

# New Jersey State Technical Committee Agenda

## Wednesday October 7, 2009

### Minutes

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The meeting was called to order at 10:05 AM.

Those in attendance:

Sam Conard	Somerset County	Howard Henderson	USDA – RD
John Keenan	Nature Conservancy	Nancy Coles	USDA – FSA
Liz Thompson	NJ FB	Paul J. Hlubik	USDA – FSA
Marie Banasiak	NJ FB	Dave Schaaf	USDA – NRCS
Dave Clapp	NJDA	Fran Grasso	USDA – NRCS
Kim Korth	NJ DEP – ENSP	Gail Bartok	USDA – NRCS
Tim Barresi	NJDEP – FS	Janice Reid	USDA – NRCS
David Glenn	NOFA – NJ	Nicole Ciccaglione	USDA – NRCS
Audrey Moore	USEPA Region 2	Sharif Branham	USDA – NRCS
Donna Sohboonlaka	USEPA Region 2	Tim Dunne	USDA – NRCS
Steve Peterson	USDA – NASS	Tom Drewes	USDA – NRCS

Tom welcomed everyone and reported that the Ag Appropriations conference bill has been delivered to both houses but not voted on yet. We anticipate approval soon.

The minutes were reviewed and approved with one change to the date, The meeting was held Wednesday, July 8, 2009.

### **Committee Reports**

Tom gave an overview of the State Technical Committee for the new members.

#### Outreach Sub-Committee

Gail Bartock gave an update for the committee. Coleen, Marie and Barb met and established the Conservation Outlook calendar. It is still being decided who will maintain the calendar and who will decide what gets posted.

#### Program Sub-Committee

Janice passed out and reviewed a handout with the results of the Financial Assistance Funds for 2009. Tom presented similar data with the program numbers by county.

The Sub-committee is recommending a new policy as follows: An applicant shall not be eligible for ranking if they have any contracts that are behind schedule. The policy would provide an incentive for applicants to get and stay on schedule; and reduce the chance that multiple problem contracts will be developed.

The policy recommendation was discussed, it was decided that we adopt this new policy.

### **Old Business**

#### CRP, CREP, SAFE

Nancy mentioned that FSA has started to release annual CRP rental payments for 2009, \$93,737.00 was paid and there is approximately \$64,000 that still needs to be released. She

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AMA – Agricultural Management Assistance Program  
AWEP – Agricultural Water Enhancement Program  
CAP – Conservation Activity Plan  
CCPI – Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative  
CIG – Conservation Innovation Grant  
CRP – Conservation Reserve Program  
CREP - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

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EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentive Program  
FRPP – Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program  
GRP – Grassland Reserve Program  
HFRP – Healthy Forest Reserve Program  
SAFE – State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement  
WHIP – Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program  
WRP – Wetland Reserve Program

passed out the usual CREP and CRP report, now showing a total of 133 contracts in the state. Paul Hlubik gave an overview of the CREP for the committee.

Nancy also gave an update for SAFE. The NJ Audubon project has 35.9 acres contracted, and the Grassland project has 95.1 acres with 79.5 acres in process. Salem, Cumberland and Warren counties have the contracts.

#### 2010 Program Target Dates

Janice presented a handout with program target dates as recommended by the programs sub-committee. It is hopeful that we will have the 2010 allocations for these mandatory funded programs soon.

Tom reported that, for the 1<sup>st</sup> CSP signup which closed September 30, NJ had no applicants. We were the only state with zero signup. He thanked our partners, especially FSA and Farm Bureau, for helping us get the word out.

Janice stated that the 1<sup>st</sup> round of applications for 2010 FRPP will be due October 31. There are some applications that rolled over from 2009 for this program; others may be submitted.

The final program rules will be published soon as follows: AMA & WHIP – mid-October; EQIP – before January 2010. For the easement programs (WRP, GRP, and FRPP), the recent comment period has closed and final rules will be issued once all comments can be addressed.

Announcements for Program Funding are planned to be released nationally as follows: National CIG and CCPI – early in fiscal year; AWEF – November 2009.

