

2020 Grant County Local Work Group Meeting Minutes

1. Welcome & Introductions (Started 10:05 am)

- Damon Brosnan, DC in Gilliam/Wheeler counties, introduces Aaron
- Introductions from Hannah Mears, Emma Anspach and Tereasa Perkins.
- Landowner/Agency Introductions-See sign in list.

2. New DC Introduction

- BS from OSU in Nat. Resources w/ emphasis on Watershed Mngmt.
- MS from University of Idaho in Rangeland Ecology and Mngmt.
- Range Tech for ARS in Miles City Montana (2004)
- Soil Con in JD (2010)
- Rangeland Mngmt. Specialist in John Day (2014)
- District Conservationist in John Day (2019)

3. Soil Health Challenge Update/ Northside Mule Deer Success Story

Soil your undies for World Soil Health Day

- Shows impact of microbes on organic material
- Cropland has higher activity than rangeland
- A few from Grant County, Monument High School
- Some landowners still have some. This spring would be good to get those out.
- Talk to NRCS if anyone is interested and putting some out on their property
- See all from state on Oregon NRCS page.

Grant County Success Story

- Northside hunting unit.
- Mostly Juniper work. 63 Landowners. 8,000 acres of juniper cut. ~1.5 million spent.
- Focusing on winter range habitat
- Other partners working on upland winter range projects (ODFW, SWCD, Watershed Council)

4. CREP 2019 summary

- Tereasa Perkins
 - Started Jan 2018 with Grant SWCD.
 - Grant submitted and approved for another two years.
- Explanation of CREP in Grant county
 - Site visit required to go to contract
 - Fencing in riparian areas, tree and shrub plantings, juniper removal, seedings
 - New: Treated 235 acres of stream acres. 5 new landowners.
 - Renewal: 354 acres. 10 landowners.
- CREP in Baker County:
 - 2 new contracts
 - 3 renewal contracts
- Mark Webb asks question of how it is all reported.
- Sue Greer and Damon answer that OWEB and other agencies do reporting, but as for NRCS, CREP no because of PII.
- Question: is there funding?
- Answer: Damon answer, yes continuous funding available. CREP is not only funding for fencing, ODFW has some as well.

5. Review 2019 EQIP/RCPP/CSP contracts

- RCPP (Blue Mountains Vegetative Health Initiative): 5 contracts, 400 ac. \$336,147 spent
- Kahler Uplands Improvement: 6 contracts, 466 ac. \$119,960 spent
- JDU Forestry: 4 contracts 211 ac. \$124,000 spent
- CSP: no contracts in 2019, applications being taken now.

6. 2020 Drought Outlook

- Post Fire/Flood awareness publications from OR NRCS on our website for public to look at.
- Started winter off below normal, coming back up and now about normal for the county. Last summary taken Feb 7
- Rain and snow both will cause flooding, with snow density being an important variable.
- Where are we sitting overall? Even with good amount of precip, we are sitting at moderate drought conditions.

7. Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 – What has changed?

- Signed by President on Dec. 20, 2018
- Still waiting on final guidance.
- Programs reauthorized: EQIP CSP ACEP etc.
- Focus on keeping most fertile and productive grounds in production
- Improving soil health, air/water quality and other Natural Resources
- EQIP has new enrollment options through incentive contracts. Advanced payments available to Historically Underserved producers.
- CSP has authorized contract renewals, shift from acres to dollar amounts per enhancements.
- ACEP: increases flexibility for partners to meet cost share match requirements.
- RCPP: making the program its own separate program, simplified funding authority for programs implementation.
- Mark Webb: who determines priorities? Will Western Oregon get more funding over Eastern Oregon?

Damon: Not much is going to change, Eastern Oregon takes a large amount of the funding because of land mass. The last few years the state was broken out into zones, Oregon had five, with funding for each zone. Not sure if the zone will still be used in 2020.

- Jack Southworth: when will we get answers on Farm Bill?

Aaron: Final rules must have public comment period through the federal registry, then we will get the updated rules, should be any time.

8. Break (5 minutes)

- Talk about how good cookies are and how many we have eaten.

