

Lane County Local Work Group Meeting MINUTES

Tom Snyder Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Lane County, District Conservationist opened the Lane County Local Work Group (LWG) meeting at 10:05.

Introductions

Tom asked the attendees to give their name, who they represent and asked what they wanted to get out of this meeting or add to the discussion.

Attendees: Davis Hernandez (NRCS), Suzy Liebenberg (NRCS), Lily Leiterman (UWSWCD), John Flannigan (ODF), Justin Patton (ODF), Nancy Toth (EWEB), Dave Downing (UWSWCD), Maryrae Thomson, (Landowner), Al Hrynyshyn (UWSWCD Board/Landowner), Abel Kloster (UWSWCD Board/Landowner), Gary Jensen (UWSWCD Board/Landowner), Curt McKinney (Landowner), Carol McKinney (Landowner), Jen Weber (MWC/CFWC), Jed Kahl (LTWC), Garry Rodakowski (Landowner), Orrin Leir (Landowner), Reed Goodpasture (Landowner), John Brice (Landowner)

Some of the reasons for attending the meeting are: Promoting Firewise forest management, Opportunities to partner on projects, Learn and share conservation needs, Drinking water source protection, Manage invasive species, Learn how to better utilize Farm Bill program opportunities to leverage other grant opportunities and Personal growth opportunities.

Objective of the Local Work Group Meeting and Description of Oregon's Strategic Approach to Conservation.

Tom described the long-term relationship between NRCS (formerly SCS) and Conservation Districts. Conservation Districts have provided local priorities and perspectives to federal funding since the beginning of both organizations. The LWG is a large part of the locally led/bottom up strategy NRCS utilizes to prioritize funding at the county level.

This process is especially important in Oregon because of the Strategic Approach to Conservation and the Conservation Implementation Strategies Oregon utilizes to prioritize funding. In Oregon, NRCS, establishes priorities where there is partner assistance, willing landowners and a clearly identified resource concern. There is a defined geographic area for the strategies.

Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District (UWSWCD) Priorities and Opportunities

Dave Downing (UWSWCD District Manager) Explained that the district has been around since 1954 and has been focused on Ag related issues. He reiterated that the SWCD has provided local representation for utilization of federal funds. The district's priorities include Camp Creek Strategic Implementation Area (SIA) supported by the Oregon Department of Agriculture. The focus of the SIA is to identify water quality concerns in the Camp Creek watershed and work

with landowners to address concerns on their property. In addition to conservation projects, water quality monitoring is another component to the SIA.

Dave talked about the National Association of Conservation Districts funding they received to assist NRCS with practice certification.

Other opportunities the district provides landowners is access to the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) grant programs for on the ground projects.

Existing Funding Opportunities

In 2018 NRCS utilized Farm Bill Dollars to fund 1 high tunnel contract, 4 local foods contracts and 4 oak restoration contracts in Lane County. There were 9 contracts total, covering 2,229.1 ac, obligating \$298,453.26

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Suzy Liebenberg (NRCS Wetland Easement Specialist) Described the ACEP program including, Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) and Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE). Currently in Lane County there are 13 WRE Easements covering 1,807 ac. There is one new easement nearly finalized covering 172 acres. There were 2 inquiries about wetland easements in 2018.

She explained that the ALE program is for working lands with unique conservation value. NRCS will not hold these easements and 50% cash match is required up front. The WRE program is for protecting, restoring and enhancing wetlands, primarily wet prairie in the Willamette Valley.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

Tom talked about the CREP program. NRCS does the technical aspect of CREP, but Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers the program. Landowners with a CREP project sign contracts with FSA. CREP has two main objectives. It is primarily for water quality, but a close second is wildlife habitat. The CREP program is non-competitive. Unlike other programs that are ranked and competitive to get funding, CREP is for anybody whose land meets the requirements. By participating in CREP landowners agree to not graze or harvest any type of crop from the riparian zone.

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

EQIP is the most widely used program in Lane County. There are national initiatives and Locally Led funding priorities in EQIP.

Initiatives (Organic, High Tunnel, Energy, Dairy/Livestock)

The Dairy/Livestock, High Tunnel and Organic initiatives are national initiatives that are available across the entire country. Both the Dairy/Livestock and Organic Initiatives have limited funding and are very competitive. The High Tunnel Initiative is less competitive because of the small dollar amount of High Tunnel Contracts. The application cutoff for 2019 funding

has passed, but NRCS takes application year-round. Currently there is 1 Dairy/Livestock application that has been selected for funding. There are 5 High Tunnel applications selected for funding. There were 5 Organic applications and only 2 of them were selected for funding.

