

NRCS Wallowa County Local Group Meeting

2/8/18

Prairie Creek Center Conference Room

Abe began the meeting at 2:08 p.m. by introducing himself and Jacob. There are agendas, signups on the tables for attendees to put their name and email address and a survey. Refreshments are in the back and the restroom is just out the door at the back of the room. Abe asked everyone to introduce themselves and tell what they want to get out of the meeting. The following were the responses:

Wanted to see what others were doing for conservation.

Here to learn

Here to learn

Here to listen

Would like to see NRCS go to the north end for timber management.

Here to get notes

Likes the CSP and would like to see Spalding Catchfly documented.

Same as Scott

Interested in removing juniper

To hear about ideas in timber.

Interested in irrigation efficiency in the Lostine area

Interested in pivots off Hurricane Creek

To learn about soil health and annual grass management and prescribe fire.

To keep money toward fuel reduction and moving out to the north for vegetative treatments.

Implement fuels reduction and learn more about the prescribed fire practice.

Here for the free coffee and to see where the farm bill is going and how it will affect future projects. Also interested in juniper removal and prescribed fire.

Interested in invasive grasses using fire as tool and spalding catchfly

See what conservation could be done in the Lostine area.

There to hear what peoples priorities are for conservation

Interested in water

Juniper removal and irrigation efficiency in the Lostine

Like to see those enrolled in restoration and the weed issues.

Learn more about easement funding

Kathleen brought up that often they receive phone calls about conservation and she does not know who to refer them to. She asked if there was a document that showed who was involved in what programs. Cynthia said the Code of the West that is being updated, has some of this in it.

Abe said he will be going over the Farm Bill programs, Past/Present projects, Long Range Plan and Priorities by landuse.

Farm Bill Programs

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Abe said there are 46 CSP contracts in Wallowa County that entails 140,000 acres and \$600,000 paid out in 2017. This program rewards landowners for doing conservation on their land and encourages them to do more. The program changed this last Farm Bill taking out some of the old enhancements and adding new ones based off resource concerns. When renewing a CSP contract, a landowner can't do the same enhancements that were on the prior contract, but they are able to see up front what their payment will be. Kelly said she heard there was a program in managing land for spalding catchfly. Jacob said NRCS does not have for that specifically, but it could be an FSA program. CSP does have pest control, but it is integrated on a holistic basis. CSP is competitive, but not the re-enrollments.

Environmental Quality Incentive program (EQIP)

In 2017 the EQIP contracts totaled 3.3 million dollars in contracts for irrigation efficiency and forest thinning. EQIP pays for specific practices that address a resource concern. It was asked if juniper could

be taken out of forest land. If thinning is begin done then yes it can, but juniper on rangeland there needs to be a practice for it which is usually under brush management.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

This program offers new opportunities of the NRCS conservation Partners and agricultural producers to work together to harness innovation, expand the conservation mission and demonstrate the value and efficiency of voluntary private lands conservation. Currently Wallowa County has 4 successful RCPP applications bringing in 8 million over the next 5 years. This money is in addition to their normal funding that NRCS receives. The following are the RCPPs that have been awarded in Wallowa County.

- Alder Slope Partnership – awarded 1.1 million for irrigation projects on Alder Slope.
- Wallowa Front Fuel Reduction – awarded 2.28 million for thinning on the Divide, Lostine, Bear Creek and Alder Slope
- Conservation of Soil Health - awarded was 3.2 million dollars that will be used through ALE and EQIP for easements and irrigation efficiency.
- Wallowa Lake Irrigation Modernization – awarded 1.73 million dollars for group pipelines in the north portion of Prairie Creek.

Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)

This program is for an easement that will be held by another entity. There are 2 of these in the county, one with Land Trust and the other Nature Conservancy. NRCS does not hold easements. These easements are to keep lands in agriculture. Kathleen said NRCS pays up to 50% of the fair market value. The landowner can donate 25% of the value so an additional 25% needs to be obtained. There is no state agency in Oregon that pays to keep land in Ag. The newly developed heritage program may be able to help with this in the future. Jeff added that each easement is negotiated with the landowner and the funding entities. NRCS reviews the easement and the management plan and retains 3rd party enforcement rights.

