

Ron Graves, Wasco County SWCD manager handed out the draft SWCD long range plan for the group to look over and provide feedback to him after the meeting. Ron went through parts of the plan and highlighted the current list of prioritized resource concerns and solicited input from the group if there were any changes needed. Ron mentioned the SWCD annual meeting coming up on February 21<sup>st</sup> at the Discovery Center. He highlighted the following projects in the

plan: Mosier wells, Rock Creek/White River irrigation ditch piping, Fifteen mile and white river Lidar, Wal-Mart Conservation Easement, off stream irrigation water storage, e. coli monitoring expanded, Agriculture water quality plan, erosion control/no till, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), rangeland improvements (moving to a higher priority). These projects are listed in the SWCD long range plan as priority projects.

Beau Sorenson then handed out the group a packet containing NRCS program flyers. He went through each flyer describing what the program was and how it tied in with the local priorities. Antelope Creek, Forest Health and White River Irrigation projects are all local EQIP dollars that came from CIS' submitted last year. Funding is available for these projects in 2013. The rest of the projects in the handout are National EQIP initiative funding and information about the Stewardship program. The list of prioritized resource concerns was also handed out the group and Beau explained that this list was approved by the Wasco SWCD last year and that NRCS locally will follow this priority list.

## **AGENCY REPORTS:**

### Oregon Department of Forestry

David Jacobs reported to the group that the priorities for his department are Forest Health including disease, overstocking, and fuel loading ultimately leading to risk of catastrophic wildfire. ODF has a contribution agreement with NRCS to complete inventory and write specifications for forest stand improvement. Approximately four million dollars has been spent within this protection district over the last several years on these priorities. They continue to focus on Seven mile Hill, Sportsman's Paradise and the Rock Creek area as high priority due to the wildland urban interface in these areas. ODF also gets federal grants to work in bark beetle infested areas which usually also tie to wildland urban interface for priority. David informed the group that a new bark beetle has spread to the area, the California Five Spined IPS beetle. The beetle has been found in the Mosier area and is identified by the damage that it causes. This beetle will kill the entire tree where as our more familiar beetles only kill the top of the tree. Ryan Bessette has a fact sheet on the beetle and will provide it to the group. This beetle affects Ponderosa Pine and is a non-native insect. Leading into 2013 and 2014, David hopes that the contribution agreement will continue with NRCS and that the local CIS for Forest Health will continue. ODF will continue to utilize National Fire Plan dollars for work around wildland urban interfaces but this money is decreasing as is the bark beetle money. David asked that NRCS and the SWCD consider moving Forest Health higher on the priority list. Ron Graves encouraged David to come to the SWCD meeting or write a memo for the board to consider with his reasoning.

### Wasco County Planning Department

Joey Shearer reported that there are no specific long range conservation projects in place for the planning department. He described that planning is split into two areas: 1) Outside the National Scenic Area of Wasco County and 2) Within the National Scenic Area of Wasco County. Within, the planning department has conservation objects to protect the scenery and cultural resource sites. In the entire county; resource protection of agricultural lands and forest lands is high priority. This is the first time they heard many of the other concerns brought up by the

group and expressed this was a good opportunity for the planning department to see what was going on in the county.

#### Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife - Fish

Jason Seals reported that they continue to prioritize and work in the Fifteenmile watershed to treat water quality and quantity concerns related to fish. They are concerned over irrigation reservoirs built in the Juniper Flat and Wamic areas and are working with Oregon Water Resources Department on this concern. These small ponds add to a cumulative negative effect on water quality within these watersheds. This is a significant issue for ODFW. The riparian work that has been completed in Wasco County is commendable and continues.

#### Rock Creek Ditch Improvement Company

Pat Davis would like to see that the United States Forest Service attend these meetings in the future. Pat was glad to see all of us together and talking about our priorities and opportunities. Pat explained that he has three hats at this meeting; he is a rancher, irrigation district chairman and watershed council chairman. He pointed out that depending on what hat you are wearing is how you see the resource concerns or issues. He brought up an issue with pine beetles that are a problem adjacent to his property. The land adjacent to him is owned and managed by the game commission and he is concerned about the management of the forest and pointed out that they are ineligible for many of the programs we have available in Wasco County. The USFS has done a good job in treating forest health issues adjacent to his property. Pat feels blessed that the irrigation district piping project is listed as a high priority for NRCS and the SWCD. He would like to see a Lidar flight of the area in 2014 as the Irrigation District could use this data to complete a study to expand the storage of their reservoir. David Jacobs mentioned that he does have a grant to hire a crew to complete forest health projects on state lands. Pat offered that perhaps this meeting could be the forum we need in the county to talk more in depth about some of these issues such as the ODFW concern of irrigation reservoirs.

#### Wasco Soil & Water Conservation District

Much of the discussion about the priorities of the SWCD occurred earlier in the meeting, however, Josh Thompson added a few additional projects. He reported that he was working with the irrigators in the Tygh Valley area to remove five pushup dams, four of which are fish passage barriers. The planned project would remove all barriers, eliminate the use of the high line ditch and screen pumps. This project will improve water quality and fish passage in this area. Josh estimates that the Rock Creek piping project will complete phase one within three years. He reported that the riverfront project is moving forward and successful. The SWCD has been working as a liaison between private landowners and other agencies to address the feral swine issues in the Antelope Creek watershed. This project continues. Josh believes this issue will be a resource concern in Wasco County indefinitely.

#### Wy'East RC&D Energy

Charlie Hanna reported that work continues in the area to partner with NRCS and SWCD projects. Currently the energy program offered by the RC&D pitches in additional grant funds

from BPA or local utility companies on irrigation improvement projects. Charlie stated that if we can save energy than we can also save water.

#### Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife - Wildlife

Mike Moore reported that much of their work is habitat work with small grants. He introduced the Deschutes Canyon Noxious Weed Control project that they have been working on. This project treats the Deschutes river up to the rim where they are targeting Skelton weed, Scotch Thistle, and White Top. Funds have been secured to hire two technicians to complete pesticide application within the project area. They want to expand the treated areas up to the rim and need private land owners on board. The goal is that weeds could be treated regardless of land ownership. Currently there is NRCS cost share available for producers on the Sherman county side, need to expand this to the Wasco county side also. Mike also mentioned that a lot of work is being done in adjacent watersheds to Antelope Creek in Jefferson and Crook Counties and encouraged the group and NRCS to continue to support juniper removal.

#### Natural Resources Conservation Service

Much of the NRCS priorities were accounted for earlier in the meeting; however, Mary Beth Smith added that there is a national campaign to push the four principles of soil health. She described these principles and asked the group to help NRCS find willing producers in the county to establish trial plots for intensive crop rotations and cover crops. She provided handouts about soil health to the group.

In closing Beau asked the group for feedback about the meeting. Pat Davis, the planning department and ODFW agreed that this was a good opportunity to hear about where our conservation priorities overlap. Pat suggested that we could dive deeper into some of these issues in future local work group meetings. Beau mentioned that the schedule was out for the SWCD neighborhood meetings and suggested that if any of the agencies wanted to be on the agenda for 2014 they should speak with Ron Graves. Beau announced that this meeting would become an annual meeting for the partners to come together each year and discuss long range plans and resource concerns. Beau will send out the meeting minutes to everyone and once the Wasco County NRCS Long Range Plan is updated, he will also send that out to the group.