CLIENT GATEWAY— A NEW WAY OF DOING BUSINESS WITH NRCS

Conservation Client Gateway is a USDA public website that allows individual landowners and land users the secure ability to request conservation technical and financial assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Conservation Client Gateway provides users the alternative to work with NRCS via the Internet as a supplement to in-person support. All you need to get started is a USDA eAuthentication Level 2 account and a Service Center Information Management Systems (SCIMS) record linked to your eAuthentication account. For more information, customers can go to the national NRCS website for instructions on how to get started. The new system is not yet available for use by entities, such as tribes. However, this option will be included in the next version of the software.

TRIBAL OUTREACH WITH NORTHWEST INDIAN FISHERIES COMMISSION NETWORK

State Conservationist Roylene Rides At The Door provided 2014 Farm Bill information to Tribes via Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission video teleconference in March. In addition to sharing information about the Farm Bill, NRCS programs, initiatives, and timelines, Roylene also discussed the Resource Stewardship Planning pilot; the Regional Conservation Partnership Program; the National Water Quality Initiative, and the Cultural Resources prototype agreement, and the Tribal Advisory Council.

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

In January, USDA delivered first-round funding to 115 high-impact projects across all 50 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Five high-impact conservation projects in Washington State are receiving $23 million as part of the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) that was authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill. RCPP’s significant focus on public-private partnership enables private companies, local communities and other non-government partners to invest in efforts to keep our land resilient and water clean, improve wildlife habitat, and promote economic growth in agriculture, construction, tourism and outdoor recreation, and other industries.

State matching funds for RCPP authorized projects has been proposed in each of the budgets from Washington State Governor Jay Inslee, and the Washington State Senate and House budgets. Each budget proposes a match of $4 million for the 2015-17 state biennium, except the House which proposes $5 million. A state budget has not yet been passed as of June 11, 2015 and it’s not clear when budgets will pass. Funding would assist in the implementation of the conservation projects authorized by RCPP.

All of the funded projects have aspects that will address habitat and water quality and quantity, and will contribute to improvements to habitat for wildlife and fish.
2014-15 RCPP PROJECTS SELECTED

Palouse River Watershed (WRIA 34) Implementation Partnership
Lead partner: Palouse Conservation District

Through implementation of the Palouse River Watershed Management Plan, more than 15 partners will work with producers to address water quality concerns and reduce water quality regulatory action on producers in this area of Washington and Idaho. One innovative project component includes the promotion of the Farmed SMART certification program, which provides an opportunity for environmental markets. Outcomes include over 250 acres of riparian habitat establishment on the Palouse River and tributaries, 45,000 acres of Conservation Tillage and Direct Seed cropping systems, 520 acres of Agricultural Easements acquired.

Precision Conservation for Salmon and Water Quality in the Puget Sound
Lead Partner: Washington State Conservation Commission

The Puget Sound is the second largest estuary in the United States, and one of the most productive for salmon and shellfish. Partners will use an ecosystem-wide process for targeting high priority areas in the Puget Sound to improve water quality and habitat for at-risk species, including Chinook salmon, bull trout, and steelhead.

Upper Columbia Irrigation Enhancement Project
Lead partner: Trout Unlimited, Inc.

This project will help fund irrigation efficiency improvements with large irrigators and irrigation districts to modernize water delivery infrastructure. Enhanced instream flows will benefit critical spawning and rearing areas for Endangered Species Act (ESA) fish and provide passage during migration during seasonal low flows in critical Upper Columbia Tributaries. This project enhances existing conservation plans in the region and accelerates their implementation. Water savings from the efficiency improvements will be placed back into the Washington State Trust Water Right Program.

Yakama Nation On-Reservation Lower Yakima Basin Restoration Project
Lead Partner: Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation

This project addresses critical needs for the integrated conservation and restoration of fish and wildlife habitat, water quantity, and water quality on the Yakama Reservation in the lower Yakima River basin project. This project will also benefit multiple aquatic and riparian species, including chinook and sockeye salmon, Pacific lamprey, and important cultural plant species.

Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation Water Quality and Habitat Improvement Project (216)
Lead partner: Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation

The project focuses on reducing soil erosion and stream sediment by repairing or removing stream crossings, decommissioning forest roads, installing road drainage and protecting wetland/riparian areas. In addition, this project will improve range conditions through feral horse management and improve wildlife habitat for the sharp-
tailed grouse and Columbia River redband trout. Outcomes include over 50 bridge, and culvert replacements, forest road decommissioning, two large wetlands protected from head cutting, removal of feral horses and re-establishment of native grassland habitat.

