

NRCS Local Work Group Meeting – Gilliam County (In-Person)
March 4th, 2024

Attendees:

DelRae Ferguson (NRCS)	Wally Powell
Jessica Jones (NRCS)	Matt Kamerrer
Joel Verkruyse (NRCS)	Bryan Johnson
Kayla Mims (FSA)	Brooklyn Griffith
Adrianna Salutregui (FSA)	Sam Bates
Herb Winters (SWCD)	Tim and Nora McDonald
Roger Lathrop (SWCD)	Dustin Hill
Norie Wright (SWCD)	Jason Flowers (Oregon Wheat Growers League)
Rita Rattray	

Agenda Overview

Staff introduction

- DelRae (District Conservationist)
- Jessica (Soil Conservationist)
- Joel - introduced as new staff (Natural Resource Specialist)

Partner Updates

- SWCD (Herb Winters)
 - RCPP match requirements have been met.
 - Considering renewing the Thirty Mile RCPP for around \$4 million.
 - FIP progress – John Day Basin Partnership will be potentially requesting another \$12 million from the state for 2025. There is over \$2 mil in open projects.
 - Willow Creek feasibility study - Idea of recharging ground water during the spring. It was recommended by OWRD to not fund. Will be writing a letter to request a change of decision.
 - BLM - Stream restoration funding, hydrologic assessment, bass study, and small grants updates. \$550,000. Lowest 10 miles of Thirty Mile Creek. Want it completed by 2025. Will be installing BDAs in Phase 1, berms will be removed in phase 2 (2026).
 - OSU hydrologic assessment - Using ground penetrating LIDAR in areas of stream bed where it goes dry seasonally. Looking into ways to restore water above ground. Looking into feasibility.
 - Small grants - Program is up to \$15k, trying to work in areas outside of RCPP. Trying to get OWEB to up the max funds amount because \$15k doesn't go very far. Hoping for policy changes.
 - Weed department - Working more closely together and seeking funding through grants. BLM will hopefully be spending some of their money on the weeds issue in Armstrong Canyon.
 - CBASS and Bass Blitz - Tagged over 700 bass in 2023. Hoping to put BDAs in the mouth of Thirty Mile to slow down the amount of bass moving upstream but there is some BLM pushback.
 - Instream projects - Phase 2 of BDAs on N fork of Butte Creek in 2023. Will be installing phase 2 on the Wilson project and Wet Fork Hay Creek in 2024.
 - John Day Basin Partnership just did a large mule deer prioritization study where they assessed mule deer needs so they can target funding to assist mule deer.
 - America the Beautiful grants are up to 5 million dollars, considering trying to pursue some of those funds.
- FSA (Adrianna Salutregui)

- Deadlines upcoming:
 - ARC/PLC enrollment and elections - March 15th
 - CRP general signup starts today, ends March 29th - Gilliam will be hitting 25% capacity
 - Continuous CREP signup deadline - Sept 30th
 - When done spring planting, come do spring acreage reports, also CRP reports - July 15th
 - No grasslands signup announced yet, waiting for more information

2023 EQIP Funding Pools

- Drought and Wildlife Watering Strategy - 3 contracts (some big systems with solar components)
- Wildlife Friendly Travel Corridors - 6 contracts (1 mile, removal and replacement)
- Seasonal High Tunnels - 0 contracts

2024 EQIP Funding Pools

- Drought and Wildlife Watering Strategy - 2 apps received (both funded)
- Wildlife Friendly Travel Corridors - 6 apps (5 funded)
- Seasonal High Tunnels - 0 apps
- Currently working through the preapprovals. Always possible that we will get more funding later on.

RCPP (Mainly Gilliam county but takes in Butte Creek area)

- Practices: Mainly BDAs but includes supportive upland practices
- In year 4 out of 5 year agreement. Planning to renew next year.
- 2024 - 28 apps received, with over 3.5 million in ask. Only will end up spending \$600,000.

EQIP IRA funding pools

- IRA crop - can be used for climate smart practices on crop land, would need to be something that isn't already in a CSP contract.
- IRA range - RX grazing (virtual fence), juniper, herbaceous weed control, etc.

Climate smart practices

- Juniper added
- Herbaceous weed control added
- Prescribed burning added
- Some grazing practices added
- BDAs added

2024 updated cost share rates

- Rates went up for some practices: brush management, fence, obstruction removal

Farm Bill

- We still don't have one.
- Payment limitations (PL) have just been extended, has been causing some issues with applications.
- CSP renewals cancelled due to meeting the PL, can't renew until the farm bill resets the PL.
- Farm Bill extended until 9/30/24. Not expecting any updates before then.

FY25 funding pools

- Livestock water (county wide)
 - Budget last two years was \$133,333. Not sure if that will increase.
- Woven Wire (county wide)
 - Priority given to fence within 1 mile of highway
 - Budget last two years was (\$113,000), hoping to increase that in 2025 potentially around \$200,000.
- Within our office we may want to start moving apps without BDAs from RCPP to these other pools for an increased chance of funding applications.

CSP

- Will be the biggest funding year we've had in a long time.
- We will direct you to IRA or Classic based on the enhancements you are interested in.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

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- Will be facing PL issues this signup.
 - App deadline is March 29th

CRP Grasslands

- NRCS update as of this year: You cannot do EQIP or RCPP on land that goes into grasslands, so that need to be considered. If you need livestock water or fence to facilitate grazing, you may want to apply with NRCS before pursuing CRP Grasslands.

Other resource concerns/areas of interest? Open discussion

- *Tim McDonald - Irrigation upgrades on Rock Creek, washout areas on fields in Rock Creek.*
 - Herb - funding is available through OWRD to do an inventory. We are starting to get an idea for future funding pools, there will be a survey going out.
- *Nora McDonald - Solar upgrades for irrigation*
 - DelRae - NRCS can do an energy audit, which can be discussed. It's available as a CSP enhancement and might be able to be tagged to IRA funds.
- *Jason Flowers - working on getting a CIS in place to help implement improvements to sprayer tech. Might pursue a larger CIS rather than counties, maybe go large like Columbia Basin. May also turn towards a no-till farming based CIS. May also target fire (No-till leads to less fire breaks).*
 - DelRae - Open to looking into it. We already used CSP to fund a weed-it for some producers but there may be others interested in it for sure.
- *Wally Powell - woven wire boundary fence?*
 - DelRae - we have allowed it in specific circumstances. Landowners must both be in agreement and fence won't move location. We can talk about specific locations.
- *Matt Kamerrer - Directed at Herb. Spraying weeds on BLM with the drone?*
 - Herb - BLM doesn't allow us to fly the drones on BLM land.

Upcoming deadlines

- CSP classic - March 29th
- EQIP/RCPP - sometime in fall, likely November
- Wheeler SWCD - 3WP in house cost share application - May 1st
- FSA - ARC/PLC Election and enrollment - March 15th
- CRP general signup March 29th
- Acreage reporting - July 15th