

USDA State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting

October 26, 2023

Meridian Technology Center, Stillwater, OK

Jeanne Hamilton, State Conservationist for NRCS Oklahoma: Called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and gave a brief background to the group. She has been with the agency for almost 26 years but this is her first State Technical Committee meeting in Oklahoma. Due to the large turnout we had introductions around the room.

To kick off the meeting Ms. Hamilton mentioned the NRCS Chief Cosby's 5 priorities and what my vision and interpretations of those are for Oklahoma.

1. Our workforce, getting staffed up and trained so we can work efficiently with our partners and producers to get more conservation on the ground across the state. We have a lot of national entry level position that will be rotating through <https://www.usajobs.gov/> When we went through a restructure a few years ago our people that were promoted to DC positions were still responsible for their home office and the day-to-day activities. We are back filling GS11 Resource Conservationist in all our field offices so we can provide support to our customers and our staff. We do have acting's in a couple of our ASTC positions, we are working to fill those and will have selections on those soon.
2. Our partners, building stronger relationships with existing partners and engaging with new partners. New RCPP coordinator and Urban Conservationist which are key positions to reach more customers and educate them on the RCPP and Urban programs.
3. Urban, my interpretation of Urban Conservation isn't just cities, we talk about food deserts and where we need to have local foods. In my mind that is more our non-traditional agriculture and small producers. Having someone in that position will help us engage customers we have not been able to help in the past and reach folks in all scales of agriculture.
4. Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry. While it is a recent term, our goal at NRCS, is getting conservation on the ground. Everything we are doing is helping producers to be more resilient to extreme climate issues. The conservation and planning practices we are doing always target being more resilient. We do have specific practices are targeting for climate smart ag. All IRA money is focused on Climate Smart Ag practices.
5. Equity, which is in both our program delivery and who we have on staff and who we are working with in both our customers and partners to ensure we are reaching all of our potential audiences in all of those efforts. We are doing more with agreements and the partners that assist us, in building our staff to achieve equity across the state. I hope to see progress in all of the priorities as we move forward in Oklahoma.

Karla Stephens, Acting ASTC Programs: NRCS always accepts applications for all of our programs year-round, though we must implement batching deadlines for funding cycles for workload prioritization. The first funding cycle deadline is November 3, 2023, this is for all programs EQIP, CSP and ACEP easement applications. Depending on funds, we could have another sign up later in the year. Funding has increased significantly for FY24 CSP and EQIP due to IRA which is not part of the farm bill. We are working to obligate those funds, for CSP there is 10 million and for EQIP there is 33 million statewide. This is up to a 50% increase in funds. There will be a public database available (should be released nationally in January) to monitor funds to ensure they are properly obligated for the climate smart practices for CSP and EQIP IRA funding. Oklahoma IRA funds Climate Smart Practices must address Soil Health, Nutrient Management, Livestock Waste, Grazing and Pasture Issues and Agroforestry and Wildlife habitat. The FY 2024 Farm Bill funding for CSP includes 16 million for Classic, Renewal Contracts and Organic. The 2018 Farm Bill funding requirements must include 5% to beginning farmers and ranchers and 5% to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. IRA FUNDS CANNOT BE MIXED WITH FARM BILL FUNDS

Farm Bill FY 2024 EQIP funding

Non-Inflation Reduction Act that addresses by Team, a locally identified resource concern, will have 12 million dollars for local fund pools and 4.8 million dollars for the Nationally Mandated Joint Chief's Landscape Restoration Initiative, which includes: Monarch Butterfly Initiative, National Air Quality Initiative, National Water Quality Initiative, Northern Bobwhite and WaterSmart Initiative. Additionally, we have 8.2 million that Oklahoma has determined these funds will assist with Forestry, Lagoon Closure, Great Plains Grassland Initiative, AFO/CAFO, Irrigation, National Water Quality Initiative, Northern Bobwhite Quail, Monarch Butterfly, WaterSmart Initiative, and the Joint Chiefs Air Quality Initiative.

EQIP funding also includes 5% to beginning farmers and ranchers, 5% to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, 10% targeted to wildlife-related conservation practices, 50% targeted to livestock-related conservation practices and 5% required for CIC (Conservation Incentives Contracts). For EQIP funding there will also be 8.2 million with the state determining where those funds will best be used: Forestry, Lagoon Closure, Great Plains Grassland Initiative, AFO/CAFO, Irrigation, Northern Bobwhite Quail, Monarch Butterfly, WaterSmart Initiative, Joint Chiefs and Air Quality Initiative.

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ACT NOW

This is a new obligation process for EQIP that Oklahoma will be using this fiscal year to quickly obligate the funds. The priorities Oklahoma has determined are Soil health, Grass planting and High tunnels. The priority practices that meet a minimum ranking threshold that can be quickly obligated and funded.

- ❖ Trey Lam- How did you come up with those priorities and is there a role for the STAC to assist in that determination?
- ❖ Karla Stephens- We determined them from our state resource concerns, priorities and backlogged practices that have a minimum threshold so we can quickly process the application.
- ❖ Jeanne Hamilton- One of the things with ACT NOW, the intent when the idea was developing, is when a producer walks in signs an application, what can we turn around quickly? We tried to focus on things we know have a positive impact on the environment without having to go through a lot of assessments so we can get those practices implemented. We can talk about expanding it next year as this is the first year implementing ACT NOW in Oklahoma. We are trying to see how it is going to work for us and we can reevaluate it moving forward.
- ❖ Karla Stephens- To add to that, construction practices require designs which take time and others require cultural resource review which is also time consuming. We tried to keep it simple to help it function the way it was meant too.
- ❖ Jeanne Hamilton- We also took into consideration is what can we fund with the IRA funds verses our general funds so we can get IRA funds obligated first then use the general funds for our local resource concerns.
- ❖ Shalonda Guy- For the funding that is allocated for this FY, assuming each state has separate funds, will Oklahoma be able to compete for other states funds if they don't use theirs by the end of FY24?
- ❖ Jeanne Hamilton- Typically we have picked up additional funds at the end of the FY but the amount we have been funded is much higher than we are used to managing. But if we obligate all of it, we are given a few times a year to do a fund assessment and money not being used is sent back and other states can pick it up. Also this is our initial allocation letter information before the last FY closed out. We don't have a full federal budget right now as we are functioning under a continuing resolution, so those numbers are subject to change once the budget is approved.
- ❖ Question: Where does ACT NOW fit into the funding pool? It seems to be only EQIP practices. Where does it fit in the process?
- ❖ Karla Stephens- There is not an exact figure on how much funding will be set aside. In general, we want to do ACT NOW funds first and then rank the local fund pool.
- ❖ Jeanne Hamilton- It is going to be upfront, as the applications come in, we will have a short time frame to evaluate those applications and if they meet the previously identified threshold in our ranking process we can obligate right away. We have a ranking deadline, and our sign-up deadline typically extends into the next calendar year which left a month or two for field offices to complete the ranking process and had to wait till everyone had been through the process before we could funding decisions. This allows us the ability, as soon as we receive the application, to obligate if it meets the threshold immediately.
- ❖ Clay Pope- For clarification, is ACT NOW for IRA funds and Farm Bill Funds?
- ❖ Jeanne Hamilton- Yes both fund pools apply to ACT NOW. So, the Seasonal high tunnels would come out of our general funds and the rest of the practices will come out of IRA funding.
- ❖ Clay Pope- When you say soil health, does that include CIC (Conservation Incentive Contracts)?
- ❖ Jeanne Hamilton- No, that is a separate pool of funding.
- ❖ Karla Stephens- We wanted to keep it simple the first year, so we don't overwhelm our Field Offices. We also have plenty of funding this year and don't feel that it will be an issue.

2024 Ranking Criteria

Each fund pool includes the following: will have up to 5 priority resource concerns identified, land located in Source Water Protection Area will receive additional points in any fund pool, assessments of existing conservation efforts will be compared against planning criteria thresholds to determine the level of efforts needed to make improvements to the resource concern(s), cost-effectiveness of the proposed conservation treatment and individual questions regarding the impact to specifically identified resource concern in each fund pool.

