



**Tillamook County Local Work Group Meeting
February 20, 2025**



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The meeting was called to order by Thomas Gehrkins at 10:04 A.M.

Those in attendance were:

Thomas Gehrkins, Natural Resources Conservation Service District Conservationist
Jeremy Mills, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Soil Conservationist
Dee Robinson, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Program Assistant
Michele Long, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Partner Biologist
Ray Monroe, Tillamook Soil and Water Conservation District, District Manager
Michael Blankenship, Tillamook Soil and Water Conservation District, Water Quality
and Invasive Weeds Technician
Rudy Fenk, Tillamook Soil and Water Conservation District, Director
Walter Porter, Tillamook Soil and Water Conservation District, Director
David Wells, Oregon Natural Forestry
Jan Stewart-Wells, Oregon Natural Forestry
Mitchell Cummings, Natural Resources Conservation Service, District Conservationist
Emeritus

Thomas Gehrkins welcomed everyone to the meeting.

He explained that the purpose of the meeting is to receive agency and public input on agricultural interests and natural resources issues to help guide the conservation efforts of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Tillamook County.

He then explained that the NRCS provides both financial assistance and technical advice.

He explained that financial assistance is organized at the national, state, and basin level.

National Initiatives include Organic, High Tunnel, On-Farm Energy, and Easement Programs.

State Initiatives include Animal Feeding Operations, Western Oregon Wildfire Emergency Stabilization, and Emergency Animal Mortality Management

Basin Initiatives include Basin-Wide Animal Feeding Operations (AFO), Forest Health, and Soil Health.

Finally, there is the Nehalem River Water Quality Conservation Implementation Strategy (CIS) which starts in 2025 and is scheduled to run until 2028.

Thomas Gehrkins then discussed the Lower Willamette/North Coast Basin Forest Resiliency CIS.

The focus area for 2025 is private forestland in the Tillamook Bay Watershed.

After developing a Forest Management Plan (FMP), assistance may be available to help implement conservation activities including Pre-commercial Thinning, Tree Planting and Site Preparation, Brush Management, and Herbaceous Weed Control.

Thomas Gehrkins said that he is planning to move the Forest Health Conservation Implementation Strategy from the Tillamook Bay watershed to southern Tillamook County in 2026.

Next, Thomas Gehrkins discussed the North Coast Lower Willamette Basin Animal Feeding Operation (AFO) Initiative.

A current Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) is required before applying for implementation practices. Eligible practices include manure management, nutrient management, roof runoff structures, and heavy use pads.

Thomas Gehrkins then summarized 2024 NRCS financial assistance in Tillamook County.

NRCS received 31 applications and funded 14 contracts. During Fiscal Year 2024, NRCS obligated \$343,574.50 and made \$456,681.29 in payments. 440 acres were treated.

Thomas Gehrkins then introduced the 2025 to 2028 Nehalem Water Quality Conservation Implementation Strategy (CIS). This CIS seeks to improve water quality and riparian habitat of the Nehalem River watershed to improve conditions for coho (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) and other native fish species within the watershed. Reducing soil erosion, eradication of invasive vegetation and restoration of riparian vegetation are important goals of this project. The CIS covers the Nehalem River Watershed in Tillamook, Clatsop, Columbia, and Washington Counties. Primary resource concerns addressed are water quality, riparian habitat, and aquatic habitat for salmonids.

Thomas Gehrkins then provided examples of the technical advice that NRCS can provide including regenerative agriculture, cover crops, crop care advice, and horticultural advice.

After ending his presentation, Thomas Gehrkins requested ideas from the audience on how to improve NRCS programs in Tillamook County.

Michael Blankenship said that planting after Japanese knotweed removal is a need that the Tillamook Soil and Water Conservation District has identified.

Michael Blankenship said that virtual fencing was an emerging technology that he thought farmers may be interested in.

Thomas Gehrkins explained that there was an application for virtual fencing with a farmer in southern Tillamook County.

Walter Porter asked about Japanese knotweed removal in the Nehalem watershed.

Michael Blankenship said that the Tillamook Soil and Water Conservation District had done spot control in the Nehalem watershed. The district's Japanese knotweed control program started in southern Tillamook County and was progressing north. Currently, the district was working on Japanese knotweed in the Trask River watershed.

Michael Blankenship explained that Japanese knotweed was a B listed weed with the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Walter Porter asked about Scotch broom.

Michael Blankenship explained that Scotch broom was also a B listed weed with the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Michele Long explained that the Nehalem River Conservation Implementation Strategy was designed to improve Japanese knotweed control in the Nehalem River watershed. By working with the watershed councils, the Natural Resource Conservation Service could work with landowners in the Nehalem Watershed while the district continues working in the Tillamook Bay watershed.

Michael Blankenship said that an issue with Japanese knotweed control was access. Because it grows on river banks, he needs a boat to reach Japanese knotweed.

Walter Porter said that Japanese knotweed can be controlled by cattle grazing.

Thomas Gehrkins agreed and said that a farmer in the Nehalem River watershed was doing so.

Michele Long said that Japanese knotweed needs ongoing attention and active management by the landowner.

Ray Monroe clarified that Japanese knotweed was not a primary weed of concern for the Tillamook Soil and Water Conservation District. The district has five priority weeds. The Japanese knotweed control program is a separate, grant funded effort.

Thomas Gehrkins said that a goal of creating the Tillamook Bay Conservation Implementation Strategy was to complement the work that the district was doing on Japanese knotweed in the Tillamook Bay watershed.

