

**Marion County Local Work Group (LWG) Annual Meeting  
February 23, 2024  
9:00 AM – 12:00  
Meeting Minutes/Summary**

**Record of Attendance**

1. Les Bachelor <i>NRCS</i>	18. Karin Stutzman <i>MSWCD</i>
2. Jarod Seaman <i>NRCS</i>	19. Olivia Jasper <i>ODA</i>
3. Theresa Brehm <i>NRCS</i>	20. Amanda Robinson <i>ODA</i>
4. Karlynn Wierer <i>NRCS</i>	21. Katie Kearney <i>ODA</i>
5. Dani Aleshire <i>NRCS</i>	22. Greg Wacker <i>OWRD</i>
6. Marissa Theve <i>NRCS</i>	23. Chris Seal <i>USFWS</i>
7. Anthony Collora <i>NRCS</i>	24. Derek Godwin <i>OSU Extension</i>
8. Anna Eby <i>NRCS</i>	25. Brad Moore <i>Energy Trust</i>
9. Eleanor Kenyon <i>NRCS</i>	26. Gayle Goschie, Landowner- <i>Goschie Farms</i>
10. Ann Walker <i>NRCS</i>	27. Bob Koenig, Landowner and <i>Santiam WCD</i>
11. Kim Gray <i>NRCS</i>	28. Andy Livesay <i>Westwood Farms</i>
12. Will Fett <i>NRCS</i>	29. Tyler Grindstaff <i>OVS</i>
13. Julianna Eckley <i>FSA</i>	30. Taylor Meyer <i>Stettler Supply</i>
14. Scott Walker <i>MSWCD-Director</i>	31. Eli Garvido <i>Stettler Supply</i>
15. Brenda Sanchez <i>MSWCD-District Manager</i>	32. Eric Kaser <i>Saffron Supply</i>
16. Becky Pineda <i>MSWCD</i>	33. Lindsay McClary <i>CTGR</i>
17. Chelsea Blank <i>MSWCD</i>	34. Scott B

Les Bachelor (District Conservationist, NRCS Salem Field Office)

Les began the meeting of the Marion County Local Work Group by saying that this may be his last LWG meeting after serving as District Conservationist for 24 years.

Les presented Certificates of Appreciation to farm owners Bob Koenig and Gail Goschie for their many years of service to the Local Work Group. He said that their support since he started here has been instrumental in helping with outreach efforts, especially for the Wetland Reserve Program and micro-irrigation. Gail thanked Les also for all his hard work, saying that he never stops, doesn't say no, and has really worked to increase the type of programs implemented in the district.

Les gave a presentation on the priorities and achievements of the Salem Field Office during his tenure from 1999-2023. He discussed how the NRCS Locally Led Process and the Local Work Group function to advise the District Conservationist on conservation program priorities and eligible practices. He said that, with four Groundwater Restricted Areas in the District, Water Quantity has been and still is the #1 Resource Concern. Water Quality and Soil Erosion/Health are the next most important concerns.

Achievements from 1999-2023 specific to *Irrigation improvements* and does not include EQIP-Initiative programs, Organic, High Tunnel, Energy and does not include Wetland Restoration Program-(WRP-WRE), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), no-till, cover crop, Dairy/Livestock operations, and Forestry. Irrigation Only:

272 low pressure energy efficient irrigation systems installed.

33,130 acres contracted with \$23 million.

57,883 acre-feet of surface and groundwater saved yearly for all practice installed.

#### Dani Aleshire (Natural Resource Specialist, NRCS Easements)

Dani said that there are 54 easements in the Lower Willamette North Coast Basin, with 14 in Marion County. She works on the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) and the Agricultural Land Easement Program (ALE). The ALE helps farmers keep their land in agricultural production.

#### Chris Seal (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

Chris said that the western pond turtle has been proposed for listing by the USFWS, so that will impact our work.

He said that there have been a lot of successes over the years here in the Willamette Valley. The Oregon chub and three species of plants have been recovered and removed from the Endangered Species List. The Fendler's blue butterfly has been moved from Endangered to Threatened. He said that these achievements have been made with minimal regulatory impacts in a small part of the U.S. with a lot of high value farmland. High quality habitat restoration in specific areas using voluntary work and partnerships has been the key.

Les presented Chris with a Certificate of Appreciation for all his work over the years to restore wetlands. Les said that Chris's dedication to the success of restoration would involve late into night seed on the WRP easement along Duck Flat Road.

#### Jarod Seaman (Soil Conservationist, NRCS Salem Field Office)

Jarod gave a presentation on the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), a program that offers technical and financial assistance on agricultural and forest land. CSP can be the next step after implementing an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract. A 5-year contract would be signed for the entire operation. To qualify, the producer must already be meeting or exceeding the stewardship threshold for at least two natural resource concerns on each land use. Then they must agree to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least one more resource concern.

He said that the application process is like EQIP. This year's deadline to apply is March 29. The producer must establish a farm record with the Farm Service Agency (FSA). Then the producer and the land must meet eligibility requirements.

