

State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting  
July 28, 2015

Hosted by Sherre Copeland, NRCS Partnership Liaison

Attending:

- NRCS: Roylene Rides at the Door, Jeff Harlow, Alan McBee, Rick Noble, Doug Allen, Sherre Copeland, Heidi Eisenhour, Lief Fixen, Alan Walker, Ty Meyer, Bonda Habets, Kurt Merg, Megan Stewart, Patti Playfair, Elaine Preston, Dave Kreft, Lee Hemmer, Chris Elder, Michelle Hennings, Ray Ledgerwood and Rod Hamilton. Others may have attended via webinar and this meeting is open to the public.

### **Roylene Rides at the Door, Opening Remarks**

Roylene

Thank you for your time joining in on this STAC. Thanks also to the Partners for helping getting conservation on the ground and helping us record what we are doing SRA. Solid in budget requests. We hosted the National Conservation district and was able to show case our work with other states. WA is doing great and Roylene will be our STC for years to come! Our Proactive approach to the workload and obtaining your feedback and partnership is key in our conservation effort. We had 66 applications for whole farm planning districts and commission. Working in concert with the Administrative Transformation, we have had some challenges in staffing and setting this up; however, your support and understanding helps us press forward. The next fiscal year Equip Policy deadline is Oct trying to put plans first and use a three year transition in conservation planning and training. NRCS WA received 14 pre-proposals that were subsequently reviewed, ranked and rated and now at National Headquarters. The Secretary will announce selections in September. We will not know until about January; WA competed well thanks to the partners. Roylene also mentioned that with the updated time lines, we ask the local working groups (LWGs) to meet as early as possible in the fall to receive their input for future budget proposals.

### **Dave Kreft – Sign ups and enrollments for Easement**

FY 15 ranking period cut off was May 15. Total ACEP allocation to Washington was \$1.2 mil

- ACEP Ag Land Easement allocation \$839,000
- ACEP Wetland Reserve Easement allocation \$386,012

Total requests for all FY15 ACEP program applications was \$3million+

- ACEP ALE – Received application packages from 6 cooperating entities, requesting funding for 12 parcels, totaling \$2,658,815 of federal match (NRCS)
- After ranking looking to fund 5 parcel applications totaling \$800k
- ACEP WRE received 6 applications, requesting \$416,473 (including planned restoration costs)
- After ranking looking to fund 3 applications totaling \$386k

Requested more funds, may not get more. How do we increase allocation? Perform and do well, RCPP is another avenue to get more funds in the state. Any additional funds would be targeted to RCPP area, of course.

Easement subcommittee formed for the STAC; volunteers were asked at last meeting....members cannot receive direct funding from NRCS. Plan on meeting in August via the net. If interested in being in the meeting/on committee, please let Dave Kreft know. Goal of committee is to prioritize limited easement dollars; traditional cropland preservation and also look at the grasslands, sage grouse apps, graze land, CRP coming out, etc. Regular Ag land...what needs to be preserved...we have quite diverse lands....how do we blend them to implement the program. Do we need to recruit special entities...are we missing someone? Perhaps someone from the Rangeland sector. Jack Field at WA Cattleman's association recommended by Frank O'Leary. Sherre had possible members from Methow and Whatcom County; however, both are receiving direct funding. WA Association land trust, Jeff H. has a contact...Hanna Clark. Subcommittee would be an advisory to the STC to make decisions, etc. similar to the STAC. Michael Crowder would represent WACD, etc. Ideas welcome. FYI – Jeff shared that Monica Hoover on National Team to review our Easement documents when they go into closing, etc. Monica will be a National Auditor to help WA learn from this in the next 120 days. Might be some delays in reviewing easement applications. Federal Register easement and rental agreement....that is the difference, they got split off. Help build long-range plans with this committee.

### **Rod Hamilton – Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**

Ways to become eligible for CRP is air, water quality wildlife on the land. Air quality used as a designation. A significant soil has subject to wind and volcanic materials in them erode-ability or expiring CRP. Twenty-five percent of the state cropland will be cut out of the CRP zones. Goals is to cut tucks that have a smaller percentage of the area and designate part of the state. We would rather not simply cut Air Quality....a lot of the land is flat with very little rain fall. Some of the land may not be eligible. A national directive made by the agency due to reductions, Farm Bill etc. These are more general CRP versus targeted CRP.

CRP is an objective of contracts for 10-15 years in exchange for rental agreements to put perennial coverage on the land to develop wildlife with the lands taken out of production. A high percentage of the folks would like to sign up again ... many were in for 20+ years. Max \$32 million down to \$24 million and must be below that ceiling soon.