9. 2020 Conservation Implementation Strategies

- RCPP: Blue mountain Vegetative Health Initiative (Grant SWCD)
 - Awarded in 2017
 - Juniper and Pre-Commercial Thinning
 - ~\$ 1.2 million awarded
 - \$1.1 for EQIP
 - \$70,000 for CSP
 - \$623,000 spent as of now
- Upper John Day River Flow Restoration and Protection Project (CTWS)
 - Awarded in 2018
 - Ditch piping/Irrigation efficiency improvement projects
 - \$3.9 million
- EQIP: JDU Forest Resiliency
- State-wide Initiatives:
 - Seasonal High Tunnels
 - Energy
 - Organic/Transition to Organic
- Kahler Multi County Uplands Improvement Project: No Funding in 2020 but taking applications

- 15 contracts in 3 years, \$420,115 spent
- New landowner interest form to figure out what they are interested in.
- Ritter Uplands Management: No Funding in 2020 but taking applications

Deadlines TBD

- CSP Deadlines:
 - Renewal Deadline: March 20, 2020
 - ❖ 2014-2016 eligible contracts that have had one prior contract
 - CSP Classic Deadline: May 29, 2020
 - ❖ All other non-renewal landowners can apply
- New enhancements have not been released yet. Kacey mentions that they will look like what we have seen the last few years. Major distinction from the original CSP: late documentation will no longer be an option. Documentation must be in before fiscal year to get that year's payment. The enhancements are more practice based, NRCS employee will come out to certify practices, to measure acres, distance, completion to the job sheets.

10. Funding Opportunities Beyond 2020

- 2021: Ritter Upland Management, Kahler Upland will be available. South Fork Watershed Council RCPP, Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership if funded
- 2022: Ritter Upland Management CIS (year 2), SFWC RCPP, Joint Chiefs, New CIS??
- 2023: Ritter Upland Management CIS (year 3), SFWC RCPP, Joint Chiefs, New CIS??
- South Fork John Day Watershed Council submitted an RCPP in December 2019 in Izee/South Fork John Day River area.
 - Uplands work including: Juniper, Pre-Commercial Thinning, stock water, cross fencing, aspen restoration
- Joint Chiefs:
 - Goals is to get more work across boundaries of public and private lands done
 - 3-year funding opportunity
 - Joint funding opportunity between NRCS/Forest Service
 - A grant opportunity available to whole country
 - Is not local money, so won't take away from local opportunities.
- Damon mentions that the Kahler CIS was an application for Joint Chiefs that was not chosen for a few years in a row and the DC in the three counties decided to turn it into a CIS.

11. Review of County Priority Resource Issues/ New Project Ideas

Past Resource Concerns:

- Invasive species (juniper, annual grasses, herbaceous weeds) sweet briar rose?
- Forest Health (including aspen restoration)
- Grazing Management (including stock water developments and cross fencing)
- Water Quality/Quantity (irrigation improvements, stock water)
- Easements (to keep working lands in ag production and mitigate threat of subdivision)

New Ideas (Based on Land used in the County):

Rangeland:

- Rangeland burning and seeding to clean up juniper work that has been done
- Invasive species: Juniper and annual grasses, med-sage, yellow star-thistle, white-top
- Grazing management, including stock-water developments, small reservoirs (permitting, helping mainstem flows, fighting wildfire)
 - Ponds not ideal, permitting is a long and expensive process and there is no guarantee, difficult to fit into NRCS contracting
 - Damon - Grain silo large capacity tanks for firefighters to pump/dip out of
 - Well and spring fed with installed cisterns

- The county is updating its emergency management plan, might they be a partner to address some of these same concerns?
- Discussion of wells. NRCS does not pay for dry well. Must sleeve entire hole, more expensive, but cost share has gone up.
- Educational opportunities for grazing management? Ties into soil health properties from NRCS
 - Partners? Educators?
 - Herd management/stockmanship w/ OSU extension
 - Suggested presenter: Tony Malmberg: knows local issues, has taught classes before. He lives/works in Eastern Oregon.
- Maintenance for Juniper cuts
 - O&M for 10 years, landowner responsibility.
 - Prescribed burning: being pushed more in Wheeler county. Trying to get permits in timely fashion so those windows for burning can open up more.
 - Cutting juniper when they are smaller (Phase I or II) then burning right after and 5 years after to push out the maintenance timelines.
 - Concerns about annual grasses coming in after burn. Only burning on good sites.
 - Liability issues with burning: hiring contractors, larger parcel landowners, carrying insurance.
 - Herbicide treatments on those small junipers coming back
- Aspen Fencing (buck and pole) what are the funding opportunities?

