Attendees:

1. Amanda Moore, Natural Resources Conservation Service
2. Loren Unruh, Natural Resources Conservation Service
3. Kevin Blakely, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
4. Gary McAninch, Oregon Department of Agriculture
5. Jay Gibbs, Natural Resources Conservation Service
6. Barry Bushue, Farm Service Agency
7. Cory Owens, Natural Resources Conservation Service
8. Julie MacSwain, Natural Resources Conservation Service
9. Tracy Robillard, Natural Resources Conservation Service
10. Scott Oviatt, Natural Resources Conservation Service
11. Brenda Sanchez, Oregon Department of Agriculture
12. Jan Lee, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
13. Jim Johnson, Oregon State University Extension, Forestry
14. Adam Coble, Oregon Department of Forestry
15. Jericho Winter, Natural Resources Conservation Service
16. Andrew Owen, Natural Resources Conservation Service
17. Tammy Dennee, Oregon Dairy Farmers Association
18. Rachel Reister, Rural Development
19. Ken Yates, Oregon Waters Resources Congress
20. Mike Collier, Oregon Association of Water Utilities
21. Nicole Williams, Willamette Partnership
22. Bruce Taylor, Intermountain West Joint Venture
23. Jerome Rosa, Oregon Cattleman’s Association

FSA Update: Barry Bushue

- FSA will relocate its state office to Portland to share space with the NRCS state office. The move is tentatively scheduled for November.
- Multiple deadlines are approaching for FSA programs including the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Market Facilitation Program (MFP) and Agriculture Risk Coverage/Price Loss Coverage (ARC/PLC). FSA encourages farmers to sign up sooner rather than later.
- Staffing continues to be a challenge with several vacancies throughout FSA Oregon.
- There’s potential opportunity for hemp to be covered through non-insured crop disaster assistance program, also called NAP. Adding hemp into the program would create significant workload challenges for FSA with potentially 70,000 acres going into hemp in Oregon this growing season.
- The MFP has added cherries, alfalfa and hazelnuts. This brought many new farmers to FSA offices who had never previously worked with FSA. Though it created workload challenges it also opened the door to an entirely new customer base for FSA and allowed growers to learn about other FSA programs and loans.

NRCS Update: Jay Gibbs, NRCS

- Ron Alvarado will be coming back to Oregon in February to resume the position of State Conservationist after serving on a national detail. Jay Gibbs will return to his post in Heppner as a Basin Team Leader.
- NRCS is ramping up implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill with final program rules being published and with funding allocations in progress to states.
• Staffing at NRCS is ramping up. NRCS has been hiring multiple positions across the state and will advertise more positions in the coming months.
• Customer Service is a priority for USDA and for NRCS.
• Local Work Group meetings are in full swing right now across the state. Partners and groups associated with the state technical committee are encouraged to participate locally in these meetings, where priorities are set for each county.
• NASS just released a survey for irrigation districts; districts are encouraged to participate in the survey to provide information that will shape decision making.

Farm Bill Update: Loren Unruh, NRCS

• Interim rules are underway for various Farm Bill conservation programs. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) interim rule was published in November and the comment period closed Jan. 13. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) interim rule was published in December and the comment period ends Feb. 17.
• The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) rule was published in December and the comment period ends March 6.
• The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) rule is in clearance process for publication and will be published soon.
• Once the rules are finalized, NRCS will start implementing. NRCS expects to get sign up deadlines in coming weeks.
• EQIP and CSP are continuous sign ups. Even though cut off dates have not been established yet, producers are encouraged to go ahead and sign up now if they are interested.
• NRCS is also rolling out a new ranking tool to help evaluate and prioritize applications.

QUESTION: How would ACEP intersect with the Oregon Agriculture Heritage Program should that program get funded?

ANSWER: The program did not secure funding last legislative session, but there’s potential for it to be funded in the next session. Should it get funded, it would complement ACEP. NRCS participated in a testimony to the Oregon legislature about ACEP last year.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program Process Update: Loren Unruh, NRCS

• Existing RCPP projects will continue to be managed under 2014 Farm Bill policies.
• New FY19 RCPP projects will be managed according to the new RCPP rules for the 2018 Farm Bill.
• A big change in this program through the new Farm Bill is that now RCPP is its own stand-alone program and is no longer under the “umbrella” of EQIP.
• RCPP funding has increased to $300 million annually in the 2018 Farm Bill, nationally.
• There are now only 2 (no longer 3) funding pools for RCPP proposals: 1) statewide and 2) Critical Conservation Areas (which in Oregon that is the Columbia River Basin). The national funding pool was eliminated in the new Farm Bill.
• Oregon has 2 RCPP projects that were successfully renewed this year. The uncompetitive renewal option is new for RCPP in the 2018 Farm Bill.
• RCPP proposals are reviewed at the state level and may require coordination with adjacent states. States submit ranking to the national office for a funding decision. NRCS expects to announce projects selected for funding this summer.
Next funding announcement for FY20 RCPP is planned for July 2020. Now is the time to start meeting with NRCS local basin team leader and district conservationist to formulate a proposal for an RCPP project.

