

**October 20, 2015 Oregon/Idaho NRCS Tribal Advisory Council
Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians**

Attendees

Members: Jason Robison (Cow Creek), host; Mike Wilson (Grand Ronde), Mike Kennedy (Siletz), Jason Kesling (Burns Paiute), Katherine Minthorn-Goodluck (IAC, Tiichum Conservation District)

NRCS Staff: Ron Alvarado, Oregon State Conservationist; Loren Unruh, Programs Lead ; Bari Williams, Easement Program Specialist; and Kathy Ferge, Oregon State Office. Presenting via teleconference, Scott Oviatt, Snow Survey Supervisory Hydrologist.

Guests: Gerald Rainville, Cow Creek Board of Directors

Welcome from Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Indians

Jason Robison welcomed the attendees to the meeting and introduced tribal board of directors member Gerald Rainville.

Tour Comments

Jason provided a quick synopsis of the October 19 tour of Cow Creek cattle operation and ranch, including the visit with John McAfferty, tribal economic development director. Jason shared the three areas the tribe considers in planning: economics/business, environment and culture. Through good business planning the tribe was able to avert a potential \$6 million loss in the cattle operation.

Additional comments by tour goers included:

- Impressed by the holistic management of the K-Bar ranch—planning that supports cattle, hay, elk, and deer; culture, economics, environment
- Reclamation work for ag lands (hillside clearing) was a different approach than had been seen
- Importance of the tribe's story, emphasis of both restoration and history and culture
- The business checks and balances that allowed management to save the tribe from a \$6 million loss
- Dramatic positive change to the tribal garden both on the land and in financial management. Excited to see the future of the native plant portion of the garden
- Proximity of cattle operation to I-5, presents opportunity to share the good work of the tribe
- Take a look at CSP and other NRCS programs, seems like there's a lot that can be funded on the ranch
- K-Bar ranch was featured at IAC national convention four years ago. It would be good to have an update at the 2016 national convention.
- Land use planning, use of 5-year Strategic plan important to success for management and outside funding opportunities.

Tribal Advisory Council

The regular meeting of the Tribal Advisory Council was then opened by State Conservationist Ron Alvarado.

Agricultural Act of 2014: A programmatic update

Loren Unruh gave an update on Farm Bill programs and encouraged tribal partners to explore the breadth of NRCS programs.

Overview of 2015

Easement programs

ALE: 6 applications received 3 projects funded (~16,000 acres for \$2.4 million)

WRE: 8 applications received 2 projects funded (~13,000 acres for \$3.7 million)

These are competitive programs with identified priority areas. Applications are ranked and there was one tribal application submitted.

Environmental Quality Incentive Program

500 contracts covering over 500,000 acres for over \$16 million

6 tribes with 8 contracts received over \$393,000 participation includes funding for both Conservation Implementation Strategies and Sage Grouse Initiative.

There is an increased interest in forestry related CIS projects. These include: forest health (stand improvement), habitat, fire abatement, thinning and slash treatment, fire prevention.

There are several projects that are working within the public/private interface. These are collaborative projects involving US Forest Service, Oregon Department of Forestry, NRCS, and private land owners. There are currently 2, Two Chiefs projects (USFS and NRCS), the East Face project located on the east face of the Elkhorn Mountains in eastern Oregon and Ashland Forest All-Lands Restoration Project (AFAR).

Mike Wilson noted that the Grand Ronde have a fire prevention program managed by the tribe on tribal lands.

Jason Robison noted the Tribal Forest Protection act utilizes a whole watershed approach to forestry management.

Conservation Stewardship Program

Loren described the CSP as utilizing the base conservation efforts implemented under a program such as EQIP and providing additionality by increasing the number of new conservation practices. This program works under 5 year contracts with the landowner providing annual self-certification that the enhancements were employed.

In 2015 there were 120 new CSP contracts for a total of 300,000 acres for \$2 million. This included one tribe with two contracts that received ~\$400,000. There 214 renewals for \$ 5million.

Loren provided a PowerPoint that outlined program changes beginning in 2016. It is anticipated that the changes will increase ease of program management and implementation. The application process will be similar to that of EQIP and enhancements will more closely align with practices found in the Field Office Technical guide. These changes will apply to new contracts in 2016.

Jason Kesling noted the Burns Paiute tribe have signed up for CSP and had a question as to what that means. Loren explained that most NRCS programs take continuous sign ups. This means even though an application is outside of the program processing window it will be accepted by a field office. When the processing window opens applications which have been received will be processed and the landowner notified. Loren encouraged Jason to check in with the field office to ensure smooth processing.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Loren emphasized Oregon's success in receiving RCPP awards. For 2015, the first year of the program, six proposals were selected for funding. In 2016, 12 preproposals were submitted from Oregon partners. Of those 10 were asked to complete final proposals. Final proposals are due at national headquarters November 10. Basin Team Leaders are the point people for the program. It is important for partners to connect with BTLs as they are preparing preproposals. Those awards that have been selected for funding came from partners who worked closely with NRCS.