#### 2010 Ranking Pools – EQIP

Janice explained the recommendation of pools for 2010. There has not been a large request for livestock and the sub-committee recommends that we combine the ag waste and grazing land into one pool. The sub-committee is also recommending that dry cropland and irrigated cropland be split since there are such a large number of applications. Finally, it was also recommended that forestry be a separate pool. Additionally we will need to have the nationally mandated pools for CAPs and the Organic Initiative. The Committee agreed with these recommendations.

Janice reported that the NRCS Chief has required each state split their ranking pools down to the local level. The sub committee will discuss this change at their next meeting.

Tom gave an overview of the history of local pools that existed in NJ. He explained that NJ had 3 priority areas in the past based on targeted watersheds. There were some problems nationally with the way funds were allocated to these target areas, and local pools were done away with under the 2002 farm bill. Since then we have had only statewide pools. In the 2008 Farm Bill, it was mandated that local workgroups be re-established; one of the recommendations will be to break the state in two: South Jersey and North Jersey.

#### 2010 Conservation Activity Plans (CAP)

Janice reminded the Committee that our July recommendation was for NJ to offer five CAPs in 2010 – Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP), Fish & Wildlife Plans, Forestry Plans, Integrated Pest Management Plans (IPM), and Whole-Farm Energy Plans.

Janice gave an explanation of CAP and mentioned that NJ-NRCS is very comfortable offering four of the five recommended CAP's: CNMP, Fish & Wildlife, Forestry, IPM. She explained that no one is available to prepare whole-farm energy plans, which require an analysis of all energy uses on the farm, including crop production (tractor HP, fertilizer application, tillage frequency, etc). Without data it is too difficult to establish payment rates.

Tim said NRCS will be working on providing these Energy Management Plans in the future and is working with local partners toward that end.

### 2010 Forestry initiative - EQIP

Tim reported that there is about 16 applications for 2010 EQIP from landowners who are interested in Forestry. NRCS has added practices in EQIP that will be offered to these applicants. It was agreed to provide an EQIP Fact Sheet specifically for the Forestry initiative.

Tim held a meeting with local partners to further discuss implementing EQIP on forest lands. Meeting highlights include:

- NJ Forestry Stewardship Committee has agreed to act officially as a sub-committee of the State Technical Committee for forestry issues in NJ.
- NRCS agreed to provide training on NJ EQIP and Forestry opportunities, and how to become a TSP, for forestry consultants with SCD's, NJFS and other partners.
- We also were asked to provide brief presentation at the November 7<sup>th</sup> NJ Forestry Association meeting on Forestry CAP's and AgLearn access.

Jim B. also mentioned that the Forest Stewardship Committee is working on a State Forest Assessment that is due July 1, 2010.

### 2010 Organic initiative - EQIP

Tim reported that NRCS NJ signed a contract with NJ NOFA to provide NRCS employees training on organic farming issues. He also wants to start a working group (similar to forestry working group) this fall to brainstorm organic farming and NRCS conservation programs opportunities. David Lee, Jack Rabin, Dave Glenn, and Michelle Glenn have been mentioned/volunteered to participate in this work group.

David Glenn offered to have a round table discussion about organic issues. NRCS employees will be encouraged to attend the NOFA-NJ annual conference that will be held this winter.

## **New Business**

### 2010 Budget Outlook

Tom mentioned that the house and senate meet in July 2009. The numbers for our Farm Bill programs seem to be the same as 2009. FRPP will most likely increase about 25%. EQIP may increase about 10% but he is not sure if that money is targeted for a special area. He is hopeful that a budget will be passed by the end of October without the need for further continuing resolutions.

### GRP 2009 results

Nancy updated the committee on GRP. Our original allocation was \$192,272; we ended up with six contracts approved and \$132,302 obligated. Little funding had to be returned and Nancy commended the Hackettstown office on such a quick turn around on the last contract obligated.

Nancy mentioned that you can not be in the DCP program and GRP at the same time. We must be careful when potential applicants inquire about GRP.

Tim explained that there are mowing restrictions under GRP. Program rules prohibit mowing or harvesting of enrolled acres during the nesting season (April 1 – July 15 in NJ). A recommendation was made by this committee in 2004 to allow mowing or haying of up to 50% of enrolled acres in any year, in order to encourage more program enrollment.

