

RC&D Council: High Country RC&D, Idaho

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Category:

Working with Partners or Sustainability

Title:

“Stone Soup” - Facilitating a Win-Win-Win Consortium which builds community and grows capacity for all.

Story Description:

In early 2011, High Country RC&D stepped outside our comfort level and took on the lead/facilitation of what has grown to be a project that spans four states, includes three RC&D's, 11 Soil & Water Conservation Districts, and 12 Rural Electric Cooperatives (REC). As a result, High Country was able to retain half of the operating capacity it lost when NRCS pulled out. In addition all the partners were able to retain or rebuild their operating capacity; improving the overall health of their organizations. Ag Producers are saving ¼ to ½ on their energy bills. REC's are seeing a significant reduction in seasonal demand for electricity, enabling them to remain in the cheaper Tier 1. BPA benefits by not having to build more power generation capacity to service their customers.



Back ground for NARC&DC: In October of 2010, the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) approached the Idaho State Association to expand a pilot project to their entire service Area. As pilots in Oregon and in Washington were helping Rural Electric Cooperatives get their Ag Energy Efficiency Program out on the ground; resulting in the Ag Producers implementing Ag Energy Efficiency practices with a goal of reducing energy consumption by 10%.



The State Association declined the opportunity, but said that they would appoint a member RC&D as proxy if that RC&D was willing to take on the project. The High Country board members at the meeting saw the great potential of the project to help High Country Ag Producers save significant energy costs. They asked their “brand new-to-them” coordinator, to work with the BPA representative to find out more about the project.

From October 2010 to early February, 2011, BPA pooled Idaho, Southwest Montana, and Western, WY. If High Country were to compete for the project with BPA, we would need to cover that area. There was no way we could implement the project on our own. So we built a consortium with Bitterroot and Headwaters RC&D in Montana, Western Wyoming RC&D, and Mid-Snake RC&D to cover their geographic areas. We also built a partnership with the SWCD’s in our area to deliver the program on the ground. Due to a capacity shortage in the other RC&D’s, High Country took the lead in pulling the project proposal together and took on the overall Project Coordination. The Proposal was submitted to BPA.

Then in Mid-February, 2011 the RC&D world found out that Congress was most probably going to cut our funding. We made it through March, but it looked like the ax was going to fall in April. At the end of March, High Country found out that our consortium had been funded by BPA to implement the project.

With the news that RC&D’s could be losing their coordinators (and the threat was very serious), Western Wyoming and Mid-Snake dropped out of the Consortium. However, their partners, the Soil & Water Conservation Districts still wanted to participate.

After an emergency meeting, the High Country Board stepped up and made the commitment to continue the project, and continue as the overall project coordination, despite the possibility of losing their federal coordinator. They reached out and took in the SWCD’s in the Mid-Snake and Western Wyoming and made them a part of High Country’s share of the consortium. In April, the Coordinators and Boards of the Consortium were able to assure BPA that even with the loss of their federal coordinators; the RC&D’s would be able to successfully implement the project.

High Country entered into a five year agreement with BPA on behalf of the consortium which would be funded year-to-year, based upon satisfactory performance.

This year we are expanding into NE Nevada (4 SWCD’s), and adding 4 more REC’s in Idaho (3 SWCD’s). We are also in negotiation with Mid-Snake RC&D to re-enter the program in 2013.

What's unique about this project is that each partner has the flexibility to implement their deliverables as best suits them, as long as they stay within the agreed budget. The partner RC&Ds receive dollars for coordination plus an administrative fee for their portion of the project. High Country's SWCD partners are contracted to complete a set of deliverables. If they are able to complete those deliverables under budget they are paid the contract total. As you can see, the set up has the ability of increasing the overall capacity of the Consortium partners.

Total Project Value: I need some help with this. Will finalize it next week for you.

BPA (2011 - \$200,000)	\$200,000
Partner Match	\$ 15,000
REC Energy Efficiency Program \$\$ on ground	\$ 90,000 to date
Ag Producer Energy Savings	\$ 20,000 to date
Value of Energy Saved to BPA	\$ 5M per megawatt
Value of remaining in Tier 1 energy to REC	\$???????

Return on Federal Investment: N/A this project is support by rate payer, not tax dollars.

Outcomes to date:

- 42 on-farm energy audits completed
- 5 irrigation system upgrades installed,
- 1 variable speed pump installed
- 34% of farmers receiving an energy audit implements the recommended energy efficiency measures.
- 2 businesses created (Energy audit related)
- 8 full time equivalent jobs created
- 7 full time equivalent jobs retained.
- 1 SWCD's retained (in danger of closing door due to lack of funding prior to project).
- 380 ag producers informed and educated about potential energy cost savings
- 3- RC&D's able to maintain at least ¼ of lost Federal Coordinator capacity.
- 7 SWCD's increased operating/program capacity
- Excellent marketing for all involved RC&D's and SWCD's, resulting in higher profile and name recognition in our communities.
- Increased donations to High Country (approximately \$2000).
- Building of community and mutual-aid on other endeavors between Consortium Partners.



Youth Involvement: N/A, unless you include our College Intern.

Presentation Preference: Oral