Unlocking Carbon Markets for Non-Industrial Private Forest Landowners in the Pacific Northwest
Lead partner: Pinchot Institute
By aggregating landowners into groups, the American Carbon Registry (ACR) reduces transaction costs for carbon credit trading and allows small producers to participate. This project will target approximately 250 non-industrial private forest landowners in Oregon and Washington who wish to participate in a regional carbon crediting program and who possess lands in NRCS and state priority areas as defined in regional conservation strategies. Targeted parcels will be between 75 and 4,000 acres in size, with the majority being less than 250 acres. NRCS and partner assistance will cover much of the initial expense of participating in carbon projects, specifically the development of a forest management plan and subsequent implementation of pre-commercial thinning to enhance carbon stocks.

NRCS NATIONAL STAFF VISIT YAKAMA NATION CRITICAL CONSERVATION AREA - RCPP

USDA’s Deputy Under Secretary Ann Mills visited the Yakama Nation in Central Washington State to see firsthand how funds from the Regional Conservation Partnership Program will help the Yakama Tribe and communities in the Yakama Basin.

Through RCPP, NRCS is working with the tribe to accelerate the recovery of Middle Columbia Steelhead, re-charge the alluvial aquifer, reconnect over 1500 acres of floodplain, restore riparian vegetation on 7.5 miles of stream bank and improve irrigation water conservation.

By installing new irrigation piping, the reservation will save nearly 275 million gallons per year. The piping is part of a 225-square-mile irrigation project, which will help save water and decrease the amount of sediment entering waterways.

The lower tributaries of the Yakima River currently produce more than 50% of the wild steelhead population in the basin. The RCPP project, Yakama Nation On-Reservation Lower Yakima Basin Restoration Project, will benefit multiple aquatic and riparian species, including steelhead, chinook and sockeye salmon, Pacific lamprey, and culturally significant plants.

This project is complementary to a second project, the Yakima Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan Implementation. Together the two projects present a comprehensive plan for addressing Columbia Basin resource concerns at the scale of the entire Yakima River Basin. It’s working together and forging these new partnerships that will better help our environment, our economy and our daily lives.
2016 REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM- Ongoing

NRCS National Headquarters is currently conducting the proposal sign up for the 2016 funding for the RCPP. Pre-proposals are due to Washington, DC by July 8. Nationally, there is about $225 million in available funding that will go to increase or accelerate natural resources conservation activities on private agriculture and forestry operations. Tribes and other partners are eligible to apply for an NRCS contribution to help fund project proposals to address water quality and quantity issues, wildlife habitat, and other natural resource concerns.

JOINT CHIEFS LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

Since 2014, the Chiefs of US Forest Service and NRCS select projects that seek to reduce and mitigate wildfire threats, protect water quality and supply for communities and industry, and improve habitat for “at risk” or ecosystem surrogate species on public and private forest lands. Tribes have an opportunity to provide input to the services on priorities in regions or states. Tribes can also be a contributing partner on developing proposals or implementing funded projects.

This year, the Northeast Washington Initiative collaboration project area included the eastern half of the Colville reservation, all of the Kalispell reservation and all of the Spokane reservations. Each of the tribes were notified of the funding opportunity and were encouraged to apply. There is also collaboration with the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The Northeast WA Fuels Reduction project is in and around the Colville National Forest and was funded for $1.5 million. This project will reduce and mitigate wildfire threats to Colville National Forest land and adjacent private property in Ferry, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties. Accomplishing this work will also protect water quality and supply for communities and industry and protect habitat quality. FY 2015 funding: USFS - $1,000,000; NRCS - $500,000. This partnership will provide additional funds to address areas with forest health conditions due to overcrowded, damaged trees that are susceptible to increased harm from insects, disease and wildfire.

To further the success of the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership, with proactive collaboration, USFS, NRCS, and the Washington Department of Natural Resources hosted an All Lands, All Hands Forestry Workshop in Ellensburg, Washington on June 4. Nearly 80 participants attended to learn more about the opportunities for this funding and begin discussions and collaborations on potential project development. Tribes were encouraged to engage in collaborations with other partners and to help identify areas of vulnerability in the forestry resources and assist in developing future project proposals. In addition, tribal representatives discussed the common boundaries the Tribes have with the USFS and the USFS Stewardship contracts opportunities and Anchor forest concepts. Typically, project proposals are due to Washington, DC in mid-November and require submittal and approval by both USFS and NRCS.

