



United States Department of Agriculture

New Jersey State Technical Committee

Minutes of September 11, 2013

Those in attendance:

Amy Hansen, NJCF
 Andrew Burnett, NJDFW
 Audrey Moore, US EPA Region 2
 Beth Freiday, USFWS
 Bill Angstadt, Growmark FS
 Brian Cowden, TU
 Bruce Eklund, NASS
 Chad Cherefko, NRCS
 Dave Clapp, NJDA
 Eric Olsen, TNC
 Gail Bartok, NRCS
 Gef Flimlin, Rutgers Coop. Extension

Howard Henderson, USDA Rural
 Development
 John Cecil, NJ Audubon
 Kathleen Hitchner, NJDEP
 Kathy Hale, NJWSA
 Kristina Heinemann, US EPA Region 2
 Lauren Lapczynski, NRCS
 Liz Thompson, NJFB
 Marie Banasiak, NJFB
 Nancy Coles, USDA FSA
 Steve Eisenhauer, NLT
 Stephen Gould, US EPA Region 2

Carrie Mosley opened the meeting at 10:12 am and thanked everyone for attending the end of the fiscal year State Technical Committee (STC) meeting. Paul Hlubik, State Executive Director with the NJ FSA, joined the meeting from Hamilton Square through the use of video teleconference equipment.

Carrie reminded attendees that the role of this committee is to provide feedback and guidance to NRCS as we develop and implement our Farm Bill conservation programs. The STC meets quarterly. September marks the end of the Federal fiscal year. At this time, we're busy allocating the FY 2013 funding that was provided to New Jersey, while also looking ahead toward 2014.

Today's meeting includes several follow-up items from previous meetings including the geographic priority areas where we layered the maps that were provided by the partners. Gef Flimlin from Rutgers will be talking to us about aquaculture today. Several aquaculture businesses were damaged during super storm Sandy and NRCS was not prepared to provide assistance. Several states have been working with shellfish producers and NJ NRCS is looking to learn more about the conservation needs of this industry in our state.

June Meeting Minutes review and acceptance

Christine Hall

Christine Hall requested any comments or corrections regarding the June meeting minutes. No corrections were needed and the minutes were approved and accepted.

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OLD BUSINESS

Program Subcommittee Update

Gail Bartok

Gail Bartok provided the programs wrap-up for 2013 obligations. All of our financial assistance conservation programs have been obligated. In the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, we were allocated \$4.1 million. Of that, we obligated 195 contracts and \$3.7 million. For specific information regarding obligations of the fund pools and initiatives, please contact [Gail Bartok](#).

The Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative is funded under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and includes two target species in NJ, Bog Turtle, and Golden Winged Warbler. We received \$103,000 and were able to receive additional funding to obligate \$111,000. The additional money allowed us to fund another application.

In the Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP), we were allocated \$35,000. These are 5-year contracts covering over 2,000 acres. The Conservation Security Program, which CStP replaces, is obligated on an annual basis. This year we spent \$84,000. These programs are based on enhancement practices. The CStP payments are based on producers undertaking additional conservation activities and improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities. Some examples include converting to drip irrigation, reducing nozzles, precision pesticide, no-till, and cover crop.

This year was the final year of the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program in New Jersey's Raritan Basin Watershed. This was a 5 year program for certain watersheds in Hunterdon, Somerset, and Morris counties. We spent \$194,000 for FY 2013. A little money was sent back.

In the Agricultural Management Assistance Program, we requested additional money and were able to spend \$135,000 on 6 contracts.

For FY 2014, there are a few changes being made to how we will be screening and ranking applications for funding. The significant shift is how we will be focusing on the natural resource concerns on the farm. The ranking was modified based on input from the State Technical Committee Survey to focus on the top four priority resource concerns. In NJ, the State Technical Committee determined the top four resource concerns to be water quality, soil quality, soil erosion, and inadequate fish and wildlife habitat. The ranking will ask more pointed resource concern questions to focus on our priority concerns. More points will be given to applications that address all of the top four. In addition, we asked more questions regarding the "avoid, control, trap" model, which was presented in the National Water Quality Initiative. These questions focus on water quality issues by giving a higher priority to first avoiding the problem, compared to controlling, and lastly trapping pollutants. An additional question may also be modified after today's discussion on geographic priority areas. Ideally, we want our ranking questions to promote both addressing resource concerns and addressing those resource concerns within our priority areas.

