

# Malheur County Local Work Group Meeting

## February 12, 2025

### 1-4 PM

- 1:00 – 1:15 Welcome and introductions
  - Lynn introduced the NRCS and introduced the meeting poll, and addressed some housekeeping needs
  - Introductions ended at 1:10
  - A copy of the agenda was added to the zoom chat
- 1:15 – 1:40 Review/Overview of NRCS programs/ Conservation Implementation Strategies/ and identified county resource concerns
  - RCPP- no current RCPP funded projects in Malheur
  - Easements- farm bill program, towards wetlands and working ag lands
    - Set aside easements, and non-set-aside (farms with threats towards conversion)
  - EQIP
    - Sage grouse initiative
    - High tunnel
    - Organic
  - Question: “Would these USDA programs be affected by recent Executive Orders and subsequent court rulings? Are allocated amounts stable and secure for these programs?”
  - Is the Long Range Strategy document available online?
  - Stock water for grazing distribution towards better SG Habitat?
  - Are there soil organic carbon projects that the NRCS funds? ---not directly, but our conservation practices do indirectly increase soil organic carbon.
- 1:40-1:49 Soil Survey Update
  - Jonathon with soil survey office (NRCS)
    - 12 million acres with 11 counties fully or partially covered
- 1:50-2:15 Partner and industry updates
  - Malheur SWCD – invasive species work in Jordan Valley, water quality analysis
  - US Fish- executive order limbo, fuels reduction (fire in rangelands) invasive annuals, juniper removal, work with SWCD, Pheasants Forever, Watershed council, NRCS, Partners Program does have funding availability around 25k,
  - Tom- emergency fire reseeding efforts (Siberian wheat, forage kochia) rangeland drills on fire rehab projects (free of charge to landowners), redid sage grouse maps, mapping with deer wildlife management units, wildlife numbers are generally up due to moisture levels.
  - Hayden- working with NRCS for projects, working with FW Trust for funding to this area for water conservation and soil erosion control.
  - Eric- Jordan Valley Cooperative Weed Management- Owyhee Watershed Council- working with NRCS, SWCD, ODFW, Oregon state lands, working on invasive annual grasses in Jordan Valley using herbicides. Dealing with noxious and invasive weeds to improve habitat for livestock and wildlife, while in turn improving rangeland health.... Education and outreach. Most herbicide results have been good, except where in the past where Plateau did not outlive the annual wheatgrass seedbank. Rejuvra is depleting the seedbank now.

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- Nicole-Owyhee Watershed Council- Biennial basis for funding. OWeb large grant funding has shifted to summer applications instead of spring and fall. Small grant funding has changed. Leading on Malheur County Partnership group: OWeb funding, federal funding, formalizing the group.
- Mark-Owyhee Irrigation District- Owyhee reservoir is 75% full, snowpack is really good. Releasing water from the dam, we are going to have a good water, and it is looking pretty good to spill. Continued flows of Owyhee river out of the dam for a while longer. Starting project on Kingman lateral area. Seepage issue in a mile of the canal on a hillside, and they are going to put in 72 inch pipe for 1 mile. Lot of traffic on Owhyee Lake road to get all their equipment and pipe in this summer.
- Bill- Experiment Station- money to pressurize .....
- Maria-ODA- Interest in what the quality of streamside vegetation looks like... always interested in good ranching and farming practices that keep watersheds productive and healthy. Agricultural water quality grant due March 5, streamside restoration grant, looking for another strategic geographic location for grant.
- Russell- OSU Extension- Core pesticide training Feb 21, Four Rivers pest management short course.
- Malheur watershed council- large grant Idaho pipeline project, 100% turnover in staff over the last year, quite a few projects (new pivots, juniper management)
- Sergio- Livestock and Rangeland Extension in Malheur county- targeted grazing on public grounds in Malheur County over winter months. Working with the DOI. Fine fuels management virtual tour. Targeted grazing around Idaho, Nevada, and Oregon, Land management plan for public and private land manager's course. Post fire land management plans...
- 2:15 – 2:30 Break
- 2:30 – 2:40 CAFO update – funding opportunities
  - No CAFO ODA Rep at meeting
- 2:40 – 3:00 Prioritization of resources discussion
  - Are we spending our time on the correct resources in our county as a whole.... Have had some interest from producers about water quality related to feedlots.
  - This past year, we had a plan in place for how we were going to spend our time, then the Cow Valley and Durkee fires came through and shifted our funding to wildfire recovery. We anticipated a large amount of funding through IRA, and we had a large number of applications, for EQIP, but a lot of that funding has gone away. We have a huge workload in the application process, with no funding available.
  - We have ups and downs in funding and applications, emergencies etc, we are trying to stay focused on the priorities that have been discussed with partners and producers.
  - Lynn opens the floor to partners and producers to voice their input on NRCS priorities
  - Lynn do you have any idea if the funds will be gone forever, or if there is a time frame on the pause?
    - Once the new secretary of ag gets into office, we are hoping that will move the process along. We have no official word
  - What funding is out there looking forward that could replace IRA?
    - A lot of those fundings are unknowns. IRA was supposed to last until 2027, then drop off forever. We did not fund anything with IRA in 2024. We funded 3 or 4 projects in 2025. This year we funded a significant amount. We are trying to stay focused on local funds, so we can leverage the reduced funds we do have.

- Please review the local priorities that we're providing feedback on right now. Were the local priorities 1) Rangeland Health (Sage-Grouse Habitat) and also 2) Irrigated Land and Soil Stability?
  - Rangeland health, soil erosion from irrigation induced erosion are the current priorities.. Is there a need to shift the priorities?
- Is fire recover a priority? Or is that still under rangeland health?
  - Joe answers with idk if it needs to be listed as a priority, as of right now. It is our focus this year and into next year. Last year is the first time NRCS and Oregon department of forestry did assessments on burned land, to create burn severity maps, that feed into erosion flow models, to identify if there is a high risk to resources, then identify priority treatments. ‘
- What is our resiliency to drought, wildfire, and even economics...
- Malheur County Rangeland Partnerships
  - A group of landmanagers to strategically approach rangeland health across the county. We want to be aware of each other's priorities, and more successfully receive funding. This group takes into account wildfire recovery in a quicker, more efficient way than just working with a single entity.
- Sergio wants to hear from the room about soil health, a more specific topic than rangeland health: Focusing on Rangeland Health should be reconsidered by land owners. Sagebrush rangeland resistance and resilience should be considered. Additionally, I want to hear about rangeland soil health, which is arguably different than “rangeland health”. It's more specific (like previously identifying sage-grouse habitat) and is the foundation upon which everything grows. Rangeland soil should be identified as it was what private landowners and technical assistance groups recognized for emergency actions after wildfires.
  - Jonathon says we did have an initiative for soil health
- 3:00-3:07      Looking into the future
  - We are trying to increase the capacity to do more. The Malheur range partnership is one way... on the cropland side, we have engaged with a number of additional partners that have brought in increased funding to do more irrigation improvements. Some partners are getting funded to do work that the soil cons at the NRCS does (planning projects, inventory information on farm. Programs such as RCPP, PL66 Owyhee irrigation district. Doing what we can for irrigation system transitions.
- 3:50 – 4:00      Summary, good of the order, networking opportunities
- 4:00              Adjourn

### **Zoom Participants**

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