

Building a Vision for the Future

Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District Community Needs Assessment Summary

December 2019

On December 11 & 12, 2019, the Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District (District) hosted a series of three community needs assessment meetings to gather input from local stakeholders on the state of agricultural and conservation programming and services in Eastern Lane County. The District's objective was to learn about the work that partners are doing, learn if there are ways the District could support and enhance that work, and understand if there are significant gaps in programming that the District could help address with new resources.

The feedback gathered during these sessions, as well as through an online survey and direct conversations with stakeholders, will be used to finalize the District's strategic plan, inform the District board's decision whether or not to put a new tax measure before voters in 2020, and identify an appropriate role for the District and for any potential new resources should the District move forward with the tax base initiative.

Format

The three meetings were each focused on two program areas: *Forestry and Wildfire Prevention* and *Wildlife Habitat, Agriculture and Local Foods*, and *Urban Conservation and Conservation Education*. At each meeting, the District gave a brief background on the history of the District and its current operations and explained the opportunity before the District to expand the scope and scale of resources it can bring to bear for agriculture and conservation in Eastern Lane County through the tax base initiative. Participants were asked to break into small groups to discuss the following questions and report back to the larger group:

1. What work is currently going on in the County under these program areas? And who does it? (Organizations, partnerships, individuals, agencies, etc)
2. How could that work be sustained or elevated if more resources became available?
3. Is there a role for the District in supporting those efforts?
4. What are the gaps in these program areas?
5. How could the District fill those gaps if resources are available?



Eric Nusbaum, Associate Director at Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District describes the District's mission.

A complete list of the ideas generated at each meeting is provided at the end of this document.



Prepared by Willamette Partnership for the Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District

Key Takeaways

It was clear across all three meetings that there are many organizations doing great work in each of these areas, but many of them have the same needs: stable funding and greater staff capacity, technical assistance, coordination and communication among organizations, and increased community awareness of issues and solutions.

Stable Funding and Staff Capacity

In each meeting, participants identified many organizations that already provide important programs and services but have difficulty maintaining stability due to a lack of funding or staff capacity. It was noted that many of the funding sources these organizations relied upon in the past no longer offer an adequate level of support to sustain programming or maintain staffing levels. Relying on volunteers means program delivery is often inconsistent. Possible solutions include:

- An increase in District staff to ensure consistent program delivery;
- A new granting program; and
- Micro loans to help with start-up costs (e.g. bridge loans to help with up-front costs or cost-share programs).

Technical Assistance

Participants identified a wide array of technical assistance needs across the community, from best management practices for forest plans and prescribed burns, to guidelines for successful implementation and maintenance of hobby farms and rain gardens. Participants also noted the need for specialized equipment rental to reduce costs and increase the availability of equipment to landowners.

Coordination and Communication Among Organizations

At each meeting, there was consensus that the meeting itself was of great value to the participants. There isn't currently a forum for agricultural and conservation program and service providers and landowners to come together to share what they are working on and find ways to work together. Participants felt there is a significant need in the community for a clearinghouse of information, both for practitioners to stay up to date with what other organizations are working on, and for residents, businesses, and schools to have a one-stop-shop for learning about the programs and services available in the County. Participants expressed a desire to coordinate across organizations to develop community-wide goals and track metrics on progress toward those goals.

Increased Community Awareness

Participants identified the need to increase awareness of the interactions between urban and rural landscapes, and the value – economic, environmental, and social – that agricultural and forest lands provide to the community. There was general consensus that messaging and communications aimed at building a culture of stewardship is a gap that needs to be filled.

Conclusion

Participants identified a clear set of needs for both financial and technical resources to support effective and durable agricultural and conservation-based work in the District. Participants also identified the need for clearer context around this gap analysis in terms of what role the District *could* or *should* play in filling gaps or supporting existing work. Articulating the relationship between the identified needs and the mission/vision/purpose of the District could help both pollsters and the District craft a more specific and compelling or exciting message about how additional resources generated by a tax base would be used to achieve meaningful outcomes for its stakeholders and citizens.

