



*Columbia County Local Work Group Meeting
February 8, 2018 St. Helens USDA Service Center*

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by Don Mehlhoff at 1:10 p.m.

Don welcomed everyone to the meeting, and stated that the purpose of this meeting is to provide a forum for partners, farmers, ranchers, and forestry representatives and conservation groups to share conservation activities and discuss natural resource problems that should be prioritized. The group assists in guiding NRCS where to use farm bill funds for technical and financial assistance in the future. Don stated his appreciation of everyone in attendance for coming and volunteering their time to participate. We (NRCS) have the ability to target specific resource issues that are important to the county.

Don presented a PowerPoint presentation explaining the Local Work Group process, our current Conservation Implementation Strategies (CIS's), Farm Bill Programs, and showcased conservation practices that have been implemented throughout the county through various NRCS Programs.

The Annual Local Work Group meetings are required by NRCS policy as a way to obtain local input on ways to make Farm Bill programs work locally, assist with establishing local resource priorities, and identify practices needed to address resource concerns in the county. Although we meet only once each year, comments or suggestions are always welcome throughout the year. Feel free to call or email any time.

Farm Bill Programs in Columbia County include EQIP, CStP, CRP/CREP, RCPP, and WRE

EQIP - Environmental Quality Incentives Program -

- Purpose – To solve priority natural resource problems on agricultural lands such as soil, water, wildlife and related resource issues.
 - Assist farmers, ranchers and forest owners in complying with federal, state and local regulations
 - Encourage environmental enhancements
 - NRCS's bread and butter conservation program. Most flexibility to address local resource needs on a county level
 - Past 10 years, 205 contracts have been funded

- Current EQIP Conservation Implementation Strategies in Columbia County:
 - Forest Diversity – year 6 of 7. This has been very successful! We received a two year extension that will take us through 2019
 - Columbian White-Tail Deer (CWTD) – year 5 of 5, participation in this CIS has been low

- Organic Initiative – National initiative where applications are ranked for a state-wide pool of funds rather than a local pool of funds
- Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative – National initiative where applications are ranked for a state-wide pool of funds rather than a local pool of funds
- Energy Initiative - National initiative where applications are ranked for a state-wide pool of funds rather than a local pool of funds

CStP – Conservation Stewardship Program

- Annual payment for conservation - 5 year contract
- This Program has been completely revamped
- Includes both crop land and forest land
- We have had 25 contracts in last 10 years, 7 currently active
- Designed for operations that are already functioning at a higher level of conservation and are willing to adopt enhancement activities that make additional improvements

CRP/CREP – Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (administered by FSA)

- We have 7 contracts that cover 305 acres of riparian forest buffers
- All located in the Mist/Birkenfeld area

ACEP – Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

- ALE – Agriculture Land Easement
NRCS purchases easements on land used for agriculture to reduce conversion of those lands to non Ag uses
 - No current ALE easements in the county
- WRE – Wetland Reserve Easement
Previously known as WRP. NRCS purchases easement on ag land to restore wetlands. We have 3 permanent easements in Columbia County that covers approximately 480 acres.

RCPP – Regional Conservation Partnership Program

- Unlocking Carbon Market for NIPF in the Pacific NW
 - New in 2015 – partnership with Pinchot Institute for Conservation
 - Bring funds into a few counties in Northwest Oregon and Southwest Washington for forest practices, forest plans and carbon inventories plans. Began in 2015 – 2018. This is the final year of this program
- Lower Columbia Watershed Partnership
 - New in 2017 – Grant from NRCS to Columbia SWCD
 - Uses watershed authority to implement practices that address water quality and fish and wildlife habitat in the Clatskanie – Rainier regions of the county. NRCS funds are combined with matching funds from the SWCD and other partnering agencies. 2018 will be the first year of implementation

Nathan gave an overview of the Lower Columbia Watershed Partnership (RCPP). Project area encompasses North of Rainier, upper Clatskanie, Beaver Watersheds, and focuses on restoring physical and biological characteristics of the watersheds. Total

project amount is \$8.8 million over the next 5 years. Half will be coming from NRCS-RCPP, and the other half will be coming from partners. This has brought a huge workload into the county. National Watershed Authority allows for the collaboration of agencies and partners to work with landowners that wouldn't normally be eligible for typical Farm Bill Program funding. Types of projects will include watershed erosion, water quality, and wildlife habitat. This will be a 5-year project/program. The area was limited to ten 8-dig HUC's. This is one of the first RCPP Partnership projects in the Nation, and is being looked at closely as a pilot project. One project will be the culvert replacement at Apiary Road and Shaffer Road intersection. Another example of a project is on Dribble Creek, and will remove a culvert on a decommissioned forest road that will open up the streambed for fish passage. Timeframes for action plan development – a Watershed Plan, which is currently being developed and waiting for review, must be in place before dollars can be spent on any projects. Focused on stream restoration. Practices include fish passage, floodplain restoration, erosion control, bank stabilization. This will function similar to our EWP projects. Will have a set number of projects that have already been identified.

