

## Oregon Technical Advisory Committee Agenda

August 15, 2013

Aurora Experiment Station

Link to OTAC Minutes and Presentations:

<http://www.or.nrcs.usda.gov/partnerships/otac/index.html>

Next OTAC Meeting Date: **To Be Determined**

### MEMBERS PRESENT

CalLee Davenport, US Fish & Wildlife Service; Brad Siemens, US Forest Service; Erica Giegos, US Forest Service; John Byers, ODA; Tom Pinit, The Conservation Foundation, Sam Asai, Farm Services Agency; Chris Schreiner, Oregon Tilth; Joshua Seeds, OR Department of Environmental Quality; Lois Loop, Farm Services Agency; Kay Teisl, Oregon Cattlemen's Association; Ron Alvarado, Bill White, Sara Magenheimer, Kathy Ferge, Cory Owens, Jim Regan-Vienop, Mike Merrill, Desiree Burns, USDA/NRCS; Kyle Heinrick, Burns Paiute Tribe; Gene Foster, OR Department of Environmental Quality

### OPENING REMARKS

**Ron Alvarado** – Thank you all for coming. Sequestration is real. FY13 - NRCS is working through cuts as an agency. It's looking like FY14 & FY15 may be headed in the same direction as well. NRCS will continue putting conservation on ground. The Farm Bill is still up in the air. In September, the House and Senate will have nine days to conference on the Farm Bill. Hopefully they'll get the Farm Bill passed. NRCS wants to continue great partnerships in Oregon.

**Lois Loop** – Former State Director Lynn Voigt recently retired after 45 years of service. The State Executive Director position is a political appointment. Bob Perry is currently the Acting State Executive Director. Bob was unable to be here today, but expects to attend the next meeting. We are eagerly awaiting the Farm Bill. Hoping a bill or resolution gets approved soon. We are offering farm loans for those unable to get traditional loans. FSA is currently focused on Commodity and Emergency programs. Without a current Farm Bill, we still have plenty to do. Currently we have fewer personnel than in past. FSA has shared management, consolidated offices, and is continuing to take care of our clients.

### Strategic Approach to Conservation – Michael Merrill

*PowerPoint: OR NRCS Strategic Approach to Conservation – See attachment for PowerPoint information.*

We're at the end of FY13 implementation strategies. Look at several areas: FY14 (where we are going), focused efforts to work with local groups, previous meetings – ODA and AG water program, OWEB and things they're doing. Show how strategies tie in to the end-of-year and where we might be going in 2014. Resource foundation allows us to apply resource issues to the Farm Bill when released. Show solving natural resource problems, and what we are accountable for. This helps paint a picture of where we are going and restoration funds are being used (water quality, habitat issues, etc.) Use monies to invest where there is an outcome and demonstrate how the state of OR manages and gets things done. Helping clientele on the ground – what resources they need and priorities from the ground up.

After 2008 we were asked what the funding was spent on (to show accounting of all dollars and acres, etc.) It's hard to tell the story with graphs. We're heading towards success stories. State agencies all input information for a better picture of resource based problems we invested and focused on - SGI, Tillamook, etc. (see PowerPoint). We will be fully engaged in a strategic project by FY14. We're almost there. We're getting better at telling the story than in the past. We need to be and are, grounded in the process at the ground/local level. The agency is building from the ground up. Field offices were asked to do a 5 to 10 year strategy for major priorities and how to tackle them. Developing suite of projects to invest in, building a portfolio (outcome vs. output). Local workgroups are growing. DC's along with the partners are to write goals together. Currently building information database that can create summaries and reports to help look forward (plan). Develop and implement strategies. Getting to a point where DC's are able to look forward a few years to implement with locals. Keep working with partners throughout the year to meet deadlines and help partners for how/ when to engage in processes. CIS's some from past, present and possible future investments. DC's had to be strategic in deciding strategies most needing immediate focus. National initiatives that don't fit into focus areas needed to be addressed. 95% were obligated. Some contracts are pending towards end of year. Conservation Contracting: Forest fuels and SGI. Soil health; (potentially for FY 14), wildfire, plants, air & water quality, habitat, etc. overlap with priorities, matching with partners. We're going through a leadership review now. State resource for budget allocations. We are continuing outreach, continual planning and improvement of processes and outcomes.

