

## Marion County Local Work Group (LWG) Annual Meeting

February 28, 2025

9:00 AM – 12:00

### Meeting Minutes/Summary

#### Participants

|                                                                  |                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Theresa Brehm <a href="#">NRCS</a>                            | 14. Jason Marshall <a href="#">Pudding River WC</a>     |
| 2. Karlynn Wierer <a href="#">NRCS</a>                           | 15. Emma Smith <a href="#">Pudding River WC</a>         |
| 3. Dani Aleshire <a href="#">NRCS</a>                            | 16. MacKayla Fithian <a href="#">Pudding River WC</a>   |
| 4. Marissa Theve <a href="#">NRCS</a>                            | 17. Kegan Craig <a href="#">Energy Trust of Oregon</a>  |
| 5. Eileen Stone <a href="#">NRCS</a>                             | 18. Gayle Goschie <a href="#">Goschie Farms</a>         |
| 6. Adriana Campagna <a href="#">NRCS</a>                         | 19. Andy Livesay <a href="#">Westwood Farms</a>         |
| 7. Brandon Steiner <a href="#">NRCS</a>                          | 20. Ellie Coleman-Skiles <a href="#">Westwood Farms</a> |
| 8. Ethan Lukens <a href="#">NRCS</a>                             | 21. Annie Coleman <a href="#">Westwood Farms</a>        |
| 9. Eleanor Kenyon <a href="#">Pheasants Forever/NRCS Partner</a> | 22. Laura Ruggles <a href="#">Sow Sow Farms</a>         |
| 10. Scott Walker <a href="#">Marion SWCD Board</a>               | 23. Carolyn Foland <a href="#">farmer</a>               |
| 11. Brenda Sanchez <a href="#">Marion SWCD</a>                   | 24. Kurt Sommer <a href="#">farmer</a>                  |
| 12. Becky Pineda <a href="#">Marion SWCD</a>                     | 25. Katie Sommer <a href="#">farmer</a>                 |
| 13. Chris Seal <a href="#">USFWS</a>                             |                                                         |

#### Introductions

Theresa Brehm, NRCS Salem Field Office District Conservationist, convened the meeting. She introduced Eileen Stone, NRCS State Office Compliance Specialist, as the facilitator. Theresa explained that the purpose of the meeting was to review the accomplishments from the past year and to gather input from everyone to identify resource concerns and priorities for Marion County.

#### Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Update

Theresa gave an update on NRCS work for Fiscal Year 2024. NRCS has a new State Conservationist, Greg Becker. It was a record year for technical and financial assistance in Oregon. Marion County obligated \$4.1 million for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contracts, covering work on 5,923 acres. Irrigation improvements received 78% of the funds, with the remainder going to animal feeding operations, soil health, cropland, pastureland, and forestry.

In response to a question/comment about the impact of the newly discovered aquifer in the Oregon Cascade Mountains, Theresa said that we still must follow the current water rights laws and conserve water.

The Soil Survey Program mapped an additional 6 million acres in Oregon. The national goal is to complete initial mapping of all acres in the United States by 2026. The focus in Oregon right now is to map U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands.

Eleanor Kenyon, Pheasants Forever Partner, and Dani Aleshire, NRCS Basin Easement Specialist, gave an update on easements. Currently there are 14 conservation easements in the county, protecting over 1,300 acres of wetlands and some adjoining uplands. The work to conserve wetlands is done closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. There are a number of new applications this year throughout the state for the Wetland Reserve Easement and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

In response to a question, Eleanor said that Pheasants Forever is working mostly with NRCS now but is looking to expand their work outside of the agency. Their focus in other states is usually on uplands, but they are working on wetlands and adjoining uplands in Northwest Oregon. Expanding hunting access in the future is also a goal.

#### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Update**

Chris Seal (USFWS) said that his agency wouldn't be able to do as much to protect habitats and plant and animal species without the partnerships with NRCS, other groups, and private landowners. Multiple threatened or endangered species have been de-listed or down-listed, as a result. In Marion County, the work has benefited the Oregon chub and four plant species.

In response to a question about which species could still be assisted with more limits on funding, Chris mentioned Willamette daisy, oak and prairie habitats and associated bird species, and game species.

#### **Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Update**

Becky Pineda, Marion SWCD Ag Conservation Planner, provided copies of their annual report. She said that they focus on technical assistance and offer grants to help implement conservation projects. They are a partner with NRCS. They have planners and specialists in their office who work on cropland, livestock, natural areas, riparian areas, urban areas, and plants. The District works throughout Marion County, but directs more resources to areas that have the greatest resource concerns, including the Howell Prairie Creek/ Pudding River Strategic Implementation Area (water quality and riparian areas), the Headwaters of the Pudding River (water quality, cover crops, riparian areas), the 2020 wildfire perimeter, and the Molalla-Pudding Pesticide Stewardship Partnership. Marion SWCD awarded grants last year to 33 projects that applied conservation practices on 1,290 acres. The District also awarded grants to partners.

