

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Oregon Tribal Advisory Council

Thursday, Nov. 3, 2016

Meeting Notes

(All handouts are included on the Oregon NRCS Tribal Web page)

Participants:

Tribal Representatives

Mike Wilson, director of natural resources, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

Mike Kennedy, director of natural resources, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon

Jason Kesling, director of natural resources, Burns Paiute Tribe

Katherine Minthorn-Goodluck, Intertribal Agriculture Council Oregon/Idaho, also representative for Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indians Tiicham Conservation District

Doug Minthorn, Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indians, Tiicham Conservation District

Jason Robison, director of natural resources, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians

NRCS Representatives:

Ron Alvarado, state conservationist

Heather Medina Saucedo, acting assistant state conservationist – Programs

Todd Peplin, farm bill program specialist

Thomas Hoskins, McMinnville district conservationist

Annie Young-Matthews, NRCS Plant Material Center manager

Kathy Ferge, state tribal liaison/outreach coordinator

Welcome from Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde

Mike Wilson, natural resources director with Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, provided a brief overview of tribal history and the various treaties that impact who they are today. The confederation includes tribes from the Willamette, Umpqua and Rogue Basin. The current reservation is a fraction of the historic Grand Ronde reservation. The tribe was one of Oregon's terminated tribes, working 30 years to be restored in 1983.

NR staff include 20 year round employees and up to 95 seasonal staff. The department includes road crews, timber, wildlife, environmental services, summer youth, and fire crews. While the Grand Ronde are a compacted tribe, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) maintains trust responsibility for final project approval, NEPA, etc. M. Wilson pointed out the fire crew works throughout the United States. Several staff who started working for the department's youth crew are now full time staff. In addition to reservation lands, the tribe is purchasing conservation properties within the ceded territory. The most recent purchase, of close to 1,000 acres, is on the north Santiam.

Open meeting

Ron Alvarado, state conservationist NRCS, opened the meeting by thanking the Grand Ronde for hosting. He reflected on the positive relations NRCS Oregon and the Tribal Advisory Council have developed. He hears of challenges other states have with tribal relations and notes that the six years of Council meetings has paid off in relationships that get conservation on the land. He encouraged the representatives to maintain their diligence in monitoring programming and policy, noting now is the time to engage in providing input to the future Farm Bill. He also acknowledged that while NRCS cannot lobby the agency can provide information. However, due to the time constraints that often arise tribes should be preparing now for opportunities to address policy changes, even being proactive to stay engaged in the process with an eye to how to best leverage tribal resources.

Agricultural Act of 2014: Programmatic Updates

Conservation Stewardship Program (see CSP PowerPoint for additional information)

Todd Peplin, farm bill specialist, provided an overview of the revised CSP.

Key points:

- Contracts are for 5-years.
- Program of additionality, start with a base level of conservation and add enhancements to round out contract. Great program for tribes that have implemented some type of resource management plan like an Integrated Natural Resource Plan. The work done provides the base level of conservation, tribe can choose enhancements.
- State has identified 5 zones with specific resource concern per zone. There is a state-wide zone specific to forestry that includes:
 - Soil Erosion
 - Soil Quality Degradation
 - Water Quality Degradation
 - Degraded Plant Condition
 - Fish and Wildlife – Inadequate Habitat

- Tribes are not subject to Adjusted Gross Income limitations. However, AGI does apply to individual tribal members.
- Tribes have an opportunity to add enhancements that are tribal specific. K. Ferge will email a list of enhancements for review. T. Peplin can be contacted directly with new enhancements. Suggestions on new enhancements will be taken until December 9, 2016.

J. Kesling asked about the level of investment and whether it make sense for tribes to take part in the program? T. Peplin explained the new process is entirely different from former process; tribes have the ability to utilize current plans, where they have documented activity which feeds directly to CSP; the plans can be either EQIP or tribal (IRMP, etc.; additionality again builds on tribal goals—increased wildlife habitat, or higher levels of forestry management.

J. Kesling asked how the resource concern determination differs from past program. T. Peplin explained that zones which describe resource concerns upfront. He noted the process is transparent and enables to producer (tribe) to see the connection to payment, the enhancement increases the value of the payment. Kesling noted that at times it's hard to find EQIP practices that fit tribal needs/interest and that the past CSP had enhancements but depending on the location may not pay for enhancements of interest to the tribes.

R. Alvarado noted each tribe is supposed to have a tribal specific CIS tailored to their needs and interests. H. Medina Saucedo noted that every tribe is different in their approach to CIS and some tribes choose to have a CIS that addresses resource concerns beyond tribally owned land. Ron noted he will check on the status of tribal EQIP projects. T. Peplin noted CSP could follow EQIP contracting.

