

# Local Working Group Meeting Minutes

1/28/2025

9:00am-12:00pm

Parkdale Field Office, Conference Room

6780 Hwy 35, Mt. Hood Parkdale, OR 97041

## *Welcome and Introductions*

NRCS staff: Carly Heron, Damon Brosnan, Jenn Eatwell, Cal Dwyer

HRSWCD staff: Kris Schaedel, Cheryl Rice, Brian Nakamura

ODF staff: Kristin Dodd, Chase Duncan, Jaime Gonzalez

Wy'east RC&D staff: Dara Morantes, Jackie Solomon, Anna Peach

Irrigation districts: Ben Bronson (MFID), Steve Pappas (EFID), Megan Saunders (FID)

Other attendees: Lissa Biehn (FSA), Andrew Spaeth (HRFC), Cullen Bryant (BPS), Mike McCarthy (McCarthy Family Farm)

## *NRCS Program Review:*

Carly reviewed the FY24 EQIP programs for Hood River County:

### *a) What happened in 2024*

#### 1) Pollinator/Beneficial cross county CIS continued

-3 Pollinator/beneficials contracts funded for a total of \$25,485.

#### 2) Continued AQ funding

-2 Air Quality contracts for \$262,984.

#### 3) Reinstated Middle Fork Irrigation District CIS utilizing waterSMART Initiative funds

-Irrigation projects with IRA and MFID waterSMART funds totaled \$533,457.

#### 4) Hood River Forest Health and Resiliency CIS

-Forestry projects funded via IRA contracts totaled \$221,962

5) Farmer's Irrigation District on-farm upgrades continued

*b) What's current?*

1) EQIP-active CIS's as well as new EFID waterSMART grant and potential Joint Chiefs forestry project

Carly reviewed plans for FY25 contracts: 14 Forestry applications, 2 Air quality applications, 10 applications for East Fork and Middle Fork irrigation district pools, and no applications were received for the Farmer's Irrigation District pool this year.

2) Opportunities for small farms/organics-Jennifer Eatwell

Jenn explained the small farms and organics program. She oversees three programs in EQIP: the food security initiative, the high tunnel initiative, and the Organic Transition Initiative. The food security initiative's goal is to increase accessibility of food to local communities. Main practices include irrigation improvements, high tunnels, cover crops, mulching. Jenn shared a map of local food deserts in Oregon. She shared a high tunnel fact sheet and high tunnel program information. She reviewed the Organic Initiative and the Organic Transition Initiative. Program requirements: certified organic, organic transition, or exempt. Small farms applications are ranked against other applicants in the basin.

A question was asked of what is a "small farm?" Jenn explained there is no designation/definition for what is considered a small farm.

A question was asked of income limits to qualify. Jenn explained the producer must have an AGI of less than \$900,000.

*c) What's next?*

1) Potential for RCPP – Oregon Ag Trust working on potential RCPP

2) Conservation Stewardship Program

Carly shared about a future meeting with the Oregon Ag Trust for potential RCPP programming.

Mike shared that most properties in the area are 40% farm, 60% forest, with significant streams, dry valleys, water, fish, forest, farm conservation easement program and RCPP programming would be beneficial.

Carly asked the group if there are any needs in the community for future funding.

Mike shared about a forestry burning project attempt to make biochar in a shipping container. Mike expressed the need to have a biochar burner available for the community.

Andrew expressed that there are many projects with a need for a curtain burner for orchard waste. He asked if NRCS has a program to cover the cost.

Carly explained there is a program called CIG to provide grants to do new and outside-of-the-box projects. NRCS can not write the grants but can provide information to producers to write their own grant.

Kris added that there are stringent restrictions for permits for curtain burners because they are a point source of pollution.

There was also concern about the small sizing of a container and the large amount of materials needing burning.

Kristen Dodd explained ODF's interest in RCPP for prescribed fire practices.

Damon explained that RCPP is a grant where a partner can apply for funds to carry out conservation at a large scale. NRCS has expressed interest in prescribed burning on a larger scale. The central Oregon District would be the first district to apply the practice. The practice would also include fuels reduction. Funding match is required. A technical writer is writing the proposal. Hood River and Wasco counties would be included in the footprint. Damon expressed the large need for prescribed burning. All projects would be on private lands. Forest Service and BLM are both excited about the opportunity.

Andrew asked how many years the RCPP would be for. Damon replied they are looking at a 10 year window for the project, with hopes that momentum will keep it going.

Kristen shared about ODF's other projects that they provide. They allocate state-funded grant programs to private landowners for fuels treatment. Cutting, limbing, underbrush reduction, and mastication. Programs in Hood River county include: fuels reduction around homes and the Western States grant for defensible space around homes. She shared that the community outreach events, and sign-up lists are helpful in getting applicants.

Kris pointed out the importance for forestry practices to align with oak restoration practices.

Kristen noted appreciation for the SWCD mobile chipping program model and the benefits of agencies working together on projects.

*FSA Programs-Lissa Biehn*

Lissa explained FSA's role and programs. FSA has an organic cost-share program. The Emergency Forest Restoration Program is available and open until April 4<sup>th</sup> for help with restoration post-fire. Disaster programs are available for cost-offsetting. FSA in Wasco County Spent \$3 million last week for the market program. Lissa mentioned a need to get producers in the door to make sure that they fill out their paperwork properly.

Carly and Lissa expressed appreciation for everyone working together on sign-ups.

Kris informed irrigation districts that SWCD funding can cover all of the cost of irrigation materials but not labor, and there must be a demonstratable water savings.

Kris shared that they spread awareness about SWCD's programs at grower's events, newsletters, trainings, and workshops. Getting in front of growers at their events are good places to spread information about programs.

Mike expressed appreciation that the NRCS, ODF, FSA, and SWCD programs are great to work with, but growers are not making profits. Others supported that farmers are financially hurting.

Wy'east RC&D explained the programs that they have available: REAP, Resiliency programs, feasibility studies, and the E-Farms program.

Carly appreciated everyone for coming and contributing to the meeting.