



NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
**CONSERVATION  
 SHOWCASE**



**Participant:**  
 The Confederated  
 Tribes of the  
 Grand Ronde

**Program:**  
 Environmental Quality  
 Incentives Program

**Location:**  
 Oregon Coast

**Oregon  
 Natural  
 Resources  
 Conservation  
 Service**

## NRCS Conservation Assistance Supports Tribal Elk Habitat

**HUNTING AND GATHERING FOR FIRST FOODS IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF TRIBAL CULTURE—YET IN THE FAST-PACE OF 21ST CENTURY LIVING, THESE TIES TO THE LAND CAN BE FORGOTTEN.**

The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde (CTGR) have not forgotten the importance of keeping its people connected to their heritage. Like many other tribes in our region, the CTGR embraces a lasting commitment to the land and to their elders.



To that end, the CTGR is working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to improve elk meadow habitats on tribal lands, and to provide safe access for tribal elders to participate in traditional hunts.

Lindsay Belonga, a wildlife biologist with the CTGR, explains that hunting in Oregon's Coastal Range can

be arduous. Trees grow thick and undergrowth can be impassible. Needless to say, hunting in this terrain is not for the faint of heart. Finding Roosevelt elk and Black-tailed deer can be a daunting challenge. To tribal elders, it can be a dream of times past.

By creating meadows within the forest, the Grand Ronde Natural Resources Department expects to improve habitat for these key species within the upper South Yamhill River watershed and improve access for tribal elders.

With financial assistance through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the tribe

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—Lindsay Belonga  
Wildlife Biologist  
Confederated Tribes  
of the Grand Ronde

will reintroduce and maintain these grassy meadows into the landscape. The meadows vary in size and shape, and they will require routine maintenance to combat invasive species and vegetation growth. The sites will be planted with elk-friendly grasses and forbs to provide high quality forage. Hedgerows will vary the food choices and provide cover.

Sue Reams, acting NRCS district conservationist for Polk County, is picking up where Tom Finegan left off. Finegan was the former Polk County district conservationist for many years until he retired this summer. He was instrumental in engaging the Grand Ronde in NRCS programs. Finegan assisted with the planning process and the first two years of implementation for this project.

Reams says the project is going well so far. Most recently, Bill Richardson from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Kathy Pendergrass, NRCS plant materials specialist, helped create the seed mix for the high-elevation meadows. Some native species will be included in the mix,

because NRCS wants to encourage using native plants whenever possible.

“This partnership (with NRCS) has been huge,” Belonga said. “The tribe does not have funding designated for meadow maintenance. We are constantly searching for funding and partners. Not only does NRCS bring a high level of expertise, but the transition between Tom and Sue was seamless.”

Other project partners include the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Polk County Soil and Water Conservation District.

The tribe says it will consider the project successful if they’ve improved their own land and engaged their tribal elders in regular hunts. They also hope to encourage neighboring landowners to develop similar habitat improvement projects. This will offer elk a greater area to roam and graze, as well as improve hunting throughout the east side of the Coastal Range.



**Elk Meadow Before**



**Elk Meadow After**