Forestry:

- Public/Private Interface – Thinning
- More cost share availability for PCT
 - Is NRCS cost share appropriate? \$300-400/acre was mentioned as the need amount
 - Lots of variable in cost based on slope, aspect, density.
 - Cost to haul loads, NRCS does not have any opportunity for that now, but landowners are interested in doing so. OWEB is looking into this as an option.
 - Different cost shares on density of trees?
- Aaron considering moving Forestry CIS to Ritter area, more interest there than in Izee and landowners based on information from Ritter Collaborative Group.
 - Izee area has produced limited application the last few years.
- Why can't we have a county wide funding pool and work with everyone who is ready and willing to do pre commercial work? (multiple landowners)
 - Have to get away from random acts of conservation
 - CIS created for prioritize projects in the county
 - Need to be able to show progress and outcomes in a defined area. CIS's allow this to occur.
 - Easier to leverage partner money
 - Other options outside of these areas are available: OWEB, Tribes, SWCD
- Is CSP an option for those landowners that aren't in a CIS focal area?
 - CSP is an option for all landowners in the county
 - But most of the enhancements are management based and the same type of practices might not be an option under CSP.
- Frustrating to not get any funding when you are near the funding areas, but you are interested in projects (multiple landowners)
 - Amy Stiner: maybe you are in the area, but you do not qualify for that funding: Ranking, AGI
- Maybe success should not be measured by treated acres, or miles of stream
 - Need to focus on what was in that area historically, need to look at that seriously for water purposes.
 - John Day Partnership could help with measuring the impact better of project better with the monitoring program that is proposed.
- Soil health is big driving factor for many concerns on multiple land uses in the county.

Irrigated/Crop/Pasture:

- Diversions/Head gates.
- Piping ditches to keep from losing water to evaporation. Water quality and quantity.
- Integrated water management planning. Can NRCS do this? What are the options? Are there education outreach opportunities?
 - Must submit a CIS for an area and have landowners apply.
 - It was suggested that the upper John Day River where a lot of work is being done might be a good option.
 - A landowner thought there would also be interest from Mount Vernon to Picture Gorge.
 - IWM including timing, advanced measurement options coming available on the market, but they are typically used on high dollar crops and may not be useful for some of the irrigation systems or crops in Grant County. Needs future investigation.
- Where should the priorities be in the county for irrigation improvement project:
 - Steph Charrette: delivery systems so we are not over-using water.
 - Interest in reviewing water rights and options from the state office
 - Instream flows: creating subgroup to improve quantity and quality to look a priority.
- The Energy funding pool is an option for doing on farm energy audits and improved infrastructure.
 - An audit is needed before the recommendation in the audit can be funded for improvements
 - Variable frequency drive (VFD) pumps are becoming more popular.
- Riparian fencing are important for improving water conditions and riparian vegetation and should be a priority- Russ Powell
 - BDAs (have to do them before CREP, they will not pay for it)/ NRCS now has a practice that can be used to install them
 - Weed presence and treatment along water ways? What can be done?
- Educational series for landowners:
 - Proper usage - irrigation
 - Timing - irrigation
 - Emerging farming technologies – no till on crop and rangeland
- Cover Crops? What is a cover crop? How could it be used in Grant county?
- Tailwater capture/reuse
- Past programs has funding for surface water in Harney County. Is that program still available? (Frank Burns)
 - Aaron and Damon do not believe this funding is still available. Will consider contacting the Harney county DC to learn more.
- What can be done about improper irrigating including?
 - Over usage that decreased production
 - How can we increase production?
- Contour and leveling to increase flood efficiency? What are the options?

12. Adjourn (12:15 pm)