K. Minthorn asked about the ability for allottee owners of Public Domain allotments to participate in the program. She described the holdings of the NUMU Allottee Association, a group of individual owners from many different tribes. NRCS completed a range assessment on half the 11,700 acres. K. Ferge said because the land is not currently being managed the place to start would be with a Conservation Implementation Strategy through the EQIP program. However, BIA seems to be interested in taking a more active role in management so the process would really start there to determine what they will provide and discuss how the two agencies can work together.

R. Alvarado noted that like all programs CSP has limited funding. However, tribes can identify where funds are most needed. He also noted there is value in straight technical assistance. Tribes can develop CIS priority areas by utilizing their own resource management plans and identifying their priority areas.

J. Robison reminded the group there is a new Farm Bill approaching and with it comes the opportunity to advocate for program appropriations that are specific to tribes. H. Medina Saucedo shared that Local Work Group meetings provide tribal partners the opportunity to provide input into county planning scenarios.

Participation in Oregon Technical Advisory Subcommittees

H. Medina Saucedo stated that the Oregon Technical Advisory Committee serves in a similar capacity to the Tribal Advisory Council, in that it meets regularly with the State Conservationist to provide him with guidance from a broad group of conservation partners. K. Ferge noted the tribal directors of natural resources and tribal chairs are invited to participate in this group. Burns Paiute participates fairly regularly and is represented by Ben Cates. She said with the diverse participants it provides tribal partners with a larger forum with which to share their interests. They also benefit by hearing what other agencies and non-governmental organizations are working on.

At the last meeting four subcommittees were formed that will meet separately from the Committee. These subcommittees include: Working Lands for Wildlife, Conservation Innovation Grants, Farm Bill Programs, Easements. She also distributed the list of committee members. She noted that the meetings will most likely be held via teleconference or webinar and encouraged tribes to participate in the subcommittee process.

2017 Program Timelines

H. Medina Saucedo shared program timelines for 2017. They include:

- EQIP - Nov 18, Feb 17; EQIP includes the following special initiatives: High Tunnel, Organics, Energy, Sage Grouse
- CSP - Feb. 3
- Agriculture Conservation Easement Programs - Nov. 18, waiting on 2nd dates

Introduction to Working Lands for Wildlife (see PowerPoint)

H. Medina Saucedo introduced the new Working Lands for Wildlife initiative, noting SGI is an example of what the program looks at. The national office is moving from national initiatives to state-identified initiatives. There is no new funding for the program, unless a project is funded through Regional Conservation Partnership program. Program criteria include: species of interest need to be on the Threatened and Endangered species list, there needs to be an ability to leverage funding to provide specific outcome. For 2017 Oregon utilized Sage Grouse programming.

Oregon is in the process of determining species of interest for 2018. At the fall OTAC meeting participants identified their top 3 species of interest. These include: coastal coho, spotted frog, and streak horned lark. NRCS is interested in hearing tribal species of interest. These included: lamprey, mule deer, black tailed deer, elk. Lamprey was a common interest of all tribes present. For species that are considered threatened the concept, as with the SGI, is to preclude listing. R. Alvarado agreed with the suggestion that focus should be on landscape wide management and not species driven.

2016 Annual Report

H. Medina Saucedo shared the NRCS Oregon 2016 Annual Report which highlights the work of the agency over the last year. The state leads the agency in many areas including number of Regional Conservation Partnership Program awards and Joint Chiefs (NRCS and US Forest Service) awards. The Grand Ronde tribe has secured funding for both High Tunnel and Organic Initiative. M. Wilson shared that the EQIP contracting is a challenge to work through. R. Alvarado said that he recently had the opportunity to tour urban agriculture projects in Cleveland, OH. One garden used geothermal process for the high tunnel, enabling the farmers to produce food throughout the winter. One of the challenges faced by tribes is the ability to grow tribal crops of cultural significance because they are not “market” crops. Additionally, tribes tend to use their gardens to support food services for their seniors and others in need as opposed to growing crops for cash. This is not always supported by agency eligibility requirements. K. Minthorn-Goodluck said that the allotments in Harney County were traditional camas areas and that it’s a goal of the allottees to restore those areas.

Introduction to NRCS Plant Materials Center (PMC)--(see PowerPoint)

Annie Young-Mathews, PMC manager, introduced participants to the Corvallis Plant Materials Center. Service is divided by ecological zones with the Corvallis PMC serving western Oregon, Washington, and northwest California. Eastern Oregon and Washington is serviced by the Pullman, WA or Fallon, NV PMCs. There is also a PMC in Aberdeen, WA serving Puget Sound and northwestern Washington.