Locally Led EQIP Strategies

The application cut-off date for locally led strategies is March 15th. NRCS is still accepting applications for funding projects in 2019.

Forestry Resistance and Resilience Funding Pool

The forest strategy can cost share on traditional forest practices such as pre-commercial thinning and pruning, but projects will only rank out for funding if there is a habitat improvement component. The logic behind this funding pool is to diversify habitat types in Doug Fir plantations. If landowners will improve habitat by interplanting to diversify the stand, remove invasives and replace them with natives or other types of habitat improvement, they can receive funding for more traditional production related practices. Right now, there are 2 applications outside of the priority area and 1 pending application not yet submitted.

Oak Habitat Enhancement Funding Pool

Both oak savannahs and oak woodlands are severely declining in the Willamette Valley. These habitats are lost through conversion to agriculture, successional transition to Doug Fir forest and development. These habitats were maintained by Native Americans with fire. By keeping the understory clear of woody species and maintaining open spacing hunting, acorn production and other plant gathering is more productive. This habitat type is also home to many plant and wildlife species that are declining due to insufficient habitat. In the absence of fire, grazing could be used as a management strategy to maintain the open herbaceous understory. An oak savannah is primarily an upland prairie with a few scattered oaks, approximately 60 to 12 oaks per acre. An oak woodland has approximately 50% canopy cover and supports a robust herbaceous understory. Partners, such as the Long Tom Watershed Council, have shown great interest in partnering on oak habitat restoration. They are already doing outreach for this funding strategy by bringing in producers to sign up for EQIP.

Currently there are 7 applications for both forest management plans and oak habitat restoration.

McKenzie Riparian Funding Pool

Lilly Leitermann (UWSWCD Conservation Specialist) Presented on the McKenzie Riparian strategy that she developed to complement the Pure Waters Partnership (PWP) that has been developed with the Eugene Water and Electric Board (EWEB), the McKenzie Watershed Council (MWC) and the UWSWCD. PWP offers protection and restoration on riparian habitat along the McKenzie River. EQIP funds can be used to address water quality concerns on agricultural land adjacent to the riparian zone. Projects could include pasture management practices such as

fencing, off stream watering facilities, heavy use areas for mud and manure management and prescribed grazing.

Currently there is one pending application that has not yet been submitted.

Group discussion of resource concerns and future funding priorities

The group described natural resource concerns on forestland, cropland, pastureland and wildlife land. The concerns/issues/opportunities that were brought up include:

Reducing fire hazard in residential areas situated in forests.

There is interest by landowners in the Coyote Creek Watershed and the Mohawk Watershed to do forest related practices.

Established Doug Fir stands 20 to 30 years old are dying due to drought stress.

Newly planted stands are needing additional weed treatments because of slow establishment due to the drought.

The High Pass area of the Long Tom Watershed has several landowners interested in doing forestry work.

Oak habitat needs to continue being a priority for NRCS funding. This work has a lot of potential for leveraging additional funds from partners.

Biochar could be a solution to the astronomic amount of slash that is burned in oak woodland restoration if it could be done on an industrial scale. Currently there is not the equipment or contractors in the area to create biochar instead of burning slash piles.

With the Doug Fir dying due to drought, the harvest of the timber can facilitate conversion to a more drought resistant landscape such as oak woodlands.

Hazelnuts are significantly expanding in the Willamette Valley. Grass seed growers transitioning to hazelnut production are using extremely inefficient travelling gun irrigation systems because that is what they already have. This is particularly important in the Junction City/Coburg area in North Lane County.

Efficient irrigation on hazelnuts is expensive to install.

There is a real need for renovating orchards due to the Eastern Filbert Blight.

Chipping both trimmings and trees being removed would reduce smoke emissions.

Biochar could really benefit orchard maintenance and renovation.

Tansy Ragwort populations are expanding. The cinnabar moth caterpillar is no longer available for release. The new bio control is some kind of flea and is not as effective.

Many pastures in the Coast Fork Willamette area are tile drained. These tiles outlet directly into surface water carrying fertilizers and other contaminants. They are also causing some erosion and head cuts at the outlet point. These tiles could use some buffers to minimize negative impacts.

Closing

Tom thanked everybody for their participation. He reiterated that the conversation we had at the LWG can and should continue throughout the year.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:05.

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