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State Payment Rates for 2024

Source Water Protection Area practices will remain the same receiving the highest payment rate allowed by regulations. Payment Rate is set at the lowest level that still allows the adoption of the practice by the customer. Determining factors for payment rates include materials, equipment installation, labor, mobilization, acquisition of technical knowledge and foregone income.

- ❖ Arnetta Cotton- Why is it at the lowest possible rate?
- ❖ Karla Stephens- To be honest I am not sure, but I went with what we have done historically.
- ❖ Trey Lam- Would there be an opportunity to educate people on what water source protection practices are for our commodity groups or partners?
- ❖ Karla Stephens- There are specific geographic areas that are determined for those practices and Steve Glasgow will speak on that topic shortly.
- ❖ Robert Perez- On the 33 million IRA EQIP funds for 2024 I understand those are supposed to be climate practices only. Are you allowing the supporting practices to be included in the IRA funded contract?
- ❖ Karla Stephens- Steve Glasgow will answer that question in his part of the meeting.
- ❖ Robert Perez- The Farm Bill funding has 4.8 million in nationally mandated funds, was there input from the STAC on where these funds are targeted? Can those areas be flexible?
- ❖ Jeanne Hamilton- We can discuss that on a subcommittee. The funds showed on the national initiative are mandated in the state allocation letter at a minimum. At the state level we can have flexibility with additional funds going that direction.
- ❖ Robert Perez- On the geography of where the funds can be put on the ground is that at the states discretion or are there predetermined counties?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- A lot of the initiatives are designed based on frameworks and strategic planning already put in place and determined by our STAC. A lot of our initiatives do the same work, and we nearly have the whole state in some kind of coverage to get the benefit on the land. We designed and targeted it that way by working with STAC committee members over the years to define those areas.
- ❖ Robert Perez- Moving forward with the level of funding, the flexibility in reevaluating those decisions to possibly expand those areas?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- If the wildlife committee wants to look at that, then we will pull together and have a meeting and discuss where we can refine based on the science and research and local emphasis is. Some areas we have flexibility and some we do not.
- ❖ Sarah Blaney- On the National Climate Smart meeting 10/25/23 it was stated that Prescribed Burn, brush management and herbaceous weed management has been added to climate smart practices.
- ❖ Karla Stephens- Steve will cover that shortly, but there is an extensive national list that is published, and Steve will go over that.
- ❖ Arnetta Cotton- I want to echo what was said about flexibility, I understand that these are fixed based on what has been happening but if some other areas of the state outside of what is fixed, I am hoping there will be flexibility when there are earnest projects going on to try to meet those things.

ACEP (Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs)

WRE (Wetland Restoration Easements)

The Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC) for Oklahoma for FY24 will be utilizing fair market value with individual appraisals for the landowner compensation rates (80% of the agriculture value is paid to the customer). By policy, GARC must be established each year, it sets the maximum allowable dollar per acre paid to the customer. The GARC established in 2023 is \$2000/acre. It is being recommended that in 2024, GARC be set at \$2500/acre maximum (appraisals during 2023 ranged from \$1600-\$2000/acre. Appraisals are done on dryland or irrigated land. (Note: an email was sent to the ACEP and wildlife subcommittees following the meeting for further input into the GARC rate for ACEP-WRE, EWPP-FPE, and HFRP. Based on their responses, the GARCs for Oklahoma for those programs will be not to exceed \$2500 per acre)

Before ranking, the number one question for ACEP-WRE, is the land even eligible?

ACEP-WRE Ranking priorities include cost of restoration, acres of restorable hydrology, percent restorable hydrology vs upland buffer, cost of operation and maintenance of restoration, resulting type of hydrology restored (including Playa/Upland Depression, Seasonal Shallow Water and Temporary Shallow Water) and the proximity to existing WRE easements or Wildlife Management areas.

- ❖ Question: On the \$1600-2000 average appraisal, was that on dry land or was it irrigated land?

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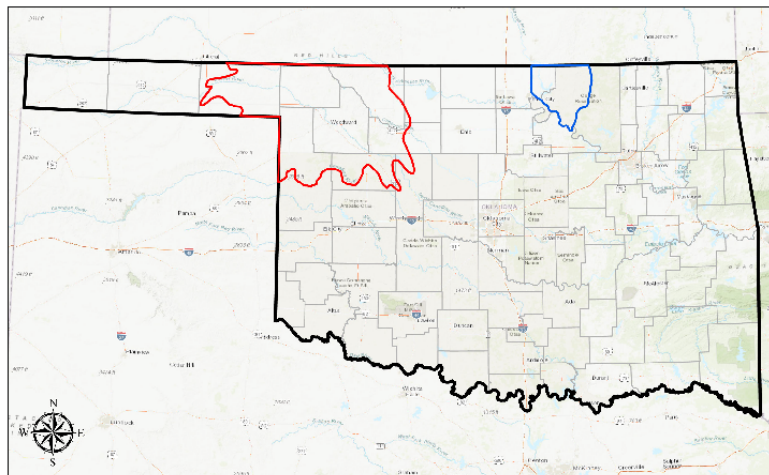
- ❖ Melanie Oliver- None of them are irrigated, all are dry land.
- ❖ Question: Is that ever a case where you'd have an application on irrigated ground?
- ❖ Melanie Oliver- We could take an application for it, but we haven't had one. Our past GARC's were set at \$2000 max an acre and an irrigated landowner would want more. We hadn't had any justification to bump it up until this past FY. There are different way to have specific GARC rates for specific areas if we start getting application like that. In doing appraisals this is what we have stuck with for the last few years.

ACEP-ALE – Agriculture Land Easements

The easement prevents conversion of agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses like urban sprawl and wind farms. NRCS provides matching funds to eligible ENTITIES that are State, Tribal, and local governments and nongovernmental organizations with farm and ranch land protection programs. **Private landowners work with the entity as a sponsor.** Please note that agricultural land easements are permanent.

To be eligible for ALE it must be private or Tribal agricultural land and must contain at least one of the following conditions: Prime or unique farmland designated soil types, historical or archeological resources, enrollment would protect grazing use as well as related conservation values by restoring or conserving land and protecting the land will further State or local policy consistent with the purposes of ALE. Federal cost share assistance associated with ALE is not to exceed 50% of the fair market value of the ALE as determined by the appraisal. Discussed Grasslands of Special Significance (see map below)

Oklahoma NRCS ALE-Grasslands of Special Significance



Some of the criteria used to determine ranking scores for eligible ALE applications in 2024 will include: prime, unique, or important farmland, historical or archeological significance, protected grazing usage, area of land offer-decreased amounts in farmed acres (development to non-agriculture use), percent population growth in the county, population density, grassland of special environmental significance and threatened and endangered species protection.

- ❖ Question: State rate cap, is it the same GARC on ALE that it is on WRE?
- ❖ Melanie Oliver- The federal government can only pay 50% but we do individual appraisals for each application or a max rate.
- ❖ Robert Perez- Has the funding increased for ACEP-ALE or has IRA increased those funds?
- ❖ Karla Stephens- For ACEP-WRE it is 1.5 million for Oklahoma, it is subject to change and we can request additional funds.
- ❖ Robert Perez- Are those funds used easily?
- ❖ Karla Stephens- That is a complex process.
- ❖ Melanie Oliver- Depends on the year. On IRA and the easements, they have specific land areas that are tied to IRA funds based on soils. In Oklahoma the WRE-IRA it is extremely small and very few acres across the state that qualify for the wetlands. On ALE we are in the middle of it, so where we would normally get \$300,000-\$500,000 we got 1 million under IRA funds due to a large project in the Osage Hills. These are ranked nationally, so they decide if they are approved.