WASHINGTON TECHNICAL NOTES UPDATED

Management” has been developed, reviewed, and will be added to the Electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG). Washington NRCS Technical Notes can be found in the center on our Washington NRCS website, eFOTG link, selecting Washington, Section 1/References List/Technical Notes by Discipline: Agronomy, Biology. These updates are provided for review to the Washington State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC).

SOIL SURVEY FOR TRIBAL LANDS

NRCS has committed to working with the Quileute Tribe to develop a soil survey on all Quileute Tribal land, including the areas recently acquired from the National Park Service. Field work begins July 2015 and will be completed by staff from the Soil Science Division in cooperation with Tribal Fish and Wildlife. The soil survey will provide detailed information about physical properties, capabilities, and limitations of soils, and will aid the Tribe in making decisions on how to most effectively manage natural resources.

Soil surveys have been completed with several Washington Tribes.

NATIONAL WATER QUALITY INITIATIVE

The National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) is a focused effort targeting financial and technical assistance to producers to address water quality issues. The NWQI uses the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) to provide financial assistance to implement conservation practices in the selected watersheds. NRCS staff and the staff of the Whatcom Conservation District provide the technical assistance to develop the conservation plans, write the conservation practice standards, and develop the engineering plans required for practice implementation.

In 2013, two watersheds in Whatcom County were selected for the NWQI program. The watersheds are Fish Trap Creek and Wiser Lake Creek and they are both part of the Nooksack River watershed. These watersheds encompass an area of 52,946 acres. Major agricultural activities include dairies, raspberries, blueberries, and corn silage. The activities underway in 2015 marks the third year for NWQI in these two watersheds. The conservation plans and individual producer contracts developed to date have been with active dairies. The focus of these conservation planning efforts has been to bring manure storage lagoons up to current specifications to improve the storage, transfer and placement of animal waste.

The goal of the National Water Quality Initiative in these two watersheds is to protect and improve water quality. The Lummi Nation, the Nooksack Tribe, Whatcom Conservation District and the Department of Ecology have all provided guidance in the development of this initiative.

WASHINGTON TRIBAL CONSERVATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

While all Washington Tribes were invited, representatives from 8 Tribes met in February to develop a strategic plan for the Tribal Advisory Council, including strategic areas, measures of success short and long term goals, milestones, and actions. The notes from that session are attached.
This core group also met in April to begin the process of the Tribal local working group. With 2 additional webinars, the core group was able to identify priority resource concerns, provide input on ranking questions, address hold down concerns for practices, and ensure that the appropriate practices included would be available for any potential projects funded.

The work of last year’s Tribal local working group resulted in $1,414,183 of EQIP for Tribal projects in 8 counties.

Over the last several months the Tribal Advisory Council was provided information on rulemaking of NRCS programs under the new farm bill. As each program was announced, information was brought to the Tribal Advisory Council to be shared with others in the Tribes they represented for input and comments.

Additionally NRCS provided a presentation to the Tribal Advisory Council and some specific Tribes (in the NRCS Northwest Team where the pilot is), and other partners regarding the Resource Stewardship Planning tool. By utilizing this planning tool, NRCS will be able to identify where a landowner is exceeding conservation on some resource management but may be falling short on other components. This will allow the land owner and NRCS focus the work to not only maintain those good conservation practices but to raise the level of conservation in areas identified as needing improvement.

**RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP EVALUATION TOOL PILOT**

Washington NRCS is currently participating in a National NRCS pilot utilizing the Resource Stewardship Evaluation (RSE) tool. Results are being communicated to National staff for further refinement of the tool. Results have been positive from customers as it is tailored to specific fields and is easy to visualize resource conditions on the document.

Objectives: Utilizing USDA NRCS assessment tools, provide a more streamlined, presentable document of land resource assessments for customers. The tool will provide a snap shot of stewardship quality on a participant’s entire farm. The tool will also provide a consistent platform for employees and customers allowing for easily recognized benchmarks of the current resource conditions.

The RSE tool will promote whole farms planning through-out the Nation and is planned to be released FY 17.

**VOLUNTARY NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION PLANS**

In an effort to gain knowledge of customers’ requests for stewardship needs and the NRCS workload demands, Washington NRCS conducted a statewide Resource Management Systems (RMS) sign-up in FY15. This sign-up provided over 100 requests for RMS plans on multiple land uses including small farms agriculture, grazing, timber, and dryland/irrigated agriculture.

The resulting demand will require NRCS staff as well as partners to assist in developing RMS plans that will provide an assessment of the resources, alternative treatments, and documenting landowner decisions for resource treatment.
The impact from the development and implementation of these plans will provide large positive impacts on resources for wildlife, forest health and fire prevention, improved grazing systems, and numerous soil, air, and water quality impacts from implementation of dry/irrigated agriculture Resource Stewardship Systems.