He said that the payments have increased this year. The minimum payment is \$4,000 per year for 5 years and the maximum is \$40,000 per year, depending upon the number of acres and the level of

stewardship. Les said that he expects to see more applications from smaller operations than in years past.

Les Bachelor (District Conservationist, NRCS Salem Field Office)

Les requested another year of funding for the Mid-Willamette Watershed Conservation Implementation Strategy (CIS) and for the Lower Willamette North Coast Basin Animal Feeding Operation (AFO) CIS. He said that there is still a need to address water quantity and quality concerns and there is still interest in the funding from producers.

Theresa Brehm (Soil Conservationist, NRCS Salem Field Office)

Theresa gave a presentation on soil health and the Soil Health Restoration and Management Conservation Implementation Strategy (CIS). It was proposed last year for Marion County, but now it has been expanded to include the entire Lower Willamette and North Coast Basin. The purpose of the strategy is to fund practices that improve the resiliency of farmland by improving the soil ecosystem. The process would start with soil testing to determine the amount of soil organic matter. A soil health management plan would be developed. Practices such as cover crops, crop rotation, reduced tillage, nutrient management, prescribed grazing, and soil carbon amendment can be used to increase the soil organic matter, support soil organisms, improve soil structure, reduce erosion, and increase the availability of water and nutrients. Theresa said that there has been interest in using soil carbon amendments such as compost and biochar.

She said that the CIS will focus on areas with moderate to high organic matter depletion and erosion potential, especially in Groundwater Restricted Areas. Soil potential information can be found in Web Soil Survey.

She has received applications requesting \$300,000 in Marion County this year.

Marissa Theve (Resource Soil Scientist, NRCS State Office, based in Salem)

Marissa said that she is working on a backlog of wetland compliance determinations but will also be helping people collect and interpret soils data.

She said that the Mt. Hood National Forest has a surplus of biochar that people can pick up for free in late spring to use on their farms and gardens. The Forest Service has a pyrolizer that it is using to process biochar from woody debris collected during salvage of the Riverside Fire area. She said that biochar is porous and slowly releases moisture and nutrients. But it must be "charged" with compost, manure, or other fermented material to make the nutrients available.

She said that the NRCS State Office is acquiring a portable x-ray fluorescence device that can be used to test for heavy metal contamination in soil and amendments.

Olivia Jasper (Regional Water Quality Specialist, Oregon Department of Agriculture)

Olivia gave a presentation on agricultural water quality. She said that ODA is the lead agency for enforcing the Clean Water Act on agricultural land. Two of the rules that they enforce are the Waste Rule and the Streamside Vegetation Rule. The Waste Rule prohibits the placement or the runoff of trash, soil, manure, or chemicals into waters of the state. The Streamside Vegetation Rule requires streams to have vegetated buffers to stabilize banks and filter out pollutants. Perennial streams must also have shade.

She said that ODA doesn't fine producers most of the time for compliance issues. Most of the time they will visit farms to have a conversation about prevention and mediation. She described one major erosion event that occurred when a farmer removed all the Christmas trees right before an extreme rainstorm. Large gullies formed, sending soil into drainages, across a road, and onto a neighbor's fields.

She said that ODA is currently emphasizing reducing stream temperature and the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for mercury in the Willamette Basin.

She said that producers should work with the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to address water quality issues on their lands, especially in Strategic Implementation Areas.

#### Brenda Sanchez (District Manager, Marion Soil and Water Conservation District)

Brenda gave an update on activities of the Marion SWCD. She said that they have a full team now, including an urban conservation planner. It is an election year for Directors; there are five seats open.

The district is currently evaluating 10 applications for 3-year pilot Partner Grants.

The Howell Prairie Creek/ Pudding River Strategic Implementation Area (SIA) is funded for one more year. They are monitoring suspended solids in Howell Prairie Creek. The district is planning to set up a new SIA in another area.

The Native Plant Sale will be held March 1-2. A bulb sale will be held in the fall.

The Western Oregon Cascadia Recovery Effort, a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), has funding available to address resource concerns on forestland affected by the Beachie Creek, Santiam, and Lionshead Fires of 2020. Many practices can be funded, including slash treatment, tree and shrub planting, and invasive species treatments.

A Hazelnut Cover Crop Workshop will be held on May 3 with lectures at Chemeketa Community College and farm tours. Register on the Marion SWCD website.

The Little Habitat Project is available for urban backyard habitat certification.

Marion SWCD is starting to work on the Strategic 5-Year Plan.

#### Brad Moore (Energy Trust of Oregon)

Brad gave a presentation on the energy efficiency incentives available for irrigation system improvements. Incentive rates and caps have increased this year. The producer can apply for a rebate if

they are a customer of PGE or Pacific Power. Practices that qualify are water application efficiency improvements, pump upgrades, and installation of scientific irrigation scheduling systems. Examples of application improvements include replacing big guns, wheel lines, or hand lines with pivot, linear, or micro irrigation systems; replacing nozzles; and fixing leaks. A pump upgrade would include adding a variable frequency drive. Producers should apply for incentives before purchasing equipment. Do not install before incentive is approved.