All of our conservation programs follow a continuous sign-up. This means that a landowner can apply for a program at any time. However, applications will only be funded after a designated cutoff. We always accept applications for our programs. An applicant that applies early will be better prepared at the time of funding decisions.

Our first sign-up period for FY 2014 is October 18, 2013. This includes the EQIP – conservation activity plans, General EQIP, and AMA. Conservation activity plans will have a cut off every third Friday of every month.

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When deadlines are announced, we will announce through a press release and alert the State Technical Committee.

New CRP, CREP, SAFE Activity

Nancy Coles

Nancy Coles provided a new consolidated report (attached) detailing the FSA conservation program activities. The numbers in the report were based on the August tally. In the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), there are 299 contracts on 203 farms. The table detailed a comprehensive list for all CRP programs, including Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The number of farms can change depending on how farms are reconstituted. For example, a farm can split or merge. The total annual payments are \$168,834 on 2,211 enrolled acres. Nancy Coles added all expiring acreage to the table up to 2027 to show how contracts are spread how out through the 10-15 year process.

Out of 299 contracts, 191 are CREP. CREP includes 695.1 acres. The average contract size is still small with 3.6 acres and \$136 dollars per acre. One contract was added this year to include the new practice, pollinator habitat for 0.6 acres.

State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) has 55 contracts with 64 practices over 645.9 acres. The Ag Heritage area has 116.7 acres out of the total project acreage limit of 450 acres. The Grassland area has 350.4 acres enrolled with a project limit of 750 acres. The Raritan-Piedmont area has 168.8 acres out of 550 acres. With the new limits established this year through coordination with the STC, there is room to grow in these SAFE project areas.

Unfortunately, the one general CRP application did not make the national cut-off and was not funded. General CRP is a national competition and the score was below the threshold.

CRP payments issued are \$361,358 to date. County offices are going through a pre-payment process now to make sure that all the t's are crossed and i's are dotted with the eligibility paperwork before the end of the fiscal year. Rental contracts are typically issued the first week in October.

The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), which funded repairs for damage associated with Hurricanes Irene and Sandy, has issued \$152,615 this fiscal year.

GRP payments issued to date are \$50,689 with 33 contracts over 2316.2 acres. We have one GRP easement on 18.9 acres with two pending GRP easements.

A question was posed regarding pollinator habitat. How does the CP38E-1, introduced cool season grass practice enhance wildlife habitat under the SAFE program?

Nancy Coles explained that putting in cool season grass aids the bird population. They are required to do delayed mowing. In CRP, participants are not allowed to mow the entire acreage anyway. Beth Freiday added that some species, like bobolink, benefit from those cool season grasses.

Another question was asked regarding the ECP deadlines. Nancy explained that sign-up for storm events are dictated at the county office level. First, the county office has to recognize the need for the program and apply for assistance. The sign-up periods cannot be more than 60 days, but it is dictated at the local level.

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WRP Program status

Gail Bartok

Gail Bartok provided an update on the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). The WRP program is for lands that were previously drained for agricultural use that have wetlands restoration potential through restoration agreements or permanent easements. In 2013, we received 1.5 million and spent 1.4 million. Of that, we have 3 restoration projects, which are 10 year agreements where we contract funds for the restoration work. We contracted \$43,000 for the 3 restoration projects.

We have 8 new easements for 1.1 million (250 acres). We were given an acreage cap of 106, but we asked for more acres to fund additional easement projects. Gail Bartok expressed her gratitude to the biologists and Beth Freiday for promoting the program. We have 1 project in Salem, 6 in Warren and Sussex, and one in Somerset.

In WRP, USDA is the holder of the easement, but in Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), we work with a cooperating entity to preserve farmland. In these cases, USDA is a third party enforcer and the entity holds the easement. These are typically purchased at a 50/50 rate. In 2013, we received 7.7 million, and spent 6.2 million on 19 parcels. This does not include the due diligence to acquire these parcels. We funded all the parcels that were submitted this year.

There were a few major changes last year to FRPP that slowed down the process for prior year acquisitions. This may have impacted why we received fewer parcels as entities are playing catch-up on the backlog of parcels that need to be acquired.

We could always use more interested entities to partner with for the FRPP program. Contact Gail Bartok for more information on what is required of a cooperating entity.

The next sign-up deadline for FRPP is October 31, 2013.

