

Attendees

Brent Johnson*	Jessica Jones, NRCS	Matthew Brown, ODF
Bret Henry*	Jonathan Moncada, NRCS	Sawyer Logan
Penny Moon*	Kara Lanthorn, FSA	Ben Logan
Carmen Oakes*	Shane Stevenson	Bryce Logan
Matt Ingram*	Melody Henderson	Jeffrey Kee
Brooke Moore*, SWCD	Ty Hodder	Jim Bob Collins
Kristen Neuburger*, SWCD	Jere Hamel	Earl Mortimore
Cassi Newton*, SWCD	Julie Walhrich	Maria Snodgrass
Debbi Bunch*, MJDWC	Brad Walhrich	
DelRae Ferguson, NRCS	Jason Davis	(* In-person with Wheeler SWCD)

Started 10:07am

FSA Update – Kara provided a staffing update, as well as information on the ERP phase II, CRP, CREP, and LFP programs

NRCS Intro – Jessica provided an introduction of NRCS staff and stated the reason for the Local Work Group Meetings.

Wheeler SWCD Update – Cassi introduced staff and provided updates pertaining to vacant positions, plans for District purchased property, ODA Focus Area and potential SIA, AgriMet Weather Stations, weed program, projects contributing to RCPP match, outreach/education and social media.

MJD Watershed Council Update – Debbi provided changes to the office contact information and location, an overview of the organization’s structure and focuses, and photos of current projects.

ODF Update – Matthew Brown presented on behalf of Brandon Ferguson. He introduced key staff and upcoming changes to staff (noting that staff has quadrupled to improve response time), information about upcoming changes to the Practices Act and an increase in diseased trees across the landscape.

Farm Bill Program – Jessica presented a FY22/FY23 snapshot of EQIP, RCPP, EQIP-CIC, and CSP; including common practices, funding levels and location maps.

IRA Funding – DelRae presented details of the Inflation Reduction Act; including when it was signed into law, how much funds allocated to NRCS programs, what the core focus of the funds are aimed at, and a timeline of when producers could see the funding come online.

FY24 Funding Pools – Jessica presented the funding pools for fiscal year 24 – including the ending for Kahler Uplands Improvement Project; continuation of Drought & Wildfire Watering Strategy, Wildlife Friendly Travel Corridors, and JDU Forestry; and the start of a forestry based CIS in the Waterman Flat area..

Discussion –

Jim Bob Collins: Will the IRA provide an increase for livestock water and woven wire funding?

Livestock water and woven wire are not considered climate-smart, but could be paired with climate-smart practices as leverage.

Jim Bob Collins: Could rangeland seeding include seed mixes that benefit mule deer health and habitat?
There is a potential it could, rangeland seeding is often paired with forestry and brush management practices which are included in current funding pools and the upcoming Waterman pool.

Jim Bob Collins: Are there going to be any increases in ability to do controlled burns.
There was discussion at the Wheeler SWCD Annual Meeting regarding controlled burns and a presentation by the state forester, Andrew Owen. It is not anticipated for it to happen right away. Discussion is the cost-share would likely be NRCS putting the burn plans together and not cost-sharing on the actual lighting of the match, so the burn itself is not under contract.

Jeffrey Kee: ODF has a current funding pool for Urban Interface Fuel Reduction and there has been discussion of landowners becoming trained burn bosses – any local education or training planned for this?

This was also discussed at the Wheeler SWCD Annual Meeting. Requested information regarding training and will follow up to the attendees of this meeting with any information received.

Jeffrey Kee: Is there any discussion about compensating landowners more if the brush piles are not burned to sequester more carbon?

Projects that leave brush piled would not be supported due to the fire risk. Matthew provided some knowledge regarding carbon sequestering of young versus older trees and the benefits of burning to open up space for new growth – noting fire can still be beneficial even if the focus is carbon sequestration.

???: Does the RCPP provide any riparian restoration on the main stem of the John Day River? Such as riparian forest plantings?

No riparian plantings specifically, but there is a heavy focus riparian areas of direct tributaries to the John Day River. A lot of the projects being completed through RCPP include BDAs and then afterwards, FSA and the SWCDs are enrolling the area into CREP and completing plantings and fencing.

Jessica mentioned annual grass treatments using Rejuva and the cost-share available for these treatments.

Jeffrey Kee: Is NRCS looking at anything to assist with water storage from winter storage from ponds, wet meadows, or confined aquifers that may be identified in the lower basin – off channel reservoirs or ponds?

NRCS cannot cost-share on ponds. NRCS can cost-share on WASCObS – such as dams created to slow water, not hold water. There is funding in the RCPP if landowners were interest and there is discussions occurring in Gilliam County about how NRCS can fit into that, which would like be indirect through irrigation improvements.

Jeff Kee advised that the Department of Geology and mineral industries are updating a study completed in 2007 that will likely look at some potential confined aquifers and water movement in Butte Creek and Wheeler County. The project is in the planning phase, currently seeking funding.

Jere Hamel: Can you describe a little about the virtual fencing and how much of it is going to be on water development?

The virtual fencing cost-share has not been approved for the cost list, yet but there is a lot of pressure to get it approved for FY24. The discussion currently is whether it will be categorized as prescribed grazing or fencing – or a combination of both. It is unsure how water will fit in, but it is evident that it needs to be included. Prescribed grazing is one of the number one climate-smart practices that is being pushed and water is going to be a number one facilitating practice for that.

Jason Davis: Is there still money for cross-fencing?

The only funding for fence right now is the woven wire pool and the RCPP, but cross-fence is always an available practice. The SWCD or Watershed Council could possible help through a small grant.

(Cassi) Fencing is a practice available through the small grant program, but there is no funding available right now. The small grant funding will renew in July.

Jason Davis: (directed at Jere Hamel) How well did virtual fencing work in timber compared to open space?

(Jere) As long as you preplan, there is no real difference. The information is pre-programmed, so you need to be thinking of the next moves such as when the forested pasture needs to be programmed prior to cattle being moved. The system makes you put more thought into you your grazing practices instead of moving cattle on the spur of the moment while out riding. Towers can be shared amongst neighboring landowners without disclosure of personal information.

(DelRae) Virtual fence is a hot topic right now, so there are lots of presentations going on about it – Gilliam SWCD will have a speaker from the OSU Experiment Station at their Annual Meeting in March.

Jason Davis: Does the Waterman boundary include anything east of Waterman Road?

The boundary was just snipped to the roads, but it is not set in stone and can be discussed. It was recommended to use the boundary of the BLM land east of Waterman Road.

Ben Logan: Is there any ideas for another location? The Kahler boundary did not reach all the way to us until recently.

Kahler did not originally reach your ground, but was extended the last two or three years. But the majority of the work currently is not in the Kahler area anymore and it was decided it was time to move since the funding has been available for however long in Kahler and whatever was missed could be picked up by the RCPP. However, that does not limit the potential of starting something new once we see what the IRA money brings.

Bryce Logan: Are we picked up by the RCPP because the Kahler funding just got extended and is not ending before we could really make use of it?

The RCPP does not reach your ground, but the two funding boundaries meet, so no ground was missed, but we need to shift funding for now and can look at maybe 2025 once we see what the IRA brings to the table. There's going to be a big push for forestry everywhere, so there is opportunity in the near future.

Jessica gave an overview of the timeline for the next year and noted pertinent deadlines. She thanked everyone for attending and providing feedback.

Ended 11:41 am