**Question:** Lois – Is there flexibility in strategies/funding re: flooding, catastrophic events? **Answer:** Yes, usually different funding. Continually evolving and urgent needs require flexibility to adjust funds as necessary. (FY14 list – handout)

**Question:** Is there good local participation with NRCS? **Answer:** Yes, many landowners come in to the meetings, feedback to the Public Affairs Officer has been positive and local participation is continuously growing. Each county has their own page (link) online for local information.

**State Resource Assessment Process – Jim Regan-Vienop**

*PowerPoint: 2014 NRCS State Resource Assessment Process – See attachment for PowerPoint information.*

Several OR NRCS staff have been assisting our STC with the FY14 State Resource Assessment process for the last 9 months.

History – Was a 2011 State Resource Assessment. In that one, information built upon CIS's in place at the time. Priorities were based on Oregon's Strategic approach to conservation. 50 unique SRA's, couldn't really be compared, so in FY13, this information was not requested.

For FY14 – NRCS National Headquarters wanted an SRA to help inform the new budget process. Four main purposes were:

- 1) Create a method for States to document their resource needs;
- 2) Provide a scientific, quantitative foundation for establishing priorities with the State;
- 3) Utilize the resource assessment process in combination with other workload analyses to adequately document the TA needs of each State in relation to FA needs for the FY 2014 allocations process; and
- 4) Inform or influence the Agency's performance metrics for future Fiscal Year performance planning.

For the FY14 SRA a database tool was created with several multi-part steps to give a more consistent picture. The tool used standardized data and processes (e.g. to better inform OMB, etc.) The database was pre-populated with standardized data and was less GIS based than previous SRA.

**Question:** Are there guidelines of how to parse out (dollars), or is it always a judgment call? **Answer:** We evaluate strategies to determine. **Question:** With funding partners, is this a deep evaluation? **Answer:** NRCS looks at all phases to make our decisions.

**Ron Alvarado (NRCS):** OMB appropriates certain amount of money to agencies.

- 1) Oregon felt it was not communicating well enough with OMB to be able to address the issues in Oregon to get the proper funding.
- 2) We are a decentralized agency: meaning, states do not get an equal share of yearly budgets. There are two main objectives in moving to this type of budgeting process. The budget process determines how & what CIS's are funded.

**Question:** Any standardized approach to monitoring/measuring programs? **Answer:** National uses data sets. Every state has monitoring, but Oregon doesn't have link to acreage yet, which is why trying to evolve budget process to improve solid monitoring for outcome concerns. NRCS doesn't have infrastructure to monitor at that scale, but partnering helps put focus on specific areas and helps avert duplication by different agencies.

**Tools: Cooperative Civil Rights Committee – Kathy**

In 2012, the State Farm and AG community took that further to see if the three agencies in Civil Rights (FSA, NRCS & RD), could be combined. The task for force and effort became the "OneUSDA" effort. NRCS has eight special emphasis members. We ask for volunteers (employees) to serve each area. Those recommendations were presented to the State Farm and AG community in May. The committee's primary focus is civil rights as it relates to employees, with a secondary focus of outreach to customers. FSA & RD will fully transition into the committee. NRCS will lead the group for the first year/longer.

**Chair (NRCS):** Heather Medina Saucedo

**Vice Chair (FSA):** Debbie Carter

**Vice Chair (RD):** Patricia Cousins

Concentrated effort in keeping with USDA's efforts of cultural transformation and a blueprint for stronger service (modernize and develop service and delivery). The structure is relatively flexible and will remain that way. This helps employees get a better understanding of partners on a day to day basis. We plan to be a committee by October 2013. The committee is currently limited to the USDA agencies that comprise the State Farm and AG committee.