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We have 2 new positions provided from national policy:

RCCP Coordinator – Tiffany Nelson

I don't have all of the answers being very new. RCCP (Regional Conservation Partnership Program) is a partner led approach to getting conservation on the ground. There are different modes of funding: Classic which mirrors traditional programs like EQIP and CSP, easement and land rentals. Then there is alternative funding which is for innovative projects. I am still learning about the alternative funding. I have a lot of trainings coming up in the next year and I plan to absorb as much as I can so I can be a good resource for this state and for potential and existing partners. Tiffany.nelson1@usda.gov Phone # 405-742-1236

- ❖ Robert Perez- In the last virtual STAC meeting Oklahoma was going to fill a lot of vacancies to put in the infrastructure so that in this next FY there would be opportunities to talk about partners. There are a significant number of partners highly engaged in pursuing RCCP in Oklahoma. There seem to be some changes nationally to make the process easier, but it can be tedious. We are interested (representing @ 14 organizations) and are excited about starting a conversation about how to help NRCS nationally and reach a high number of partner positions that they set as a goal.
- ❖ Tiffany Nelson- My goal is to find out who are the potential partners and who the established partners are, so when I am trained up, I can host trainings and meetings to talk about the process of going through RCCP and writing those proposals and building that relationship from there.
- ❖ Trey Lam- To give the other side of that, we have had several unsuccessful ones. It is a difficult program to manage and work through. We have come to look at it like EQIP, if you are wanting extra EQIP dollars sure but if you are working on a special project it doesn't fit. I have spoken at the national level about the struggles with RCCP. It is a challenge for a state like Oklahoma without any large corporate NGO entities that are headquartered here for the match funding. For RCCP we are going to have to make changes or bring in folks from out of state.
- ❖ Jeanne Hamilton- I'm sorry that has been your experience. Like Tiffany mentioned, there have been streamlining efforts going on. Nationally they understand that the process has been cumbersome, confusing and is not working as well as it should. We are building our Outreach staff right now so one of those things will come into play making sure everyone understands the commitments before signing the contracts. Tiffany and I will be going to a training next month where they will be showing us the new tools and processes. We will come back with more information and get more RCCP rolled out efficiently.
- ❖ Tiffany Nelson- I think communication has been an issue on RCCP so I plan on having open communication to ensure everyone knows what is going on and is on the same page and know what is expected of them and what they can expect of us.
- ❖ Robert Perez-Something that was discovered was Partner commitment is not a hard match, it is nationally viewed as a partner commitment. We would like to have success here in Oklahoma and help get it on the ground.

Urban Planner – Mary Fisher

Please join my Urban Subcommittee, if you are interested, please get with me and we can discuss it.

- ❖ Robert Perez- We are pretty limited in what we can do but we empathize with the need for urban ag in food deserts, but we are learning about educational tools like pocket prairies in urban environments. Do you have any interest in talking about working on pocket prairies in the future in Oklahoma?
- ❖ Mary Fisher- Definitely have interest in talking about that in the future. I want to touch on this, Urban. Don't let that term deter you from working with me if you are in rural areas, NRCS does not have a definition for Urban. On a national meeting it was said that New York City is very much urban but so is a rural community with a population of 300 people in Kansas. I also work on a small-scale basis, in rural communities and food deserts.
- ❖ Trey Lam- We are already a partner with an employee in Tulsa and we have a partner position with NRCS though an agreement funded position in OKC that is for the same thing. We are excited and believe there is a great deal of expansion in the urban areas and also as we move out to the rural areas. A lot of our food production for those food deserts come from the rural areas just outside the urban areas.
- ❖ Mary Fisher- I have worked with Jack and Marcus both and they are a delight to work with.
- ❖ Trey Lam- We would like to expand that partnership to have more people and staff.
- ❖ ODWC:- Do you plan to work with schools in small communities on outdoor classrooms?
- ❖ Mary Fisher- I am planning on doing that, I have made some connections in OKC, with OKC Beautiful, where they help schools create gardens. I would love to work with other partners to do that as well. If you know of any connections, please let me know.

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- ❖ Jeanne Hamilton- Mary is our main Urban Conservationist so she will also assist our internal staff with training on Urban Ag.
- ❖ Arnetta Cotton - Do you only work with schools, or do you work with community-based organizations?
- ❖ Mary Fisher- All of the above!
- ❖ Question: You mentioned food, do you deal with water issues as well?
- ❖ Mary Fisher- Unless it falls with-in rain catchment or small-scale micro-irrigation, no. Those are my 2 that deal with water.
- ❖ Question: Like declining water levels, like an aquifer?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- That is more broad scale agency mission verses the Urban only. The practices done in Urban will have a positive impact but in that context of the planning would be focused on that.
- ❖ Tiffany Nelson- That would fall under RCPP, we could partner on something like that.

Steve Glasgow State Resource Conservationist

Updates on Initiatives

I am going to cover what has changed to update the group on a few of the key initiatives. GPGI, Great Plains Grasslands Initiative, it was born out of our Great Plains Grasslands Biome framework, which looked at how we wanted to preserve our open grasslands and protect core areas while managing urban encroachment, woody encroachment, and invasive herbaceous species. In Oklahoma our primary threat we are trying to target is woody encroachment, primarily Eastern Red Cedar. We started 3-4 years ago having quarterly meetings and we developed core areas where we knew we had intact grasslands that were being managed and protected but woody species are encroaching and moving into those areas. One major goal that we have is to take care of invasive species before they have a chance to take over, this is also a priority resource concern. This is where we are targeting specific funds in the open grasslands to try and protect those. In year one, we were in the northwest part of the state, which is the Lesser Prairie Chicken area, last year we expanded our funding to the other four areas making 5 total core areas, with great success! We had more application than we had funds. Going into the future, we have the opportunity to target these open grasslands and expand those areas. A lot of times producers come to us because they can't do it on their own and they see a cedar forest and that's when they want conservation dollars to help. What we are trying to do is take those dollars and help before it becomes a forest so we can cover all the acres and before it is producing seeds that spread it further.

- ❖ Trey Lam- With-in this program, when you are ranking, would the smaller trees get a high ranking than the full forest?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- That is the concept for GPGI, but that doesn't mean that Eastern Red Cedar in Payne County is managed the same way. The other value of this is bring it into the local community and stake holders, like in Red Rock producers have come together and are developing prescribed burns to do together as a common objective covering multiple sections.
- ❖ Trey Lam- If we bring together state or partner dollars with-in the specific areas and projects, would it be possible to match that way? Where we pick up some of the landowners cost and target certain areas?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- Absolutely.

GPGI strategic blueprint plan that we put together is our answer to this issue. The plan is so broad, it is education, outreach, positionally RCPP with the end result being what we want to achieve on the land. GPGI is just one tool of many agreements with-in the state.

Source Water Protection Priority Areas

Working with STAC sub-committees we have expanded our priority areas. We are allowed to have up to 20% of the state acres be in Source Water Protection Areas. We took the Oklahoma watersheds that were on the national EPA list, that had greater than 70% of the acres contribute to source water, which put Oklahoma almost at 20%. Now within these watersheds we can prioritize those conservation practices to protect them. If a producer is applying new practices that will attribute to the water quality or quantity, they get extra points in their ranking. We have completed the first 5 years on NWQI & Little Beaver Watershed and have been approved to continue with funding in the Little Beaver Project area. It will enable us to ramp up the efforts and keep moving forward with Little Beaver watershed.

EQIP Water Smart works off of entities that have grants that work through the Bureau of Reclamation through their water smart program. We have begun our 3rd year in Blue River, while we have improved the water quality the main issue is the quantity. We have taken the Blue River and expanded the area around it to include in our Source Water. Each area has specific funding based off of precise plans. The dollars have to target those geographic areas, the specific practices and resource concerns.

