

State Technical Committee Meeting Minutes
Natural Resources Conservation Service, South Carolina

July 1, 2009

The Committee met at the Farm Bureau Building in Cayce, South Carolina beginning at 10:00 a.m.

Attendees:

- √ Niles Glasgow, SC NRCS State Conservationist
- √ Craig Ellis, SC NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs
- √ Erica Westbrook; SC NRCS State Resource Conservationist
- √ Wayne Mitchem, NC State University
- √ Powell Smith, Clemson University Extension Service, Lexington County
- √ Gary Burger, National Wild Turkey Federation
- √ Eddie Wells, USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)
- √ Charles Broadwell, Sumter Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD)
- √ Walt Douglas, Lexington SWCD
- √ James Williams, Retired NRCS
- √ David Branham, SC Farm Bureau
- √ Susan Guynn, Clemson University, Forestry & Natural Resources
- √ Scott Phillips, SC Forestry Commission
- √ Walt McPhail, Private landowner
- √ Marc Cribb, SC Dept. of Natural Resources (SCDNR)
- √ Stephen Henry, SC NRCS
- √ Dick Yetter, SC NRCS
- √ Joe Cockrell US Fish & Wildlife Service
- √ Leslie Morgan , SC DNR
- √ Greg Henderson, SC Association of Conservation Districts (SCACD)
- √ Mary W. Morrison, USDA Forest Service
- √ Judy Barnes, SC DNR
- √ Helen Pittman, Jasper SWCD

Glasgow called the meeting to order and stated the goal of the meeting was to inform and get input on the process NRCS is undergoing to implement the 2008 Farm Bill and some other associated matters with our practice standards.

Glasgow stated that one of the exciting things about the Farm Bill this year is that there are a record amount of signups. Presently, we are at the 29 million dollar level this year, and in past years it has been about 13.5 million. He reported that there is a lot of interest in this Farm Bill. He emphasized the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or EQIP, which has about 6.5 million dollars, with a 29 million dollar request.

Glasgow emphasized that this is a five-year Farm Bill and that producers not selected for funding should continue to apply for funding.

Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, Craig Ellis, presented a summary and update on the components of the 2008 Farm Bill. **Highlights included:**

EQIP – 13 different categories available, 10 state wide levels of competition and 3 watershed levels of competition. Ellis provided copies of ranking tools that are used and gave a brief explanation of how the rankings were divided.

Ellis reviewed funding for EQIP. In SC, the program was funded at 6.6 million dollars. He reviewed the special initiative for organic farming; \$615,000 of the 6.6 million had to be dedicated to organic farming. Sign up for organic farming has been low, probably not going to be able to use all of the \$615,000 available, and everybody that meets the criteria will probably get funded. Glasgow commented on the organic farming funds indicating that any unused organic funds would go back to national headquarters and allocated to other states that could use the money. The goal is to spend \$50 million nationally for organic farming.

Ellis discussed briefly how SC is considered a regional equity state under EQIP, stating that a request has been made for 4 million additional dollars to put SC up to about 10.6 million, if the additional funds are received. The request for additional funds was made because of the high interest in the Farm Bill--29 million dollars in requests vs. 6.6 million dollars received—which equals funding for only 22% of the applications.

Glasgow commented that the odds of getting the 4 million dollars are not good because there may only be about 10 million dollars to be given out nationally and we asked for four million of it. Simply put, there is more money being requested than there is available.

Ellis reviewed where EQIP stands with obligated funds. As of the meeting, obligated funds stood at 70%, and there are a few more to get obligated and then we will be ready to request the regional equity money.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, or WHIP – This year there were around 1.6 or 1.7 million dollars in requests. We received around 1.1 million dollars in funding. We are going to be able to cover the majority of the WHIP applications this year.

Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative, or CCPI- Received 2 requests, one from the Foothills RC&D Council, and one from the SC Poultry Federation, both were accepted and funds have been set aside for those as instructed.

The request from the Foothills RC&D is to address stream restoration efforts to help restore trout streams in that area. The request from the Poultry Federation is to address concerns with a holistic approach to treat resource concerns on operations that are going into production, and addressing those that already exist.

Wetlands Reserve Program, or WRP – Ellis discussed some of the changes to WRP, pointing out the requirement for 7 year ownership; that the option-to- purchase agreement has been expanded and has a little more information in it; and that the warranty easement deed has new language in it that is more defining regarding some of the activities related to hunting and recreation.

WRP received a little over 4.5 million dollars this year so far. A request has been made for 1.9 million dollars in additional funds, for a total of around 6.5 million. We have received 5 applications that we are requesting funding for totaling almost the 6.5 million dollars.

Grassland Reserve Program, or GRP – We just concluded the first cut off for this year for GRP. Signup was low, and we received 5 applications for rental agreements and two applications for easements. This year SC received around \$258,000 for GRP. If we take the 5 rental agreements which will total in the neighborhood of \$50,000, and then we fund the top easement (which is 114 acres), we're going to come up short. A request has been made for

another \$186,000 to try to cover all of the rental agreements and the top ranked easement. There has been no reply at this time.

