

# 2016 NRCS OREGON TRIBAL UPDATE

## FY 2016 Tribal Contracts

Environmental  
Quality Incentives  
Program (EQIP) and  
Regional Conservation  
Partnership Program (RCPP)

14 contracts

\$803,387

1,936 acres

Conservation  
Stewardship Program

7 contracts

\$103,738

23,637 acres



Abundant water and green meadows greet members of the Oregon Tribal Advisory Council and NRCS staff. The site visit to the Logan Valley property, owned by the Burns Paiute tribe, provided opportunity for the tribe to share fish and wildlife management goals, the focus of this property.

### Tribal Advisory Council Meetings Now Hosted by Tribal Partners

State Tribal Advisory Council meetings have taken on a new dimension with our tribal partners hosting the meetings. The October meeting was hosted by the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians in Roseburg, and the May meeting was hosted by the Burns Paiute Tribe in John Day. Each meeting included a half-

day tour of tribal properties with discussions on tribal management and how NRCS may partner with the respective hosts to help them achieve their goals. Oregon State Conservationist Ron Alvarado attended the Cow Creek meeting, and Acting State Conservationist Tom Watson attended the Burns Paiute meeting.



Photo courtesy Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

## State Office Expands Tribal Outreach Efforts

NRCS Oregon programs staff, assisted by the state tribal liaison and field staff, provided outreach to four tribes that requested one-on-one meetings focused on specific tribal interests. NRCS staff gave presentations about the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program to three tribes and presented on the Conservation Stewardship Program to four tribes. Tribes wishing to receive similar presentations about NRCS conservation programs are encouraged to contact the Kathy Ferge, state tribal liaison.

NRCS was also well represented at the Northwest Intertribal Agricultural Council Conference this September in Pendleton. Scott Oviatt, snow survey supervisory hydrologist, shared the latest information on drought and climate change, and Cory Owens, state soil scientist, gave an engaging

presentation on the importance of soil health.

NRCS also participated in two USDA tribal listening sessions: the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians spring meeting in Grand Ronde and the National Congress of American Indians summer session in Spokane. The spring session included representatives from the Farm Services Agency and Rural Development and the Washington Federal Tribal Extension Agent. The second listening session was hosted by the USDA Office of Tribal Relations and focused on national-level tribal issues.

## Field Offices Continue to Provide Excellent Service

NRCS field offices continue to expand services to Oregon tribes. Two tribes added CSP contracts to their slate of funding. One tribe expanded their EQIP funding to include High Tunnel and Organic initiatives.

## NRCS Conservation Assistance Supports Tribal Elk Habitat

Hunting and gathering for first foods is an important part of tribal culture—yet in the fast-pace of 21st century living, these ties to the land can be forgotten.

The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde (CTGR) have not forgotten the importance of keeping its people connected to their heritage. Like many other tribes in our region, the CTGR embraces a lasting commitment to the land and to their elders.

To that end, the CTGR is working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to improve elk meadow habitats on tribal lands, and to provide safe access for tribal elders to participate in traditional hunts.

Lindsay Belonga, a wildlife biologist with the CTGR, explains

that hunting in Oregon's Coastal Range can be arduous. Trees grow thick and undergrowth can be impassible. Needless to say, hunting in this terrain is not for the faint of heart. Finding Roosevelt elk and Black-tailed deer can be a daunting challenge. To tribal elders, it can be a dream of times past.

By creating meadows within the forest, the Grand Ronde Natural Resources Department expects to improve habitat for these key species within the upper South Yamhill River watershed and improve access for tribal elders.

With financial assistance through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the tribe will reintroduce and maintain these grassy meadows into the landscape. The meadows vary in size and shape, and they will require routine maintenance to combat invasive species and vegetation growth. The sites will be planted with elk-friendly grasses and forbs to provide high quality forage. Hedgerows will

vary the food choices and provide cover.

Sue Reams, acting NRCS district conservationist for Polk County, is picking up where Tom Finegan left off. Finegan was the former Polk County district conservationist for many years until he retired this summer. He was instrumental in engaging the Grand Ronde in NRCS programs. Finegan assisted with the planning process and the first two years of implementation

*“We are constantly searching for funding and partners. Not only does NRCS bring a high level of expertise, but the transition... was seamless.”*

—Lindsay Belonga, wildlife biologist  
Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde

for this project.

Reams says the project is going well so far. Most recently,

Bill Richardson from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Kathy Pendergrass, NRCS plant materials specialist, helped create the seed mix for the high-elevation meadows. Some native species will be included in the mix, because NRCS wants to encourage using native plants whenever possible.