OK NRCS Bob White Quail, Grasslands and Savannas Initiative and OK NRCS Forestry Initiative

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Nationally they developed a framework for conservation of working lands for wildlife for Bob White Quail approximately three years ago. Oklahoma is part of that, and we have designated priority areas to target those efforts. Historically our goal has been to restore the cross timbers ecosystem, not only for Bob White Quail but for other aspects. The area is a good fit for the quail so while before we used the Cross Timber funding, we will now use the Bob White Quail funding. Practices won't change as they are already benefiting the quail and the livestock producer. ODWC and Pheasants/Quail Forever both help promote these initiatives in this specific area. If we put all the initiatives on a map almost the entire state of OK would be covered. While they are all different, the type of work we do and the outcome on the land is the same. You will notice a lot of the Ecological Science aspects come down to invasive species and prescribed fire as our main focus. In the eastern part of the state, we are continuing with our forestry initiative to restore the native forest ecosystems. We have had it in place since the early 2000's, revamped and changed over the years, and we expanded to the northeast part of the state. We realized we have unique opportunities which brought us to the Joint Chiefs Restoration Project. These are joint between NRCS and the U.S Forest Service nationally where both agencies fund them together. We work with the Oklahoma Dept. of Forestry, coming together with local entities to put together potential projects. We submit those proposals similar to a grant. We tried for several years and were finally approved this year for the northeast part of the state in a joint project with Arkansas; Arkansas Ozark Watershed Restoration Project. The goal is to to manage landscape with combined efforts and restore native ecosystems and expected outcomes for water quality and wildlife.

Climate Smart and IRA (Inflation Reduction Act)

The Mitigation list has had some modifications and changes. The IRA directs NRCS to use the additional funds specifically for climate change mitigation. Mitigation activities address causes of climate change such as greenhouse gas emissions and carbon storage. As an agency we must account for how much greenhouse gas was reduced and how much carbon storage was increased. Adaptation addresses the consequences and how to adapt to changes. Nineteen new practices were added to the Mitigation list, those that are highlighted are provisional (meaning there is science behind it, but we haven't developed the tool to measure the practice yet). To find a list of FY24 NRCS climate-smart mitigation activities you can go to this website [Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Mitigation Activity List \(usda.gov\)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Climate-Smart-Agriculture-and-Forestry-Mitigation-Activity-List)

The 19 new practices including soil health (soil carbon amendment), Livestock (waste and feed management), Grazing lands-Brush (all woody residue to remain on site), Burning (when we needed to improve deep rooted perennial species) and Energy efficiency-irrigation (switching system). We will have some limitations, like the Brush management verses Prescribed Burn, if you cut down the tree you must leave it on the ground but if you burn a pasture and happen to burn a tree that's okay. You cannot run fire across a field that has had brush management. Please keep in mind that these practices may differ from state to state but the outcome must still be reduction of greenhouse gases or carbon sequestration. Ten CSP Enhancements have been added as well. Coordination is KEY when working with Climate Smart and IRA.

- ❖ Tanner - What is the reasoning or justification for not piling up and burning woody residue skeletons or the cedar trees itself?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- The current National answer is more confusing than the instruction on how to carry out the practice. Originally you would cut down and chip or mulch the woody residue to get the carbon from the tree back on the soil. That is what they changed. A lot of people argue that trees store a lot of carbon, so if I am cutting it down and leaving it out there it is still "on the land". This is one of the provisional practices, so I expect there to be a lot of discussing and changes. But it does give us the ability to use this practice in certain situations.
- ❖ Tanner- If we have research to show, can we submit it?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- Send it to me and I will submit it. The national office wants the research, the mitigation list has come from research.
- ❖ Jason Warren- How do they modify the carbon storage or emissions, is that on a per acre bases? Are they running a lifecycle analysis on these practices? For instance, if you cut down a tree you are going to burn fuel, a lot of trees is a lot of fuel. Second, if we plant 10 million acres of grass on the high plains from TX to NE, are they thinking about how that affects the global food production complex with the shift in acres for crop production? I'm not against planting 100 million acres of grass in the high plains I'm just asking if they have considered that from a global perspective. Because it's a global contaminate then it will shift, if we do what we need to do to reduce our foot print, the production will shift globally.
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- What they are going to look at is in the context of would that 10 million acres grass planted contribute to something. I don't know that USDA is going to go to that level, but we can report and show the impact for the United States.

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I don't know that these practices are looking at that scale. This is new and a lot of scientists are building our climate team and it will continue to evolve as we move forward.

- ❖ Jason- In the modeling phase, once we put all these practices out on the landscape and then quantify it, do they have plans to measure the resiliency?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- That is the intention. When we say through NRCS, all the practices that have been completed, the results are "x amount" of metric tons or carbon sequestered or greenhouse gases. On the list where they don't have an asterisk or highlight, they have ways to quantify the practice. The provisional ones (19 new ones) they are still working on that.
- ❖ Question- Is mechanical control the only option?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- We can do chemical control, but we have to cut off the dead tree that has been chemically controlled and leave it on the land. We have a lot of resprouting species, so we would cut it and then chemically treat the stump. The biggest issue I see that will hurt us is we are trying to promote prescribed burn, which is on the list, in conjunction with cutting down that cedar tree but the mitigation list will limit us there. I don't want everyone to get hung up on being restricted on IRA spending, remember the other EQIP funds we have, if we do a lot of other soil health practices that are big spending things, that other pot of money frees us up to do a lot more of brush management and prescribed burn.
- ❖ Question- Is there currently an amount of time the woody residue needs to sit there before we could do a prescribed burn?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- That level has not been described yet. Those are question I have raised to them.
- ❖ Question- When they are determining this, have they looked at grassland carbon sequestration storage below ground verses tree covered carbon sequestration above ground, weighing the list as "what's a better permanent carbon scene"? The amount of carbon may be similar, but one is above ground and vulnerable to being released, are they weighing the importance of that?
- ❖ Glasgow- Yes, they are taking it into account through the discussion submitted to get this added. The Great Plains states made the push to get Brush Management on the list. The balance there is to look at invasive species, when an ecosystem is supposed to be grasslands, woody species aren't supposed to be there. That has been our argument. Thinning is also included in the practices for our cross timbers to help the health of the existing woody species that is historically part of the ecosystem.

One of the things that has come out of this is for our wildlife folks. Before our Wildlife Upland Habitat Management 645 practice was on the list and has now been removed. The reason was we did perennial planting under that practice, but it has now moved under other standards. Forest Stand and Improvement is a big practice in our Quail and Cross timbers area, in our Joint Chiefs and Forestry Initiative. So, we will be to do a lot of IRA mitigation practices in our existing forestry programs in the eastern half of the state. This list going into the future, will constantly change as they look at the bigger picture on energy reduction.

- ❖ Clay Pope- This is on brush control; I know that at one time in EQIP, biological control on an upland practice qualified. Is that still the case and does it carry over to IRA when you are talking about brush control and taking multi-species grazing?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- Right now it is not in there but that doesn't mean they won't add it in the future. The key is I can get a goat to eat the leaves but its not going to cut it down to lay on the land.
- ❖ Clay Pope- On Soil Health, what do you do with early adopters? I know from a publication in Kansas and of some discussion in Texas about how they were using some of their IRA money last spring on conservation incentive contracts (CIC). I know of 4 guys already who have made those conversions to climate smart practices, and I am assuming there is an additionality factor to do but the whole idea of maintaining the practices you've already undertaken probably, in a lot of cases, were already under EQIP before. Is that something that still qualifies under IRA and that OK is looking at as a way to 1- try to move some funds out and 2- going back to the early adopter, the way to keep building on successes like some of the other initiatives in the past?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- Right now moving forward we are treating this as EQIP with IRA dollars. Adopting the practice to address those resource concerns.
- ❖ Clay Pope- Five % of those EQIP dollars is supposed to go to the CIC right now under the Farm Bill funding.
- ❖ Dustin Stoner- It is under discussion.
- ❖ Clay- What about the Advanced Soil Health Livestock Integration Initiative? I am curious about assisting producers in grazing cover crops.
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- I have not heard of that Initiative, that has not come down to us in Oklahoma.

