



New Jersey State Technical Committee Minutes of December 4, 2012

Those in attendance:

Andrew Burnett, NJ Div. of Fish & Wildlife
Audrey Moore, US EPA Region 2
Charles Roohr, NJ SADC
Christine Hall, NRCS
Dave Clapp, NJDA
Dean Collamer, Growmark FS
Elizabeth Ciuzio, USFWS
Eric Schradung, USFWS
Joe Dunn, Morris SCD
John Cecil, NJ Audubon

John Parke, NJ Audubon
Kathy Hale, NJWSA
Kristina Heinemann, US EPA Region 2
Lauren Rega, NRCS
Liz Thompson, NJ Farm Bureau
Marie Banasiak, NJ Farm Bureau
Nancy Coles, FSA
Paul Hlubik, FSA
Richard Shaw, NRCS
Sheila Hall, Morris SCD

Carrie Mosley, State Conservationist, welcomed everyone to the last 2012 State Technical Committee meeting at 10:15 am. Carrie is the new State Conservationist for New Jersey. She has a history working with NRCS in Montana, Idaho, and Arizona. She has been responsible for managing State Technical Committee meetings in Montana and understands how valuable the State Technical Committee is to NRCS.

Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Status - Carrie Mosley

It has been an interesting year for NRCS with a pending Farm Bill. There are a lot of unknowns this year. We are currently operating under a continuing resolution that goes through March. NRCS received continuing resolution budgets, so we now know the money that we will be receiving through March. There is a reduction to the budget for the continuing resolution. Some programs are not authorized until an action is taken. Those programs include CRP, WRP, GRP, and HFRP. In the meantime, we will be moving forward and proceeding with the programs that remain such as WHIP, EQIP, AMA, AWEP, and FRPP. Our FRPP dollars remain comparable to previous years. EQIP has been the hardest hit program for reduction.

The payment schedule will be finalized and available by the end of the week. Ranking will be uploaded this week and the ranking will happen in January. We will continue to move forward with the hiccups and proceed as we can.

Paul Hlubik asked how much EQIP has been reduced. Carrie Mosley indicated that EQIP has been reduced to about 80% of the prior year funding level, which equates to about a million less.

A question was posed about WHIP – Working Lands for Wildlife. The Working Lands for Wildlife program is continuing to move forward.

September meeting minutes review and acceptance – Christine Hall

Christine Hall requested comments and acceptance on the September Meeting Minutes. Elizabeth Ciuzio's comments were received about the WRP – GARC and will be incorporated

into the September Minutes. The minutes with the proposed corrections were reviewed and accepted.

Old Business

Program Subcommittee Update – Christine Hall

The screening criteria and state criteria for ranking of EQIP were finalized. We reprioritized some of the questions to standardize the total points. We are still waiting for guidance on the National Water Quality Initiative. Since the programs subcommittee asked about the wildlife related practices and what funding pool they would be ranked in, we have since renamed the forest funding pool to *forest and wildlife* and there will be wildlife specific ranking questions added there.

Action: NRCS will rename the Forest funding pool to Forest and Wildlife funding pool and add wildlife related ranking questions for EQIP ranking 2013

There are two vacant positions: State Resource Conservationist and the Assistance State Conservationist for Programs. It may be a few months before we have an idea of who the selection will be.

CRP, CREP, SAFE Activity – Nancy Coles

There is no reauthorization for the CRP program as of October 1st. There is no approval for new offers or contracts. We can continue to make payments on sign-in and incentive payments, rental payments, and cost-share payments that are already in the works. CRP costs are estimates, but we are unable to pay more than what was estimated at this time.

As of November 2012, CRP has 320 practices enrolled with 299 contracts and annual rental payments of \$172, 544. The number went down because some of the contracts have expired. The contracts are either 10 or 15 year contracts. There is some reluctance to re-enroll the program. The heirs are not obligated to continue with the contract. We encourage them to continue to participate in the program, but they are not required to.

The average rental rate is \$74.73.

By the end of September, 14 contracts were enrolled in CREP. Practices for CREP include Grassed Waterway, Filter Strip, and Riparian Buffers. There has been no interest in contour buffer strips. CREP is limited to environmentally sensitive lands, which is why the contracts are typically small with an average of around 3.7 acres and the average rental rate is higher at \$136.10.

The SAFE program ended at the end of the fiscal year with 55 contracts, 2 are pending until we are authorized to act on them. The Agricultural Heritage and Habitat Conservation Plan areas have 6 contracts totaling 116.7 acres. The Grassland Habitat Restoration Management area has 37 approved contracts at 354.9 acres. The Raritan-Piedmont Wildlife Habitat Partnership area has 12 approved contracts totaling 176.5 acres.