Ray Monroe said that it was good to have funding to assist landowners in managing Japanese knotweed. Financial assistance allows landowners to invest in control measures and take risks that they could not afford on their own.

Michele Long reiterated the need for long term control of Japanese knotweed by landowners.

Thomas Gehrkins replied that the goal was to assist landowners in initial control while developing the skills for long term control.

Ray Monroe said that an ongoing problem that the Tillamook Soil and Water Conservation District has seen is communicating with absentee and small acreage landowners.

Thomas Gehrkins said that the Natural Resources Conservation Service prioritizes outreach to new landowners.

Michele Long said that the Tillamook County Assessor's Office once had a program where they provided information packets to new landowners that included some resource information. It is unknown if this is still being provided.

David Wells asked if there are cost limits on Technical Advice.

Thomas Gehrkins said that the NRCS would provide as much technical assistance as landowners need.

David Wells said that he had heard that Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife may be delisting coho salmon.

Ray Monroe replied that listed species are not necessary to enable conservation.

Michele Long said that rather than managing for single species the emphasis should be on protecting ecosystems.

Ray Monroe emphasized that clean water is a priority for the district.

Thomas Gehrkins replied that water quality will always be a priority for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in a place with ten feet of rainfall per year.

Thomas Gehrkins said that he wanted to bring new crops and ideas to Tillamook County.

Michael Blankenship said that he believed that we needed workshops on new forages and cover crops. He said that workshops are most effective when they are held on a farm and other farmers can see how a practice is implemented.

Michele Long said that farmers seem to prefer to continue farming in ways that they have done in the past and can be resistant to change.

Walter Porter explained that farmers were concerned about increased expenses and labor. Farmers need to know that new practices are cost effective before implementing them.

Ray Monroe said that Oregon State Extension Service had not done as much outreach since Troy Downing retired.

Michele Long said that smaller operators struggle to implement new practices.

Ray Monroe discussed the consolidation in the dairy industry. He said that there had been 468 dairy farms and that there were now 60 dairy farms.

Ray Monroe then said that he appreciated the NRCS North Coast Basin plan and that it aligned with the priorities that the district has.

Thomas Gehrkins said that an important issue identified in the North Coast Basin plan was food security. High tunnels were an important practice for improving local food security.

David Wells said that this was the second year of the Oregon Private Forest Accord. He has heard that the Oregon State Governor's Office has said that there is not money for assisting landowners that was expected when the Private Forest Accord was agreed to. This means that forest landowners may be coming to the NRCS for financial assistance with roads and culverts

Thomas Gehrkins replied that this was the last year of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program for fish passage. Without partners the program could not continue.

Michael Blankenship said that the obstacles to implementing fish passage projects need to be identified.

Thomas Gehrkins said that permitting was an issue for fish passage due to the number of agencies involved. There is also the cost of engineering and design.

Walter Porter said that he was concerned about fire risk due to less active management on federal lands.

David Wells replied that Oregon was number 2 in the nation for the FireWise program. He discussed fire mitigation efforts in Bay City due to their proximity to the Tillamook State Forest.

Thomas Gehrkins adjourned the meeting at 11:03 A.M.

Topics we will be focusing on are:

NRCS Statewide Initiatives Available in Tillamook County:

National Initiatives: Organic

High Tunnel

On-Farm Energy Easement
Programs

State Initiatives: Animal Feeding Operations

Western Oregon Wildfire Emergency Stabilization Emergency
Animal Mortality Management

Basin CIS's: Basin Animal Feeding Operations Forest
Diversity (location for implementation of
practices being considered for relocation)

Tillamook County CIS: Nehalem River Water Quality 2025-2028

Lower Willamette/North Coast Basin Strategies:

Forest Resiliency– Focus area this year is private forestland in the Tillamook Bay Watershed. Practices include Forest Management Plans, Pre-commercial thinning, Brush management, Tree/Shrub establishment and many others. A Forest Management Plan must be in place before implementation practices can be applied for Basin-Wide Animal Feeding Operation – Waste Storage facilities and roofs have been added practices this year. A current CNMP is a required for eligibility before implementation practices can be applied for. We have a local North Coast/Lower Willamette basin funding pool, so we don't need to compete state- wide for project funding.

Tillamook Strategies:

Tillamook/Nestucca Watershed Function – on year 4 and is Continuation from the Two-Chiefs projects. Focus area includes Tillamook Bay Drainage and South Tillamook County. Funding will be available for three years. Culverts/Bridges will be one of the main practices. Some of the additional practices include fencing, off-stream watering, access road, Channel stabilization, pipeline, water troughs and others. Two Hundred Thousand available for projects this year.

2024 Program Summary for Tillamook Co.

Received 31 applications; funded 14 contracts.

During the Fiscal Year 2024 Obligated \$343,574.50 and made \$456,681.29 in payments. Treated 440+ acres

Currently Identified Resource Concerns:

Water Quality – addressing with AFO funding pool as well as watershed function
Locally Sourced Food Supply – High Tunnel initiative

Fish Passage – actively working for past 10 years to address this concern

Forest Health –Focusing on getting FMP's for local landowners. Practices are being applied.

Air Quality – Worked with air quality in past CIS.

Current Focus for Partners:

For questions or Concerns or to request accommodations for persons with disabilities, please contact Thomas Gehrken with the USDA NRCS at (971) 727-7085 or by email at thomas.gehrkens@or.usda.gov

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