

**2017 Polk County Local Work Group Meeting
Meeting Notes**

Friday, January 27, 2017

9:00 am – 12:00 pm

OSU Extension Service, 289 E. Ellendale Ave., Suite 301

Dallas, OR

Purpose: To build and expand partnerships that will identify and evaluate resource issues, and find ways to collaboratively improve priority identified resource issues.

- Objectives:**
- 1. Review the Polk County NRCS Long Range Strategy**
 - 2. Receive a progress report on implementation of the Long Range Strategy**
 - 3. Discuss next steps and emerging issues**
 - 4. Prioritize actions for 2017**

Opening

Karin Stutzman, District Manager for Polk SWCD, called the meeting to order and gave the welcome and opening remarks. Karin noted that Tom Finegan retired as NRCS District Conservationist about a year ago. Sue Reams has been serving as Acting DC in the interim. A new DC – Evelyn Conrad – has been selected, but with the federal hiring freeze going into effect prior to her arrival, it remains uncertain when she might start. Karin reviewed the meeting purpose and agenda, and introduced Zola Ryan as the facilitator. Zola asked the participants to introduce themselves.

NRCS Long Range Strategy and Progress Report on Implementation

Sue Reams, Acting DC, provided a brief history of the Local Work Group and similar local natural resource planning efforts. The 1996 Farm Bill established the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and called for a locally led process with Local Work Groups to help NRCS prioritize local natural resource concerns. In 2010, Oregon NRCS began the Strategic Approach to Conservation. Each DC was required to work with their Local Work Group to develop a Long Range Strategy for their county. Polk SWCD and NRCS held two meetings of the Polk County Local Work Group that year to identify priorities for the Long Range Strategy. The priorities identified in the Long Range Strategy were water quantity/water quality in groundwater, education, and air quality.

The Polk County Natural Resources Discussion Group was established in the early 1960s and is very similar in makeup and purpose to the NRCS Local Work Group. The Natural Resources Discussion Group still exists and continues to meet. In fall of 2010 (the same year that the Long Range Strategy was developed), the Natural Resources Discussion Group met and the following concerns were raised: forest health, upland and wetland wildlife habitat.

Sue noted that the NRCS Long Range Strategy expired in 2015 and has not yet been revised.

She then gave a summary of the progress NRCS has made to date on implementing the Long Range Strategy, as well as work done on other identified priorities.

Water Quantity/Water Quality in Groundwater

Summary of priority as identified in the Long Range Strategy:

All water quantity was prioritized as HIGH in Polk County at the 2 meetings, but the topic was recognized as too complex to address as too many stakeholders who were identified were not present. As a result, there was only enough information to move forward on groundwater along the Willamette River. To move forward on water quantity for the entire county we would need:

- Oregon Integrated Water Resource Strategy, not finished by OWRD, would be a good source of information
- Polk County Comprehensive Plan
- Suggestions of innovative designs such as tanks, winter withdrawal only

Progress to date:

- EQIP Polk Groundwater Protection Program 2010 to 2015 (completed) – Goal is to reduce nitrate leaching into shallow aquifer along Willamette River, by increasing irrigation efficiency over 20%, planting cover crop or between row permanent cover, reviewing producer’s nutrient management system and recommend changes.
 - Micro-Irrigation Systems: 5 systems applied (235 ac)/5-10 system goal 50-100%
 - Efficient Sprinkler Systems: 3 systems applied (324 ac)/5-10 system goal 30-60%
 - Irrigation Water Management: 420 ac applied/1800 ac goal 23%
 - Nutrient Management: 150 ac applied/1250 ac goal 12%
 - Cover Crop: 32.2 ac applied/500 ac goal 6%

Education

Summary of priority as identified in the Long Range Strategy:

The group decided that this is a component of all natural resource concerns and would not be addressed as a separate issue at this time.

Air Quality

Summary of priority as identified in the Long Range Strategy:

Vineyards needed a spray program. Outcomes, measurement systems, and partners were identified.

Progress to date:

NRCS has not implemented any programs related to this priority.

Surface Water Quality

This was not identified directly as a priority in the Long Range Strategy. However, Dallas NRCS designed 2 different surface water quality programs since 2010, but neither was funded by Oregon NRCS.

Forest Health and Vigor

Summary of priority:

This was not identified as a priority in the Long Range Strategy. However, it was identified as a concern by the Natural Resources Discussion Group. In addition, forest health has emerged as a priority for NRCS at the basin level.