On October 8, 2012, new acreage for SAFE was authorized. The anticipated increases are 150 acres for the Ag Heritage area, 250 for Raritan-Piedmont, and 350 for the Grassland area. All

three project areas were increased. Thanks to everyone on the committee for helping to get the acreage increased.

Since October 1, CRP has issued \$199,711. The ECP program has issued \$73,049. GRP has issued \$21,724. Two new contracts were added to GRP in 2012.

A question/comment was raised regarding sign-up issues. It was recommended that FSA have better information on the website and on fact sheets for the program. The fact sheets are more applicable to how partnerships are involved and less clear for what is required for producers. The producers want to see how the program works. Also, there is a disconnect between the tax assessor and farmland preservation that often gets in the way of sign-up. Is there a way to put information on the website for soils information and farmland preserved parcels being eligible for the program? Perhaps post a link on the website for where this information is available.

Joe Dunn expressed that the issue is with the 1964 statute in NJ being based on the old SCS programs and there has not been any new updates. The definitions aren't dovetailing with the new NRCS. There are meetings now to discuss how the definitions can be modified. They are trying to define what is and what isn't classified as farmland assessment.

WRP Program status & FY13 Rate Cap - Christine Hall

At this time, we are unable to accept new applications, but we are continuing to work on the ones that were accepted last year. We closed on 81 acres in Sussex County in November. This brings the state total to 15,634 acres now. We are also actively working on closing two new parcels, one in North Jersey and another in South Jersey.

We would like to continue our discussion on the Geographical Area Rate Caps (GARC) in anticipation of the WRP program. For WRP, we have different means that we could use to compensate the landowner. To simplify the process in NJ, we establish a rate cap. This is the amount that the producer would get paid to enroll their land in WRP. Per the guidance from NRCS headquarters, we conducted a market survey. In the past, the market survey contractor looked at recent sales. This year, we sent examples from other states and got a more thorough market survey report. We had them look at Warren and Hunterdon, Ocean and Burlington, and Salem and Cumberland. The Ocean/Burlington and Salem/Cumberland rates were so similar we decided to combine those and have a North and South Jersey rate. The rates are for cropland, wooded, specialty cropland (cranberry), and bog turtle. We have still not submitted our rate proposal to headquarters so it is still open to discussion. In south Jersey, we decided to pay about 90% of the average rate for cropland, which is now \$3500. The data does not support the \$4000 rate.

We would like to have more discussion of how we would like this to be done for future years. Right now we are looking at paying 90% of the value for cropland and 50% of the value for forestland. Some questions that we may have for future years: Where should our focus be? Are these rates reasonable? Are there other areas that we should be focusing on? Are we getting the projects that we want?

Carrie Mosley asked the State Technical Committee from their perspective, what are the key wetlands that they would like to see restored?

Discussion ensued regarding the push for bog turtle to be a component of WRP. The committee pushed for the WREP proposal and feels that as far as endangered species go, this is an important part. PA has been used as a good example of incorporating Bog Turtle as WRP.

Cropland is important to highlight WRP restoration. There are other programs that help forestland, so they like targeting cropland and bog turtles. Sometimes the restoration projects in forestry are important, but they already have some value for wildlife as they are.

Elizabeth Ciuzio added that the way regulations are now there are more tools available for restoration on cropland. It is more difficult to restore forested wetlands.

Christine Hall mentioned that we will be looking at the market survey every year and we would like some discussions in the future of how we would like the market survey conducted. For example, we could include more counties in the data collection.

Action: For the 2014 WRP Market Survey, NRCS will convene a subcommittee to discuss how we would like the survey developed.

A comment was posed that we could split the state into 6 areas. The appraiser may be able to use the data from NJ farmland preservation.

Some key notes to remember:

- We cannot pay 100% of the fair market value
- The specialty crops rate is only applicable to cranberry and blueberry
- Cropland and pasture are combined.

590 Nutrient Management Standard - Carrie Mosley

The Nutrient Management standard has been around for a number of years and is a key practice that NRCS promotes and administers across the country. The national office issues broad, generic standards that each State then has the ability to modify the standard to fit their needs. The national standard changed in two key areas 1) when we make nitrogen recommendations based on the nitrogen content of the soil and 2) the application of manure on frozen soils. The state standard did not change much based on the new national standard.

