

NRCS Local Work Group Meeting – Gilliam County (In-Person)
February 4th, 2025

Attendees:

DelRae Ferguson (NRCS)
Jessica Jones (NRCS)
Nathan Adelman (NRCS)
Adrianna Salutregui (FSA)
Herb Winters (SWCD)
Roger Lathrop (SWCD)

Melanie Theall (GEJDWC)
Rita Rattray
Wally Powell
Mike Durfey
John Anderson
Jana Griffith
David Capasso (ODF)

Agenda Overview

Staff introduction

- DelRae (District Conservationist)
- Jessica (Soil Conservationist)

Partner Updates

- Adrianna Salutregui - FSA
 - Deadline for LIP, LFP, & ELAP is 3/3/25.
 - Deadline for EFRP is 4/4/25.
 - ARC/PLC signup has started, deadline is 4/15/25.
 - Spring acreage report deadline is 7/15/25.
 - ECP (fire fencing) every application for less than \$125,000 has been approved by the county committee. Applications over \$125,000 go to the state or national office for approval, they have been sent up but are waiting on approval.
 - No word on general CRP or CRP Grasslands signups yet, though they are expected with the Continuing Resolution. There is no CRP expiring this year, only expiring CREP. Gilliam county is at the maximum CRP acres currently.
 - Emergency grazing has a high potential of extension past the March 1st deadline, this request is at the national office right now for discussion.
- Herb Winters – Gilliam SWCD
 - Projects - RCPP, FIP, OWEB,
 - RCPP – Currently in the last year of the current agreement, planning to renew and possibly expand the boundary.
 - FIP Focused Investment Partnership - Thirtymile monitoring, restoration, hydrologic assessment. Focused on steelhead habitat. Working on app for "FIP 2.0" for 2026.
 - OWEB Open Solicitation
 - Comstock basin Livestock Distribution
 - Restoring riparian and upland habitat along Thirtymile
 - Virtual Fencing Program Development
 - The SWCD is partnering with Sustainable Northwest and OSU to develop a program. The SWCD owns 10 Vence towers. The goal is to implement the virtual fence tech to improve post-fire recovery, livestock management, and protect riparian habitats.
 - John Day Basin Post-Fire TA
 - The goal is to develop a coordinated post-fire restoration framework for the John Day Basin Watershed.

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- Place Based Planning
 - Goal is to strengthen regional water resilience through conservation, monitoring, and infrastructure resilience.
 - CREP - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
 - Over 3000 acres enrolled in this county. Compatible with BDAs.
 - Small Grant Program
 - Administered by GEJDWC
 - Around \$15,000
 - Annual Meeting and Dinner
 - Upcoming on March 11th, will be serving a prime rib dinner, and they planning having a speaker to discuss drone technology.
 - Mike Durfey – Gilliam County Weed Department
 - They are looking for new tech for better weed control on public and private lands. The current scale has mostly been roadsides, they would like to partner with BLM and others to improve upon this. Hills and tough areas are a huge time sink for backpack spraying.
 - Last year the department had an extra \$64,000 available that was used to purchase a spray drone. The drone is advertised at 53 ac/hr spray capacity.
 - Mike got his pilot's license last year and is currently studying for aerial applicator license.
 - They would eventually like to partner with landowners in the off-season to assist with their weed problems.
 - Nathan Adelman – NRCS Basin Team Leader for JDUSR
 - Based out of Pendleton. Started position at the end of March 2024.
 - David Capasso - ODF NRS1 Field Forester out of Fossil
 - Moved to the area in April 2024.
 - John Day Unit covers Fossil subunit and the Monument subunit
 - Overview of ODF positions
 - Dustin Gustaveson - Unit forester -John Day Unit
 - Brandon Ferguson - Forest Resources Manager
 - Brandon Vos - Stewardship forester Grant-Harney
 - Matthew Brown - Stewardship Forester Gilliam-Morrow-Wheeler
 - Adele Underwood - Community Wildfire Forester
 - Kara Doescher - ODF/NRCS Coordination Forester
 - Mary Jo Itel - NRS1 Field Forester
 - Marnie Woodbury - Admin Specialist 2
 - Michael Cearns - NRS1 GNA Field Forester
 - Vacant position for an NRS2 Conservation Forester