Progress to date:

- EQIP Forest Health Program 2010 to 2015 (completed) – Goal: 50 landowners and 2000 acres basin wide. Results: 1420 acres treated in Polk alone. Practices included:
 - Forest Stand Improvement (Pre-commercial thin)
 - Forest Slash Treatment
 - Brush Management
 - Forest Management Plans written
- RCPP Oak Savanna/Woodland Restoration 2015 to 2019 (active) – New program encouraging partners to be local leaders on local natural resource concerns. NRCS assists with contracting only. Treatments will include these practices:
 - Forest Stand Improvement
 - Woody Residue Treatment
 - Conservation Cover
 - Brush Management
 - Herbaceous Weed Control
- EQIP Diverse Forest Program 2017 to 2021 (active) – New fund based on 2010 Forest Health Program with diversity encouraged. Focus area chosen is Luckiamute Watershed. Goal is 1200 acres basin wide. Treatments will include these practices:
 - Forest Stand Improvement
 - Woody Residue Management
 - Brush Management
 - Pruning

- Herbaceous Weed Control
- Conservation Cover
- Tree and Shrub Planting

Wetland Protection

This was not identified as a priority in the Long Range Strategy. However, NRCS offers the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE). The program is managed at the state level.

Progress to date:

1 wetland easement was purchased in 2010. 180 acres.

Wildlife Habitat

Summary of priority:

- EQIP Elk Meadows Habitat Program 2015 to 2019 (active) – This program is being conducted with Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, and is not part of the Long Range Strategy.

Progress to date:

- 54 acres are being treated.

Evaluation/Discussion of Progress on Long Range Strategy

Zola led the group through a discussion and evaluation of each priority in the Long Range Strategy, as well as Forest Health. The basic questions for each priority were:

1. Are we done?
2. If not, what needs to happen next?
3. Are changes needed?

Zola prefaced the discussion by stating that while the Long Range Strategy is technically expired and will need to be re-evaluated and revised when the new DC is on board, the focus for today's discussion is what does NRCS need to do over the next year?

Water Quantity/Quality in Groundwater

The consensus of the group was that this issue is far from being fully addressed and remains a priority. Next steps identified were to gather more information about water quality and conduct education and outreach to get that information out to people.

1. *Need more information about water quality.*
 - a. *What data exists?*
 - b. *What water quality parameters are important to track?*
 - c. *How expensive will it be to collect the needed data?*
 - d. *Timing – Do we have a problem now, or is one developing? How soon will it be a problem?*
 - e. *Notes:*
 - i. *Full spectrum water quality sample - \$2500 per sample*
 - ii. *Mapping of mineralization?*
 - iii. *Studies are being conducted in Benton County regarding water quality impacts of various crop and management alternatives. Results may have applicability for Polk County.*
 - iv. *Interest in looking at water both above and below the basalt layer. They are not the same.*
 - v. *Producers who grow consumable products are required to sample water annually. This data could possibly be accessed and used.*
2. *Education/Outreach*
 - a. *How to get the data/information out to the people*

Education

The consensus of the group was that education must be a priority for NRCS. Producers need information regarding natural resource data, regulations, permitting processes, programs and grants that exist, etc.

Notes:

- *County applied for Place Based Planning grant from OWRD but demand exceeded supply and Polk's application was not selected for funding.*
- *Are there opportunities to do the planning anyway, independently, and possibly at less cost?*
 - *Coordinated Resource Management as a possible alternative*
- *There is also a need for education to state agencies regarding why water is a problem.*

Air Quality

The consensus of the group was that this issue is being addressed through other agencies and is no longer a priority.

Forest Health

Zola reminded the group that Forest Health was not one of the priorities identified in the Long Range Strategy. The Dallas NRCS office has been working on it as part of a Basin-wide NRCS strategy. Also, the Natural Resources Discussion Group had identified it as a priority. ODF staff also pointed out that ODF had been working on and finalized that Community Wildfire Protection Plan at the same time or slightly after the NRCS Long Range Strategy.

In preparation for the Local Work Group meeting, Sue had expressed concern that when the most recent basin wide Forest Health funding pool was being developed, she was provided limited time to provide a new focus area for Polk County and did not have an opportunity to seek input from the Local Work Group. The watershed selected was the Luckiamute watershed. Sue wanted to receive feedback from the Local Work Group on whether they were ok with this being the focus area.

The consensus of the group was that the Luckiamute Watershed was acceptable, however, they would like to see the program move around the county because there are many areas that could benefit. ODF staff explained that NRCS and ODF have entered into an agreement for ODF to do much of the planning with landowners, and they would be interested in a phased approach, doing planning in one area and then moving to the next while NRCS comes behind offering funding to landowners to implement the plans. Zola stated that NRCS and ODF were taking this approach in Klamath County and that David Ferguson, the DC in Klamath County, would be a good source of information on how they were making that work. Sue mentioned that this is only the first year for the program in the Luckiamute Watershed but interest has been rather low. ODF said that they could assist with outreach.

Other Issues

Zola asked the group for any other issues, next steps, or concerns that had not yet been brought up.

Notes:

- *Hemlock and Tansy – participants encouraged to keep an eye out for these weeds and let agencies know if/where they are seen.*
- *Sacrifice Areas – manure and mud*
- *Erosion*
 - *Bank erosion Lower Rickreall*
 - *Erosion increases seen with higher intensity rainfall*
- *Need for water filtration systems to have potable water for wash down*

Emerging Issue – Water Storage Options

Zola announced that the focus of the meeting would now shift to the issue of water storage. While water storage was not identified as a priority in the Long Range Strategy, NRCS is aware that it has been raised as an issue repeatedly for a long time and is clearly a priority for many people. So while the Long Range Strategy is in need of revision, NRCS did not want to wait until that process is complete to begin exploring the water storage issue.