Kristina Heinemann made some recommendations for the standard and Fred is incorporating those changes. For those that were interested in the changes, the draft standard was distributed after the meeting. The deadline for NJ to submit the standard is the end of the month and we believe we are on track to meet that deadline.

Action: NRCS will incorporate State Technical Committee recommendations into the 590 standard prior to submission

Kristina Heinemann asked if there is a process that the standards are reviewed. Carrie was not aware of a formal process, but they are likely reviewed. We are able to add additional clarification to the national standards, but we cannot take anything out.

State Technical Committee Survey - Christine Hall

Discussion on the survey was tabled for the next meeting due to the time constraints.

New Business

Hurricane Sandy Disaster Recovery - Paul Hlubik

Paul Hlubik discussed that since the storm was at the end of the season, it did not impact most crops, but it did impact many producers. Many producers suffered physical damage to properties, buildings, forestland, fields, etc. After assessing the damage, NJ FSA requested 2 million in Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) money for Hackettstown, Columbus and Freehold. They were told that more money is available if needed and requested. The fisheries and nurseries industry was one of the most heavily hit. Two hatchers that supply 70-80% of the oysters and clams in the state were wiped out in the storm. We need to act quickly with the programs that we do have available. FSA has an emergency loan program offering 2.125% with up to 7 years terms except on normal operating capital. They are working with growers through the state. Livestock fencing was the only fencing that was considered under ECP. They are hoping to get deer fencing included in the listing. They are also looking into providing some assistance to rebuild the framework for high tunnels.

Howard Henderson mentioned that the only disaster program that RD has is the Emergency Community Water Assistance Grant Program. This program is for rural communities that suffered damage to their water system. The grants can go up to 500,000, but that is only after FEMA and any other assistance has been subtracted. FEMA has been everywhere. They have a couple thousand employees in the state working on all different aspects of recovery assistance. The governor is the overall coordinating entity over and above FEMA. The governor actually directs the resources. Governor Christie has been very involved in this process.

As far as disaster funds, NRCS has the Emergency Watershed Program. These funds can be accessed fairly quickly where there could be a lot of damage in a watershed, such as debris removal to limit damage in the future. Before the disaster, we were allocated 500,000 dollars in case we needed it. We have not used any of this money at this time. These are disaster funds, but we could also use regular program funds to manage systems that are not in emergency situations. For example, this could be an opportunity for a producer to completely redo a system that was wiped out to have it redesigned to be better.

Outreach workshops – lessons learned - Shelia Hall & Joe Dunn

Three of NJ's Soil Conservation Districts (SCD) were asked to provide outreach to get the word out about NRCS opportunities and programs, especially with the new initiatives. The idea was to find new ways to reach our underserved farming community. They decided to host 3 workshops over the course of the year in North, Central, and South New Jersey. They tried using alternative sources to promote the workshops and target a new audience to come into their local USDA office.

They learned that the venue was important for the workshops. The soil quality and composting workshop held at the Genesis Farm got people to come from the organic farming community, and also had some attendance from alpaca farmers which is a new group of producers in the state. They are looking for a lot of information and sources of funding.

In October, the Morris SCD offered a forest landowner workshop in the evening. This workshop had a larger audience. They were fortunate to have Joe Dunn provide a mailing list to target forestry professionals to disseminate the information to landowners.

Lessons Learned from the workshops:

- Fall and evening meetings were more successful than those during the growing season
- Offer food, a light meal

- Have a diverse group of speakers from different agencies. (At the forest workshop, they had USDA technical, NJ Audubon, and district representation)
- Allow enough time for participants to ask questions

What they learned was not successful:

- Newspapers
- Offering workshops in areas without many agricultural activities
- Not sticking to the allotted time

They are working to coordinate another workshop for December 20th. This will be a round table capturing the new USDA programs. It will be a 3 hour evening workshop. They are working with Dan Mull in Hackettstown for this workshop.

Sheila suggested for the future to use non-traditional outreach such as blogging and twitter to reach non-traditional customers. Using social media can help maintain the relationship with the producers. At Evergreen Farm, site of a Mercer SCD workshop, the venue was very important. The producers were looking forward to the opportunity to tour the farm. It was tailored to things that producers were interested in learning about.

Urban Soil Conservation Opportunities - Rich Shaw

Due to the meeting running behind, Rich will present at the next meeting.

Open Discussion

Howard Henderson reported that rural development has been busy with the disaster efforts helping with housing and economic assistance in rural areas. He welcomed Carrie to NJ and expressed that it was nice to have new leadership.

