

Executive Summary
State Technical Committee Meeting
September 18, 2008

Item	Decision
Statewide ICN Access for future STC Meetings	Meetings stay as is (face to face)
EQIP – County Allocation Formula for FY09	40% - water; 30% livestock; 20% soil; 10% wildlife
EQIP – Payment Rate	50% average cost
EQIP – Reserve Fund Included mandatory five percent each for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers. Six percent for CCPI equals \$2.72 million.	Set aside \$4.3 million for FY09-special projects/issues, supersheds. Forestry resource concerns will have access to \$500,000. If the funds are not used they will be returned to address other resource concerns.
EQIP – State CIG	Continue in FY09 – 4 grants/\$75,000 each maximum – use National Priorities
EQIP – 100 percent no-till/strip till incentives	There will be a limit of 320 acres allowed into this pilot program. Year 1-\$15 acre/ Year 2-\$25 acre/Year 3-\$35 acre
Establish a Pollinators Sub-Committee – if interested notify Rich Sims. (Need Sub-Committee Members)	Means to integrate pollinators into all Farm Bill Programs. Inger Lamb – Chair John Myers, Advisor
EQIP – Incentives for increased Soil Conditioning Index	Iowa NRCS will have a pilot project in Area 1 and Area 2 to see the producer interest for increasing organic matter in the soil. Criteria developed and ready for comments by the State Technical Committee.
EQIP – Negative points for applicants that have an existing contract that is behind schedule.	Exception-provide waivers on circumstances with valid reason for being behind schedule.
EQIP – Livestock facilities	Iowa NRCS has a higher demand for funds than are available. Iowa NRCS needs to concentrate the funds to address existing resource concerns and will not provide financial assistance (FA) for new livestock facilities that do not have an existing resource concern.

State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
September 18, 2008
693 Federal Building
NRCS Conference Room
Des Moines, Iowa
1:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Present: Richard (Rich) Sims, State Conservationist, Chair; Lyle Asell, Paul Tauke, Bill Ehm, Ken Herring, and Steve Hopkins, IDNR; Doug Helmers, FWS; Rick Robinson and Doug Gronau, Farm Bureau; Susan Heathcote, Iowa Environmental Council; Francis Thicke, Organic Dairy Farmer; Kelly Tobin, Producer; Merlin Plagge, FSA; Jerry Miller, ISU Extension; Chuck Gipp, IDALS-DSC; Mark Ackelson; Dave Van Waus, Pheasants Forever; John Sellers, Jr., Producer; Sean McMahon, Iowa Nature Conservancy; Deb Ryun, CDI; Brad Parks for Greg Thessen, NASS; Sarah Carlson for Teresa Opheim, Practical Farmers of Iowa; Linda Kinman, Iowa Water Agencies Association; Inger Lamb, Iowa Prairie Network; Bruce Barnhart, LICA; Duane Sand, SSCC; Madeline Meyer, Producer; Cy McDonald, Iowa League of RC&D; Jeff Hastings, Trout Unlimited; Suzanne Hall, EPA; and Dave Whittlesey, National Wild Turkey Federation. Other not members: John Moreland, Senator Harkin's Office; Lisa Walters, Iowa Rural Water Association; Jim Gillespie, DSC; Kelly Smith and Allen Bonini, IDNR; Vickie Friedow and Robin Holcomb, FSA; Paul Sweeney, Marty Adkins, John Myers, Larry Beeler, and Shelly DuBay, NRCS.

Welcome/Opening Comments – Rich Sims

Rich welcomed everyone, provided background information in his career with the agency, announced that these meeting are being recorded and introductions were made.

The minutes from March 20, 2008, meeting were sent to all members prior to the meeting and posted on the Iowa NRCS website. A recommendation to accept the minutes was made by Derryl McLaren and John Sellers seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

Conducting Future State Technical Meetings

Rich shared that this committee was developed two Farm Bills back. If you come to these meetings to have a good discussion, we will have that. If you come with the expectations of having votes/concurrences, we will not have that. This is an opportunity for the State Conservationist to listen to your ideas, how you would like to have the Farm Bill Programs operate in our state, and then the State Conservationist will make the decisions from the input that is provided how to direct the Farm Bill Programs. This is a change from the way previous meetings have been conducted.

Regarding the minutes, Shelly DuBay will be disbursing them back to you for review. The front page of minutes will be all the decisions (Executive Summary), so you will not have to go through the details of the minutes to find out what actually was said during this timeframe.

The hope is to have the rules out on the majority of the Farm Bill Programs sometime in January-February 2009. Please keep the following dates available: January 29 or February 19. The training may not be done for the Conservation Stewardship Program by this time, but do not want to hold up any input from the State Technical Committee just because of one program.