The former Conservation Security Program, or CSP, has been renamed the Conservation Stewardship Program --Discussion has been to have a nation-wide sign up available to everybody. Ellis provided a summary and asked for input. Discussion ensued regarding limiting crops to the 5 crops mentioned on the summary; resource concerns including air quality, animals, plants, soil erosion, soil quality, water quality, water quantity, and energy. Greg Henderson suggested adding vetch, cowpeas, Australian winter peas, Arrow leaf clover, and crimson clover to the list of conserving crops.

State Practice Standards: Glasgow introduced Assistant State Conservation Engineer Stephen Henry to discuss the *Conservation Power Plant* Practice Standard. Henry presented a packet of information and indicated that to his knowledge SC is the first state in the East to develop this interim standard of work with farms helping to develop on-farm power generation to supplement the farm's energy needs.

Henry discussed alternative energy sources for farms and how they could be implemented. He noted that an energy audit would be needed before a power generation unit would be located on a facility. Discussion ensued regarding cost share, the energy audit, requirements of the energy audit, and who would be qualified to perform the energy audit.

Henry concluded by noting that there was a huge amount of interest in this area and he wants to see NRCS be a leader in this field, and be proactive in developing the standard.

SC NRCS Wildlife Biologist Dick Yetter discussed Shallow Water Development and Management Practice Standards that are being developed. Standards are revised every 5 years. The Shallow Water Standard was updated in 2006 and due to ambiguous language there is a need to update some of the criteria. The changes are as follows:

- Under purpose, in the last sentence the words "where shallow water habitat has been identified as a limiting factor" have been added.
- Under the criteria section, second paragraph, the word "and" was inserted in the first line between the words "permeability" and "seasonal".
- Under the criteria section, paragraph 2, sentence 2, should read "...at natural conditions of water table depth of 1 foot *and* a clay content of greater than 25%."
- Under the criteria section, paragraph 3, the criteria was changed to include, "on the inside slope of any current impoundment what would be a gradual slope dike anywhere from 9:1 to 20:1."
- Under the criteria section, paragraph 7, "No area of the impoundment shall have a water depth greater than 3 feet."
- Under the criteria section, paragraph 8, the sentence "the maximum slope allowed on the offered acres will be 2%..." was included.
- Under the considerations section, paragraph 14 was included to read, "water levels may be managed as a method to control unwanted vegetation."

Yetter noted that a more holistic approach was being taken to a lot of our biology related issues. He discussed some of the tools that are used to identify limiting factors such as wildlife index and wetland functional assessment. Discussion ensued regarding using liners in the construction of shallow water ponds where soil conditions are not conducive.

SC Association of Conservation Districts President Greg Henderson discussed Micro Jet Irrigation and Peach Orchards. He stated that orchards are not considered crop land; and that there are about 14 thousand plus acres of orchards from Columbia to Augusta. He introduced

Wayne Mitchum who presented info. on a study on micro sprinkler irrigation and the presence of micro sprinkler irrigation in an orchard and varying the herbicide strip width. Mitchum showed photographs of orchards affected by lack of ground cover and the resulting damage.

The study looked at ways to minimize pesticide use in peaches. As part of the herbicide portion of the study it was looked at if you could use micro sprinkler irrigation to reduce the herbicide strip width and reduce the amount of herbicide used in orchards.

The data showed that a 6 foot wide herbicide strip with micro sprinkler irrigation produced the same size tree as an unirrigated 12 foot wide herbicide strip at the end of year one.

At the end of year two, again, with a six foot wide irrigation strip you got about the same amount of growth with irrigation as you got with a 12 foot wide herbicide strip and no irrigation.

The third year essentially showed the same thing, a six foot wide herbicide strip with irrigation, resulted in the same size tree as a 12 foot wide herbicide strip with no irrigation.

However, when yield was introduced in the third year, we got the greatest yield with a 12 foot wide herbicide strip with micro sprinkler irrigation. A 6 foot wide herbicide strip with irrigation resulted in about the same yield as a 12 foot herbicide strip and no irrigation. He concluded that there would be a benefit to having the irrigation and the wider herbicide strip from a yield standpoint.

Henderson discussed the need to get the growers to implement good soil management practices in their orchards as a part of Micro Jet Irrigation in the early years of the orchards. He suggested a point system could be put in place to rank applications. Suggesting, "If a producer is maintaining a narrow herbicide strip and maintaining a good ground cover throughout an established time then that would give him a higher point ranking for Micro Jet Irrigation." He reiterated that orchards are crop plants that are just not planted every year. Discussion ensued.

Glasgow spoke briefly about things to watch for; including the Climate Bill in Washington and trading carbon credits. He also reported, for information purposes only, that the NRCS has been undergoing an audit and they are doing things a little bit differently, and asked those present to keep this in mind.

Glasgow also reported on the progress of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, also referred to as the Stimulus Package, and said, "We advertised the opportunity to offer easements to eligible flood plains through a sign up. We received 72 applications across SC and one SC application was selected, however, the applicant decided not to participate."

Glasgow then reported that the Stimulus Package has benefited South Carolina in that the South Darlington Watershed has been authorized for assistance via ARRA to alleviate flood damages to residences and businesses by providing flood protection to nearly 90% of the affected area. The 2,290 acre watershed will receive \$ 1, 040,000 in federal funding, with the local sponsor providing \$455,693. The project is slated to be completed by 2010.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.