Subset of the Air Quality have zones for Wildlife.

Lee from CD; how will this affect a county that has on-land owners with contracts already signed? Only impacts new land, but not current contracts.

Bonda shared how Air Quality is still a large part greenhouse reduced by 26% by 2016. Good to continue Air Quality and the Department of Ecology has proof the land owners are doing good stewardship and promote Air Quality and PM10.

Unsure of the final date, for CRP reduction and appreciate input from NRCS and STAC for areas to reduce. Please provide input to Rod Hamilton by **August 11**. Kurt mentioned overlay the two maps (wildlife and air quality) and take off the excess. We do not plan to cut sage grouse habits that are going well. The SAFE program recently received 12.5K acres.

Sherre clarified that should the CPA basis remain the same which is currently air quality and PM10 Soils and if it does stay the same where should we cut back to get down to the 25 percent of cropland acreage allowable and if people are not providing that now to send to Rod by August 11 via email. Sherre will send out a reminder for input to the STAC.

CRP Grassland program. What special criteria should we give ranking points for and should we target any specific areas for the state? CRP rental contract--starting sign up on Sep 1 for this program. Unfortunately not a lot of information is available at this time and a factsheet is what they have currently. Structured like CRP 15 years, grass land will target grazing lands. Producers can continue to graze the land and will have to comply with the grazing plan requirements set by NRCS. Capped at two million acres nationwide. Two things in the ranking applications will include potentially established by each state. Special ranking points, by WA can designate an **area** or we can designate **features**. Kurt and Rod communicated regarding this, see the maps provided by Kurt. Two top sage grouse; mule deer lower right, lower left Elk zone....area is growing. Mule deer is not highest ranking priority. Not sure if there is a cap on the wildlife areas, but should be. Sage Grouse would be best. Field by field appraisal can be reviewed by DFW, may slow the process and take time to review. Sage brush may be a feature to review and grassland to complement. Idea to pull together a smaller committee to come up with questions for ranking, Bonda, Kevin G., Kurt, & Rod. Have something to show the producers. Rod will share information once more criteria is available.

Lee asked about Okanogan County and Kurt said we could trim there if needed. Also Lincoln County cover sharp tails, too. Do the state lands qualify for this program?

BCAP questions. Allocations already used up. Harvest woody material burned for energy. Hall wood from 2 sources, Ag waste, national forest to address forest issues, disease or insect problems. Paid up to \$20 dollars a ton. Rod is the state contact. Applications taken each year \$180K was given this year.

Lee question on CRP – extending the grazing date? Possible, basically, when it gets close, they will make a decision. Right now through Sep 30. This may be extended if the drought continues.

**Alan McBee** – Trout Unlimited agreement know as Upper Columbia Irrigation enhancement Project— not plan on doing a sign up; a very specific project. Five identified in the Okanogan, area, funding through EQIP to work with eligible producers to do larger scale delivery systems and improve the amount of water kept in streams. All five are similar; three are different 30566 program will require watershed assessments. Will help with design and construction of these within five years. How will we spend the money in the first year by the end of the fiscal year?

Yakama Nation already identified specific projects; no RCPP at this time. Proposing Salmon habitat and restoration; between nine and twelve projects; system habit improvement projects all occurring on the Yakama reservation. Through the EQIP, potential producers this is what we are doing.

**Doug Allen** – Colville confederated tribe \$4 million overall next three to five years. Primary objectives are to replace culverts, bridges, habitat areas disturbed by horses. Wetlands. Requesting waiver for the sign up and planning to get contracts set up this year. Moving quickly. Palouse Watershed...anything that drains in the Palouse River. Seven to ten conservations districts included. Several organization involves \$8 to \$9 million in next five years. Primarily promote farm smart, direct seed, recurring buffer habitat along the watershed and tributaries. Delaying sign up to determine what practices eligible,

working to roll out in Oct. and CSP is part of the agreement. Spring or early summer to roll out that part. Easement is part of this as well.

Alan Walker – do we feel for how many were included in the fires for the Yakama? Some are and culverts, distributed by roads, scattered. Not sure if this part is within the fires and costs may be increased because of the fires. Alan mentioned this is something to consider. Doug agreed and mentioned Environmental Trust is doing most of the planning, and they are the leads.

**Rick Noble** – Western WA shared that two RCPP agreement sign ups already conducted, also working with OR. Forest land owners, unlocking forest land. Goal is to get carbon sequestration. RCPP develop forest management plans. Large geographic area southwest WA up to Puget Sound. Sign up moving great and anticipate future sign ups within the next three years.

