



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service



2020 NRCS OREGON TRIBAL UPDATE

Tribal Youth Plant Seeds of Heritage

Today's Youth are Tomorrow's Leaders

Children, from the Grand Ronde Chinuk Wawa language class, cluster around raised beds at the native plant nursery. Jeremy Ojua, nursery supervisor, asks students “who knows what camas is?” About half the students wave raised hands.

The students have been here before. And they will be here again. It's all part of Ojua's plan. He is planting seeds, connecting students to the native plants that are part of their heritage and engaging them as future leaders of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde. Today's youth are tomorrow's tribal leaders.

The large camas bulbs initially propagated by the nursery came from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Plant Materials Center (PMC) in Corvallis. PMC camas is used to provide



students with a camas digging experience and populate a nearby restoration area.

Jeremy collects around 1,000 camas bulbs from the PMC in the fall. He brings them back to the nursery where they're “planted” in shallow trenches.

When it's time to harvest, Grand Ronde kindergarteners visit the nursery and use miniature versions of traditional digging sticks to unearth the bulbs.

“They're not real sure about what they're doing when they start,” says Ojua. “But once they get it figured



AMERICAN INDIANS

and Alaska Natives are eligible to participate in all NRCS programs and may have special status as provided by statute or regulation. The demand for NRCS services by American Indian tribal groups continues to increase as the value of NRCS assistance becomes better understood.



out, they are excited to unearth the bulbs and the dirt is flying.”

Today, the students range from kindergarten to 5th grade and are eager to taste some of the barestem biscuit root and narrowleaf onion also grown in the raised beds.

They take a short hike through the forest to spread camas seed on a site selected by Ojua. He explains that the land is managed by the Grand Ronde Natural Resources Department (NRD). Currently consisting of a series of short trails, Ojua hopes to convert the site to a full-fledged restoration area.

▶ Planting seeds and heritage

As the students round a bend, they see purple flowers of camas growing in the wild. Well perhaps not so wild, as they’ve been planted by Ojua, but they’re beautiful in a natural setting. Ojua organizes the students so they don’t disturb the area and shakes tiny round seeds into eager hands. At the appropriate moment Ojua



has the students throw the seeds into the air, “now you’ve planted camas!”

Coming from a silviculture and wildland fire background, Ojua had little experience with growing plants in a controlled setting when he began working in the nursery 2014. Until a year ago, it was a part-time gig, especially during fire season.

Ojua notes the Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE) is integral to the success of the nursery, encouraging its development about 6 years ago. That assistance continues as IAE staff write grants, develop plans and build raised beds. Their “Plants for People” project is funded by Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and aims to make culturally important plant materials available for restoration projects. Most importantly, through its

Habitat Restoration program, IAE is leading restoration projects in areas of significance to the Grand Ronde. This includes Champoeag State Park near Wilsonville; Herbert Farm and Natural Area near Corvallis; and now Tyee Nature Reserve in Grand Ronde. And it was IAE that introduced the Grand Ronde to the Plant Materials Center.

The PMC has donated a variety of native plants to the tribe including large camas, Lewis’ mock orange, Indian plum, Pacific willow, Pacific ninebark, redosier dogwood, and dune willow. NRCS staff, such as Tyler Ross, who joined the group for the day, are also available to provide technical assistance to the Grand Ronde, as well as other western Oregon tribes.

Ojua is not only working with youth but is also reaching out to the wider tribal community.





Besides providing plants for the tribal ceremonies and various restoration projects, he also sees his role as heightening community awareness of the many culturally significant plants that can be found in the area.

"I've identified at least 40 species of cultural significance in the NRD nature area," he said. "There's literally a smorgasbord of edible plants in our forests that could be available to Tribal members!" His outreach includes working with other tribal departments such as Health and Wellness, the Women's Transitional House on establishing various plantings of culturally significant foods. He's also worked with the Marion/Polk Food share youth program, adding a raised bed to grow vegetables this summer. This fall that same bed will transition to a First Foods bed, with camas, yampah, biscuit root, and onion. He's also toying with what he calls

"First Food Starter Pots", planters with a variety of native "vegetables" that community members can take home and plant in their gardens. There have been a handful of Grand Ronde Tribal Members who have shared their knowledge of culturally significant plants in the area. Ojua explains most are elders and there are also a couple of cultural resource staffers who help him identify plants, share plant uses and preparation. He sees the youth as an opportunity to expand this knowledge base.

Restoring community one student at a time

And on this day these engaged Chinuk Wawa students have planted more than camas. They've planted the idea that they are a part of something bigger than themselves; a tribal community that spans generations, a generation that can restore community.



2019 Tribal Program and Contracts at a Glance

EQIP Environmental Quality Incentives Program

6 CONTRACTS

1,747 ACRES

\$ 603,776

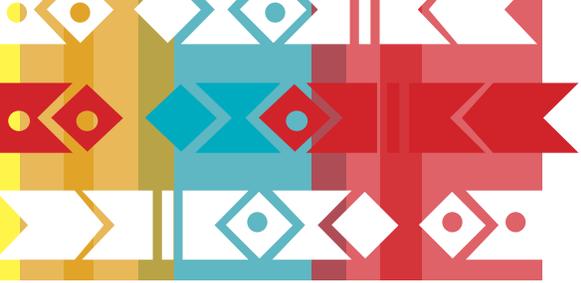
CSP Conservation Stewardship Program

7 CONTRACTS

91,525 ACRES

\$ 482,943

*Preliminary data subject to change, based on NRCS Protracts database.



Tribal Advisory Council A Guiding Force



From left to right: Amy Bartow, seed and plant production manager PMC; Ron Alvarado, Oregon NRCS state conservationist; Mike Kennedy, director of natural resources, Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians; Annie Young-Matthews, former manager PMC; Mike Wilson, director of natural resources, Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde.

The Tribal Advisory Council was formed in 2012 as a forum for Oregon’s Native American Tribes and tribal members to address natural resource issues on tribal lands. The Council meets twice a year and provides a tribal “voice” to inform and guide the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on conservation related issues that are important to Oregon tribes at the state and national level.

The Council includes representatives from nine of the federally-recognized Native American tribes in Oregon, along with technical staff from the Intertribal Agriculture Council. The Council is convened by NRCS Oregon under the leadership of State Conservationist Ron Alvarado. Input from the committee is used to guide implementation of locally-led Conservation Implementation Strategies that engage Oregon tribes in NRCS Farm Bill assistance programs.

Key Activities of the Council

-  Provide Oregon tribal representation to the NRCS West Region Tribal Advisory Council.
-  Share issues that serve as barriers to tribal access to NRCS resources, and identify tools that can help tribes be more successful in their work with NRCS.
-  Collaborate to provide various training opportunities to Oregon NRCS staff.
-  Identify NRCS related training needs for tribal natural resource staff and work with NRCS to deliver training.
-  Educate tribal council members on how to work with and access assistance from NRCS.
-  Assist NRCS in identifying opportunities for tribal outreach.
-  Serve as conduit for tribal consultation with their respective tribes.
-  Host tribal demonstration tours to share best practices and explore additional opportunities to partner with NRCS.

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