Statewide ICN Access

Rich asked about having future State Technical Committee Meetings via the Iowa Communication Network (ICN). This would open the meeting up statewide with additional individuals able to access the meeting. Is this a good tool to use or is it better face to face as we are conducting today? There was some discussion.

Ken Herring - DNR has used ICN for rule making process with the hunting regulations and has been generally a very good opportunity for stakeholders across the state. There have been a few minor problems with maintenance and technical difficulties.

Deb Ryun – There are pluses and minuses. Plus side - can be more inclusive. As of now, there is one voice per entity. Minus side - you could easily have one group way in very heavily and dominate a conversation.

Duane Sand – It's important to have a core group that meets face to face and knows each other as individuals and build the comfort level over time. There has been many times over the years that major conflicts have been avoided because individuals know individuals and would give each other the benefit of doubt even though we would traditional represent organizations on the opposite ends of the spectrum. There is real value by having the majority of the activity with people face to face.

Farm Bill Programs Update Significant Changes from 2002-2008 – Larry Beeler

Larry Beeler provided a PowerPoint presentation on the 2008 Farm Bill. Larry shared that he will not be able to tell when the rules will be published or how NRCS is going to implement this part of the legislation. Larry provided information on what the legislative language states and what Iowa has received from the NRCS National Office. Under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Ground and Surface Water Conservation is being replaced with Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP). The Conservation Security Program is no longer available. The program has changed to the Conservation Stewardship Program. The current Conservation Security Program contracts will remain enforce and NRCS will continue to make payments as obligated in the contract. There will not be new enrollments or the opportunity for modification existing contracts under the Conservation Security Program. The Conservation Stewardship Program will not be offered on a watershed basis, it will be statewide. There was a question/answer discussion on the different programs throughout the presentation.

The decision was made that Larry would provide all the State Technical Committee a copy of the presentation via email through Shelly DuBay and/or load the presentation on the Iowa NRCS website.

Sub-Committee Reports/Updates:

EQIP/CIG, Deb Ryun, Executive Director, CDI -

Deb Ryun provided a copy of the minutes from the Sub-Committee Meeting held on August 7, 2008, for review. Deb went over the document by section in detail for discussion.

Funding Issue:

- County Allocation Formula – 40% - Water Resources; 30% Livestock Resources; 20% Soil Resources; 10% Wildlife Resources: This is the formula used for the amount each county receives.
- Percent of Payment Rate – Is inflation addressed in 2008 Farm Bill? If a producer is on schedule with their contract which has a payment schedule, the producer will be paid the amount of the current year as stated in the payment schedule.
- Reserve Fund Process – The Sub-Committee looked at past funding allocations with \$2 million being held for Supersheds. The Sub-Committee also suggested putting \$1 million for other special projects that might include forestry, organic farming, livestock, energy, air quality, related practices and others. Having coordinated projects instead of individual applications is a better way of approaching the new program areas (energy/air quality). There was a lot of discussion on the special projects issue.

IDNR has a statewide wildlife comprehensive action plan that can be located on their website. This was coordinated by Fish and Wildlife Service as a requirement for states receiving money to implement a wildlife diversity plan. All 50 states had to undergo this process.

Resource Concern Treatment:

- Increase no-till/strip till/ridge till incentives – The payment rates should be increased as producers continue the practice. The incentive rates suggested: Year 1 - \$10/acre; Year 3 - \$20/acre; Year 5 - \$30/acre. This could include a requirement of at least one winter workshop and a summer field day each year, similar to what IDALS-DSC is requiring. There was some discussion that was favorable of this incentive. Details would be worked out when the allocations are ready to be distributed if approved.
- Include practices to provide habitat for pollinators, vines, fruits and vegetables – Establish an additional Sub-Committee outside of the EQIP Sub-Committee to determine means to integrate pollinators into all Farm Bill Programs. Individuals that are interested in being on a Sub-Committee for pollinators are to notify Rich Sims.
- Offer incentive payments for planting a cover crop – Suggest NRCS survey other states if they have offered this type of incentive and at what rate. An incentive of \$20/acre was discussed within the Sub-Committee. This incentive would be to plant a cover crop in between the harvest of corn or soybean so the ground would not be left bare over the winter. This issue is being put on hold at this time because there are no rules published, without funding and there needs to be research done.
- Incentives for increased Soil Conditioning Index – This may be available with the new rules, but currently is not offered as a practice. If this becomes an option, the suggestion would be Iowa NRCS offer this incentive to producers. Soil Conditioning Index is a model that shows whether the soil is gaining or losing carbon. Deb shared that National Geographic has a great article on soil quality.

