

NRCS Wallowa County Local Work Group meeting  
2/7/19  
The Place  
Joseph, Oregon

At 2:20 p.m. Abe Clark introduced himself and the other NRCS employees Jacob Johansen and Joe Kline. He asked everyone to introduce themselves and Jacob asked if they would give their resource concerns.

Name	Represents	Resource Concern
Kevin Melville	Wallowa SWCD/Farmer	Sediment, Soil pH
Cynthia Warnock	Wallowa SWCD	To hear what others resource concerns are
Tom Smith	Wallowa SWCD/Landowner	Irrigation efficiency in Lostine area
Jeff Fields	Nature Conservancy	Invasive grasses, things NRCS can get involved in
Scott McClaran	Rancher	Invasive grasses
Chris Cunningham	Rancher	Yellow Star Thistle, invasive grasses
David Bates	OWRD	There to see how he may help with water use
Kyle Petrocine	Wallowa Resources	Soil Health, water conservation, hydro power
Lindsey Jones	Wallowa Resources	Yellow Star Thistle, meadow hawkweed
Jean Jancaitis	Wallowa Resources	Invasive grasses
Kelly Birkmaier	Rancher	Invasive grasses, Spalding Catchfly
Eric Carlson	ODF	Fuels reduction
Tim Cudmore	ODF	Any and everything to do with trees
Alyssa Cudmore	My Blue Mountain Woodland Partnership	Forest Health, fuels reduction especially out North
Wendy McCullough	Landowner	Forest Health and obnoxious weeds
Eric	Wallowa Land Trust	Funding programs to preserve working lands
Kathleen Ackley	Wallowa Land Trust	Ecosystem health across the landscape
Lisa Mahon	Wallowa SWCD	Forest health especially out North

Abe said there were some landowners that called that could not attend the meeting but expressed an interest in irrigation.

### Objectives

Abe said the objective of this meeting is to:

- Listen to everyone so NRCS knows what to focus on in the future.
- Ask questions and share any ideas that the attendees have.
- Review last year's meeting on what folks felt were resource concerns and NRCS follow up.
- Review the current Farm Bill programs.
- Give an update on the past and present projects.
- Develop or review specific resource priorities by land use.

### Resource Concerns at 2018 Local Group Meeting

- Timber Management Out North – the current RCPP for the Wallowa Front may be expanded to include this area

- Juniper Removal – NRCS received a CIS for this and have funds available for this.
- Irrigation Efficiency on the Lostine area – from a 2019 RCPP there are in the planning stages for the sheep ridge.
- Interest in pivots in the Moonshine Ditch area – funding is available for this under a new 2019 CIS.
- Prescribed fire practice - They have one area that they will be doing a trial burn on.
- Invasive grasses – this is part of a new 2019 CIS and there is opportunity for a new RCPP.
- Spalding Catchfly – no update
- BioChar – Still not an Oregon practice. May fall under a CSP enhancement. Could possible get some landowners to sign up to try it.
- Upland Livestock Water – Did get some installed with drought funding. For future pipelines that eliminate open ditches they are including installation of livestock water in the planning.
- Cover Crops on Dry Land – Planting of Austrian peas for summer fallow is being tried in the Pendleton area.

### **Current Farm Bill Programs**

#### Conservation Stewardship Program (CSPP)

- This program pays for what you are doing and to improve or try new things.
- Currently have 52 contracts for 149,000 acres, spending \$800,000 in 2018
- Practices consisted of grazing management, precision ag, pest management and riparian plantings.
- Did not go away with the new Farm Bill. There will be changes to the program with one being no more automatic renewals.

#### Environment Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

- This program pays for a specific practice that addresses a resource concern.
- In 2018 spent over 1 million dollars
- Practices included irrigation efficiency, forest thinning, range seeding, stock water, cover crops and transition to organic.

#### Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

- A program that allows partners to secure NRCS funding to be used through NRCS programs for specific areas and for specific conservation activities.
- Currently have 4 RCPPs that will bring in 8 million over the next 4 years.
  - SWCD RCPP – Alder Slope Partnership
    - Awarded 1.1 million
    - Contracted for 6 pipelines
    - This RCPP is completed
  - WR, Wallowa Land Trust, TNC RCPP– Conservation of Soil Health in Wallowa County
    - Awarded 3.2 million
    - Used for easement under ALE and irrigation improvement under EQIP
    - TNC has completed 2 easement for 18,000 acres and Wallowa Land Trust has finished 1 easement and working on 2.
  - WR RCPP – Wallowa Front Fuel Reduction
    - Awarded 2.28 million
    - For thinning on the Divide, Lostine and Bear Creek area.
  - FCA – Wallowa Lake Irrigation Modernization

- Awarded 1.73 million
- For group pipelines in Prairie Creek
- Contracting will begin in 2019

#### Agriculture Lands Easements (ALE)

- A program to help farmers/ranchers keep their land in agriculture by limiting/preventing subdivision and conversion to non ag uses.
- Easement are not held by NRCS

#### **Past & Current Project Update**

##### Past

- In the 2002 Farm Bill priority was in the Bear Creek, Lostine, Lower Valley and Zumwalt area
- For the 2008 Farm Bill focus was in Prairie Cree, the Moraine and the Leap/Parsnip area.
- For the 2014 Farm Bill projects were done in the Alder Slope, Prairie Creek and Divide areas.
- In 2017, 2 million of drought EQIP funds were used to help with phase I of the North Prairie Pipeline.
- In the 2018 Farm Bill working in the Alder Slope, Prairie Creek, Divide, Lower Valley and Zumwalt areas.

##### Current Program Sign Ups

- Alder Slope – Moonshine Irrigation Efficiency
- Wallowa Ecological Function Restoration – Juniper Removal
- Blue Mountain Fire and Fuels Reduction – to thin trees that grew in CRP fields that are now expired.
- Projects under the existing RCPPs .
- 1.73 million of the FCA RCPP will be used for phase II of the north Prairie Creek pipeline. There is also \$300,000 in it from OWEB. Money will be saved from reduced irrigation pumping and the leakage of water in the system will be eliminated.

#### **Resource Concerns by Land Use**

- Forestland
  - Top concern is wildfire
    - Areas of concern are Mount Howard to the Divide, Bear Creek/Lostine area, Alder Slope and out north.
    - EQIP paid out \$851,000 over a 3 year period for thinning on Alder Slope.
    - Funds will be used this fiscal year for the Divide.
    - Was asked if there is money for monitoring. There is not, but the SWCD is doing photo monitoring for projects they have grants for.
  - Noxious weeds is another concern
    - Was asked if weed control is done after thinning (ground disturbance) or perhaps seeding. This is something that needs to be encouraged and part of the project.
- Cropland
  - Irrigation efficiency is a resource concern.
    - Priority areas are Alder Slope and Prairie Creek
    - There were 6 pipelines installed using \$891,000 of the RCPP funding.

- Soil Health is another concern
  - This is where Kevin had a concern. The pH is slowly dropping because of the amount of nitrogen fertilizer used. The cover crops are helping with this. Many farmers are doing the cover crops on their own.
  - It was asked about biochar being used for fertilizer. It would depend on the type of wood used and on the process. It may absorb water and not work as it should. Also cost prohibited.
- Rangeland
  - Juniper and noxious weeds were the top priority.
    - Thru the Conservation Implementation Strategies there is now funding available for 5 years for juniper removal. There is mostly Rocky Mountain juniper instead of Western juniper that the rest of the state has. Nine landowners have signed up for this. J is working on finding something that would take juniper to get it off site.

### **Future Work**

- With proposed money from the state for the Wallowa dam, there will be funding for fish screens and installation of other pipelines (there are 3 proposed). Some of the funding may also be used in the Lower Valley.
- It was asked if there is cropping that can be done for livestock grazing. The local farmers are currently experimenting with cover crops for soil health and for livestock grazing. Abe said they are learning from the producers' trials and errors. Is there a role for NRCS in this? Abe answered there will be some that may pay 75%, but here Wallowa County is far ahead on this that a program is not really needed. For dry lands though this funding may be beneficial.
- Kathleen asked if there is an interest in pollination. Abe said there are some producers out there trying it, but there is not funding for it at this time.
- There was a mention on working on infestations of Yellow Star Thistle and Medusa Head for rangelands. Abe asked if there would be several landowners interested in the treatment of Yellow star Thistle out North because a funding pool could be applied for. Scott McClaren said doing some seeding with wild basin rye works good. An RCPP for this may also be good.
- With an RCPP monitoring will not be paid for. Abe is not sure what the changes are in the new Farm Bill for some of the programs except for they will be able to contract with ditch companies instead of individuals.

Abe thanked everyone for coming. Meeting ended at 3:40 p.m.