

Local Work Group
Harney County Community Center,
484 N Broadway, Burns
February 25, 2025

Present: Tyler Goss, Breanna O'Connor, Braden Morris, Jason Kesling, Barbara Pearson, Damon Brosnan, Rachel Beaubien, Andrew Donaldson, Kaylee Littlefield and Danielle Reynolds, Sara Ugalde, Karen Moon, Chad Boyd, Brenda Smith, Dustin Johnson, Braden Ferguson, Brandon Palmer, Dominic Bachman, Jill Bachman

The meeting began shortly after 1 pm. NRCS Rachel Beaubien led the meeting. There was a brief time of introductions.

Sara Ugalde of FSA informed the group of her agency's programs and deadlines. The Emergency Livestock Indemnity Program deadline to submit for 2024 is March 3, 2025. Indemnity includes costs associated with the wildfire: transportation of cattle, water or hay; death loss. The Emergency Forest Restoration Program deadline will be April 4, 2025. Sara will be working with ODF. The deadline for reporting acreage is March 15, 2025. Grazing loss for NAP insurance is being compiled; there is 90% cattle loss in one area. Twenty deaths so far have been reported with calving deaths due to winter storms. Anything beyond a 3% mortality can qualify. There were no questions.

Rachel provided handouts of power point slide on 2025 Progress report on implementation. She described current NRCS programs. Goals were set in the long-range plan in 2010 and have been adapted recently into a new Long Range Plan. For the most part 2010 goals have been exceeded.

Conservation Implementation Strategies were each discussed – Working Lands for Waterbird Habitat Conservation, Northern Harney Range and Forest Health Transition Communities, Stinkingwater Medusahead Management, and Saving Groundwater in the Harney Basin. It was discussed how additional acres have been able to be treated in coordination with CWMA/SWCD in Medusahead areas and Forest Health areas.

There was also discussion on the ability to work in post-fire areas following 2024 wildfires. Six contracts were obligated after fires to treat weeds and seed and do some prescribed grazing.

Dustin what's involved in prescribed grazing? Deferment, two growing seasons of rest.

Chad: \$2M of funds after fire? Rachel: It was for entire state for the existing fires. Danielle half of seeding has been done already. Whether affected spraying should take place this fall.

Brandon Ferguson (ODF) explained counties served and staff. Hiring a forester, hope to interview soon. Program with fires, NRCS post fire recovery team. Surveys on 13 fires in our unit for outcomes of needs and treatment. Letters sent to landowners. See about 25% match through state to offset cost to landowner. May see about funds through OWEB.

Matthew Brown assists Brandon, back up. Stewardship forest in Wheeler, Morrow and Gilliam counties. 200K seedlings ordered to be planted spring 2026 (across Eastern Oregon counties). Barely scratches the surface with the number of fires this year. Foresters with a limited number of acres with a stream has program to fully fund. Four foresters in our unit, Grant and Harney Counties.

Water: CIS for saving groundwater, community planning efforts. Specific effort mentions technical and financial efforts MESA to LESA. No funding past couple of years, lack of eligible applicants. May need to edit CIS, hesitant re: groundwater changes.

Karen 3 more meetings, last in May. Rules recommendation and completed in summer or September. Changes will be coming sooner vs. later. Push for LESA.

Dustin anyone come through re: groundwater for assistance? Drew 2. Rachel eligibility on water rights, NRCS must design within legal water rights.

Sage-grouse. Treatments listed from 2010. Now at 150% of that goal.

Chad: where do contractors come from? Rachel: mastication added, local. Chad: now might be a good time to show second number to show value to local economy of influx of dollars. Important. Danielle no bidding process. We pay landowners and they select who they want. SWCD has bidding process. "Good for herd, good for the bird, good for the local economy." Damen—economists show local economy that for every dollar spent. It's a great point.

Rachel 5 contracts last year cutting juniper. 146% of goal set in 2010.