Nancy mentioned that this policy needs to be reviewed once the program manual is released. According to the appendix signed by the contract holder, the participant agrees not to disturb any ground during the nesting season. This is also stated in the federal register. So for now we will no longer allow any disturbance during the nesting season. Instead we welcome other recommendations on how to increase participation in GRP.

## HFRP

Tim reported that proposals for 2010 funding are due November 1. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) sent a letter to NRCS describing their work to identify important and potentially threatened forest areas in NJ, together with a request for HFRP consideration. Tim handed out the map from this report which shows five target areas; one in north Jersey and four in south Jersey. John Keenan confirmed that TNC has on-going talks with forestry owners in Cumberland County for conservation easements. Tim will work with TNC to develop a proposal for submittal by the deadline. Janice gave an overview of the program to explain that both easement acquisition and restoration contracts are possible under HFRP, with restoration focused on enhancing habitat for a target federal or state endangered species.

## WRP 2010 Geographic Area Rate Cap

Janice reminded the Committee that our geographic area rate caps (GARC) need to be reviewed and updated annually. These rates can be used to make easement purchase offers to eligible landowners.

Our 2009 rates, which were approved by this committee in February 2009, are:

- \$6000/acre for dry cropland, pasture and permanent hayland;
- \$9000/acre for irrigated cropland and specialty land (blueberries/cranberries); and
- \$2000/acre for woodland.

After a short discussion it was agreed to use these rates again for 2010.

## WRP Outreach

Janice mentioned that the 2008 farm bill tripled the acreage goals for WRP nationally. It was recommended that the outreach sub-committee develop a new campaign to educate NJ landowners about conservation programs to restore and enhance wetlands

## **Open Discussion**

Kim Korth reported that the division is working on an at-risk species list as a result of the Builders Association request to delist the Northern pine snake.

The Division has also published in the NJ Register a wind map that identifies potential conflicts to wind-turbine placement which is open for public comments. Wildlife is the biggest concern but there are other conflicts identified.

John Keenan mentioned his interest in the HFRP and the great opportunity that has been presented.

Liz Thompson reported that there should be a lot of publicity with bond questions #1 for the open space issue and FB is supporting this issue.

Marie Banasiak reported that the FB convention is scheduled for 11/16 and 11/17.

Audrey Moore reported that Rutgers is giving a one day cranberry tour on 10/15.

Steve Peterson reported that his agency is working on an irrigation survey, a chemical use survey, and a screening of residential areas for farmers. There is a list of farmers and there may be some people that are not on the list but may have farmland that they operate.

David Glenn reported that NOFA is having a harvest celebration on 10/25. It will be the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NOFA this year, and they are targeting new highlights and directions. They are also looking into a national CIG with other states. They would like NJ to be the lead on the grant.

Howard Henderson explained the presence of Rural Development. He handed out a "Partners In Value" brochure. This program closes on November 30 with \$25 million dollars available nation wide.

Howard also discussed the possible implications of a General Counsel ruling on the definition of "rural" which could negatively impact RD programs in NJ.

Paul Hlubik gave a brief review of what the Farm Service Agency does. FSA is NJ's number two lender to farmers. FSA also has conservation programs, price supports, and commodity programs, and now a permanently authorized crop disaster program. NJ has recently been declared a disaster state for 2009 which will entitle farmers to low interest loans due to weather related issues.

Paul also explained a new program called BCAP – Bio-energy Crop Assistant Program. Currently in phase 1, the program matches farmers with end users of bio-fuels and provides a subsidy for delivering the crop to these end users.

Nancy Coles mentioned that FSA maintains farm records for USDA, and is authorized to track the direct attribution of funds. Currently there are 26 programs (NRCS and FSA) that use this data, and 49 different applications of program rules to be followed. She presented a handout to show the direct attribution process and the complexity of the programs.

Jim Barresi mentioned that the movement of firewood across state lines is becoming a big issue due to potential invasive pests and diseases. They are developing some restrictions for moving firewood. The NJ Grown label may be used to certify firewood available in NJ.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 1, 2009 at 10:00 am in the New Jersey State NRCS office, Somerset.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 pm.