Loren reminded tribal partners that RCPP is a partner-driven program, funding is focused on a specific resource issue (not for staffing per se). The CIS planning process used by Oregon dovetails well with the RCPP requirements. Currently there are no Oregon tribes with an RCPP award. However, Warm Springs is a participant in the Ochoco project. Burns Paiute noted there is an Idaho Power RCPP project that involves the upper Snake River tribes.

Ron also encouraged tribes to work with their Basin Team Leaders and utilize other NRCS staff to assist in planning projects. The goal is to assist partners in the development of successful projects.

Program Timelines

Kathy Ferge stressed the importance of being aware of NRCS program timelines. It is especially important to tribal partners since the Board/Council approval process may take added time.

CSP – not announced yet, expecting a December/January cutoff date

EQIP (CIS) – January 15 1st cutoff, April 15 2nd cutoff

Easements – November 18 1st cutoff, May 8 2nd cutoff

Easement Programs

Bari Williams gave a PowerPoint presentation to highlight the NRCS easement programs. The programs fall under the title of Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. Within this category there are two programs Wetland Reserve Easements and Agricultural Lands Easements. She noted there are currently two Oregon tribes with easements. The Technical Advisory Committee has identified priority areas for the state.

For additional information please refer to presentation and hand out which accompanies the notes.

Water Supply: End of Year Wrap Up and Expectations for 2016

Scott Oviatt gave a synopsis of the 2015 water year and projections for 2016. October 2015 is already one of the driest on record. For a copy of the presentation please refer to the pdf which accompanies the notes.

Climate Change Discussion

Kathy Ferge encouraged tribal participants to share how climate change is impacting their tribe and how the Natural Resource Departments are planning to address those issues.

- Upper Snake River Tribes (includes Burns Paiute) received BIA funds for Climate Change planning.
- CTUIR elders noticed change in timing for gathering of roots and berries. By the time gatherers got out some plants had come and gone or the quality/quantity was compromised.
- Siletz noticed the same, basically harvest season moved up a month. Received a 2-year grant from BIA to study impact to shell fish resources.
- Cow Creek have also received BIA adaptation mitigation funding to assist with planning specific to climate change.
- Grand Ronde received BIA funding to observe trends on fish runs in key locations including Willamette Falls. Concerned with high water temperatures and fish die off. Also receding lakes and potential exposure to culturally significant sites.
- Concerns also expressed regarding fish die off in Columbia River, establishing earlier feast dates, longer frost free periods.

West Region Tribal Advisory Council

Jason Robison distributed the notes from the West Region Tribal Advisory Council meeting. He noted much of the focus was on needs of the Alaska Natives and that there are a number of conservation districts within the state. He asked on the status of conservation districts in Oregon. Katherine noted that Warm Springs has an inactive district. CTUIR has the Tiichum Conservation District. Benefits can include: bringing tribal voice to resource concerns, promote culture, can hold easements.

Not all states have Tribal Advisory Councils. Jason commended Oregon on its work with the Council. He also noted that the logistics for the Regional Tribal Advisory meetings are problematic. Travel information is not presented to attendees in a timely fashion and follow up is not conducted well.

Signature Authority Challenges

There have been several tribal contracts which posed a challenge either in understanding what was needed in terms of documenting appropriate signature authority or in actually gathering the appropriate signature to meet NRCS timelines. NRCS can do a better job of explaining required timelines and what constitutes appropriate signature authority. It was noted that one way of handling signature authority was designating that authority through tribal board or council at project introduction, e.g. DNR receives authority up to a certain dollar amount. Another way to address the issue is once project is approved by the board our council designating tribal chair signature authority so the contract doesn't have to return to the entire council. Ron A. noted that depending on the program the State Conservationist may have some flexibility to extend extra time to gather signature/s for contracts.

Round Robin

Siletz – submitted a WRE application, project was denied due to lack of hydric soil; are on their 3rd EQIP contract which was highlighted as an NRCS Success Story.

Cow Creek—in the process of conducting landscape level planning, looking at fuels reduction projects, working with USDA agencies (FSA, NRCS) is new to the tribal board, connecting with the agencies will help alleviate concerns in working with them. Waiting for Congress to approve the land conveyance bill. Includes property for Cow Creek, Coquille and Coos, Lower Umpqua, Suislaw.

Grand Ronde—working on a forested meadow EQIP project to develop habitat for elk and other wildlife.

Burns Paiute—EQIP SGI contract, Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) for fish tracking technology, working on CREP mid-management practices, is interested in CSP, EQIP on new property in Grant County.

Intertribal Agriculture Council

Regional meeting was well attended and had a full slate of programs featuring various USDA agency and tribal ag/natural resource success stories.

National meeting runs December 7 – 10—Seeking delegate to represent OR, ID, WA needs a formal resolution to run. Elections take place during the annual meeting. In addition to the annual meeting and ag/natural resource presentations there is a youth conference. Tribes are encourage to send their youth.

Next meeting

Hosted by Burns Paiute in John Day, 1st week in May. Jason K. will try to set up a tour. Kathy will work on meeting logistics.