**NRCS, Soil Health (considering function & biology in management) – Cory Owens**

5 key soil functions:

- 1) Habitat for organisms,
- 2) Water supply and purification,
- 3) Engineering medium,
- 4) Recycling nutrients and organic matter,
- 5) Medium for plant growth.

You must have biology in each 5 functions for soil health. Soil health = Understanding the ecological process.

How to manage soil health: 4 key principles for any land use.

- 1) Increase plant diversity above and below ground
- 2) Minimize disturbance
- 3) Keep plants growing year-round
- 4) Keep soil covered as much as possible

Nationally – Has created a lot of fact sheets, success stories, videos, and marketing information on the website:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/soils/health/> or just search for NRCS Soil Health.

Statewide - Oregon formed Soil Health Steering Committee. Oregon Soil Health Strategic Plan 2013-2017 (Purpose, goals, actions). NRCS is looking at soil health locally as key (range, forest, pasture, crops). We are interested in exploring partnering opportunities as we move forward with this effort.

**Expansion of emergency haying & grazing of CRP for 2013 – Lois Loop**

*PowerPoint: See attachment for PowerPoint information.*

Expansion of emergency haying & grazing of CRP for 2013 (applicable to “severe drought” status counties only). For the Drought Monitor; go to <http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu>. If approved by recommendation and state committee: change of annual rental rate reduction (10% for 2013), allows sale of hay off CRP ground, authorizes ineligible practices under emergency situations (specific conditions apply: Conservation Plan, SAFE, etc.). Before presenting to the state, need concurrence of 2/3 of OTAC. Drought status is monitored and updated almost weekly (D2 or D3). Grazing and D2 must be in same county. **Comments:**

Chris - Numbers of producers that would benefit seems minimal at best, due to short timeframes.

Lois: This is short term fix for those producers this may help.

Bill: Is there a motion that we could introduce?

**Show of hands:** Majority concurs (FSA will take this to the committee for a vote).

Emergency Conservation Program - Many livestock producers are having problems statewide with lack of water. FSA will cost share for a one-time fee for hook-up to real water system (already in place). FSA will cost share 75% of eligible cost (permanent) and 50% (temporary) for any county that can prove drought situation.

CRP SU45 Results – OR increased acres in SU45. FSA accepted 59,518.7 acres from 56,432.8, expiring 9/30/13.

Ranked on Environmental Benefits (EBI)

- 1) Wildlife enhancement
- 2) Water quality
- 3) Soil erosion potential
- 4) Enduring benefits
- 5) Air quality

**UPDATES**

**Kay** – Wildfire relief funds on the ground (SGI & Ranchers impacted FY12)

**Sam** – No updates

**Jonah** – Partnerships and working together (common problems need common solutions)

**Gene** – There is current disapproval of EPA for temperature TMDL’s criteria, but will move forward with temperature work in Oregon.

**Chris** – Want to give appreciation for Sara (Organic Initiative), Sarah Brown (HQ) pointing to NRCS Oregon as being a leader. Week of Sept 15<sup>th</sup> is “Organic Agriculture Week”. Second Organic Production Survey – (2011) Oregon ranks quite high (2<sup>nd</sup> highest in organic vegetable, 3<sup>rd</sup> in fuel crops, 4<sup>th</sup> in organic fruit sales). A team will be putting on AG trainings around the state in January 2014 (see Sara for info).

**UPDATES – CONTINUED**

- Wes** – Emphasis on fire. There are 10,000 firefighters in Oregon. There have been thirty fatalities this year so far nationwide. Deputy Chief, Jim Hubbard was in Oregon to look at a cohesive strategy at the work done together with other agencies re: grant. Fire transfer - \$600 million is getting ready for fire transfer now. FS must contribute \$10 million this year.
- Cal** – Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCA) is close to being signed. Sage Grouse – Harney County, getting an agreement together. Hope to follow with CCA effort soon. HFRP site visits within the last several months with NRCS. There is potential for the Oregon Spotted Frog getting media attention soon.
- Bill** – Please bring topics for the next meeting to me and I'll work them into the agenda. I'm very happy with the turnout for today's meeting. **NRCS to work with FSA for next OTAC session date.**