Past/Present Projects

Farm Bills

In the past, under the 2002 Farm Bill, the area NRCS focused funding was in Bear Creek, Lostine, Lower Valley and the Zumwalt. In 2008, money was spent in Prairie Creek, Leap/Parsnip and the Moraine. Alder Slope, Prairie Creek and the Divide were the areas funding was spent under the 2014 Farm Bill.

Priorities

Forestland

- Wildfire hazard was the main concern focusing on Alder Slope, Mount Howard to the Divide and Bear Creek/Lostine area. Parts of these priority areas have been thinned with EQIP and OWEB funds. The remaining priority areas will be thinned with cost-shares from EQIP, RCPP and OWEB. ODF has been doing the stand inventories.
- Noxious Weed was a secondary priority for juniper in the Lower Valley and weeds identified in the county weed plan.

Cropland

- Irrigation efficiency has been the top priority in this area. Pipelines and on-farm improvements have been done on Alder Slope using cost-shares from EQIP, RCPP, and OWEB. Future projects like the ones on Alder Slope will be done in the north portion of Prairie Creek with cost-shares from the same sources including 2 million dollars from drought funds through NRCS. There was

a question about stock water if the open ditches will be replaced with pipe. Abe assured them that there are stockwater systems being installed now coming off of wells and into frost free troughs.

- Soil Health was the second priority concern. Many of the landowners in Prairie Creek experimented in cover crops using their own funding, but getting technical help from NRCS.

Rangeland/Pasture

- Noxious weed is the top priority for rangeland. Juniper is a concern
- Water Quality/Riparian was the second priority for rangeland. Tributaries of the Wallowa River and Prairie Creek were areas of concentration for this.

Future Work Ideas

Forest management – North End

The northern portion of the county to address fuel loads is something everyone agreed on. There are dryer sites out north and there are many landowners in that area that need to have stands thinned. It could be broken up into 2 areas, the east and the west side of Highway 3. The lands are adjacent to other private lands and USFS land. The bottle neck of how much work can be done will be the contractors. Lisa and Sarah, ODA, have mapped out priority areas out north. There will also be prescribed fire that could be used for a tool.

Medussa Head

This invasive grass is another concern. Prescribe fire is one way to get rid of the thatch layer followed by spraying and seeding. When burning, it would be good to work with the ODF so they could help coordinate the burning so if it crosses ownership lines etc. Prescribed burning needs to be a coordinated effort. The Carmen Ranch has done some work on medusa head eradication by using pigs. They graze the pigs on a small area. They eat the Medussa Head and tear the ground up. Annual grass or cereal grains were planted for a couple of years after the grazing and then a perennial was planted. Some think this works well in a small area.

Irrigation Efficiency

This is a priority concern in all areas in the county. Work has been done on Alder Slope and in Prairie Creek with more work to be done there. The irrigators in the Lostine area are interested in improving irrigation and the Lower Valley irrigators have expressed an interest. An engineer is already scheduled to look at Lower Valley. The Lostine irrigators are looking at combining the Poley Allen and Westside ditches. There is leaky pipe issue in the Bear Creek area.

Juniper Removal

Juniper is also another issue. Liza said the junipers on her place are using 64,000 gallons of water per day. It is invasive, hard to control. If it burns there will be a hot fire. In the past it was hard to get funding for the juniper removal because we have mostly Rocky Mountain juniper and it is the Western juniper that is consider the invasive species. There was not enough research available on the Rocky Mountain Juniper. Abe said they cannot pay for chemicals. It might be good to see if a sawmill would take the juniper. It was suggested to cut one year and then in a couple of years go in and burn the site. Abe said there might be some extra funding to possibly do a pilot project on Juniper.

Other

- Installing upland livestock water. This is needed throughout the county.

- Look at bio char. Abe says there currently is not a practice for this, but maybe in the future.
- Cost-share on the use of cover crops on dry land fields to help improve soil health in these areas.
- Spalding catchfly – Is there a program would this fall under. Abe said CSP maybe. Jacob says maybe prescribed grazing. Doing inventory is something NRCS won't pay for.
- It is not known if RCPP will continue in the next Farm Bill. Have to wait and see.
- The 5066 program may be coming back which will help with irrigation districts.
- There is no word yet on CRP signups.

Abe thanked everyone for attending. The meeting ended at 3:44 p.m.

Submitted By:

Cynthia Warnock