The PMC is charged with development of plant technology, plant training/education and technical assistance, collection of plant data, and development and testing of new plant materials. Current projects including work with the NRCS Soil Health campaign, pollinator habitat, Native Seed Production Manual for the Pacific Northwest, and technology/publication development. R. Alvarado note that for eastern Oregon tribes there may be publications from other centers specific to that ecoregion.

A. Young-Matthews noted the PMC has a number of formal relationships with various agencies and entities, including tribes. They are working with the Grand Ronde on camas propagation – have project area, also other species such as dogwood, willow, etc. The PMC has also met with the Siletz regarding a first foods projects.

There are a variety of opportunities for assistance to tribes, including providing key information and plant related technology transfer, providing plant starts for tribal gardens. A. Young-Matthews asked the group for other ideas.

K. Minthorn-Goodluck noted CTUIR has a native plant nursery, propagation is devoted to plants that can be used for various tribal restoration projects. However the program is not self-sufficient and relies on subsidies from tribal government. Tiicham Conservation District would like to host the PMC to discuss native plants.

J. Kesling noted Burns Paiute work with FS for choke cherries. There are challenges propagation from outside a given region. Additionally, FS and BLM may not have materials available due to their broader federal landscape responsibilities especially replanting associated with wildfire. For example for SGI -- CCAA who's going to supply with native stock? A. Young-Matthews noted there are some SWCDs with native plant nurseries; also private native seed producers in eastern Washington.

M. Wilson talked about the Grand Ronde plants program and noted the challenge of producing the volume necessary for projects. The PMC provided a good partnership and good growing area. From a tribal perspective questions arise regarding cultural species and whether or not it's appropriate for an outside entity to produce those species. Currently it is agreed that PMC can grow those items, with the idea that the program will build slowly.

M. Kennedy noted the Siletz work with the Northwest Oregon Restoration Partnership OR, which includes BLM and other agencies and non-governmental organizations partner for plant production. They grow at some of the schools and when you join the effort you commit to volunteer. Partners get plants at a reduced rate.

There is also a Sustainable Prison Program for endangered species restoration work.

Regional Tribal Advisory Council Update

J. Robison shared that meeting notes will be available once approved. The most recent meeting had great tribal representation. Last year's meeting there were four tribes attending and this year there were 10 tribes. The top issues discussed included:

- Notification—allowing time to incorporate tribal governance processes
- BIA roles and responsibilities
- Tribal set asides
- One size fits all contracting

Oregon has a successful model for working with tribal partners and he appreciates Ron and the direction he sets for the state. He acknowledged Ron's effort in meeting one-on-one with tribes and the regular meeting opportunities through the Tribal Advisory Council. Engagement is good at all levels including state office and field staff. He believes that Oregon is a leader in on-the-ground project funding.

Take-aways from the meeting, include:

- All states are managed differently—how they interact with BIA, timing of notifications, tribal set asides—focus is often on how tribes are different and so to is NRCS
- How tribes can work collectively to enhance value. Tribes need to work together, especially in looking forward to the next Farm Bill
- Importance of having a tribal liaison that functions at the state level
- Tribal success stories, it's important to share the positive stories. NRCS Oregon does a great job with newsletter and overall tribal PR.

Future:

The next face-to-face meeting is in Wyoming. He reminded the Council he's representing all of them so he would like to hear concerns, hot topics, other issues. He also noted that IAC Oregon is part of the state's success.

K. Minthorn Goodluck noted that all USDA programs in their work with tribes should be able to use their enrollment cards, people need their programs.

Two different departments with two different sets of requirements. The funding is going to the people who need it.

M. Kennedy noted the NRCS application does not include a box for tribal government.

Next Teleconference agenda items will include:

- Developing a charter to solidify tribal engagement.
- Hoping to increase face-to-face meetings to 2 times per year.
- BIA Trust Reform Act – developing pilots for tribes to take on full federal authority, some tribes heavily involved in trust reform, others still reliant on BIA
- Developing a catalog of Farm Bill Acronyms

Round Robin from Tribal Partners

J. Kelsing, Burns Paiute, shared a video of the first salmon in the Malheur River. ODWF transported 200 spring chinook for fish release for tribal fishing. The season was open to non-tribal members too. The tribe is currently negotiating for salmon in 2017.

K. Minthorn-Goodluck noted the Allottees Association utilized range assessment information collected by NRCS to drop a lease due to lack of feed.

