

## **Hood River County Local Working Group**

**Date:** January 13, 2021

**Location:** Meeting was held via Zoom

10:00 am

Carly opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. She thanked everyone for tolerating another zoom meeting and participating in the LWG meeting.

Introductions were made via round robin of who was there and what group or agency they were representing.

Carly gave a quick background for everyone of what the Local Work Group meetings are for and how they fit into the process of getting conservation on the ground.

A brief review of the agenda so everyone knew what to expect.

Carly shared what a Conservation Implementation Strategy (CIS) is and how it functions in the process of getting money allocated to projects. She shared what CIS's were active in 2020 what stage they were in, how many contracts and how much money was obligated in 2020.

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program was reviewed as to where it's at with spending.

Carly then shared what CIS's will be available for 2021.

Carly introduced Emily Huth and handed it off to her to give some info on the Conservation Stewardship Program.

Emily Huth gave a description of the Conservation Stewardship Program and how it can work In Hood River County. She will be the lead contact for the program in Hood River County.

Carly then introduced Stephanie Payne so she could do a short presentation on small farms, high tunnel and organic initiatives. She also discussed that in the future she is looking to develop a CIS to bring National funds for those initiatives down to the basin level. She's looking for any input anyone has on how to help develop and build that CIS.

She has a quick survey that she would like to share. Carly will send it out with the notes in the email to everyone.

Mace made some comments about how the new CIS could help to showcase that many of the organic producers now are doing a better job of working on biodiversity on their farms. Stephanie said she would be reaching out to Mace for further follow up as she works on this.

Kris asked Stephanie to explain what the Organic Initiative covers since there has been confusion over whether it covers helping people to convert to organic. Stephanie elaborated on the organic initiative and explained that it is open to anyone who is certified, transitioning to, or who meets the "farming organically but is producing under a certain income threshold". All of the EQIP practices are available for funding under the organic initiative.

Cindy asked Carly if the funding would be a good fit for small pasture production in Hood river Valley. Carly said they would still have to meet the eligibility requirements of being an organic or transitioning producer and land eligibility.

Adam asked to clarify if the growers must be selling something to get funding. Carly restated that as long as people meet the eligibility requirements for themselves and the land, then they can be eligible for NRCS funding.

Cindy asked Stephanie to elaborate on food sovereignty and how the CIS would tie to that.

Cindy said she had recently listened in on a webinar that had a speaker from Native tribes and the discussion was about how the tribal members used to have connections with larger private landowners and how they could access those lands for native food source harvesting. She wondered if there was a way to tie into the Native tribal food sources.

Carly brought the group back to focus on potential new CIS ideas for the future. Reviewing ideas that has been brought forth for discussion.

Adam had provided some issues to bring forth as ideas such as abandoned orchards which create pest load issues for neighboring orchards.

There was open discussion surrounding how to deal with the abandoned orchards given the fact that it's not owned by the neighbor orchardists. The last several years of poor crop returns has caused many growers to just walk away from their farms. There was the idea to potentially approach the nuisance orchard landowner and see about installing a beneficial cover crop, under a limited kind of lease that would allow for the complaining orchardist to enroll the abandoned orchard into NRCS programs for IPM treatments, etc.

There is some interest from growers to get a third party crop consultant in the area so they no longer have to lean on the chemical reps to be the advisors/consultants. (CIS?)

Hood River Soil and Water Conservation District is working with Ashley at Mid Columbia Agricultural Research and Extension Center to put together a grant to do some Best Management Practices and Spanish language materials. Perhaps can tie it together with the advisor/consultant.

Adam also asked about getting lists of plants developed for cover crops and plantings for pollinator habitat. Carly shared that those have already been developed and can certainly be shared.

Adam noted that new regulations from OSHA has created much wider buffers around sensitive areas which means some tree rows have been removed but the concern of drift has just been exacerbated.

He wondered how spray buffers/hedgerows might be used to deal with the drift concerns.

And finally, Adam pointed out that there is a large amount of pressure especially in the upper valley, from deer and elk in the orchards. Fence has gone up to protect the orchard, he asks how to do plantings along the fence to be a backboard to the buffers that can also be pollinator/beneficial habitat/drift barrier.

Corin expressed his interest in being involved in developing those drift hedgerows and also cover crop drive row species lists.

Heather asked if there were any specific practices that addressed sprayer calibration. Carly said there's nothing as specific as that, but rather it would be part of the whole Integrated Pest Management package. Mace noted that HQ is trying to make 595 an easier practice to work with. And if there is something already put together with a suite of BMPs for the area, then it might not be so hard to get a mgmt. plan put together.

