



Natural Resources Conservation Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NRCS Local Work Group Meeting – Wheeler County (Virtual)
March 4th, 2024

Attendees:

DelRae Ferguson (NRCS)	Ayla Morehouse (Wheeler SWCD)
Jessica Jones (NRCS)	Maria Rey (Wheeler SWCD)
Joel Verkruyse (NRCS)	Kayla Mims (FSA)
Matthew Brown (ODF)	Lisa Greene
Ben Logan	Mary Jo Itel (ODF)
Shane Stevenson (Antone Ranch)	Rick Myron
Brent Johnson	Julie Warlich
Carmen Oakes	Yann Lapotre (Ochoco NF)
David Helmricks	Kaycee Rodgers (FSA)
Debbi Bunch (Mid John Day WC)	Jake Tolton
Adrianna Salutregui (FSA)	The Times-Journal
Jere Hamel	Maria (ODA)
Cassi Newton (Wheeler SWCD)	Brandon Ferguson (ODF)
Brooke Moore (Wheeler SWCD)	Gabe Williams
Kristen Neuburger (Wheeler SWCD)	Jim and Georgia Van Winkle

Agenda Overview

Staff introduction

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

Partner Updates

- 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
- Wheeler SWCD (Cassi Newton)
 - Fully staffed as of last week
 - Ayla Morehouse joined last year as Conservation Manager
 - Maria Rey has just joined as an office assistant (Feb 2024)
 - Design has been developed for Wheeler SWCD Conservation and Community Center
 - Times Journal asked about funding progress. Funding has been secured for some furnishing. No construction dollars have been secured yet, but they actively seeking that money. Construction will be 100% sustainable so targeting some dollars with that.
 - Informational video on area and planned building
 - Moved focus area from Mountain Creek to Bridge Creek. Some funding continuing in Mountain Creek for ongoing data, but primary focus is on west branch bridge creek. Working with ODFW

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- for aquatic habitat assessments. Temp monitoring is happening at the mouth and halfway upstream. Keeping focus area in west branch for at last 12 years,
- Agrimet weather station have not been funded yet, but OWRD has installed a station in Twickenham. It is currently offline due to livestock damage. Wheeler county has a station scheduled to be installed outside of fossil.
 - Weed program has changed. BLM is allowing SWCD to treat public access lands and private land adjacent to public. Approximately 400 acres available for treatment.
 - A landowner guide for county weeds and treatments is being put together, to be released in the next few months.
 - In-house cost share programs has been launched for the weed program. Landowners encouraged to apply for next app deadline, May 1st. Focused on landowners with 320 acres or less.
 - Priest Hole restoration is planned.
 - Lower John Day Canyons Restoration Initiative RCPP. Various phases are ranging from completed to in progress. Starting with culvert design and working towards the uplands.
 - Education outreach program is still in progress.
 - Mid John Day Watershed Council (Debbi Bunch)
 - Overview of current projects. Juniper, forestry, spring developments, riparian plantings.
 - ODF (Brandon Ferguson)
 - Staff overview. Currently recruiting to try and fill Justin Tryon's previous position.
 - Matthew Brown - Contact if you are going to be doing any cutting, there have been updates to the forestry practice act.
 - Matthew Brown - ODF Stewardship Forester (541) 640-3005 or Matthew.T.Brown@odf.oregon.gov

2023 EQIP Funding Pools Wheeler Co

- Drought and Wildlife Watering Strategy - 8 contracts (some big systems, some smaller springs)
- Wildlife Friendly Travel Corridors - 5 contracts (1 mile, removal and replacement)
- JDU Basin Forest Resiliency - 8 contracts (100 ac pieces)
- Kahler Uplands - 10 contracts (juniper, fence, thinning, etc)
- Seasonal High Tunnels - 1 contract

2024 EQIP

- Drought and Wildlife Watering Strategy - 14 apps received
- Wildlife Friendly Travel Corridors - 14 apps
- JDU Basin Forest Resiliency - 11 apps
- Seasonal High Tunnels - 0 apps
- Currently working through the preapprovals. Always possible that we will get more funding later on

Wheeler Forestry North Slope Ochocho/Waterman Map

- Map of CIS area used for FY24

Wheeler Forestry North Slope Ochocho/Waterman funding pool

- 2024 - starting with \$600,000 but asking for more

RCPP (Mainly Gilliam county but takes in Butte Creek)

- 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

- All basin forestry has been funded through IRA
- IRA range - RX grazing (virtual fence), juniper, herbaceous weed control, etc

Climate smart practices

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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

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

2024 updated cost share rates

- Rates went up for some practices: brush management, fence, obstruction removal
- Forestry at one rate across the board due to priority practice status

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 (\$113,00), hoping to increase that in 2025.
- Forestry
 - Boundary has expanded to include Waterman Flat.
 - If RCPP funding pool doesn't happen for FY25, funding pool will continue so funds don't lapse.

Proposed IRA funding pool

- Range and forest health centered with a focus on climate smart practices.
- NRCS, Wheeler SWCD, and Sustainable NW would all be partners.
- Practices would include forest thinning, brush management, woody residue treatment, prescribed grazing, herbaceous weed control, range planting, prescribed burning, fuel break.
- Benefits: AGI waiver, no farm bill payment limit just a \$450,000 contract limitation, allows NRCS to leverage additional funds because of partner focus.
- Map expands Waterman/Ochoco map all the way to the eastern county line.
- Survey will be sent out to landowners within the proposed boundary to gauge interest and look at potential match.

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.
- 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

- *Carmen Oakes - wolf depredation issue. Protection fences for smaller animals like goat/sheep. Have there been any discussions? Hot wire fencing, better lighting (fox lights), lighting in livestock area and calving areas. Might be a good fit for EQIP.*
 - DelRae - no discussions locally, may be some discussion in the Wallowa area. We can enquire and do some research and get back to you.

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- *Carmen Oakes - Irrigation and solar pumps would be of interest. On an existing irrigation well, replacing pumps. May be some others in the area that might also need this.*
 - DelRae - there is some potential for this, would need to be on a CIS basis rather than a single landowner.
 - *Gabe Williams - there are still some open ditches to pipe in the bridge creek area in the old RCPP. There were some landowners that didn't participate previously, new landowner now might be able to get it done.*
 - DelRae - there is nothing available now but will follow up if we have any opportunities. Cassi also does not have any opportunities at this moment in time.

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