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- ❖ Clay Pope- Some other states were looking at using that. They were going to use it to encourage producers to grazing cover crops. It is incorporating livestock as part of your soil health programs and looking at water. Question 1- if it was something Oklahoma was looking at and 2- to get clarification; I was at a meeting where somebody said under IRA the rules had changed and that cost share dollars could be used for boundary fences. Is that the case or not?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- IRA is a pot of money, it still follows EQIP rules.
- ❖ Trey Lam- If you go and apply right now for brush management will that application be considered against both traditional and IRA EQIP money? Will there be a point where the applicant is asked if they are willing to follow the IRA Climate smart where you leave the woody residue on the ground?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- That is all a part of the planning and working with the producer. That is their decision to be made and the best program for them. It is all part of the application process. It's just another fund pool alongside all the other fund pools.
- ❖ Trey Lam- When we are having our area meetings, should we have them trying to get more producers to apply? Or do you have a back log?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- I can't speak from the programs standpoint but I would. We need to promote the conservation first and foremost. We need to make them understand the problems on the landscape and then get them through the door. Then we can work with them on the best approach.
- ❖ Trey Lam- What about producers that applied but then dropped out, is now the time to come in and apply.
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- As the announcements go out and the producers hear about the extra funds, I expect a lot will be applying. If they didn't get approved before due to backlog or ranking, they should try again.
- ❖ Marla Peeks- Back to brush management and not being able to burn trees that have been cut down. Are they thinking about the state implementation plan that we have for air quality from DEQ? Is that completely disregarded?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- They are not looking at the scale down to each state, this is broad in scope from national office down. If it was up to the states then we would be able to bring our own resources and people together and say this is what we think but because of the amount of funds, in my opinion, and tied to the manner in which it came out, they want to mandate and control what we do with it. Again, we do not know what the next farm bill is going to do or how it will roll into and be apart of... if it is, who knows. I expect under the realm of climate smart and agriculture its not something that is going to go away. I can envision a lot of things and changes that are going to be coming. I feel we will see a lot of it in the new farm bill.
- ❖ Sarah Blaney- With these Climate Smart Commodities Grants that are coming out, there are 20 right now that touch the state of OK on the website, but I know of 22. What is the plan for coordination among those entities that have those grants that touch OK because I foresee a big problem of not being able to advise producers correctly about what to sign up for and when if there isn't coordination among those entities at the state level. Also, I perceive that districts are going to get confused as producers are coming in and asking about 22 different programs that they are being directly marketed to enroll in, so what is the plan to make sure we are not duplicating efforts and we are attacking the problems we need to attack in the correct way?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- I agree. As far as I know, these 22, I have been seeing them come through because of environmental evaluations. I believe it is up to those entities and what their proposal and project is going to do to possibly reach out to the other ones. As far as I know, we don't play a roll in bringing everyone together to discuss it. However, when you start talking about 22 of them, originally, we thought there would be a couple and a lot of the projects are doing the same practices that we are doing. My biggest concern is coordination, I agree, but how much are we going to be pushing on their programs when our programs are doing the same stuff.
- ❖ Sarah Blaney- The problem, those dollars directly compete with EQIP and CSP because you can't stack them. And the fact of the matter is the payment rates for EQIP and CSP are going to be higher than any of these entities are offering so the first step for that producer is they need to be denied by EQIP or CSP before going to the second funding pool because the payment rates will be so much higher and more beneficial for them to do those practices and I think it's just been a mess from start to finish. What we applied for and what they want to fund us for are not the same thing. I don't know if anybody read my grant application before they were approved. I even said that to them.
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- That is beyond us, the stuff you bring up, I have wanted the same thing, Jeanne has probably wanted the same thing. I don't know if nationally they have given you guidance but if it's up to the parties to do the coordination you've got to become familiar with the other 21 in the state to know what they are doing and how you can

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work with each other. We need to be at that table because we don't know where we are competing. We won't deny producers so they can go to your program, just like you won't do that either. These are issues, when it first came out, that we raised though this whole process of potential outcomes. But again, it's a large fund pool and a way to get valuable conservation and benefit on the land but it is a logistics nightmare, in my opinion

- ❖ Clay Pope- Is it possible for a producer to apply for the same practice on the same piece of land though multiple entities to different grants? So, they will cross over each other?
- ❖ Steve Glasgow- They could but I don't think they can get funded from both entities because they are both federal dollars. I thought there were 18 proposals because I haven't seen or read them all and some of these may touch OK but if you don't have that local partner in the state, it may not get promoted. The ones that the entities are in state probably will spend more time promoting theirs than the ones who aren't. Sarah, I don't have a good answer for you, but I will look into it and learn more about it.
- ❖ Sarah Pope- Can you push? Just a little nudge to get some collaboration.

FSA Agency Report, Zane Fleming

Admin plans to hold several trainings over the 2024 FY to better prepare employees for working programs and personal development. Outreach for FY2023 ended with an all-time-high output of community support and engagement. FY 2024 outreach focuses on Tribal engagement and more meaningful outreach opportunities. Oklahoma FSA greatly appreciates our state agency partners, stakeholders and USDA sister agency coworkers for successful collaborations in FY 2023.

Production and Payment Eligibility Programs (PPE) Section- ARC/PLC

The Agriculture Risk (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) is an income support program that provides payments when actual crop revenue declines below a specified guaranteed level. The PLC Program provides payments when the effective price for covered commodity falls below its effective reference price. The total Oklahoma contract enrollment is 46,499 contracts for 2022. ARC/PLC 2022 program year payments were made in October 2023. [ARC/PLC Program Data \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/arc-plc-program-data) 2022 PLC Payment Rates for:

Item	Wheat	Barley	Oats
	Dollars Per Bushel		
Effective Reference Price	5.50	4.95	2.40
National Loan Rate	3.38	2.50	2.00
Marketing Year Average (MYA) Price	8.83	7.40	4.57
Higher of Loan Rate or MYA Price	8.83	7.40	4.57
PLC Payment Rate	0.00	0.00	0.00

The 2022 Final Corn, Grain Sorghum, Soybean PLC Payment rate is \$0.00 per bushel, Seed Cotton is \$0.00 per pound and Peanuts is \$0.00 per pound.

- The 2018 Farm Bill requires a unanimous election to obtain PLC or ARC-CO on a covered commodity-by commodity basis that will remain in effect for the 2019 through 2023 crop years. An election of ARC-IC in any year will apply to all covered commodities on the farm. Starting with the 2021 crop year, and each crop year thereafter through 2023, the producers on a farm may change the election of PLC or ARC on a year-to-year basis. Enrollment for 2024 will require an extension of the current Farm Bill or a New Farm Bill.

NAP

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) provides basic coverage equivalent to the catastrophic level risk protection plan of insurance coverage, which is based on the amount of loss that exceeds 50% of expected production at 55% percent of the average market price for the crop. The 2018 Farm Bill re-authorizes higher levels of coverage ranging from 50% to 65% of production, in 5 percent increments, at 100% of the average market price. For all coverage levels, the NAP service fee is the lesser of \$325 per crop or \$825 per producer per administrative county, not to exceed a total of \$1,950 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties. Producers who elect higher levels of coverage must also pay a premium equal; to the producer's share of the crop, the number of eligible acres devoted to the crop, the approved yield per acre, the coverage level, the average market price and a 5.25% premium fee.

AGI

The 2018 Farm Bill requires the implementation of an average adjusted gross income (AGI) limitation for payment eligibility for the 2019 through 2023 program years. The AGI limitation provision applies to most programs administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service. Recent process changes to the AGI process will allow the IRS to process AGI's sooner alleviating additional workload on the county offices.

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ERP: Emergency Relief Program

The Emergency Relief Program covers losses to crops, trees, bushes, and vines due to qualifying natural disaster event in calendar years 2020 and 2021. Phase 2 intends to fill additional assistance gaps and cover eligible producers who did not participate in existing risk management programs. Phase 2 payments were recently issued, and Oklahoma paid out \$31.6 Million.

Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program (PARP)

PARP is a pandemic “clean-up” program and payments to applicable producers will not be issued until the Phase 2 payment cycle is complete.