J Robison noted that tribes are not taking advantage of technical service providers. R. Alvarado noted the primary focus of NRCS is technical assistance. Robison added that Cow Creek may work with David Chain on EQIP. This includes potentially a hoop house and maybe oak restoration work. They are pushing to restore wetlands for production of native plants and use that as basis for harvest to expand plantings. Groups in both the Rogue and Umpqua Basins are going through strategic planning processes, with partners looking to RCPP. He pointed to the success of the Lomakatski RCPP in Jackson County. The tribe is also a supporter in a Joint Chiefs proposal from the Tiller district. Additionally he is developing a white paper discussing the success of NRCS efforts with tribes within Oregon.

M. Wilson-Grand Ronde – noted staff is working on CSP and NRCS is working with staff on an Elk Meadows success story. The Council will see more projects in the afternoon.

K. Minthorn-Goodluck- CTUIR – Noted on October 17 an email was circulated by the governing body regarding tribal input for selection of NRCS position with the tribe. She wanted to know if NRCS has considered having a tribal member hired for the position. R. Alvarado noted the position had been filled by Nathan James. She then asked if there had been any consultation with the tribe in the process and cited Executive Order 13175 as a basis for consultation. She wanted to know if James had any tribal experience and pointed out that Terry Johnson came with tribal experience from two different reservations and was married to a tribal member from one of the reservations. R. Alvarado said he would follow up with Jay Gibbs, the Basin Team leader. Katherine noted the Tiicham Conservation District is interested in working with Plant Materials Center for the east side. R. Alvarado committed to assisting with making that connection.

M. Kennedy-Siletz—Siletz tribe worked with NRCS and USFS on a Joint Chiefs application. R. Alvarado and H. Medina Saucedo provided an update on that process. There were a total of 7 proposals submitted. The project involving the Siletz was not in the top 3. Primary focus of the program are fire safety and water quality. NRCS Basin Team Leaders are the leads for the agency. R. Alvarado requires a CIS to be developed and implemented prior to applying for Joint Chiefs. There is a quick turn-around on applications, two months or less. He wants to ensure adequate planning and an inclusive process.

M. Kennedy noted the tribe has four EQIP contracts. Kate Danks found extra funding to complete more work for both Lincoln and Douglas county properties. They are working with McKenzie River Trust for a land acquisition grant to purchase 125 acres on Five-Mile Creek, prior to its entry to Tahkenitch Lake. Also looking at a wetlands easement for the property.

Intertribal Ag Council Update

K. Minthorn-Goodluck shared that IAC is prepping for the 30th Annual Membership meeting, first week in December in Las Vegas. Cow Creek will be represented by the manager of the K-Bar Ranch. She reminded Council members that any official delegates have to be named by council resolution. There is a concurrent Youth In Ag conference. IAC provides scholarships for 40 to 80 kids to participate. NRCS is an event sponsor. The NW region is represented by James McCuen, Colville. She noted that in January an executive director for tribal CDFI will be hired.

NRCS Tribal Liaison Update

K. Ferge presented the 2016 Oregon NRCS Tribal Fact Sheet. She went over some of the highlights and recognized the Grand Ronde for their Elk Meadows success story. She noted 2017 will feature Burns Paiute tribe. She encouraged tribal partners to consider piloting a forestry or range project focused on soil health and shared the most recent flyer from the Soil Health campaign, Healthy Soil = Clean Water. She noted tribes can contact their local NRCS office for assistance. She also distributed an NRCS handout on Plants of Cultural Significance in Oregon. She suggested the tribes review the handout and add any plants they feel are missing. She noted that any submissions will be kept confidential. She also provided CSP handouts.

2017 Spring Meeting

It is scheduled for Thursday, May 4 with Siletz hosting.

Final Comments

Doug Minthorn shared that his granddaughter qualified for the NFR in Barrel Racing.

R. Alvarado shared there is a new state Cultural Resource Specialist. NRCS is also hiring several field level positions to help the specialists keep up with contract work. There was a questions regarding NRCS involvement with FSA. H. Medina Saucedo noted that NRCS may help FSA with literature searches if time allows. However FSA is responsible for site visits.

R. Alvarado thanked Mike Wilson and the Grand Ronde tribe for hosting the meeting. He commended the Council on their good work on behalf of tribes in Oregon.

Action Items (Ferge):

- Email Notes from RTAC
- Enhancement List
- Provide cost list, when available
- OTAC subcommittees
- CIS list

Action Items (Alvarado):

- Check on hiring of CTUIR field liaison
- Review status of CIS/tribe
- Connect east-side tribes with PMCs and plant material guide
- Review tribal box on the application