Karin Stutzman provided a brief introduction and background to the topic. She reiterated that the need for water storage has been a recurring issue for many years. With the recent drought, the issue has rose to the forefront again. During the drought, junior water users were cut off from irrigating part way through the irrigation season two years in a row and came very close to being cut off again this past year. In addition, new programs and grants have been developed recently that may offer some assistance in developing storage options.

Problem Description – Why do you need or want to store water?

Zola asked the landowners and producers present who were interested in having water storage to explain what the problem or issue they are facing is. Why do you want to store water? What problem will be solved by being able to store water?

- *Currently growing dryland crops in some areas. With water storage, could go grow irrigated crops here. Greater profitability.*
- *Need quality water in higher quantities.*
 - *Using surface water from a reservoir, but water is not potable. Need potable water for wash down.*
- *Irrigation water turned off in August. Couldn't irrigate pasture for livestock.*
- *Water availability for fire suppression.*
- *Low producing wells. 2 wells drilled for irrigation only producing 1-2 gpm. Some wells with reduced capacity during summer months. Want to run wells in winter and store water for use during irrigation season.*
- *Inadequate ground water in southern Polk County. Can't get ground water. Need to rely on surface water.*
- *Having stored water diversifies management options*
 - *Crop selection*
 - *Disease management*

Other notes:

- *Excessively drained soils in some areas make pond construction infeasible*
- *There is interest in storage of both surface water and ground water.*
- *Are we at risk of losing the right to store water?*
 - *Can you be compelled to release stored water?*
 - *Conversely, reservoirs may help stream flow*

Regulatory Environment

Staff for the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) were present and were asked if they could speak to what can and cannot be done related to water storage. They were also asked to speak a bit about what is involved in terms of process and costs.

- *Off channel water storage is a better option than in channel. If you want to store water on channel, you are likely to encounter fish passage and screening issues.*
- *Water rights for storage – the storage season is approximately November to May.*
- *Roof Runoff Capture*
 - *No permit required to capture water from an artificial impervious surface.*
 - *No size restriction for storage.*
 - *No comingling of roof runoff water with water from other sources that require a water right.*
 - *Larger ponds/tanks may not need a storage permit but need to meet construction requirements.*
- *There is an alternate process available for permitting small ponds.*
- *The ground water permit application includes a place to indicate if you will also be storing water.*
- *Base fee for a small reservoir is \$850.*
- *You need two separate water rights. One for use, one for storage.*
- *There are wetland issues with reservoir placement.*
- *Can you move existing in stream storage to off channel storage? Probably no.*
- *Stored water can be used during the irrigation season.*
- *Willamette Reservoirs*

- *Reservoirs were established for multiple purposes, primarily storage for municipalities.*
- *1.64 million acre-feet total storage right*
- *As a result of the Biological Opinion, target stream flows have been established for salmon and steelhead downstream. When target are not met, water is drafted from reservoirs.*

Proposed Solutions

Multiple water storage scenarios are of interest within the group. These include:

- Pump ground water into cistern, tank, or pond
- Roof runoff capture into cistern, tank, or pond
- Surface water stored in channel
- Surface water stored off channel (ponds)

Grant Opportunities

Jon Unger of OWRD was present to present regarding grants available to assist with water storage projects. He stated that OWRD offers grants for feasibility studies. They also have a new Water Supply Development Account and offer both grants and loans. There is currently an open solicitation for this program with applications due April 15. \$5 million is available this year. OWRD will provide up to 75% of the cost and can provide a loan for the other 25%. In kind contributions and cash match can also be used for the 25%. These grants and loans are available to both public and private entities, including individuals. To receive funding an applicant needs to demonstrate the feasibility of the project and demonstrate the economic, environmental, social, and cultural public benefits of the project.

Next Steps

Next steps are for Polk SWCD and NRCS to schedule a meeting sometime in the next few months where the water storage issue can be explored in greater depth. This should include gathering additional information and inviting speakers who can present the specific details regarding the process, costs, and considerations for each of the water storage scenarios described in the Potential Solutions section above. In addition, more information on existing programs and grants available would be useful.

Prioritize Actions for 2017

Zola quickly reviewed and summarized the proposed actions for 2017 that were discussed in the meeting.

- *Water Quality/Water Quantity of Groundwater is still a priority. The actions to pursue over the course of the next year are information gathering and communicating that information to stakeholders.*
- *NRCS should place a greater emphasis on education.*
- *Proceed with the Forest Health program in the Luckiamute watershed, but work with ODF to explore options for moving the program around the county with a phased approach to planning and implementation.*
- *Continue the information gathering and education effort related to water storage that began today. Hold a more in depth meeting, with appropriate agencies presenting more detailed information, sometime in the next few months.*
- *Prioritize information gathering related to water storage over information gathering related to ground water quality and quantity.*

Closing

The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:15. Participants were asked to complete evaluation forms before leaving.