**NRCS/WACD TRIBAL OUTREACH TASK FORCE**

In 2013 the Washington Association of Conservation Districts partnered with NRCS to develop a Tribal Outreach Task force. Membership on this task force includes tribal representatives, conservation district employees and the NRCS state tribal liaison. The goal of the task force is to establish, increase and enhance effective communication; build partnerships to improve collective efforts, to build community locally, and to protect shared natural resources.

At the annual WACD meeting in December 2014, WACD supervisors and staff discussed potential training they would like to receive to begin partnering with Tribes or expand on current relationships and partnerships with Tribes. From the topics discussed at this meeting a draft agenda was discussed.

In March 2015 the WACD, NRCS, and Tribal representatives provided a Tribal Outreach and Partnership Training Seminar at Kiana Lodge owned by the Suquamish Tribe. Attendees included conservation district supervisors, district technical and management staff, WACD leadership and staff, WSCC Commissioners and staff, NRCS State Conservationist and State Tribal Liaison, and tribal presenters and participants. Nineteen (of 45 total statewide) conservation districts participated in the training seminar.

While this initial training was reduced to just 1 & ½ days, the agenda included discussion on treaties, Tribal sovereignty, the federal governments trust responsibility, Tribal land status, and differences in perceived values. Also, representatives from 7 Tribes provided presentations, and/or participated on panels showcasing successful partnerships.

This training was the first step in helping Conservation District supervisors and staff better understand the basics of treaties, court cases that affect Washington Tribes such as the Boldt decision. Together, presenters described how all of these form the background or landscape upon which partnerships must be grounded, and presenters’ information helped attendees to grasp some basic tenets about tribal rights, sovereignty, tribal lands, resources co-management, and historical aspects – all of which will help attendees start their partnership efforts with a better understanding and a new perspective.

Closing comments from participants included: “How can we keep this momentum going? When are we going to have the next training? This training has really helped me better understand where the Tribe nearby and that I’m interested in working with, is coming from.”

The WACD report is attached.
TEAM USDA at ATNI

USDA is organizing breakout sessions at the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) Conferences. In these sessions, Team USDA has meaningful discussions with Tribes about the needs in their community that “Team USDA” might be able to assist with in a more holistic manner.

In February, six USDA agencies and Washington State University Extension Service participated in the conference in Lincoln City, OR. In an effort to maximize effectiveness and follow-up from the sessions the Team USDA is planning to have breakout sessions at the annual and mid-year ATNI conferences. The next Team USDA session will be at the Annual ATNI conference in Spokane WA in September at Northern Quest.

Agencies were reminded that the breakout sessions are not government to government consultation. A smaller general attendance was reflected in the reduced participation of this session in February.

Attached are the notes from the February session and also from the September 2014 session.

RISK MANAGEMENT

USDA Risk Management Agency administers the Federal Crop Insurance Program and Risk Management Education Competitive Partnership Program

Crop Insurance
RMA helps to ensure that farmers and ranchers tools necessary to manage their agricultural risks, offering insurance coverage through the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation Multi-Peril Crop Insurance (MPCI) includes a subsidized premium and is available on various individual crops throughout the Spokane Region (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington).

Crop Programs Available

Apples, Barley, Blueberry, Buckwheat, Cabbage, Canola-Rapeseed, Cherry Actual Revenue History, Corn, Cranberries, Dry Beans, Dry Peas, Forage (Alfalfa) Seed, Forage Production, Green Peas, Grapes, Mint, Mustard, Nursery, Oats, Onions, Pears, Potatoes, Processing Beans, Soybeans, Sugar Beets, Stonefruit, Processing Sweet Corn, Table Grapes, Wheat, Livestock Gross Margin (Dairy Cattle, Swine), Livestock Risk Protection (Feeder & Fed Cattle, Swine, Lamb) and Whole-Farm Revenue Protection

Product Delivery

Products reinsured by RMA and approved by FCIC's Board of Directors are delivered through private crop insurance agents nationwide. Tribal owners and operators participate individually, through tribal allotments and tribal agricultural enterprises.

Education and Outreach focuses on various areas of Agricultural Risk

* Production Risks  * Legal Risks
Federal Register Proposed Rule Comment Period. “USDA Proposes New Insurance Options for Underserved and Specialty Crops.” On March 2, the Spokane RO forwarded (by email) the RMA national press release, ‘USDA Proposes New Insurance Options for Underserved and Specialty Crops.’ The announcement shares RMA’s Federal proposed rule publication and requested for comments to improve and expand crop insurance coverage for underserved crops. The email referred recipients to the Federal Register and procedures for submitting comments by April 27. As a result, tribal reservations from Spokane Region provided favorable comments to the Federal Register.