NJ and National Conservation Innovation Grant Update

Gail Bartok

The National Conservation Innovation Grant recipients were just announced. There were 33 funded nationally for \$13.3 million. One of our state applicants received a national CIG grant. In NJ, we have two remaining proposals that will be funded. These should be announced by the end of the week. The National CIG grant awarded was for using compost filter socks for to establish linear strips of pollinator habitat.

Mosley expressed that she had been tallying the numbers and that the good news in NJ is that we spent almost 12 million dollars on conservation private lands. In total, around 2 million was not spent due to lack of interest and applications. We don't want this to happen in the future. We'd like to keep that money in NJ. Please keep in mind that we're interested in our partners' thoughts and suggestions for how to get more people interested. How do we get the word out?

A question was asked regarding the Farm Bill extension and if there are issues with the \$300,000 limit per Farm Bill for applications. It is possible that farmers could be reaching their limit as the Farm Bill is extended.

In addition, these are tough economic times, and NRCS programs do not pay for the entire cost. It is helpful if partners can contribute matching programs to support conservation practices.

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Chad Cherefko added that in NJ there is a larger population of urban/suburban farmers. These are small farms that require the same workload, if not more due to complexity, from the NRCS perspective, but are lower dollar amounts for contracts.

Paul Hlubik added that Farm Service Agency has a conservation loan program that can help applicants to finance the cost of implementing conservation practices.

Geographic Priority Areas

Carrie Mosley / Christine Hall

Christine Hall and Carrie Mosley presented a layered map of the geographic priority areas for the 9 maps we received. The plan is to focus on our priority areas and understand how we can make our dollars go further through partner coordination. This map can continue to evolve over time. If there are any groups that would like to be added to the map, please contact Christine.

A question was asked if the maps could be shared. If the contributing organizations give their approval, the maps can be shared with the groups. Additional groups identified to request priority area maps from are: The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, William Penn – Delaware Watershed Cluster Areas, Rutgers Water Resources Program and NJDEP.

Action Item: Christine will contact the above groups to request they share their geographic priority areas.

Action Item: Create a map that differentiates between the type of focus for each priority. For example, Agricultural focus and Wildlife focus.

Kristina Heinemann asked if the NRCS could overlay planned practices with the map.

Action Item: Christine Hall will follow up on having practices overlain on the map.

Kathleen Hitchner, NJDEP, is working on to update the list of impaired water bodies (i.e. polluted streams) to only show streams that are impaired by a pollutant that could potentially come from an agricultural source. Currently NRCS uses this impaired stream list to give priority to agricultural conservation projects seeking funding. With so many of the state's streams listed as impaired, it will be useful to focus only on those areas which might actually be experiencing the impairments from agricultural pollution sources rather than other sources.

A question was asked regarding the use of edge of field monitoring. Christine explained that it is an intensive and expensive process. It is only a partial payment through the NRCS program and at this time we could not find a source willing to be the match for the rest of the payment. There is also a concern among landowners on what the data would mean to them. How would the results impact them?

Gef Flimlin added that shellfish growing areas are highly dependent on water quality. It would be beneficial to have the testing done at the *first flush*; the first flush of stormwater runoff during a rain event. Monitoring stations are automated and typically cost \$10,000 to \$12,000. An example project was the Navesink River Project in the 1980s. They had a good model to show how data could be used to upgrade water quality. This could benefit shellfish growers.

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NEW BUSINESS

WRP and GRP 2014 Geographic Area Rate Cap

Gail Bartok

A Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC)

Using a Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) streamlines our easement offer process. Individual appraisals take a lot of time and money upfront before even providing an offer to a landowner. Instead of having to do individual appraisals for each parcel, we use a pre-established GARC based on values from an Area Wide Market Analysis. In an Area Wide Market Analysis, an appraiser surveys the market of prior sales within the last 12 months and compiles a report of the data. We then use that to determine a percent that we're going to pay for specific land uses. Last year we only surveyed 6 counties. This year, we surveyed 16 counties.

The areas are based on the resource concerns and typical land uses within that area. We surveyed cropland, pasture, and woodland values for each area. We'd like to form a subcommittee to recommend the percentages for this fiscal year. We have three different ways to pay for an easement: GARC value, individual appraisal, or landowner's offer, whichever is less. An appraisal can be commissioned if there is a significantly different land use than what was evaluated in the market survey. Please see Gail Bartok if you're interested in volunteering to be on the subcommittee. We're interested in volunteers with information on the land uses, WRP, and values.

