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Partners and Friends,

Over the past few months I have wrestled with the concept of the basin work group in the Deschutes Basin and how it would be most effective. I have talked with partners, and spoke with several folks in NRCS. Finally, I made a decision to use the Wy'East Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) council as the core of the Deschutes Basin Work Group.

Here's why I made this decision. First, they have membership from across the basin. Second, they have strong partnerships with a multitude of agencies, organizations, and local governments. Third, they meet on a regular basis, which is monthly, and hold their meetings in different location in the basin to allow maximum participation.

For these reasons, I made the decision to approach the RC&D council at their last meeting, and ask that they consider fulfilling the role. After a healthy discussion, they agreed to serve in this capacity.

We are currently the only basin in Oregon who is using an RC&D council in this manner, so we are breaking new ground. There are other basins interested in the same process, and I am encouraged that we will be leading the way. I am very excited about this effort, and look forward to working with the RC&D and all the partners to make this work.

From the NRCS perspective, basin work groups will be asked to:

- Serve as a natural resource advisory group as needed within the basin to foster cooperative conservation initiatives;
- Assist local groups (local work groups and others) in understanding agency/organization funding priorities (and funding opportunities) as they establish local priorities. Provide recommendations regarding natural resource priorities for other programs as requested by the state conservationist;
- Provide recommendations to distribute 25-75% (as determined annually by the state conservationist) of EQIP funding to local offices based on locally established natural resource priorities and their link to agency/basin priorities
- Review Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, Conservation Innovation Grants and Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative proposals that are developed in the basin prior to review at state/national level to ensure projects address local resource priorities

The council will be meeting on February 19, 10:00 am in Maupin at the Community Center. During that meeting, we are going to lead an exploratory discussion about how we want the Deschutes Basin Work Group to operate. We have a lot of flexibility in how the work group will be structured. At this meeting we will be presenting the sideboards of the basin work group and a few scenarios in what the work group could look like. Those present will help build this group. Everyone's input is desired and appreciated. Please consider attending this critical meeting that will lay the groundwork for a basin work group that will be successful for everyone.

You will also want to check our basin work group websites for additional information as it becomes available. We will soon have an agenda on the website, and there is an issue paper posted that could provide some additional information regarding the basin work group concept. The website link is http://www.or.nrcs.usda.gov/partnerships/bwg/deschutes_bwg.html.

If you have any questions regarding the basin work group, please don't hesitate to call. I can be reached at 541-923-4358 x 138. Or send me an email at gina.kerzman@or.usda.gov. Also, if you know anyone else who you think might be interested in attending, please forward this invitation.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gina Kerzman".

GINA KERZMAN
Deschutes Basin Team Leader
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service