General CRP Signup 60

National notice CRP-991 announced Signup 60 for General CRP. Producers were able to make offers beginning February 27th of 2023. All offers were to be taken by close of business on April 7th, 2023. Oklahoma had roughly 50,000 CRP acres expiring in 2023. Of that 50,000 acres 22,500 acres were offered back into General CRP. Due to low rental rates, we have seen a decline in General CRP offers in Oklahoma. National notice CRP-999 announced the accepted and rejected acres for General CRP signup 60. Offers with an EBI score of 184 or greater were considered basically acceptable. Oklahoma had an acceptable acreage amount of 21,899.54. NRCS completed conservation plans for the offers that producers chose to move forward on. The conservation plans were completed and signed by NRCS, the producer, and FSA by the deadline of August 11th, 2023. The producers who chose to move forward in to contract status have been approved at this point.

Grassland CRP Signup 205

National notice CRP-997 announced Grassland CRP signup 205. Producers were able to make offers beginning on April 17th, 2023. All offers were to be taken by close of business on May 26th, 2023. Oklahoma had an offered acreage amount of 107,762.26 acres. National notice CRP-1001 the accepted and rejected acres for Grassland Signup 205. Offers with an EBI score of 77 or greater were considered basically acceptable. Of the offered acreage that was submitted by close of business on April 7th Oklahoma had an acceptable acreage amount of 85,808.11. NRCS completed conservation plans for the offers that producers chose to move forward on. The conservation plans were to be returned to FSA by NRCS on September 8th. Interim conservation plans were approved Grassland CRP Signup 205. Offers with interim conservation plans and final conservation plans were to be approved by close of business on September 30th. Contracts with interim conservation plans are to have final conservation plans by December 15th, 2023. Approval of the final conservation plans should be completed by FSA on January 19th, 2024. The producers who chose to move forward with offers with interim conservation plans and final conservation plans should be approved by this point.

Migratory Birds, Butterflies and Pollinators with Kansas and Nebraska SAFE signup (CP-38B)

This will be the 4th year of sign up and is still considered a pilot program. Counties were discussed (map was given). Oklahoma was given the opportunity to be included in the pilot program for a multi-state SAFE signup for Migratory Birds, Butterflies and Pollinators with Kansas and Nebraska. This specific SAFE signup is targeting producers in Cimarron, Texas, and Beaver counties. With this signup producers will work with NRCS and FSA to offer acreage for wetland restoration. These areas are known as Playas. In this Pilot program the producers were able to bid their offers. They were restricted to a range of SRR's between the irrigated and dryland rates for their counties. For example, the estimated range will be between \$64 and \$15. The producer can bid their offer at any number that falls in that range. The rates are based off NASS data.

We had offers in each county. After the offers were ranked by the national office, 7 in Cimarron County were accepted. The offers went the conservation planning process, and the producers were made aware of the practices that would be required to make CP38B suitable on their property. These practices could include sediment removal, some grading, shaping, and filling, and grass planting. The producers that agreed to these terms have had their offers approved at this time. Work will begin on these offers soon.

Livestock Assistance Program

Several Counties are eligible for the 2023 Livestock Assistance Program (LFP) in Oklahoma. Producers have until January 30, 2024, to sign an application in the eligible counties.

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new farm bill, Senator Lucas would rather stick with the numbers we have in our current farm bill than haste fully get a new one and it not match the changes in the climate.

Playa Lakes Joint Venture- Matt Smith

SAFE- State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement, it is a FSA CRP practice.

CIG- Conservation Innovation Grants, it is through NRCS which provides grants to do innovative conservation delivery work and improve delivery of conservation programs.

SAFE Project is about Playa restoration. The purpose is for wildlife habitat and ground water recharge. Playas are the only recharge for the aquifer so the playa restoration benefits people as well as wildlife. Oklahoma was included for the 1st time this year in the SAFE program, 3 counties in the panhandle are included: Cimarron, Texas, and Beaver. The ranking process is unique, the landowner can reverse bid, and the OK counties were clustered together for ranking. The idea about the reverse bid is to build a market price for conservation and limit the amount approved to 50% each time to encourage people to really think about the price they want to bid. In all 4 states there were 169 offers with 7,778 acres. Oklahoma had 24 with 589 acres. SAFE approved OK application ended up at 12 with 294 acres. Now work will begin on playa restoration by taking silt out and putting in grass buffers around them. In the future we would like to expand into Texas, but we aren't sure what is going to happen. No new sign up date for now until we have a new farm bill.

We have talked a lot about the funding of CIG how its coming from IRA but what gets overlooked is the outreach, marketing and communications revolving around these programs and the resource concerns. They have to be conveyed to people in the right way. We learned this lesson with playas, we used to talk about the wildlife value with playas, but it doesn't resonate with everyone. So, we started asking producers what would it take to start doing some conservation around playas? The most knowledgeable thing was recharge and what it meant for them and the aquifer, then they became interested in the program. Then we shifted our messaging around playas from wildlife to water value and the people connection to the water and it made a huge difference.

Something similar here on brush management and use of prescribed fire, we really wanted to understand how we can say it better for producers to take those kinds of conservation actions with those practices. That is what this CIG grant was about it is in 3 counties in Kansas and 3 counties in Oklahoma. We did it on a gradient of invasive species to look at different counties. We are in the middle of this grant, one of the first things we did was a social science literature search to see what kind of science was out there today on these practices and we have focus groups. Now we are going to take that information and we are going to craft some messages that hopefully will lead to better conservation and conservation delivery of those top priority practices. It connects the social science with the communication to improve the delivery of the program. Going forward we will follow up with our focus groups and the message testing that we have developed. Then we will develop some communication and outreach materials and tools that we will use moving forward. Then we will start to scale that up to connect to a larger audience getting that message out there and hopefully expand that to other parts of the state. Thank you to Steve and his staff for assistance getting word out there. We appreciate all our partners in the state.

Oklahoma Conservation Commission- Trey Lam

A new effort kicked off yesterday with the North Canadian Watershed restoration program which is a cedar program focused around trying to increase the stream flow in the North Canadian River to protect Canton Lake and the water supply for Oklahoma City. We are taking it as an all-encompassing cedar, we are talking about wildfire mitigation. We have hired some folks in those conservation districts that will run skid steers, mulchers, and clippers to create brush free zones around our small communities and public infrastructure. We are working with John Weir and the Prescribed Burn Association. We brought together volunteer fire departments and prescribed burn associations and the first training was in Blaine County. They learned about prescribed fire to prevent wildfire, backfire when they are fighting fire as well as other tools. Then they took those fire fighters out and did a prescribed burn with them to show them how it works. Then if they go to participate in one prescribed burn with their prescribed burn association, they will receive a \$10,000 grant from the state to use in their volunteer fire department for equipment. The final part of this program we will go in on 5,000 acres and completely remove all the cedars, reestablish the native grass, manage it correctly and eventually use prescribed fire there. We will measure that against a control area of 5,000 acres in a parallel watershed where we don't remove any cedars. We will look at stream flow, spring flow, soil health, wildlife, habitat assessments and try to get a real comparison. I know these have been done before, but it will show policy makers and the public the value in removing cedars. We have started and the legislature is behind it, they foresee it will prove the concept. Prescribed fire is going to be the key to making it work. With the acceptance of prescribed fire and the use of it, we do have some funding to put on top of EQIP funding or outside of it, towards prescribed fire to get it on the ground. There is interest from the state to expand it to other watersheds like the South Canadian, the Cimarron or the Washita watershed.

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Roadside erosion was another project we started this year that has to do with unpaved roads. We utilize educators from OSU and other engineers to teach proper unpaved road and ditch management and better structures that improve water quality. If these roads are managed correctly then the stream run off from these roads prevent the culverts, ditches, and streams from filling up. This is a grant program of up to \$50,000 per county if the county commissioner does the training, they become eligible for a single project. We funded several around the state, one being in Lincoln County.

Soil health continues to be a big push, we have a state statute now on healthy soils. We hired staff who are in the field now giving technical assistance and have partnered with Johnson's Seed. We had a give away program for cover crop seed and producers put it out this summer to increase the use of cover crops. This program will continue next year. We are also working with General Mills and AEM to increase regenerative agriculture in their product sourcing sheds in northwestern Oklahoma.