Damen: small farms/organic—have a basin small farm specialist. Jenny well. Covers 9 counties. Work with nontraditional landowners. Farm to table, organic, organic transition landowners. Business model expanding, 40 applications this year. Large alfalfa farmers transitioning to organic. Runs the gamut. Available and continues. Food security, more local grown food. Sustainable livestock re: sustainable NW and work with country natural beef accreditation program. Help landowners adopt practices to bring up to accreditation. Interest with landowners. Open to eastern and SW Oregon. Trying to get funding in place.

Conservation Stewardship program. Has big proponent wheat producers taken advantage. Take management to higher level trying to use more in range counties. 2 Harney County in program last year. Gradually getting introduction. Money for staff based on farm bill. Hope to continue.

Harney CREP; lack of guidance. Will meet with FSA state leadership tomorrow to try to get plan going forward for ground rules for implementation. Crucial for success pushed potential program in Klamath county. Harney county "guinea pigs." Drew: quite a bit of interest with it.

Hope to have in place after new budget.

Brenda with that TA funding with HDP interest in agencies would like to lean in with that so there is continuity. Damen and Brenda to meet.

Jason HSWCD board has a role in CREP. The board approves. Is it still done in other counties? Damen carry over from "good old days." Some counties do and some don't.

Funding pools food security included. IRA split among counties. Changes and new drafts to be turned in by April. Medusahead funding through RCPP, renewal through 2027. Damen: checking to see if could be renewed for 2nd time. It's national money, renewals are often approved. A lot in the air right now. New farm bill could be passed this year. Expect it to be funded again this year. I will find out. Must have the same intent and goal. Can change footprint and expand it. Rachel renews it or go after something similar.

Forest fringe new. Slow start was encompassing into IRA and did by HSWCD. Getting into the foothills area also falling out of priorities of middle ground.

Sage grouse initiative would continue. Danielle opal areas of SGI. Rachel. Habitat areas changed. Wouldn't hurt to change focal areas. Jason still using old map? Daneille/Rachel focal map different. Danielle, I don't know where we need to do funding. One landowner kicked out of area (went from low to no habitat). Jason process or updating, same as CIA update?

Chad—landowner with annual grass problem adjacent to federal land? How would that be determined? Danielle, I like the focus areas smaller than core? Discussion followed as to what is core and how assessed. Jason focusses from Wagontire to Steens south. Danielle makes sure ranked in those areas.

Jason if EQIP budget, how does this group determine. Rachel—conversation guides, decision based on applications for next year. Room for input. Damen—help guide Rachel. I think we should focus on forest fringe. Memory loses ground if don't treat. Budget decreases discussed.

Brandon opportunity for forestry. Other areas untapped. Recovery time for forest important. Adjacent treatments considerable.

Jason to Damen: joint chiefs still functioning? Damen yes. Made into an appropriate program. Still around doesn't rely on IRA money. I don't think it will go anywhere.

Pivots transferred water rights elsewhere and see what has happened with that ground concerns me. After pipe removed it is inundated with Russian thistle. Long term plan. Basin floor has some scary things coming. Pivots will be pulled or reduced—small farms be emphasized since working for gov't or ranching not working out well now. Lots of erosion happening now. Doesn't necessarily fit in current funding pools. Discussed pollinator plots or shrub walls. Lots of erosion happening here. Rachel current water CREP allows transition period lesser amount of water to move away alfalfa.

Chad SNOTEL shows 238% of snow in area. Depends on how it comes off can affect erosion. Damen—must advance plan. Chad seeding work with landowners near term seed mix everyone agreed on (midterm) not a lot have knowledge on understory. Would be helpful. Act now threshold can contract and not wait. NEPA and seed now within weeks. Anyone can determine urgency, just advertise. Dealing with wolves in a nonlethal way (fencing during calving). Landowners in Brothers losing calves due to wolves. Don't have to do cultural resource.