“This partnership (with NRCS) has been huge,” Belonga said. “The tribe does not have funding designated for meadow maintenance. We are constantly searching for funding and partners. Not only does NRCS bring a high level of expertise, but the transition between Tom and Sue was seamless.”

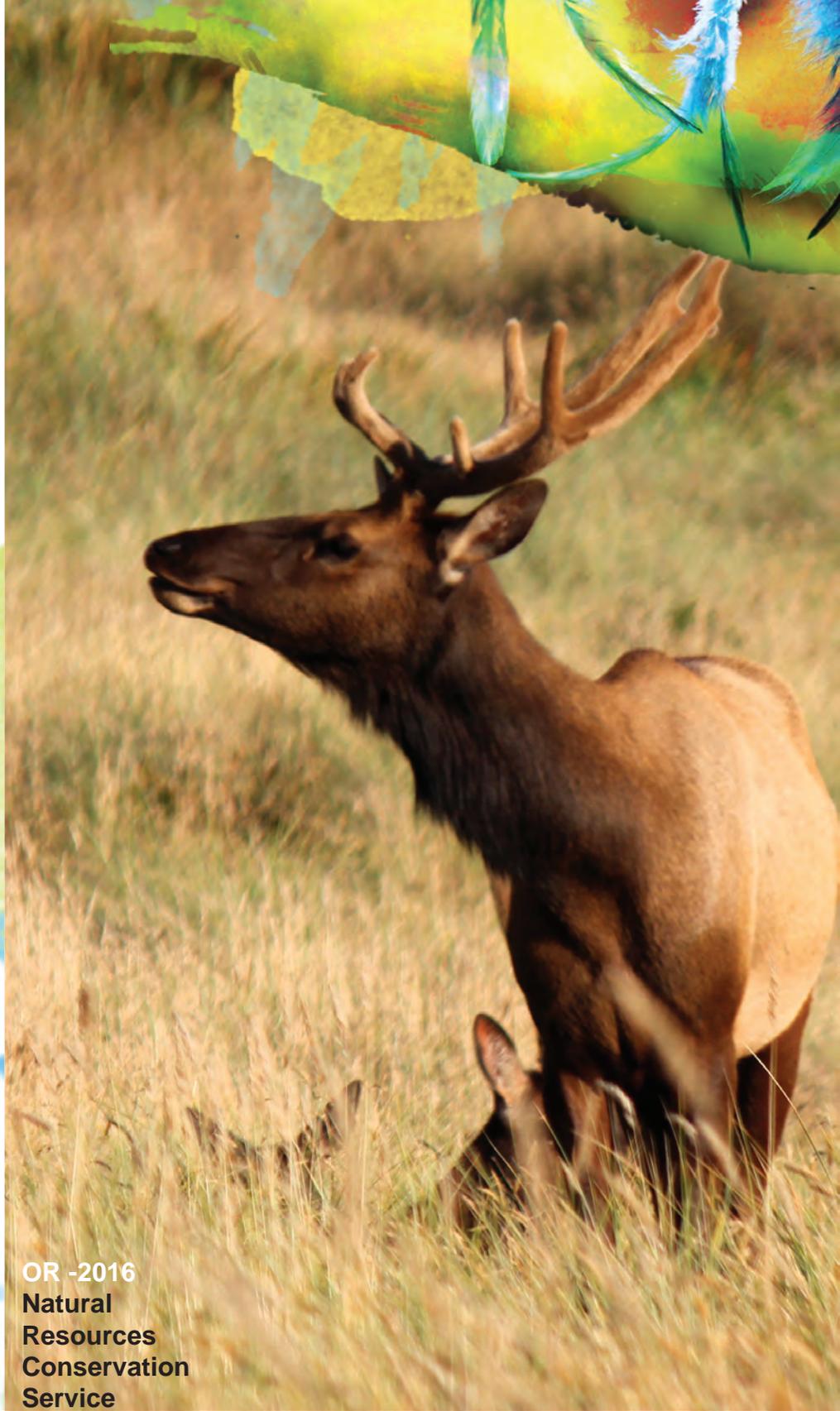
Other project partners include the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Elk Meadows: before treatment (left) and after treatment (right)



and the Polk County Soil and Water Conservation District.

The tribe says it will consider the project successful if they've improved their own land and engaged their tribal elders in regular hunts. They also hope to encourage neighboring landowners to develop similar habitat improvement projects. This will offer elk a greater area to roam and graze, as well as improve hunting throughout the east side of the Coastal Range.



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