Precision conservation for Salmon and Water Quality--WSSC; early watersheds, ranking criteria identifying, focus area, no sign up this year, hoping to get going by early fall. Potential for EQIP and Easement funding.

- 2016 Competition –
  - Preproposals applications were due July 8.
  - Announcement of selected preproposals will be September 4, 2015
  - Full proposal applications are due November 10, 2015
  - Announcement of selected full proposal is in January 2016
  - The 2016 RCPP agreement will be sign by – a date is to be determined

### **Doug Allen - LWG Pools**

EQIP LWG Pool is the largest. Around the state we have ten LWG and also a Tribal LWG that is made up of 27 tribes. NRCS local level for FY16 to formulate budget request with all the LWG inputs. State and National initiatives a lot of the information helps provide our justifications. This will help us to receive funding similar to last year. Also contributes to the development of contracts and treatment on the land. Agreement with commission to be involved this year and get idea on improving the LWG process. Looking forward to receiving the reports on where they are with these results to incorporate and make improvements. The LWG will need to meet sooner to help us adjust prior to January. As Roylene mentioned, this fall would be best to give input and feedback for the Presidents' budget for FY17 and FY18. We will share the breakdown for FY16 soon.

EQIP – National and State 13.8 mil dedicated – more this year than next, we are being heard!

Beginning Farmer and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers Pool. Receiving applications; if applicable here then they do not go to the LWG pool. CAP allows participants to sign up for pest management, forest, others using TSPs to develop the plans established by National and are funded.

Organic Transitioning is 5%

High Tunnel separated into three different pools to cover more of the state. 6% several applications were received.

Energy program \$2.5 million dollars. CAP is auto funded. Remainder of the funds implemented in practices. Additional funds were requested and not sure of the outcome at this time.

Tribal LWG Pool – some major changes this year to the Tribal LWG – one change to pool eligibility anyone within the tribal boundaries or members outside of the reservation boundaries are eligible for the Tribal Pool. Identified four resource concerns wildlife habitat, water quality degradation, degraded plant conditions and inefficient water use. Tribes will rank these within their applications and may be different for other tribes. Placed more weight to application that have not been funded within last three years. Made a split for tribal governments and individual members would apply for other applications to allow greater opportunities to the members.

Jeff Harlow noted that the On Farm Energy is one of our most popular with \$3 million in applications received. For Air Quality, over \$5 million in applications received and we had 71 applications received for the High tunnels. Doug added we have designated areas in the state eligible for Air Quality basically the PM10 type and also some areas Greenhouse gas areas in Yakima and Bonda noted we had some on the west side of the state as well.

**Rick Noble:** National Water Quality initiative. Five percent dedicated to encompass water sheds, fish traps in Watcom County working a couple of years also working with dairy, waste management. Good demand for this opportunity. We received \$2 million last year and on tract for same this year. Land owner interest high and success participation. EQIP tailor the use of the funding toward National Water Quality. Noted LWG input very helpful for future funding requests.

Wild fire and storm damage \$400K put in pool and 60 applications. Centered on Okanogan part of the state. Making these as flexible as possible...thanks for the ideas. FY 16 special projects gleaned from the LWG to develop cover crop needs, studies, and future directions funds; precept zones and on the ground trials. Watershed level planning RC concerns, funding still may be coming. Plan to review LWG special projects, etc. cease opportunities for funding.

Joint Chief Program to address water quality, habitat, federal state and water plan, State DNR. Met in June will accept ideas to work with people who are interested in submitting proposals in this area. Example: **Doug shared** that the official name of the funded project is: Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Project. In the north east part of the state fuels reduction program \$1.5 million in financial assistance with \$1 million of those dollars going toward the Forest Service to utilize within federal lands and DNR got a grant for additional \$500K state and private lands additionally we received \$500K for thinning practices/treatment and some wildlife treatment. Priority given to Kalispell reservation and housing urban areas. DNR doing a lot of the work in that section and another in Ferry country and the Forest Service priority north of Republic for treating fuel. To get it cleaned up to take care of the diseased areas, thinning and forest practices. Stevens country near the Canadian border...priority given to the treatment areas mentioned. We are able to fund eleven contracts NRCS handles the private lands of 20 acres or more and DNR is focused on the areas that are under 20 acres--good Partnership. Fuels reduction primary object. Request \$500K for next couple of years. Should hear by this fall if funding is received.