Small Group Report-Out on Needs and Gaps

Forestry and Wildfire Prevention and Wildlife Habitat

December 11, 2019 2-4 pm

**indicates idea was brought forward by more than one small group*

Incentives to match NRCS programs; promoting different types of NRCS funding*

Resources (\$)*

Information clearinghouse for organizations working in these areas*

Relationship building among organizations working in these areas

Liaison to connect landowners with other organizations*

Backbone/support organization to help keep focus on over-arching performance indicators, share information

Engagement with landowners to develop conservation plans

Technical assistance to develop forest plans, especially for those with under 5,000 acres

Biochar market

Market for non-timber forest products

Workforce development

Money, education, and messaging to facilitate more prescribed fire on the landscape*

Certification to run prescribed burns*

Technical assistance and education for landowners in wildland urban interface

Easements on working lands/match to support development of easements

Service foresters

Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Program capacity at ODFW

Capacity for organizations to engage with landowners outside priority areas

Culture of land stewardship

Cost share payment bridge loans

Soil health education and technical assistance

Education for youth and general public on forests and woodlands

Youth engagement on outdoor recreation, training partnerships

Education for new forest landowners

Noxious weed control

Monitoring of land use transitions, opportunities to engage landowners during transition periods

Communication about health, recreation, rural economy, and tourism as it relates to forests

Strengthened connections with UO and OSU

Platform for connecting local wildlife conservation projects with regional or state projects/programs

Streamlining landowner engagement

Support for innovation (i.e. an innovation fund that encourages problem solving around ag and conservation issues)

Agriculture and Local Foods

December 11, 2019 6-8 pm

**indicates idea was brought forward by more than one small group*

Ability to work with small landowners

Succession planning

Access to affordable land

Technical and financial assistance for complying with new or existing regulations (e.g. testing irrigation water quality)

Outreach/awareness of NRCS programs

Access to local markets for local foods

Community education on local foods

Marketing for local food producers

Patrolling for illegal water use

Partnering with OSU to help new farmers develop plans not tied to cost-share

Help with upfront capital costs

Small grants

Micro loans

Specialized equipment loans

Local control of programs to help with program stability (e.g. local funding may be more stable than a regional funding source that could have changing priority areas)

Community education on local agriculture

Community education on who the SWCD is/what they do

Buffer for landowners signing up for federal programs (e.g. help fill out paperwork)

Aging irrigation infrastructure

Incentives for landowners to enter cost share programs

Nutrient management, testing

Plans to improve soil health after soil testing

Community outreach on urban-rural connection

Value of ag land preservation

Technology (e.g. drones)

Agro tourism

Central tracking of which community kitchens and gardens are still in operation

Connecting farmers to land to rent

Platform for information sharing

Understanding of need for water conservation re: water rights

Local packaging facility/commercial kitchen space (e.g. the Redd in Portland)

Farm incubator

Conservation/ ag science education in schools

Technical assistance for understanding contracts

Youth job training

Invasives management - education, best management practices, money, technical assistance

Education and small grants for hobby farmers

Bridge loans

Education, programs, best management practices for carbon sequestration

Carbon market

Intermediary for resource agencies

Urban Conservation and Conservation Education

December 12, 2019 10 am – 12 pm

**indicates idea was brought forward by more than one small group*

Technical assistance around restoration on private property

Money for schools for transportation, substitutes to help with getting kids outside*

Conservation curriculum that meets requirements for preparing for standardized testing

District staff (paid, not volunteers) could provide more regular/consistent workshops in the community e.g. for rain gardens

Funding to sustain programs, relationships

Umbrella organization to help make connections between other organizations

Equity focus support

Leverage for federal funding

Internships with agencies or nonprofits

Connecting K-12 to Lane Community College

K-12 education on ag/forestry

Capacity to scale programs up

Sustained, effective education - focus on kids/family

Messaging about urban water pollution

Best management practices for hobby farms

Clearinghouse of information for homeowners, schools, businesses - invasives, connections to landscapers/ native plant nursery

Technical assistance on rain gardens, swales

Outdoor school implementation support - staff, curriculum

Youth job training

Connection to school district administration, groundskeepers

Soil sampling/ mapping of development pressure

Money for developer mitigation funds

Small grants for neighborhoods

Backbone organization - connection, communications, funding, metrics