QUESTION: Who is the target audience for RCPP?
ANSWER: Any entity that works with agricultural producers (non-federal) if they have identified resource concerns that can be addressed on-farm.

Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART): Amanda Moore, NRCS
- NRCS is launching CART – a new ranking tool to help simplify and streamline how the agency ranks applications for funding.
- Conservation Desktop is another new tool that is being rolled out within NRCS and it integrates with CART.
- The new tool automates the functions planners used to do on paper. It’s used to identify resource concerns, to identify practices, and to provide outcomes based on the practice implementation.
- Planners no longer create a conservation plan but create a “practice schedule.” They conduct the resource inventory using CART based on geospatial data.
- CART determines the inherent vulnerability and various thresholds for each resource concern.
- The assessment is created up-front at the time of application, which ties in with NRCS’s goal to put more emphasis on planning prior to implementation.
- NRCS is providing guidance to field staff on how to consistently assess and rank applications using this new tool. There will be a steep learning curve.
- CART launched today. Staff are undergoing training.

Agroforestry in Oregon: Adam Coble, Oregon Department of Forestry
- Agroforestry refers to the intentional integration of agriculture and forestry. Benefits include diversifying incomes, increasing carbon sequestration and improving water quality.
- Adam is looking for input from partners about the use cases for agroforestry in Oregon, as well as challenges and opportunities. For example, a grazing allotment on federal forestland may be considered agroforestry.
- Western Oregon has a high amount of riparian practices that may contribute to higher rates of agroforestry shown on the data charts reported from the Ag Census.
- There’s interest in developing a landowner survey to better understand agroforestry applications in Oregon.
- See slide presentation for more details and contact information.

Hemp Program Update: Gary McAninch, ODA
- The 2018 Farm Bill changed the hemp environment.
- ODA’s goal with hemp is to treat it like any other crop as much as possible.
- All hemp growers must register with ODA if they have more than 4 plants as a grower registration. Hemp processors need a handler registration; and hemp seed producers need a registration.
- Pre-harvest testing is managed by ODA to assess THC potency.
- Oregon has seen exponential growth in hemp. In 2015 the state had 13 growers and 105 acres. By 2019 there were 1,957 growers and just under 64,000 acres (registered acres, actual acres are likely more). There are 573 registered handlers as of November 2019.
- Drying and Processing tends to be the bottleneck in this industry.
- Most of the hemp is grown along the I-5 corridor. The most dense sites are in Jackson and Josephine counties. There’s a cluster of grow sites around the Bend area as well, and a few along the I-84 corridor in Eastern Oregon.
- 2018 Farm Bill interim USDA rules: Includes ODA tracking where hemp is grown; performing sampling and testing; disposal procedures for fields that test too high for THC content; and compliance provisions. All growers are required to maintain records that are sharable. All ODA records are public information.
- ODA is looking to fill a few more positions for the hemp program.
- ODA has until the end of October to get the state hemp plan submitted to USDA.
- Hemp has attracted more new farmers and young farmers.
- State rules need to be in place to be in compliance with USDA rules. Growers don’t like the THC potency rules in the USDA rules.
- There are concerns with neighbors of hemp farmers – odor issues; increase in equipment traffic/labor; cross-pollination concerns between hemp and marijuana growers.
- Outreach – ODA has over 10,000 people subscribed to the hemp email list.
- Oregon is a high hemp seed production state.
- Questions were raised about the water intensity required for hemp, and issues with growers illegally drawing water from surface water sources; issues with water rights and run-off, and overall impacts on water quality. There are many unknowns about hemp and how it may impact water quality.

**Drought Status and Water Supply: Scott Oviatt, NRCS**

- On Jan. 1 snowpack across the state was well below normal or near record lows in some cases. The statewide average at that time was 45% of normal.
- Today the state is 95% of normal for snowpack. Mountain snow storms throughout January have significantly recovered the deficit.
- The next two months are critical. If temperatures remain warm, the forecast could change dramatically for spring flows.
- The water year started off dry and warm. Precipitation amounts were well below normal across the state. Precipitation amounts have improved since then but are still not above normal in most areas.
- April is typically the peak of snowpack. The next two months will be critical in determining outcome of spring/summer streamflow.
- See slides for more details and charts/data.

**Prime Farmland List Update: Cory Owens, NRCS**

- NRCS produces a list of “Prime Farmland” and per statute, the State Conservationist is required to maintain a list of prime farmlands in the state.
• NRCS just updated this list. The last update was four years ago.
• Oregon requires that a soil has 70 or more consecutive days of frost-free conditions to be considered ‘prime’ farmland soils.
• 10 new map units were added to the Oregon prime farmland list.
• See handout for more information.

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