Action Item: Convene subcommittee to discuss and review WRP GARC for the 2014 program year

Because we have so few Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) applications, we typically do appraisals. However, the appraisals are slowing us down with the acquisition of two applications we had for easements this year. The market analysis we contracted for WRP, is also applicable for GRP. We could adopt the report for GRP purposes as well.

NRCS Practice Standard Revisions

Christine Hall

The Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) is where all of our practice standards, job sheets, operation and management requirements, etc. are housed. The FOTG is available electronically on the web at: http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/efotg_locator.aspx. Once in the interactive map, select NJ and any county. All information is the same across the state in NJ. The practice standards are in section 4 of the technical guide. Practices are reviewed every 5 years. Recently, we updated practice standard 331- Contour Orchard and Other Perennial Crops, 332- Contour Buffer Strips, 585- Strip Cropping, and 548 - Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment. These practices had no major updates.

Practice 340 - Cover Crop was updated with significant changes. Additional information was added to include when to terminate cover crop as well as information regarding diverse cover crop mixes for multiple benefits. A new table was added for these diverse cover crop mixes.

Kristina Heinemann suggested NRCS walk the Committee through the implementation process of a practice including the standard and job sheet.

Action Item: At a future State Technical Committee meeting or programs training session provide a presentation on how to use NRCS Practice Standards and Job Sheets to implement conservation.

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The New Jersey “practice catalog” has not been finalized for 2014. This is a list of conservation activities that are eligible for financial assistance through our EQIP, WHIP and AMA programs.

EWP- Floodplain Easements

Gail Bartok

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP), Flood Plain Easements was funded for Hurricane Sandy damage.

The general EWP signup offered funds where there is an imminent danger to life and property. A landowner works with a public sponsor. We had 17 projects in NJ.

The Floodplain Easement (FPE) program was also offered through EWP. \$124 million is allocated for FPE among 12 states. We accepted applications from July to September 2. NJ received 34 applications. The intent of the FPE program is to restore the floodplain area; this is done by working with a local sponsor who will hold the floodplain easement.. A pre-hurricane Sandy appraisal value is used to pay the fair market value of the property. NRCS then demolishes any structures on the property and pays for 100% of the restoration cost. These properties need to have a public sponsor that will assume title. At this time, we are finalizing the ranking to establish priority. Ideally, we'd like to have entire reaches of a floodplain and not a checkerboard effect. We are establishing a team to visit each eligible parcel. The deadline for these site visits is October 15, and we should have funding decisions by mid-November.

Aquaculture Opportunities in NJ

Gef Flimlin

Gef Flimlin was asked to come to the State Technical Committee meeting to discuss aquaculture opportunities in NJ to see what role we can play in the aquaculture world from a resource concern perspective. Gef Flimlin first explained that to understand the aquaculture market, we first must understand that shellfish are animals and that the USDA defines aquaculture as livestock.

Gef provided attendees with a presentation that focused on clam production, including the negative impacts on the industry from polluted runoff. Also discussed were state leases for land in aquaculture production. The State DEP leases two acre areas for aquaculture producers. The lease is an annual renewal. This poses potential issues for working with USDA programs as the producer must have “control” of the land for the length of their USDA contract.

Action item: Continue discussions with interested State Technical Committee members and others on the role NJ NRCS can play working with aquaculture producers. Work on policy to establish guidelines for working with these types of producers.

Gef Flimlin pointed out that from an aquaculture perspective his geographic priority areas would be the watersheds that drain to major production areas. He also provided copies of the best management practices for the shellfish aquaculture industry. It is also available on the web at: http://www.ecsga.org/Pages/Resources/ECSGA_BMP_Manual.pdf

OPEN DISCUSSION

Brian Cowden, with Trout Unlimited thanked USF&W, NRCS, and other partners of the Musconetcong River Restoration Partnership for their work with the dam removal to earn the Coastal America Award.

Audrey Moore advised that the EPA sent out a letter to registrants of pesticides regarding adding a new advisory label for pollinator protection. At this time it is voluntary, but they are hoping people will come in. The plan is to try to get these labels ready for the next growing season.

John Cecil announced that the New Jersey Audubon S.A.V.E program sunflowers for birdseed are in full bloom. Donaldson Farms and Liberty Farms have tours/mazes to see the sunflowers. NJ Audubon is also working with several partners to host a Forest Resilience workshop November 19 and 20.

Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will be held on December 4, 2013. (Note: The meeting date was later changed to January 22, 2014, by State Conservationist Carrie Mosley and then subsequently cancelled due to bad weather)

Adjourn

Meeting is adjourned at 1:10.

DRAFT