All Hand workshop was held in Ellensburg to talk about additional forestry practices and things we need to do or projects and several groups may be working on proposals to put together for the Joint Chiefs to review this fall. Sherre thanked Doug for mentioning the All Hands workshop noting that we are hoping

that any partnership groups that are talking about doing a proposal for the fall, would submit a one-page synopsis of what they want to do by mid-August. We have a contact in each agency in USDA Forest Service, NRCS and DNR who are entertaining those proposal and ensuring the coordination between the agencies to be fully vetted and prepared prior to the fall. We should get the word for submitting actual projects in October or November.

Alan Walker – noted the insect and disease issue the Mt Pine Bark beetle in the Kettle Range is pretty significant and the thunderstorms caused fires are burning...helping with fuels reduction...Mother Nature is taking care of several thousand acres.

STAC reviews gaps in Resources Concerns to provide to Roylene from the LWG projections for our funding requests. On a statewide perspective. These will be put on the STAC Website for feedback or gaps in resource concerns or directions of recommendations for funding to propose to Roylene. May also be some statewide issues that may not flow up through the LWG process that you want us to address or to project into our funding requests.

### **Bonda Habets – EPA Clarification of “Waters of the US”**

2001 & 2006 – Bonda read the “Clean Water Rule for Agriculture” – see handout FACT Sheet.

Defining the rule: page 2 – what it does not do, what it does do. Posted on the EPA website. When permits required and to update the language.

The Rule Does Not: Protect any types of waters that have not historically been covered by the Clean Water Act. The Rule Does Not: Add any new requirements for agriculture. The Rule Does Not: Interfere with or change private property rights. The Rule Does Not: Regulate most ditches. The Rule Does Not: Change policy on irrigation or water transfers. The Rule Does Not: Address land use. The Rule Does Not: Cover erosional features such as gullies, rills and non-wetland swales. The Rule Does Not: Include groundwater, shallow subsurface floor and tile drains.

Michelle, WAWG, is doing a white paper on how this impacts WA Wheat Farmers. Support NRCS funding and farmers credit and educate HR 732 rewrite regulation—paper will be provided. We could also post on the website. Should be good for all growers.

Lee - thought EPA has too much latitude and interpretative powers.

Concerned they will make a final rule by the end of August.

### **Jeff Harlow - Revised Program Timelines**

Application batch date (cutoff) is October 16, 2015 for the FY16 (previous cutoff was July 17).

Other Dates of interest:

NWQ, Sept 14; NAQI, Oct 14; NE Fuels Reduction Aug 14; Pendro Institute Aug 14; 100% EQIP Pools, conservation stewardship program (CSP) FY 15 general sign up obligated end of Aug.

Obligations due end of December; fall EQIP wrapped up; easements by Sep 24 and RCPP deadlines Sep, Nov, and Jan. Thanks again for input—very important.

### **State Resource Assessment (SRA) – Sherre Copeland**

Since Peter Bautista was working with the Civil Rights Assessment Team, Sherre touched on the large National SRA budget we recently received. She explained the difference between National SRA and the State SRA. National's report covered 3 years utilizing our input, etc. Whereas the State SRA only covers 1 year and includes information from LWG & STAC for particular budget usage and projections in the state. The National SRA will need to be broken down to relevant information to be useful for partners. The WA State SRA coordinates with LWG and STAC to develop the budget and project deadlines; update process is under development with the WSCC reviewing short comings and future plans. Lots of good input; some were not involved and did not understand how the SRA was used; now we will develop strategy to better engage in completing/updating the State SRA. This will then feed into the three-year budget and help us continue to be proactive rather than reactive. Additional information will be provided at the next meeting.

### **Around the Room**

Lee – asked if cultural resources addressed to shortened time on EQIP contract? Roylene shared that the SHIPO signed and they were good to go--the exemption list remains the same. Headquarters did not renew the National Agreement; State Agreement built without an umbrella from National Headquarters. SHIPO very willing to work with us. We contracted and ensured consultation for 30 days with the tribes with four responses and also working with Umatilla's concerns. SHIPO was impressed and signed the agreement. We are one of the first of five states to have ours completely done.

Alan W. – as a user found our State Conservationist, Roylene, to be very approachable which helps greatly and found our staff to be very positive and that everyone provides issues and processes across the board.

Dave Vogel – Does NRCS question EPA intentions? Working with EPA for clarification, etc. Roylene mentioned that Leonard Jordan is the lead and others are working with the EPA to discuss needs. Leonard is very engaged as this goes forward. Some practices exempt from the policy; no changes but helps clarify where we are supposed to be. The five year standard may change, can be complex.

Meeting adjourned at noon and the next STAC meeting is September 22, 9:30 am to 3:00 pm.