He provided water application efficiency estimates for irrigation systems, from least to most efficient. The least efficient is flood irrigation (25-80%), followed by big gun (60%), and wheel line (65%). More efficient systems are linear pivot (85%), micro-sprinkler (90%), and drip (95%).

He said that the USDA Rural Energy for America program awards grants and loans for renewable energy. Energy Trust can cover a portion of the cost of an on-farm energy assessment.

Les said that most of the producers who signed EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) contracts for irrigation improvements in Marion County have received incentives from Energy Trust. The irrigation vendors help fill out the Energy Trust application forms.

#### Julianna Eckley (County Executive Director, Marion/Polk Counties, Farm Service Agency)

Julianna said that all producers who want to apply for NRCS or FSA programs must first establish their farm within the FSA database by filling out the Form 2047.

She said that FSA is still assisting forest owners who are recovering from the 2020 Labor Day Fires, but no new applications are being accepted for the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) for those fires. The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) is available for orchard owners and other farmers dealing with damage from the recent ice storm.

#### Greg Wacker (Oregon Department of Water Resources)

Greg said that there will be no more groundwater allocations, even outside groundwater restricted areas. He said that they are only approving off channel storage and water right transfers.

#### Dani Aleshire (Natural Resource Specialist, NRCS Easements)

Dani said that the Wetland Reserve Program ranking system is being revised to include consideration of the western pond turtle.

She said that we are watching out for the emerald ash borer and Mediterranean oak borer.

#### Scott Walker (Director, Marion SWCD)

Scott expressed appreciation for the relationship between the Marion SWCD and NRCS and other partners over the years.

\*\* Representatives from the North Santiam Watershed Council, Pudding River Watershed Council, Sustainable Northwest, and Oregon Department of Forestry were unable to attend to provide updates.



# NRCS Local Work Group –

## NRCS Marion County Public Input Meeting

February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024

9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Purpose: Provide a forum for NRCS to work collaboratively with our partners to develop a plan that strategically utilizes limited resources in a way that benefits all.

**USDA -Salem Service Center, 650 Hawthorne Ave SE, Suite 130 (Conference Room)**

Please contact Les Bachelor for agenda questions at 971-273-4816, or if you are unable to attend the meeting and would like to comment on identifying resource concerns within Marion County, email: [les.bachelor@usda.gov](mailto:les.bachelor@usda.gov)

	Agenda Topics	Discussion Lead
9:00 – 9:10	Welcome and Introduction	Les Bachelor/Everyone
9:10 – 9:30	Review: County’s Priority Resource Concerns and CIS updates from 2023 1. Water Quantity 2. Water Quality 3. Soil Erosion and Soil Health Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Marion County Update Current Conservation Implementation Strategies (CIS) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2020-2024 Mid-Willamette Watershed</li> <li>• 2020-2024 Erosion Control in Orchards</li> <li>• 2020-2024 AFO, Lower Willamette/NC Basin</li> <li>• 2021-2024 EQIP-CIC (Conservation Incentives Contract)</li> <li>• 2024 EQIP-IRA (Inflation Reduction Act)</li> </ul>	<u>NRCS Staff, Marion County:</u> Les Bachelor, <i>District Conservationist</i> Jarod Seaman, <i>Soil Conservationist</i> Theresa Brehm, <i>Soil Conservationist</i> Karlynn Wierer, <i>Resource Conservationist</i> Marissa Theve, <i>Resource Soil Scientist</i>
9:30 – 9:45	WRP/WRE/Easements Update	Dani Aleshire: NRCS <i>Basin Wetland Specialist</i>
9:45 – 10:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USFWS – Conservation Partnerships Update for Willamette Valley</li> <li>• North Santiam Watershed Council Update</li> </ul>	Chris Seal: USFWS <i>Private Lands Biologist</i> Brandin Hildebrandt: Executive Director
10:00 – 10:10	<b>10-minute break</b>	<b>Break</b>
10:10 – 10:20	CSP- Conservation Stewardship Program Update	Jarod Seaman, NRCS
10:20 – 10:40	Request for additional year of Mid-Willamette CIS funds	Les Bachelor, NRCS
10:40 – 10:50	2024-2028 LW/NC Basin Soil Health Restoration and Management CIS	Theresa Brehm, NRCS
10:50 – 11:40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) – Partner update</li> <li>• Marion Soil &amp; Water Conservation District – Partner update</li> <li>• Oregon Dept of Forestry – Partner updates</li> <li>• Pudding River Watershed Council – Partner update</li> <li>• Energy Trust of Oregon – Energy Incentives Offered – Partner update</li> </ul>	Olivia Jasper & Rob Hibbs: ODA Brenda Sanchez: District Manager TBD: Stewardship Forester Anna Rankin: Executive Director Kegan Craig: Energy Trust of Oregon Brad Moore: Energy Trust of Oregon Becca Shively: Sustainable Northwest
11:40 – 12:00	Special – Recap	
~12:00 Adjourn	NEXT MEETING: Always Last Friday in February, every year	

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