Don showed several pictures of successful conservation projects in the county. High tunnel installed, pre-commercial thinning, cavity nesting boxes on forestland, rainwater harvest collection tanks, white-tailed deer fencing, hedgerow, cross fencing for livestock use exclusion, brush management, tree/shrub plantings, pollinator enhancement plantings, grass seeding, hedgerows, streambank stabilization/protection using bio-engineering, culvert replacement for fish passage, wetland restoration within WRP program, and riparian forest buffer.

Overview of NRCS Strategic Planning Process – NRCS focuses on developing long range plans that will address local-based issues that are identified by partners and landowners so we can all work collaboratively to get the most conservation on the ground.

Summary of Program interest in Columbia County:

2014 – Received 20 EQIP applications and funded 11
4 applications for Columbian White-Tail Deer
4 for Forest Management Plans
1 for Seasonal High Tunnel
5 for forest diversity practices
Funded 8 Forest Diversity
Funded 3 CWTD

2015 – Received 30 EQIP applications and funded 12
8 for forest diversity practices within the conservation implementation strategy target area.
2 for Columbian white-tailed deer improvements within the conservation implementation strategy area.
1 for Organic initiative
1 for Seasonal High Tunnel initiative
Funded 12
6 applications for RCPP – funded 2

5 CStP Renewals – all funded

2016 – Received 14 EQIP applications and 6 RCPP Applications

11 for forest diversity

1 CWTD

1 high tunnel

1 Organic

6 RCPP funded

4 CREP Renewals

1 CStP Renewal

2017 – Received 19 EQIP applications (funded 14) and 7 RCPP applications (funded 5)

8 for forest diversity

4 high tunnel

2 for CWTD

1 WRE funded

1 CStP (cancelled)

5 RCPP funded

2018 - Received 22 EQIP applications and 4 RCPP applications (to date)

13 for Forest Diversity

2 CWTD

5 High Tunnel

2 Energy

1 WRE

0 CStP

4 RCPP

Cutoff date for submitting applications for 2018 EQIP funding is March 16, 2018.

Current EQIP CIS's -

Forest Diversity: Improve the structure and composition of young monoculture, even-aged forest stands with closed canopies, trying to take these stands to the next levels – understory vegetation and mixed age stands. Don showed a map of the Forest Diversity CIS Area, and a list of practices.

2019 is the final year for the Forest Diversity CIS as written. We are exploring options for moving this to another area in the county. Consensus of the group thought it would be beneficial to open it county-wide to give the widest opportunity to those who are interested. Other counties in our basins have county-wide forestry CIS's.

CWTD Habitat Improvements: – Improve habitat through proper management of Columbia County's floodplain agricultural lands to provide habitat and forage availability for endangered Columbian White-Tailed Deer. Don showed a map of the target area for this CIS, and a list of practices. Outreach efforts resulted with very limited response. Applications have been one or two per year. Practices include Prescribed Grazing, wildlife friendly fencing, early successional habitat, brush management, pasture/hayland plantings, tree/shrub plantings, hedgerows, and cover crops. Success story: Columbian white-tailed deer have recently been down-listed from endangered to threatened. This is

the final year for this CIS. Those that have participated have been excellent projects and great conservation work, just not as many participants as we had hoped.

Setting priorities for Columbia County Resource Concerns for 2019 and beyond –

Discussion about a fire wise program and forestland protection where there is urban interface. Funding has dried up at the state level. There are opportunities to provide packets of information through the county permit department.

Previously Identified Resource Concerns in the County:

- Streambank Erosion
- Forest Road Erosion – Delivering sediment to nearby waterways
- Overgrazing of Pastures
- Mud and Manure Management – surface water quality
- Stream Habitat Condition – livestock management
- Pasture-Hayland Health and Productivity

Current Top Priorities in Columbia County in Order of Importance/Priority:

- Degraded Plant Condition – Forestland (CIS in place)
- Inadequate Habitat – Grassland/Cropland for CWTD (CIS in place)
- Degraded Plant Condition – Forestland Wildfire Hazard with Urban Interface
- Water Quality – Forestland/Private Roads Excessive Sediment in Surface Water
- Water Quality Degradation – HQ – Excess Nutrient and Organics in Surface and Ground Water from Small Animal Feeding Operations

Question about the Forest diversity CIS – and what to do after this year – will we expand to whole county? Or move to different area? Don stated that the basin has a forestry CIS that covers several counties that we could tie into so we don't have to create another CIS. Thinking about options.

