

Lake County Local Working Group Meeting Minutes
January 30, 2017
Paisley, OR

Introductions and Meeting Purpose:

Max opened the meeting asking those in attendance to introduce themselves and which agency or entity they represented. He welcomed everyone and stated the reason for the meeting was to gather advice from these conservation partners on what resource concerns NRCS should be focusing on and how to best spend Farm Bill programs funding in Lake County. Max gave an update of NRCS-Lakeview Field Office staffing changes in 2016.

Resource Priorities and Accomplishments:

Max gave a presentation on the current NRCS resource priorities in the county; Sage Grouse Initiative, mule deer habitat improvement, and SONEC area waterbird habitat conservation. This included an update of new contracts and acres added in 2016, and total acres contracted for each resource concern. Submitted and approved for 2017 is a new Conservation Implementation Strategy to improve forest health and reduce the threat of wildfire in the North Warner focus area. NRCS worked with USFS to obtain funding through the Joint Chiefs Landscape Initiative to implement forest stand improvement projects over the next three years. NRCS will work with non-industrial forest landowners on the private lands and USFS will have additional funds for fuels reduction projects on the public lands in the focus area. NRCS will announce a signup period in the near future for private landowners in the area.

NRCS has been encouraging landowners to enroll in the Conservation Stewardship Program. Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) funding is available for the Sage Grouse Initiative to prevent conifer encroachment and other threats to sage grouse habitat. RCP funding has also been secured for the SONEC waterbird habitat improvement program. Max re-emphasized the Lake County priority resource concerns in the long range strategy; invasive species, riparian health, water quality and quantity, soil erosion, forest health, and climate change.

Conservation Strategies:

Amy Markus, USFS, gave a presentation regarding the planning and implementation of USFS Forest Health Program in Lake County, why forest health is an issue and the numerous partners involved. Concerns are watershed health, wood getting to the mills, the local economy, livestock grazing and recreation. Basic problems are wildfires, insects and disease outbreaks, loss of valuable social and ecological values. She spoke about the Forest Service involvement in the North Warner project and partnerships formed with eight Federal and State agencies and thirteen private landowners. This can be a model for Lake County; projects should be designed so implementation on federal and private lands occurs at the same time to see restoration from ridge top to ridge top.

Daniel Leavell, OSU Extension Service, is working with partner agencies and private landowners in the North Warner forest health focus area. He can assist landowners in developing forest management

plans and was instrumental in completing benchmark vegetation and land condition inventories in 2016 with technical and financial assistance from ODFW and the Watershed Council. He wants to help make forest stand improvement practical and possible for landowners, along with follow-up.

Kellie Carlsen, ODF, is also working with landowners in the North Warner focus area; she will host a workshop next month providing them with information and instructing them on how to make a forest management plan. The plan will help them define their goals and objectives for forest improvement. Several agencies have created a plan template that will be effective for all agencies involved. There is multiple funding for project implementation: Joint Chiefs, OWEB and RAC funds.

Kaitlin Hasler, SONEC Wetland Biologist, has been seeking applications for the water bird habitat conservation priority. Along with incentives for early flooding of native grass pasture and hay lands to increase habitat for migrating waterfowl, NRCS can financially assist in improving the surface irrigation infrastructure, replacing water control structures to improve in-field irrigation water delivery and storage.

Mary Jo Hedrick, ODFW Biologist, spoke about the mule deer habitat improvement projects in north Lake County. They do have funding available and would like to do some planning. Since the Fort Rock WMU was incorporated into the NRCS Mule Deer Habitat Enhancement implementation strategy in 2016, Max would like to collaborate on some of the ODFW projects with private landowners to provide financial assistance in 2018.

Justin Ferrell, SWCD District Manager, reported that the Fort Rock-Silver Lake SWCD is having an Irrigation Water Conservation Seminar on February 7 in Christmas Valley. New pivot irrigation technologies will be presented at the workshop and ground and surface water will be addressed. He said the Lake County SWCD's would like to see NRCS funding spent on more agriculture production projects in the future. LeeRoy Horton, SWCD Chair, stated he would like to see NRCS funds benefit agricultural producers and less spent for Sage grouse and mule deer habitat improvements. Projects such as nutrient management for crops, ground water storage and savings, and electric power savings would be welcomed. Max stated he could develop a irrigation water management Implementation Strategy in the future, maybe for 2019, but he would need assistance from the SWCD directors and manager to develop the outcomes. Justin thought Max could use the Idaho NRCS strategy as a model; he thought the February irrigation workshop might indicate what landowners want for irrigation system improvements.

Gina Rone, USFS, gave a presentation on biochar. Biochar is a technique of pyrolysis or carbon sequestration of biomass and is great for the farming community. Biochar would be in a fertilizer form. There are some problems with getting this process up and going. Benefits would be for fire and fuel management when burning landing piles, provides an additional forest product to timber, and has less smoke emissions. It would be a benefit to the Forest Service, timber purchasers and the American farmers. There are studies going on up in Umatilla County. Daniel said there are ground trials going on in Klamath Falls. It could be a great subsidy for everybody.