Application Selection:

- Negative points for applicants that cancel a contract and then re-apply for a new contract – This was not recommended by the Sub-Committee.
- Negative points for applicants that have an existing contract that is behind schedule – This was a recommendation by the Sub-Committee with the exception that waivers could be provided in circumstances with valid reason(s) for being behind schedule. The Sub-Committee will meet again on the state ranking issues, but may have to revisit once the Farm Bill rules are published.

Length of maintenance agreements – Seedings used to be a 10 year period, now it is a 5 (five) year period, there are some conflicts when the two meet together especially out of 5-7 year old seeding that has gone bad due to the weather.

There was a detailed discussion on monitoring results of different programs and practices that Congress requires NRCS to keep track of at the field office level.

CSP, Francis Thicke, Organic Dairy Farmer –
No new information at this time.

GRP/CRP, John Sellers, Producer –
No new information, rules are being worked on at this time. FSA National training on Farm Bill Programs including CRP will be held the week of October 6, 2008.

WRP, Derryl McLaren, State Executive Director, FSA –
No new information at this time.

Nutrient Management (590) Standard, Jerry Miller, Associate Dean, ISU Extension/Rick Robinson, Environmental Policy Advisor, Farm Bureau –
No new information at this time.

Special Projects (CCPI and Supersheds), Jim Gillespie, Bureau Chief-Field Services, DSC/Lyle Asell, Special Assistant, DNR –

The only question/consideration, if Rich Sims takes the recommendation of the EQIP Sub-Committee and decides to set aside some money, then this Sub-Committee would work with Larry Beeler to get a Request for Applications (RFA) out and decide how to deal with last year's applicants. This is important to know and be able get moving on this as quickly as possible because of the RFA timeframe and to get the money obligated. Rich Sims made the decision to have the Sub-Committee work with Larry Beeler and proceed with the RFA. These are great ideas and we need to move forward on them. Rich asked if there are projects out there that the members are aware of to contact Jim Gillespie.

Watershed (PL-566/534), Duane Sand, President, SSCC –

The maintenance issues on the structures that have been in place for 50 years, there needs to be major maintenance investments done. There is not an incentive to get this accomplished or a program to assure that this can happen. There is a lack of planning money to bring more projects on line or projects that have been started that a community is counting on – there is no engineering done, need to look at state resources, or other supplemental funds.

There are approximately 2,100 structures in Iowa. At this time there are 600-700 structures that are 50 years of age and the number continues to grow.

RC&D Activities, Cy McDonald, President, IA League of RC&D –

Cy provided a handout on a few of the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) offices in Iowa. The handout provides the counties that are involved, the Board of Directors, and other information that the RC&D office is working on.

There are 17 RC&D offices in Iowa. At any one time they are working on over 100 projects or more. The role of the Iowa League of RC&Ds is to take any project that goes beyond one RC&D office and oversee that it is coordinated and completed. The hardest role is to take a RC&D project and make sure that everyone knows about the project. Congress is requiring accountability on what the RC&Ds are getting accomplished. Nothing has changed on how the process is completed; they just need to know what the projects are. The coordinators have not had to do this in the past, but they are getting this accomplished now.

Cy also provided a handout of a first draft of a brochure that the Iowa League of RC&Ds have partnered with the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT), titled "Scenic Byways of Iowa." The IDOT has a trust fund and they asked the Iowa League of RC&Ds to organize the financial sustainability; see that the signs are put up; develop a website; see that the Byway Council, which includes anyone that is on these byways, is sustainable; make sure that the corridor management planning works from one entity to the other; marketing; and keep education going at a fast pace. There are eight RC&D involved with this project.

Rich Sims shared that the RC&D Councils are made up of elected officials, supervisors, commissioners, and mayors. The role of Iowa NRCS with the RC&D councils is we provide a coordinator to help with the activities. It is a budget item with approximately \$51 million annually that provides coordinators for 376 RC&D council across the nation.

SAFE, Vickie Friedow, Program Manager, FSA –

Vickie provided the following information on the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) program. There is a lot of interest on soil rental rates. The program closes on September 18. There are several contracts that are not approved but individuals have called in to get their acres locked and waiting for the soil rental rate before they are approved. The rates vary from \$1 to \$51 per acre. FSA will be getting the applications enrolled by the end of September.

SAFE Acres as of 9/17/08	Total Acres	Acres Used	Net Acres Remaining
Gaining Ground for Wildlife	19,700	6,935.2	12,764.8
Habitat For Early Successional & Neotropical Migratory Forest Birds	3,500	146	3,354
Grand River Grassland	4,500	4.7	4,495.3

There are various programs in CRP associated with the new Farm Bill that will not be implemented until completion of either an Environmental Assessment, which takes 6 months to complete, or an Environmental Impact Statement, which takes 18-36 months. For instance, the cropping history years to determine CRP eligibility have been 1996-2001. They were to change to 2002-2007, but will remain unchanged until an Environmental Impact Statement is completed. FSA has National Training scheduled for the week of October 6.

