

February 26, 2019
Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS)
Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District (JSWCD)
Local Work Group Meeting Minutes
JSWCD Conference Room
10:00 am – 12:00 pm

The purpose of this meeting is to help guide future investment with input from other agencies and organizations.

Erin Kurtz, NRCS District Conservationist, opened the meeting by welcoming and thanking everyone for their attendance and introductions were made. NRCS is a non-regulatory agency that works with landowners on private lands. NRCS' top priority is to identify resource concerns. One is forest health and fuels reductions, water quality and quantity, and wildlife habitat. Other concerns are local food systems, pollinator, soil health, and oak restoration and farm projects.

NRCS uses the strategic approach with partners in order to leverage resources and money. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) targets Conservation Implementation Strategy (CIS) areas created with input from other agencies to capitalize on funding. NRCS just finished one strategy: Forest Stand Health & Fuels Reduction in the Seven Basins and Applegate watershed areas which took seven years and treated 1900 acres with a price tag of \$1.9 million. This project included 37 participants. The practices included pre-commercial thinning to increase productivity, help with diseases, and improve wildlife habitat. Another CIS is the Oak Woodland Health and Habitat Conservation in the Colestine area and now in the Table Rock area. The same Oak Woodland Health and Habitat Conservation practices have been used in the Central Umpqua-Mid-Klamath Oak Habitat Cooperative Conservation Initiative. This includes Jackson, Douglas and Siskiyou Counties for a total of \$1.8 million. The Klamath-Rogue Oak Woodland Health and Habitat Conservation Project also included Jackson, Klamath and Siskiyou Counties for a total of \$3 million. NRCS partners with many agencies and organizations including Lomakatsi Restoration, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Klamath Bird Observatory, and Partners for Fish & Wildlife, to name a few. The office finished contracting for the Ashland Forest All-Land Restoration (AFAR) project in the Ashland Watershed. The project is currently being implemented at a cost of \$4 million. Four thousand acres of priority areas were treated mostly along the ridges.

NRCS newest CIS is the Greensprings Health & Fuels Reduction Project. Through a NRCS and Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) agreement, ODF has been getting inventory, certification, and writing prescriptions. This is the second year taking applications with over 30 applicants interested in doing fuels reduction and forest health practices. Last year NRCS funded five contracts for \$600,000 that covers 900 acres. NRCS will continue their work in the Greensprings as long as there is interest.

A summary of NRCS's Forest restoration and Fuels Reductions projects from 2010 to 2018 includes 140 participants, eight thousand acres, and costing \$8 million.

Another NRCS CIS is the Bradshaw Drop Agricultural Water Quality Improvement Project. This project involves piping a total of 3 miles along the Rogue River Valley Irrigation District's flood canal system to switch to a pressurized system. NRCS money would be made available to landowners along the pipeline to convert from flood to sprinkler.

Other NRCS programs include 28 hightunnels for \$185,000 and Organics imitative includes eleven farms for \$120,000.

Someone asked Erin to tell about the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): In a nutshell, NRCS evaluates an entire farm system for participants who have already participated in EQIP or other NRCS conservation practices. They have a heighten stewardship threshold so NRCS now can offer enhancements (CSP). For example, the participant has good nutrient management and now wants to do slow release

fertilization. The participant can receive an annual payment for the increased conservation practices that is acreage based. The new farm bill has been rewritten and may not be based on acreage.

Paul asked if NRCS had paid for monitoring of water quantity directly related to forest restoration in the watershed. NRCS has not but other partners have done some monitoring related to forest restoration. The Nature Conservancy has done monitoring through an OWEB grant.

Erin introduced CalLee Davenport from USFWS who will talk about Partners and Pollinators. The bee population is declining. It's considered a major decline called "distinction vortex". The USFWS Partners Program is similar to the NRCS EQIP program. The Partners Program was created 30 years ago working with private landowners. The Partners Program is a financial and technical program. The Partners Program is for habitat restoration on lands not owned by state or federal, but the USFWS work with county and cities as well as tribes and non-profit conservation organizations. It is usually a 50/50 cost share that could include in-kind work. The program will pay up to \$2,500 per project. There is a required minimum ten year landowner agreement. Primary focuses are federally enlisted threaten and endangered habitat. CalLee talked about the pollinators programs in Southern Oregon. CalLee is the Region One monarch butterfly point of contact. The Southwest Oregon Pollinators Collaborative meets quarterly to discuss projects that support the declining pollinator population. If nothing else, he encouraged everyone to plant milk weed to benefit the Western Monarch butterflies.

Randy White, Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District's (JSWCD) District Manager, gave a quick history of the District. In 1993 DEQ asked ODA to work with local farmers and rancher to help curb their contributing to the "*pollution of the waters of the state*". The local Soil and Water Districts were tasked as the Local Management Agency to work with local farmer and ranchers to come up with prohibiting conditions on agriculture land and to develop best management practices to curb the conditions. Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plans (AgWQMAP) were developed. The In-land Rogue AgWQMAP includes Coos, Curry, Josephine and Jackson Counties. ODA funded the District through the Scope of Work. District's asked if there were funds to do monitoring. The Districts were told there was no funding for monitoring. Around 2011 the EPA put pressure on DEQ who then put pressure on ODA to see the outcome. Then DEQ put more pressure on ODA to come up with outcome based monitoring. The results are Focus Areas. The District's Focus Area is the Little Butte Creek. The District did pre and post monitoring on a large ranch that used flood irrigation where runoff went into the Little Butte Creek. The results showed high water temperatures cooling and turbidity, and the landowner switched from flood irrigation to sprinkler. Now Districts have funding from ODA for pre and post monitoring as part of the Scope of Work. Focus Areas are locally driven. Outreach with both the watershed council and the District have helped get the word out. In 2015 or 2016 DEQ told ODA they still need more outcome based monitoring. There were a lot of ranchers and farmers still not in compliance with the AgWQMAP. ODA implemented the Strategic Implementation Area (SIA's) with collaboration with local folks who looked at areas that have impacts. ODA sends out notices to landowners in the area of concern. The landowners are invited to a meeting. The District and watershed councils host and explain the situation and ask who is interested in improving their lands. The Wagner Creek project is a great example of how the SIA works.

Teresa Vonn, Farm Service Agency spoke about the various programs they offer. One program called the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) offers financial help due to drought and fire killed trees. Another program is the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-raised Fish (ELAP). This program offers financial assistance to producers for losses due to disease, and certain adverse weather such as blizzards and wildfires.

John Speece from the Rogue River Watershed Council gave a brief report on the projects the Council is working on. The Watershed Council is interested in working with FSA's CREP program. John has experience with CREP program.

The meeting adjourned.