On conservation planning, we are assisting NRCS as best as we can on the state cost share all around the state. We hired one Nutrient Management planner and would like to hire 2 more. The legislature and ODAFF have put together a program where we will provide the nutrient management program for the poultry industry due to the lack of it being provided in Oklahoma.

Oklahoma Farmers & Ranchers- Mike Oakley

We have lost a few members and are now rebuilding our board. It's been difficult the last few years with the challenges COVID has presented, people not wanting to get out and participate but we are getting back to it. We are actively looking for new members for our board.

Oaks & Prairies Joint Venture- Robert Perez

OPIV received a Southern Plains Grasslands Award in 2023 to support one of our Oklahoma staff members. We have an RCPP in Texas and will be one new hire for the American Bird Conservancy employee for Texas. The Cross Timbers/ Prairie Grant that is fixing to go through for TNC, we are excited to be working with them on the match so that we can put in for another Southern Plains Grasslands Easement grant to possibly get someone around Tulsa, to work with NRCS and to begin work in an area, historically, we have not had someone working. I am excited to work in that part of the state, the unplowed prairie is a fantastic acquisition to be donated to TNC. We are working with the Chickasaw Nation on a BIA grant for the Lake of the Arbuckles and are hopeful that this one will stick. The Conservation Partners Program, which we have an application actively submitted for Texas but in the next roll out, IRA funds are appearing in the CPP and it is tightly tied to NRCS which presents a lot of opportunity though it with the funding increasing significantly. For partners to go in together to get staff capacity to help deliver the OK NRCS mission.

Oklahoma State Conservationist NRCS- Jeanne Hamilton

The STAC will continue to be in person, but we would really like to see the Sub-committees being active so when we come back to the full group, they can report on the topics that need more discussion. You can sign up now or at anytime for a sub-committee, if you have any ideas for a new one, please let us know. We don't want too many so we can have people involved. There is an NRCS representative on each committee that leads the group, but we need your input in these groups.

USDA Liaison for Langston University-Shalonda Guy

I just want to remind everyone about the USDA 1890 Scholarship program. It will be made available in December and will be open for 2 months. It is for high school seniors, college freshman & sophomores to apply for the scholarship to attend an 1890 land grant institution and receive a full scholarship paid by the USDA, a paid internship while in school and a job after graduation. It is offered every year though USDA and I wanted to remind everyone.

Oklahoma State Conservationist NRCS- Jeanne Hamilton

Thank you all for coming, your time and the discussion this morning. I am so glad to put faces with names and I am excited to move forward. Please feel free to visit after the meeting with each other and thank you again for coming.

Meeting adjourned at 12:05.

Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma Migratory Birds, Butterflies and Pollinators SAFE

State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)



Overview

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Playa Lake and Rainwater Basin Joint Ventures are partners in implementing a State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) project to enroll agricultural land containing playas in parts of Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma. Playa wetlands are shallow depressions that often fill with water after rainstorms. The purpose of the Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma Migratory Birds, Butterflies and Pollinators SAFE is to restore playas to their proper function, providing benefits that include improved water quality, water recharge for the Ogallala Aquifer, and habitat for migrating waterfowl, cranes, and shorebirds.

Background

SAFE is part of the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP is a federally funded voluntary program that contracts with landowners and agricultural producers to establish and manage vegetative covers that control soil erosion, improve water quality, and provide wildlife habitat.

SAFE is a unique type of CRP that offers organizations the opportunity to partner with the USDA to establish habitat for high-priority wildlife species on agricultural land. SAFE sponsors work with the USDA to identify the wildlife species, the vegetative cover that provides habitat for the target species, and the location in the state where the habitat is needed. A partnership is formed between the SAFE sponsor and the USDA, and federal funds are made available to allow for CRP enrollment on eligible land within the SAFE project location.

Target Wildlife Species

The goal of the Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma Migratory Birds, Butterflies and Pollinators SAFE project is to provide habitat for migrating and wintering waterfowl such as the Northern pintail, shorebirds such as the declining Baird's sandpiper and Hudsonian godwit and waterbirds including the whooping crane.

In addition to providing habitat for migratory birds, the seeding mixtures that will be used will contain a variety of

forbs, including milkweed to maximize habitat for pollinators and other priority species like monarch butterflies.

Habitat

Landowners and agricultural producers participating in Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma Migratory Birds, Butterflies and Pollinators SAFE are required to develop a conservation plan with assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or a technical service provider. The conservation plan will provide details on how to restore playa hydrology, establish buffers, and manage habitat for the target species. The playa wetlands being restored will provide essential roosting, loafing, and foraging habitat for millions of migrating birds that rely on these wetland habitats. In addition to the wildlife benefits, the restored playa wetlands will increase recharge to the Ogallala Aquifer. After the habitat is established, it will need to be maintained and managed with appropriate management activities such as prescribed burning, prescribed grazing, interseeding forbs/legumes and selective use of herbicides. Proper habitat establishment, maintenance, and management will maximize benefits for wetland dependent species.



Project Location

The Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma Migratory Birds, Butterflies and Pollinators SAFE project location:

Kansas—Cheyenne, Clark, Finney, Ford, Gove, Graham, Grant, Gray, Greely, Hamilton, Haskell, Hodgeman, Kearny, Lane, Logan, Meade, Morton, Ness, Rawlins, Scott, Seward, Sheridan, Sherman, Stanton, Stevens, Thomas, Wallace, Wichita.

Nebraska—Adams, Banner, Buffalo, Butler, Chase, Cheyenne, Clay, Custer, Dawson, Deuel, Dundy, Fillmore, Franklin, Frontier, Garden, Gosper, Hall, Hamilton, Harlan, Hayes, Hitchcock, Kearney, Keith, Kimball, Lincoln, Logan, Nuckolls, Perkins, Phelps, Polk, Saline, Seward, Sherman, Thayer, Valley, Webster, York.

Oklahoma—Beaver, Cimarron, Texas.

Eligible CRP Practices

This SAFE project uses the following CRP practices:

- ◆ CP38B-23A, Wetland Restoration non-floodplain

Haying and Grazing

All current non-emergency and emergency haying and grazing provisions are authorized for this SAFE project.

When using grazing to meet the management activity requirement, grazing must be completed using state developed guidance.

Eligibility Requirements

Because SAFE is part of CRP, certain land and participant eligibility rules apply. To begin with, land must be in the project area and meet cropping history. CRP participant eligibility rules also apply to SAFE.

Payments and Incentives

In exchange for participation in CRP SAFE, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides participants with annual per acre rental payments, cost-share to assist with habitat establishment expenses, and in some cases additional monetary incentives.