Potential New Priorities:

Pollinator habitat – met with OSU Extension, NRCS PMC, Columbia SWCD, and Xerces Society. Interest is unknown or spotty at best. Lona asked how we concluded the level of interest. She thought that pollinators would be a great direction to go. Pollinators would benefit everyone. Erin suggested putting an article in the OSU Extension newsletter. Mara mentioned the PMC and the cover crop trials going on now – they have several resources available. Erin mentioned all the garden clubs that are in the county, and possibly getting information into their hands and encourage native pollinator plantings, and give them resources on where to get the plants. Marie asked if invasives are taken into account when producing pollinator and native plantings and how it affects neighboring property. Mara responded that PMC absolutely considers that, and develops very site-specific seed mixes.

Small Market Garden – Small Livestock Operations – Soil Health/Water Quality. We currently have over 30 operators interested so far. We had 4 meetings last year with the small market garden producers. This would reach an audience of producers we have not traditionally worked with before. Jim liked this idea, and thought it would be a good way to partner with watershed councils and other groups. Great way to help improve water quality and soil health. Amy mentioned water conservation and water collection systems on these small

operations are greatly needed. Question - how diversified could we get – could this include fish rearing operations? Not really our purview to deal with those issues, more ODFW.

Pasture/Hayland Soil Health – Nehalem Valley. We did an outreach mailing to about 40 operators to gauge interest. We received 14 positive responses back with interest. Resource issues include: productivity, low level of management, invasive weeds, compaction, low production species, fish and wildlife habitat (elk, Coho salmon). Maggie stated there is a great need for pasture improvements, which could lead to increasing riparian buffers. Troy mentioned the need for improving Coho habitat.

Forest Health Diversity for the Nehalem Valley and Scappoose area, or county-wide. We did outreach mailing to 64 landowners in the Scappoose area to gauge interest, and did not receive a very favorable response – only a few even responded. We could try expanding outreach into Milton creek and/or Nehalem watersheds.

Duane talked about the importance of targeting people with high interest in creating habitat for birds. Relatively easy to create bird habitat in a small area. Huge market at chain stores for bird food, feeders, houses, etc. We could do more outreach to encourage the development of bird habitat on small acreages and urban landscapes.

Question if there is any interest in conducting any future groundwater surveys. Nathan stated the one completed in Dutch Canyon was beneficial and worthwhile, but the issue is funding. Jake suggested working with OWRD for possible partnership. There is a growing need for water in the county as the population continues to grow. Rainwater collection systems could be very beneficial. Marie asked if there is any water issues with rainwater collection. Pat stated that black tanks deter algae growth, and a good filter system is a must to use with rainwater collection tanks. You can't just collect rain water and use it for irrigation without filtering. Erin stated that local landowners really need to voice their interest and concerns to the county commissioners to get water quantity issues raised as a higher priority for the county.

Jevra Brown – DSL – distributed information on fill/removal permits and the new aquatic resource management inventory. DSL is developing a comprehensive wetland mapping tool to identify where wetlands exist and provide one location for state-recognized wetlands. National wetlands inventory does not map/include farmed wetlands, so this new inventory will encompass those areas as well. Spotty wetland inventories become very challenging for planning. Adding national hydrography dataset. DSL received a grant to gather local wetland inventories and create digitized data layers to be more all-inclusive. Hoping to add the NRCS soil surveys to show hydric soils in the state. Hydric soils are indicative of wetlands. This will give them an idea where potential wetlands are that are not currently mapped. Check their website for this to come online at: www.oregon.gov/dsl

Future of NRCS in Columbia County – Setting priorities for FY19 – Don asked everyone to think about the following questions and respond back in the next couple weeks either by calling or email.

1. What resource priorities should NRCS and Columbia SWCD target?
2. Are our current resource priorities accurate?
3. Are there groups/areas that we should concentrate more time and resources with?
4. What are the outreach methods that are most effective for delivery?

Roger commented that mailings don't work. People get too much junk mail already. Face-to-face interaction is much more effective. Go door-to-door to talk to people. With small staff it's more difficult. Tracy and Robert commented that local radio spots are effective, social media, workshops. Younger folks prefer electronic media – however, we are finding that people are less likely to actually read electronic media or open a link vs having a hard copy received in the mail.

5. Are there areas in Columbia County where NRCS should target efforts for wetland restoration or riparian restoration?

Josie mentioned that we really need to emphasize water use conservation within our programs and not just water collection.

Another comment was that it would be good to have Weyerhaeuser join our LWG meetings. Mark said he would work on getting a representative here in the future.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm
Dee Robinson