The District is also involved in outreach and education. They offer Conservation Club Tours. And they provide an interview program called Conservation Spotlight, which is broadcast on KMUZ radio. The program includes a Meet the Farmer spotlight. They would like to invite more farmers to talk about their work on the program.

Scott Walker, Marion SWCD Board Director, said that the District is small and more flexible than the federal government. They can add, change, or stop programs easily. They own their building now, which has enabled them to focus on hiring and retaining staff. He said that it is fun to see properties that include a combination of NRCS and SWCD funded projects. Scott said that their strategic plan includes inspiring conservation, healthy soil and clean water, healthy habitats, productive working lands, and strong partnerships.

### **Pudding River Watershed Council Update**

Jason Marshall, Pudding River Watershed Council Board Member, said that the Council has a full board now. Their funding from Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) and Marion SWCD is stable right now, but they want to get more involved in fundraising and volunteer activities. The Council would like to have large landowners sign up for their programs, so that they can have a landscape level impact on the watershed.

The Council has been involved in efforts to remove the Scotts Mills Dam for fish passage. They are giving the lead to the City of Scotts Mills. They are also looking for a way to remove the Aamodt Dam on Rock Creek.

### **Energy Trust of Oregon Update**

Kegan Craig, Energy Trust of Oregon, said that the organization has stable private funding. They provide funding to increase the efficiency of irrigation projects and greenhouses. They only work with customers of Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural, Cascade Natural Gas, and Avista.

### **Local Work Group Activity**

Eileen Stone and Theresa Brehm described the Local Work Group activity. NRCS would like to receive input from landowners, producers, partners, and the public on resource concerns and priorities for Marion County. The input will be used to develop priorities for technical assistance and funding in Fiscal Year 2026 and to develop the next strategic plan. Eileen asked all meeting participants, except NRCS staff, to write down their top resource concerns and attach them to posters for soil, water, air, plants, animals, and energy.

A range of concerns was noted on the posters, but the highest priority resource concerns were:

- riparian area management and protection for water quality and wildlife habitat, including beaver dams
- native and pollinator plant species and ecosystem conservation and restoration, including removal of invasive weeds and oak/prairie restoration
- energy efficiency
- soil erosion and soil health

The participants then broke up into groups to further discuss their concerns and priorities.

The groups brainstormed suggestions for addressing resource concerns, including:

- funding for all types of conservation projects, including habitat restoration
- increased NRCS and partner funding of engineers
- central hub where landowners and producers can find sources of funding, technical assistance, contractors, and materials (coordination among agencies, organizations, colleges, and businesses)
- template conservation plans and practice specifications for specific types of projects
- increasing availability of native seeds and plants by providing funding and technical assistance to growers and assisting with more plant sales
- technical assistance and resources to help choose best native plant species and planting methods for projects that are economical and available
- biocontrol for invasive weeds and pests
- prescribed burning cooperatives
- property tax deferral options for landowners restoring wildlife habitat
- more options for sustainable crops, including processing

### **Wrap Up**

Theresa Brehm responded to some questions. She said that the cost list has been updated this year, providing higher payment rates to areas like Marion County that have a higher cost of living. She said that landowners/producers can stack grants (e.g. NRCS, SWCD, and Energy Trust) on some projects. Projects can be modified if something changes and a product or service is not easily available.

Theresa said that local NRCS offices determine priorities or Conservation Implementation Strategies every year. These strategies are posted on the NRCS Oregon website. The budget may be more limited in the future, so priorities and adaptability will be very important. The ability to fund and complete projects will also depend upon the staffing level of engineers and field office planners. Coordination with partners will be important.

### **Written Comments Received Outside of the Meeting**

Resource concerns:

- forest health, including tree vigor, fire risk and invasive species
- oak restoration
- irrigation efficiency and water conservation

Suggestions for addressing resource concerns:

- funding pools for forestry and oak restoration projects throughout Marion County

## MARION COUNTY LOCAL WORK GROUP MEETING



**Local Workgroup Meetings** are a valuable part of the NRCS and SWCD conservation planning process, providing an opportunity for local land managers to be part of a collaborative effort to improve natural resources within Marion County.

### You are invited to:

- ✓ Review performance of the past year's projects.
- ✓ Help shape plans and priorities future projects.
- ✓ Connect with partners and new audiences to seek opportunities to leverage partnership funds.
- ✓ And learn about other NRCS and SWCD programs which may prove beneficial to you.



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### WHERE:

650 Hawthorne Ave SE, Suite 130  
Salem, OR 97301

**DATE:** February 28, 2025

**TIME:** 9:00am

For more information or to make a public comment in lieu of in-person attendance, contact:

Theresa Brehm  
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971-273-4816