Nancy Coles thanked Christine for helping with the technical standards for the roll out of their Emergency Conservation Program (ECP). FSA has been knee deep in ECP trying to get the standards to match up with the ECP information. Some of the things that Paul did mention are still in the works to be cleared by Washington at this time. The selling of grain in the state can get tied up, the Farm Storage Facility Loan program has been active. Started at 1, now up to 20 in NJ. An individual loan could be as much as 500k. FSA can help build these storage facilities and then help with the commodity that goes in those bins.

Joe Dunne expressed that as a district, they have been involved in regulation on construction projects, but they are trying to make a shift back to their more traditional roles, forestry and education, as development activities in NJ are reduced.

Sheila Hall reminded everyone that the last outreach workshop will take place on December 20th at the Morris County Cultural Center.

John Parke shared that NJ Audubon Society is playing a leadership role in the Raritan Piedmont Habitat Partnership. They are helping to promote the programs conservation programs and have a mini-loan program to help get conservation projects completed. NJAS has been very active with forestry activities. They completed a large plan in Plainsboro for forest stewardship. The Support Agricultural Viability and the Environment (S.A.V.E.) project is looking for more producers anywhere across the state interested in growing sunflowers for birdseed under the

SAVE label. NJAS is looking for people that have more than 20 acres. If you have less than 20 acres the deer eat everything. The sunflowers also need to be a rotation.

Liz Thompson reported that NJ Farm Bureau elected a new president, Ryck Suydam. Rich has been president for 10 years and hit his term limit. Ryck is an 11th or 12th generation farmer in Somerset County. It will be interesting to what changes with the new leadership. Most of their members are "traditional" farmers, but they expect to see membership change and are happy to do outreach and help promote events. NJ Farm Bureau sends out a printed newsletter to over 7000 people. They would be happy to help promote certain items in the newsletter.

Eric Schrading stated that the US Fish and Wildlife Service is looking at cuts on a number of programs. They are also operating under a Continuing Resolution budget. Partners for Fish and Wildlife is static. They are looking at how the cuts will impact staffing and projects in the future. The Musconetcong River projects were nominated for a Coastal America award. An award ceremony will take place this spring and NRCS staff will be invited to attend.

Chuck Roohr posed a question asking who the new contact for FRPP is. Until Janice Reid retires, she will continue to be the FRPP contact person for current FRPP contracts. Any new fiscal year 2013 applications will be directed to Christine. Once an acting is named this may change. The SADC solar regulations comment period has ended. Up to this point, only roof top systems were approved. Regulations will now allow for 1 acre or 110% of last year's energy demand either on the land or on the roof. There were no major comments that required major changes. The adoption schedule should be in January or February. It will go into the register and be official at that time.

Much discussion ensued regarding what is classified as cropland on preserved land. A subcommittee was created to discuss the tax issues and ensure clarification. An ad hoc committee was formed to review the conflicting rules and discuss training needs. The committee is comprised of: John Parke, Liz Thompson Joe Dunn, Kathy Hale, Eric Schrading and Chuck Roohr.

Action: NRCS will coordinate a meeting of this committee

Kathy Hale reported that the Raritan Basin Mini-Grant program was finally approved by DEP. The application program will align with the watersheds in NJ NRCS's Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP). They will do a soft roll-out in the first sign-up period and then will do heavier outreach during the second sign-up period.

Dave Clapp had previously reported that NJDA awarded three grants to different groups as part of the animal waste management grant (North Jersey RC&D, Walkkill Watershed, and RCE of Salem). The Walkkill Watershed grant is not going to go forward. NJDA received funding from NRCS to address the backlog of conservation plan requests for preserved farms. Dave also offered thanks to NRCS for continuing to support the Conservation Assistance Program (CAP) employees that are employed by the SCDs and jointly funded by NJDA and NRCS.

Dean Collamer said the nutrient management subcommittee in PA worked with Mark Goodsen, PA NRCS. They have quite a few field crop experiments underway and the last experiment should be harvested soon.

Kristina Heinemann asked what the status of the National Water Quality Initiative is. Christine Hall said that we received an allocation in our budget for the NWQI, but we have yet to hear any guidance. Kristina gave thumbs up on the Ken Burns documentary on the Dust Bowl.

Andrew Burnett from the Division of Fish and Wildlife expressed interest in participating in the State Technical Committee. He passed out brochures on Bobwhite Quail in NJ. He is the State Quail Coordinator. The Division used to have a private lands biologist, but now Andrew is doing that work. Results of the 2012 Quail Action Plan Landowner Survey were shared with the group.

Next Meeting Date

March 13, 2012 from 10:00 to 1:00 at the NRCS office in Somerset

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 12:45

DRAFT