Carly then asked if Farmers Irrigation District wanted to introduce the idea of bringing a CIS to do irrigation upgrades in their area. Les gave a brief background and Meghan then shared that they sent out some letters as outreach to get a feel for interest in their district. They got 8 responses for roughly 150 acres. They know of some more acres just as knowledge through speaking to patrons and knowing their district that would likely be interested in doing the upgrades.

There is also a subset of FID patrons on Parkertown Springs that they could include.

There were questions about upgrading pipeline and if they could be paid for by NRCS. Carly explained that they need to be mainlines that are to facilitate the upgrade of a new irrigation system and need to be on the private ground that is under the control of the applicant. If it's a large pipeline such as the East Fork canal to pipeline, then it's a different beast altogether and you end up doing something like PL566 and RCPP projects.

Carly brought the subject of biochar up as a possible topic of discussion and Les asked if Carly had heard from the Devonshire group. Carly said that yes, she has had numerous contacts from them, but has not attended any of their meetings. Les noted that they have secured some funding now and if there is any interest in biochar we may want to reach out to them to see how we could tie in with them.

Andrew noted its a good time to look at making revisions to bundles and enhancements for biochar. And that it's potentially something we could couple with a soil amendment enhancement.

Les expressed some interest in how biochar could used for nonpoint source that is getting into their canals. Andrew said some places have been using it in waddles with straw to help with nonpoint source issues.

Heather asked if a special kiln is needed to be used to create the biochar. Andrew shared that guidance on what equipment can be used is still being firmed up but there are several methods out there already.

Carly asked for any new ideas and Kris said she wanted to put a vote in for oak restoration. There has been a great deal of oak restoration work done in the area already. Great framework via the East Cascade Oak Partnership strategic plan is already in place to build a CIS off of.

Kathy noted that the strategic plan would be super easy to just pull data out of for a CIS. But she asked if there was interest. Wasco has some money earmarked for oak habitat. They have had Columbia Land Trust out to look at those properties already.

Emily noted that there is an oak regeneration enhancement payment through CSP.

Kathy noted that she would like to come out on any oak site visits in our area.

Cindy asked if the programs can be combined/overlapped. They can and in fact, one of the ranking questions in the forest health CIS gives points for utilizing multiple funding sources.

Jeremy wanted to bring up the idea of habitat manipulation for deer and elk and somehow integrate that into the oak habitat discussion given how much of an issue the deer/elk damage in the orchards has become. ODFW has put collars on some of the animals and they have identified areas that could be good areas to work on habitat enhancement outside of the orchards.

Carly asked what that would look like. An example discussed might be adjacent private forest land with areas that had some practices such as forest mgmt. to open up the canopy, create more light on the floor, create more browse, and then pair it with some possible pollinator/beneficial plantings that would benefit both the large ungulates and the smaller wildlife while also pulling the pressure off of the orchards as a food source.

It's possible that the current CIS might be revamped to accommodate the desired outcome. Potentially a wildlife habitat goaled ranking.

Heather suggested that there might be more forest contracts in Hood River County if we had the wildlife habitat focus.

Carly thought it would be good to have the discussion with Wasco Co and see how we can have the cross county CIS be reworked to cover the common resource concerns. It would be good to have a new DC on board to get them involved in the discussion.

Kris then brought up the discussion that it seems irrigation upgrades is something that is a steady request throughout the valley and is something that will continue to be needed. She wanted to know what the limitations on revisiting areas that had been covered before.

She asked about getting on a regular rotation for the different irrigation districts.

Carly explained that a rotation is not going to be a viable option.

A valley wide "catch-all" for those places that haven't been upgraded yet is not strategic enough.

Carly explained that the idea behind CIS's is that you come in, you ID the resource concern, you treat it, and you move on to other resources, so at some point other agencies have to take the lead on finding funding for things that weren't captured under the CIS for whatever reason.

Carly then asked if Lissa wanted to give her announcements but Lissa was having technical difficulties so she typed up her info the chat box that Carly then read to the group later. That information if for anyone who has questions about the CFAP programs and what they need from new producers to give FSA a call at 541.298.8559.

Heather asked what the timeline was on getting the next CIS pulled together, written and submitted.

Carly explained that for the next deadline for a 2022 one would be due in March but that in all reality that there is enough active at this time that we should really aim on getting one ready for 2023 funding. Les agreed that it would give FID time to build up interest and iron out details if it was for 2023.

Cindy noted that it would be great to really explain to the growers that this might be the last chance for the growers to get federal funding for quite a while.

Carly just reminded everyone that there is no reason that a CIS can't be written ahead of time and shelved for opportunities that may come up. That way if funding is suddenly presented then we have a way to match a focused need to those funds and can take advantage.

Since there were no other questions, the meeting was adjourned.