**Government-to-Government - Memorandum of Understanding**

RMA Spokane Regional Office sustains a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with two PNW Tribes. The MOU’s place an emphasis on providing leadership in assisting agriculture producers to be aware of, and participate in, needed Risk Management Agency programs. Through the MOU, both entities have a mutual goal of improving efficiency and effectiveness by putting quality first; empowering people to make decisions; demonstrating professionalism and dedication and striving for continuous improvement.

*Confederated Tribes of the Tiicham/Umatilla Indian Nation Conservation District (Pendleton, Oregon):* RMA attendance at the Conservation District’s meetings sustains and strengthens the partnership. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian includes approximately 55,000 acres of primarily dry-land wheat and peas, generally having crop insurance through tribal allotments.

*Confederated Tribes of Colville Reservation Conservation District (Nespelem, Washington):* Since the signing of the MOU, the RMA participates in several workshops on animal identification (ID), premise ID, succession-of-interest on tribal lands, financial record keeping and RMA insurance programs (e.g., Livestock Risk Protection).

**FARM SERVICES**

Administers the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

**Summary and Options**

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a partnership between the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Washington State through the Washington Conservation Commission (WCC) and Conservation Districts. The program is designed to adapt FSA’s Conservation Reserve Program to address local priorities, in this case salmonid habitat. The program primarily focuses on placing forest riparian buffers on salmon and steelhead bearing streams, although in recent years other practices have been added, such as buffers for wetlands with a hydrological connection to fish bearing streams. CREP is a voluntary, incentive-based program that encourages owners and operators of agricultural lands to enhance the riparian areas in their operations.

To date 1,368 contracts have been enrolled in CREP. That’s an increase of 255 contracts since the last report. These contracts, which are predominantly riparian buffers, cover 13,934 acres, an increase of 54 acres, and provide treatment
on approximately 800 miles of stream. The average buffer width is 142 feet. The buffers are planted to native trees and shrubs suited for the site.

Under CREP, landowners and producers can receive a signup bonus, cost shares that cover 100% of the eligible installation costs, free maintenance for the first 5 years of the contract, and annual payments equal to approximately 200% of the rental rate for the soils on the enrolled acreage. CREP contracts are 10-15 years in length and the land can be re-enrolled at contract expiration if all eligibility requirements are met. All forms of agricultural production are prohibited on enrolled land. In addition to establishing the forested buffers, cost sharing assistance is also provided to existing livestock operations for fencing and off-stream water developments.

Currently, all benefits are paid for with FSA or WCC funds. However, there is the potential for other parties to join the CREP partnership and provide incentives to encourage enrollment. Partners could include other federal or state entities, tribes, or non-governmental organizations. Benefits could be structured in a number of ways, such as sign up incentives, increased rental payments, easement purchases, increased payments for wider buffers, or “cumulative impact bonuses” (where additional payments are earned when larger, contiguous sections of stream are enrolled). Coordination of these added benefits, including confirmation that participants have met all requirements, could be provided by FSA and WCC, and funds could be administered by the contributing entity or WCC.

Changes to the program such as contributions by new partners would require an amendment to the existing CREP Agreement and approval by FSA and WCC.

In April 2015, the FSA State Executive Director and program specialist for CREP met with representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency to discuss options for program collaboration.

WASHINGTON STATE CONSERVATION COMMISSION (SCC)

In January 2015, the SCC met in Port Angles, WA. For the first time, Tribal representatives participated in this 2 day meeting. The first day was a field trip to several sites in the area, the last being the Glines Canyon Dam removal site on the Elwha River. Tribal representatives from the Jamestown S’Klallam and Makah participated in the field trip on the first day. On the second day Chairwoman Frances Charles, Lower Elwha Klallam, and Vice Chairman Grieg Arnold, Makah Tribe spoke to the SCC about what the area means to them and their Tribes. In the discussion that followed, there are many shared values and concerns for the land and the natural resources.

In March 2015, the SCC met in Lacey, WA. Squaxin Island Tribal member met with the SCC and talked about historic uses of the area.

In May 2015, the SCC met in Ellensburg, WA and Phil Rigdon, Yakama Natural Resource Director met with the SCC.

Washington State University Extension Services - information requested but nothing provided

US Forest Service – information requested but nothing provided