WHIP, Paul Tauke, State Forester, DNR –

No new information at this time. The Sub-Committee is scheduled to meet on October 21.

Healthy Forests Enhancement Program – This program is being expanded in NRCS nationally. Rich thanked Paul Tauke for taking on this endeavor under his tutelage with the Sub-Committee he is working on now. Paul provided a brief overview of this program. This is a program that was authorized in the last Farm Bill but it was targeted toward specific area (pilot program) where most states were not eligible to participate. With the new Farm Bill it has changed and is designed to promote the recovery of peonies species and improve biodiversity and look at carbon sequestration. In the original Farm Bill you could receive a 10 year contract with 50 percent cost share; 30 year easement with 75 percent cost share for practices to fulfill a restoration plan; 99 year easement with 100 percent reimbursement to do the restoration plan. The significant change in the new Farm Bill, they have gone from a 99 year easement to a permanent easement. The original program was capped at two million acres. The new program has removed the cap and set aside \$9,750,000 in commodity credit corporation to implement the program. This money stays there until it is used up. Another change is 40 percent of funds have to be used to fulfill the restoration plan and 60 percent of the easement. At this time there is no information on how to submit proposals.

FRPP, Vacant Chair –

No new information at this time.

WRP Land Valuations – Marty Adkins

Marty stated the details how Iowa NRCS implemented WRP offers and evaluations this summer. Iowa NRCS did make an extensive use of a market survey analysis this year. The market survey analysis is based on using points availability rating for each soil survey. This is widely used to look at productivity and land evaluation in the ag rural state industry. Iowa NRCS looked at the inflation rate that occurred over the last 18 months, depending how old they were and indexed those values based on the average CSRs of those areas along with getting input from ag rural state appraisers that Iowa NRCS has worked with in the past. In that process Iowa NRCS came up with average dollar per CSR point for the nine crop reporting districts in Iowa (high, medium and low farmland). That was combined with the geographic area rate caps that were based on realtors land institute semi-annual farm real estate survey.

Rapid Watershed Assessment (RWA) – Marty Adkins

Marty provided an update (colored map-only 10 copies) on the RWA. The work in Iowa kicked off two years ago with work done by the Division of Soil Conservation under a national competition and Prairie Rivers RC&D completed one RWA. Marty provided details on the colors/shaded area of the state. Iowa NRCS has a RWA that has not been approved at this time that goes into the Minnesota border. Iowa NRCS has four RWAs that are being completed at this time. Iowa NRCS wants to continue working on these projects along with our partners and make sure that it is a benefit for all parties involved.

Closing Remarks – Rich Sims

Rich asked everyone to let him know how the format went for today's meeting. There was a lot of information covered. Rich stated that Iowa NRCS needs to get out and meet as many people as we can and get the word out on conservation stewardship, cultural conservation. We need to be more proactive. Rich provided copies of biographical sketches of the Iowa NRCS Leadership Team and a brochure on the agency. If there are individuals that are having annual meetings this winter please, provided this packet to them and they can contact the technical experts from the Iowa NRCS technical team to be presenters at their annual meetings. This will be mailed out to several organizations/agencies. Rich is hoping that the staff is swamped with requests to come to make presentations at the county level or where ever we can get the word out on conservation, it is very important. Feel free to share this with others.

Jerry Miller made a few comments: 1) congratulations on a two hour meeting, this is a very refreshing change; 2) Editorial – CSP - producers saying they will be eligible for CSP and Deb Ryun sharing the Soil Conditioning Index. Jerry asked the farmers in the group “How much residue they would leave after planting to be a conservation farmer, what would they say?” Answer – from the 1980's it would be 30 percent. Jerry continued that Iowa went through the floods of 1993 and 1998. In parts of the state in 1998 the soils were saturated, there was no place where the water could go. If Iowa would have had the appropriate residue, there would have been higher organic matter, lower bulk density, and Iowa would have infiltrated a lot of the water this year during the June 2008 flood. In Iowa, we have a long history of providing leadership for soil conservation. Jerry challenged everyone to redefine conservation tillage in terms of 30 percent residue or stop using the term.

The next State Technical Committee Meeting will be held on February 19, 2009, in NRCS Conference Room 693A in the Neal Smith Federal Building at 1:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned approximately 3:00 p.m.



Richard Sims
State Conservationist
Chair