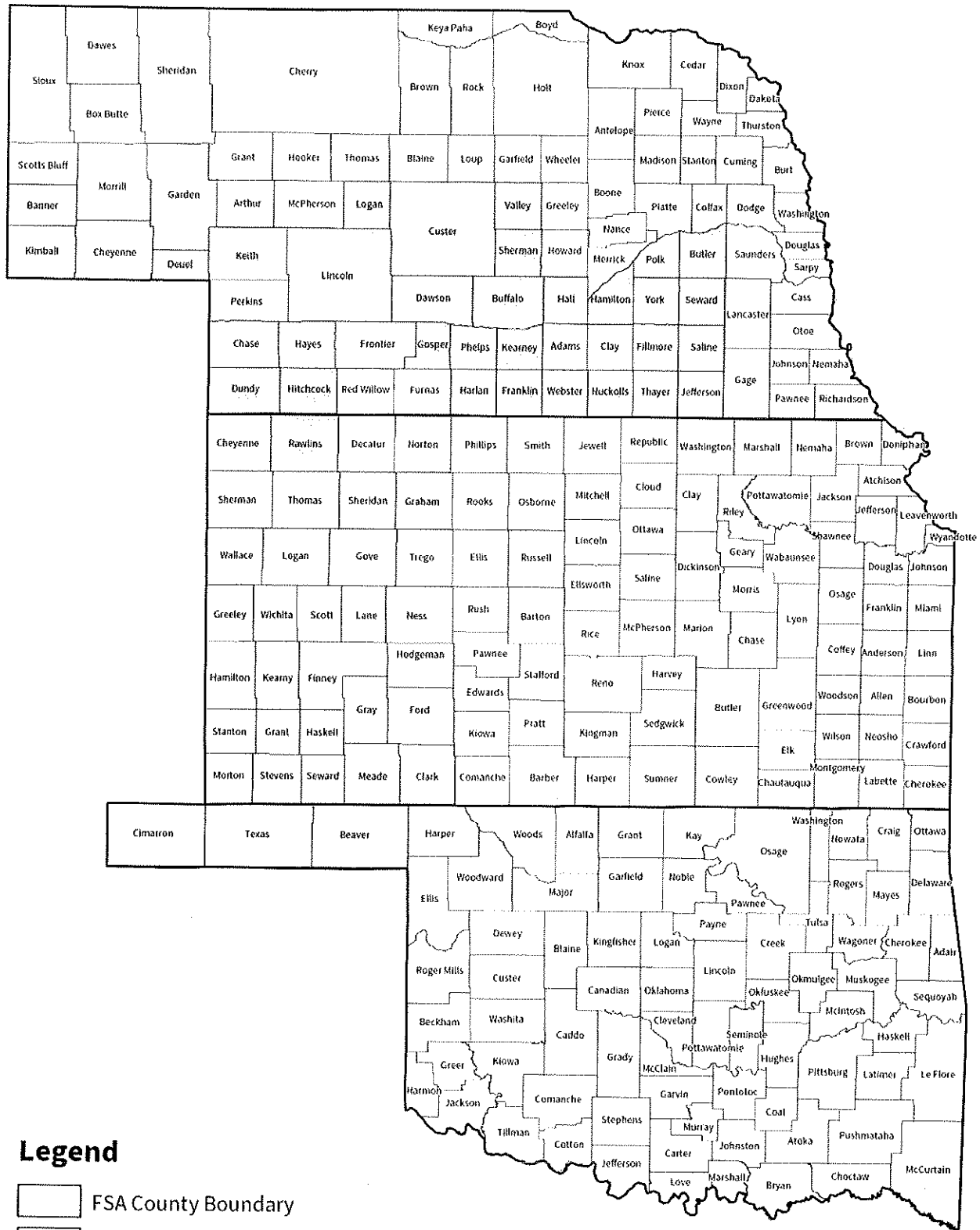
This project uses a competitive bid process, whereby landowners submit an offer to enroll their playa acres for the amount they are willing to accept as an annual payment. Offers must be between the average NASS irrigated rental rates and dryland rates for the applicable physical location of the offered acreage. Offers will compete for enrollment and scoring will favor those tracts with larger playas, greater wetland acres, offers that contain the entire playa wetland, are over declining portions of the Ogallala Aquifer, and have lower bid offers.

For More Information

This fact sheet is provided for informational purposes only; other restrictions or requirements may apply. Consult your local FSA office for details. For more information, contact your local service center and USDA Farm Service Agency office: farmers.gov/service-locator.



Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma Migratory Birds, Butterflies and Pollinators SAFE Project Map



INVASIVE WOODY PLANT SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW

A synthesized report of landowner motivations, barriers, and future needs for invasive woody plant management across the Great Plains



**FULL REPORT
AVAILABLE HERE**



In 2023, PLJV conducted a literature review on landowner perceptions regarding invasive woody plant management. The goal of this review was to identify the primary motivations, barriers, and needs for conducting management to support future application of social science insights into conservation delivery, communication, and outreach.

These results can particularly benefit applied social scientists and conservation delivery practitioners who are developing projects or are already working with landowners regularly on grassland management-related issues. Key recommendations from this report include strategies for forming new partnerships to combat invasive woody plant species, ideas for future communications and outreach with landowners around the topic, and suggested changes to current programs and policies in place.

Date Sent Queued for immediate delivery
From Julie Gahn
Subject Subject: OFRA Board and Member Training

OFRA Board and Member Training and Board Elections

Dear OFRA Members and Friends,

Hello! We hope this finds you well and enjoying the fall weather!

I'm sure you've noticed that OFRA has been pretty dormant since spring of 2020 when Covid-19 rocked our world. Are you wondering what happened to us?

Frankly, we were struggling even before Covid hit. OFRA's current By-Laws require annual board elections, with the intention of folks rolling off the board every 3 years. We haven't had enough folks volunteer to run for the Board to make that happen since I became involved with OFRA in 2014. And our Education Director, Nick Lorax, resigned after the November 2019 annual conference.

Even so, we had a full suite of offerings lined up for 2020, including getting our Demonstration Farm project fully off the ground. We were just beginning implementation when the world turned upside down.

I hope that's enough information to convey that *if we want OFRA to be a fully functioning, vibrant nonprofit that helps farmers, then we need to rebuild.*

Jeri Holmes, Nonprofit Solutions, will provide board and member training to OFRA on December 2nd, 2023.

In our preliminary discussions with Ms. Holmes, we learned that **Members have responsibilities and liabilities when they join a nonprofit -- it's not just the Board Members.**

So, the December 2nd, 2023 in training Oklahoma City is for ALL OFRA Members.

We are tentatively planning a 10 am to 3 pm meeting, with lunch served. Ms. Holmes will continue the training after we've filled our plates - aiming to make the most of our time with her.

OFRA Board and Member Training Topics

At the Saturday, December 2, 2023 training, Jeri Holmes will cover the following topics:

2 Hours of Training on:

- A) Board Responsibilities
- B) Statutory Protections
- C) Appropriate Insurance
- D) Responsible Recruiting
- E) By-Laws
- F) Articles of Incorporation

One Hour of Training On Strategic Planning regarding Board Governance and Member Involvement:

- 1) What does the next Board look like?
 - A) How do Members see themselves?
 - i) We currently have 2 types of Memberships:
 - a) Annual Dues payers with voting rights
 - b) "Friends" who subscribe to newsletter but don't pay dues and don't have voting rights.

c) We need to make sure this is clear to members and friends and decide if we want to keep it that way.

B) Do we want to keep our Member Organization structure where members elect Board members annually or switch to Board members who serve until they resign?

2) How can we structure committees so that Members who don't want to be on the Board can be actively involved?

3) How do we raise funds?

4) Strategies for growing OFRA membership and program participation.

5) How do we handle Intellectual Property (e.g. training materials)?

6) Other questions

Want to Volunteer for the Board? Or Do You Have Questions and/or Suggestions?

OFRA Board President, Mike Oakley may be reached at 918-869-0727.

OFRA Executive Director, Julie Gahn may be reached at 918-207-9107 or by replying to this email.

We sincerely hope that enough people will volunteer for the OFRA Board to keep us a strong organization that truly helps farmers with their sustainable (and regenerative) agriculture education and training needs. And that we can create a network where we truly support one another -- neighbors helping neighbors steward the land.

Please let us know as soon as possible if you want to volunteer for the OFRA Board of Directors. Now is the time to get involved and help guide the future of our organization.

I will be looking for a training location and securing it asap. It will be in the OKC area.

Best wishes in your planning for the non-growing season! (Dealing with frost and a positive test for prussic acid in Johnsongrass here. Never a dull day in the farm life!)

Sincerely,
Julie

Do you like our newsletter? Please consider forwarding it to a friend who is interested in regional sustainable agriculture and ask them to

[SIGN UP HERE!](#)

Julie Gahn
Executive Director, Oklahoma Farmers and Ranchers Association
<http://www.okfarmersandranchers.org/>
[Oklahoma Farmers and Ranchers Association Facebook Page](#)
[Oklahoma Farmers and Ranchers Association YouTube Channel](#)
(918) 207-9107

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The Oklahoma Farmers and Ranchers Association's mission is to provide sustainable agriculture education and training for all interested including underserved and disadvantaged people.

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