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Windham County Natural Resources Conservation District

Draft FY 2026 Locally Led Conservation Plan

March 5th, 2025, 10am

Minutes:

The Windham County Natural Resources Conservation District (WCNRCD) hosted a local fund pool meeting, surveyed land stewards of Windham County, and created a draft Conservation Action Plan (CAP). From this information, WCNRCD wants to move forward with three potential fund pool proposals:

1. Forestry Management Plan (FMP) – applicants apply to have this plan written for them
2. Brush management/invasives and forestry fund pool
3. Small ag fund pool

Pool 1: Forestry management plan discussion and selections:

Land Use: Forest, Crop, pasture, farmstead, associated ag land all included

Resource Concerns: Including only those that can be addressed with FMPs. Degraded plant condition ranked highest for the forestry management plans and terrestrial habitat for pollinators.

Conservation Practices: 106: Forest Management Plan, 165: Forest Management Practice Design, 148: Pollinator Habitat Design, 144: Fish and Wildlife Habitat Design

Program Questions:

* Reword Historically underserved users as we are waiting on national guidance. We will update this when we know the proper terminology.
* Did not include a question about noncompliance as FMPs are starting points for NRCS work
* Included has the application been funded: likely because state priorities have not been FMPs
* Include those not in Use Value Appraisal (UVA), as they often don’t have the motivation to get FMP
  + Those under 25 acres to be higher ranked

Resource Questions:

* Will this application address the listed resources concerns?

Weights:

* Maxed program priorities as applications are for planning work, minimized resource priorities, maxed vulnerabilities.
  + Vulnerabilities includes geospatial, rare, threatened, and endangered and the practices listed

Funding:

* Last year, Windham County had 26,000 applications and 8,000 were approve for funding. An estimated $26,000 were needed to fund those.
* Requesting $25,000 as pollinator habitat is popular now

Pool 2: Forestry brush management

Land use: forest and associated ag land

Resource Concerns: Based on last year, selected: Resource concerns: terrestrial habitat and pest pressure, degraded pant condition, concentrated erosion, and aquatic habitat

Conservation Practices:

* Note that more than 5 practices will require additional permissions. This is a change from last year, need to provide justifications if you need all the practices.
* Not including 100’s because we have the plan fund pool
* Top practice codes: 314: Brush Management, 396: Clearing and Snagging, 420: Wildlife Habitat Planting, 647: Early Successional Habitat Development-Management, 654: Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment, 666: Forest Stand Improvement.
  + Additional selected practices: 315: Herbaceous Weed Treatment, 391: Riparian Forest Buffer, 396: Aquatic Organism Passage, 578: Stream Crossing, 580: Streambank and Shoreline Protection, 612: Tree/Shrub Establishment, 645: Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, 647: Early Successional Habitat Development-Management

Program Questions:

* Applications with under 25 contiguous acres more highly ranked
* “Improve or complete a conservation system?” was removed as it is redundant
* Removed “Has this applicant been selected for funding in the past 2 years?” because of relevance
* Habitat connectivity is important but is not a great fit for ranking questions. This will be included in CAP

Resource Questions: Included the first two questions from last year’s proposal:

1. Does this application include at least one practice that addresses plant pressure on forestlands?

2. Does this application reduce soil erosion and result in an improvement in water quality of streams, water bodies, or wetlands?

Clarified the following questions from last year:

3. Does this application address wildlife habitat?

4. Does this application address aquatic habitat and/or passage?

5. Does this application address pollinator habitat?

Weights:

* Plant pressure was weighted higher due to the need for invasives control
* Vulnerabilities lowered compared to FMP pool because of planning versus practice implementation
* Resource priorities weighted higher as they are the focus of this pool
* Aquatic Organism Passage needs to be a multi-year path because of the planning
* Highlighted those listed above for the top selections. Would like to ask to add all those that are checked

Funding:

* $400,000. Increased amount of brush management funding because of the number of applications in FY25. With successful programming in the past, Windham County has had greater demands for forestry and Windham County needs more funding to support this.

Pool 3: Small ag fund pool

Land use: Crop, pasture, farmstead, associated ag land

Resource Concerns: Last year: Soil quality limitations, degraded plant condition, wind and water erosion, pest pressure, storage and handling of pollutants

Selected: Soil quality limitations, degraded plant condition, pest pressure, concentrated erosion, weather resilience

Conservation Practices:

* Top five conservation practices: 528: Prescribed Grazing, 325: High Tunnels, 327: Cover Crops, 329: Residue and Tillage Management, No Till, 808: Soil Carbon Amendment.

Selected practices:

* 314: Brush management, 317: Composting facility, 325: High tunnel, 340: Cover crop, 345: Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till, 329: Residue and Tillage Management, No Till, 362: Diversion, 347: Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation, Irrigation (436, 441, 443), 484: Mulching, 500: Obstruction removal, 528: Prescribed grazing, 516: Livestock Pipeline, 533: Pumping Plant, 558: Roof runoff structure, 570: Stormwater Runoff Control, 561: Heavy Use Area Protection, 574: Spring Development, 575: Trails and Walkways, 614: Watering facility, 642: Water well, 805: Amending Soil Properties with Lime, 808: Soil Carbon Amendment, 812: Raised Beds, 821: Low Tunnel
* Soil health testing was not included as that practice won’t rank well in this pool
* Agroforestry was not included as the NRCS practice is difficult to get producer interest

Program Questions:

* 10 or less acre operation ranks higher
* From community scale urban ag questions:
  + Is the producer providing food to the local community?
  + Is the applicant planting culturally appropriate plants?

Resource Questions:

Focused specifically on the resource concerns

Weights:

Keep the same as in the forestry brush management pool

Funding:

$400,000 based on current requests for the fund pool

Meeting ended at 12:15