2024 EQIP Funding Pools

- Drought and Wildlife Watering Strategy – 2 contracts
- Wildlife Friendly Travel Corridors – 4 contracts (roughly one mile in length per contract)

Lone Rock Fire Response

- The fire response was a collaborative effort with FSA and SWCD.
- The NRCS post-fire recovery team was out there as soon as possible assessing soil burn severity.
- NRCS Oregon requested \$2 in emergency disaster recovery funds to aid in post-fire efforts in eastern Oregon.
- In Gilliam/Wheeler counties we were able fund 11 applications for dozer line and aerial reseeding, as well as some herbaceous weed treatment. In FY24 we obligated \$264,905 in just a few weeks.

2025 EQIP Funding Pools

- Drought and Wildlife Watering Strategy – 1 application
- Wildlife Friendly Travel Corridors – 2 applications
- Wildfire Recovery – 2 applications for Gilliam county, 33 for Wheeler county
- Wildfire Recovery is the top priority so all other FY25 EQIP funding pools have been paused for the year.

RCPP

- Same available practices as the previous years.
- BDAs remain the top priority practice.
- In FY24 we had 28 applications, obligated 3 contracts, and had over 3.5 million dollars in ask.
- For FY25 there is roughly \$568,020 estimated remaining dollars and 24 applications have been received.
- This is the 5th and final year of funding, but a renewal is planned with some changes.
- We are currently working on planning and I&E for the applications.

Questions...there are lot of them

- As of right now, there is still no new Farm Bill.
- There are no payment limitations in FY25 but contract caps still exist.
- All IRA funds are on pause.
 - No payments can be made on existing IRA contracts.
 - No future IRA contracts can be written.
- There is currently a federal hiring freeze and there are currently two vacancies in the Condon Field Office.

2025 Updated Cost Share Rates

- Mostly minor increases for most practices.

FY26 Funding Pool Discussion

- Drought and Wildlife Watering Strategy and Wildlife Friendly Travel Corridors will hopefully be available again next year as there has been high demand.
- Some form of post-fire funding should still be available in FY26.
- RCPP renewal - there will potentially be a boundary change to incorporate the Upper Rock Creek watershed and incorporate virtual fence into the scope.
- Rock Creek Irrigation - Feasibility study is in progress, it's still a few years out before focus shifts here.

Other resource concerns/areas of interest?

- Virtual Fence – Still gaining momentum, NRCS now has scenarios to pay for virtual fence through EQIP so that opens doors for opportunity.
 - Rita Ratray - Does it work on properties with minimal cell service?
 - Roger Lathrop (Gilliam SWCD) – Yes, I've seen it work on properties with similar topography to yours. As long as the towers are in cell service, the towers then communicate with the collars.

CSP

- Application deadline is 2/28/25.
- FSA eligibility deadline is 6/6/25.
- We have seen more applications funded in the last two years than in previous years, this year is a little unclear with IRA funding currently paused.

CRP Grasslands

- No signup announced yet but let FSA know now so they can start to gather information.
- It is a working land program that allows grazing but does not require it.
- Annual per acre payment.
- Cannot coexist with CSP on the same acres.
- Cannot enroll in EQIP or RCPP if it is enrolled in CRP Grasslands, so meet with NRCS prior if you have livestock water or fencing needs to apply for (you can still work with other funders like OWEB, etc).

Upcoming deadlines

- NRCS - EQIP/RCPP - sometime in November
- FSA - LIP/ELAP/LFP - March 3rd
- FSA - EFRP - April 4th
- FSA – Spring acreage reporting - July 15th
- FSA - There will be a new program, but it has not been named or announced yet.