

**State Technical Committee Meeting
June 15, 2011
Minutes**

Welcome (Denise Coleman):

- State Technical Committee members are acting interest group reps.
- Moved these meetings to the afternoon to have more statewide participation and allow subcommittees to meet in the morning.
- Topics today surround funding: how we submit to get funds.
 - Asked by National office to put SRA info into spreadsheet to determine fund allocations – 10% of funds avail to NRCS for farm bill programs. As time goes on will become greater and greater percentage. Looking to target high priority resource concerns and high priority areas.

State Resource Assessment (Marcie Dunn, NRCS):

(PowerPoint presentation)

- This is different from last year – this one is national.
 - Resource-performance based.
 - What you can do with workforce now and for budget.
 - Supports Conservation Desktop Streamlining Initiative being worked on by NRCS National Headquarters.
- Looked at 9 major resource concerns, broken down into 31 separate categories.
 - We focused on crop forest pasture and other ag.
 - A two-part process with excel workbook (dividing resource concern by land use) and ARC GIS database (digitize priority treatment areas).
 - 4 different categories: potential at risk; acres needed treatment; priority ranking; priority treatment acres (what can be done in 3 years).
 - Used geographic data, NAS census data, NRI info to define areas.

Q: are maps posted on website?

A: not at the moment, may be revised. As soon as finalized could be posted.

Easement Programs Update (Hathaway Jones, NRCS):

- WRP – good year.
 - Over 7.5M in easement applications and still getting more in.
 - Obligated/enrolled about \$3M of that. Will be asking NHQ for more funding.
 - Received \$1.4M in additional funding.
 - Have 40 easement applications now and 4 - 5 of those are bog turtle applications (one at \$2M (100 acre site) with another 40 acres being donated to a conservancy).
 - A few restoration projects to fund – \$600,000 from those.
 - 1800 acres in applications so far.

- GRP: finished for this year.
 - About \$30,000 taken back from NHQ.
 - Requested to convert rental funding into GRP – that totaled about \$765,000 for 3 easements to be funded this year.
 - 2 are 100 acre parcels.
 - 15 applications for easement – 3 funded.
- FRPP: going slow.
 - Final rule published and changes to manual done late in 2nd quarter. This impacts some entities we work with.
 - Have over \$2M in FRPP easement applications, should be able to fund all.
 - About \$2M left in FRPP funding, looking to obligate.
 - Have closed/paid out on \$4M in FRPP funding this year.
- HFRP: new program for NRCS, have not obligated anything yet.
 - Working on 4 of the 1st applications that passed screening; currently getting appraisals and habitat plans written. After completed will be sent for technical review.
 - Dollar amount is dependent on appraisal and fair market value.
 - One site is 1300 acres.
 - Targets Indiana bat and bat habitat.

Q: talked about \$2M easement on 100 acre – is this typical easement price for bog turtles? How does this compare to typical values per acre?

A: located in Bucks County and close to urban area, land values are higher. Typically see between 2,000 and 5,000 across the state.

A: requires NRCS chief signature on this acquisition. Justifying habitat and how many species may be on site, leveraging of fish and wildlife providing technical assistance. Drawing more interest to this area. Currently have approx 85 acres enrolled for bog turtles.

Q: on WRP there are other bay states with money left and likely to get additional funds. In the past was an exchange between Maryland and Delaware.

A: cannot do state to state transfer, but do have request in.

FY2012 FRPP State Plan (Hathaway Jones, NRCS) (handouts):

- Every 10 years FRPP policy is to submit plan to NHQ to use for congress to get us our yearly allocation for funding.
- Plan shows what is targeted over next 7 years.
- Sent out questionnaire for entities to complete – to get an idea of what funding is needed and what can be provided in matching funds; what is backlog of farms to be preserved in their area.
 - Shows there is a need in PA for FRPP funding.
 - Due July 1st to NHQ – looking for comments from the State Tech Committee.

Subcommittee Reports:

- **Feed Management (Dan Ludwig, NRCS) (handout):**
 - Met last Thursday.
 - Successful year; 40 applications statewide and have 51 contracts (30 within the Chesapeake Bay watershed).
 - Different farm sizes, mainly dairy, approx 4 beef farmers.
 - Subcommittee would like to see initiative carried over to next year and have funding remain consistent to this year.
 - Have 18 qualified plan writers – still a learning process.
 - End product will show reduced nutrients.
 - Extending outreach by setting up teleconferences, advertising by postcards, for farmers – those who have contracts and quarterly teleconferences for plan writers, relaying info from producers.
 - Scheduling info session during APD for producers to talk to us
 - Recommendation: energy – funding sheep grazing under solar panels.

Q: if implementing 51 plans fully what is the nutrient reduction? Will reduction eventually be measured?

A: no numbers yet, will start looking at that. Haven't seen how that manure is land applied. Provide copies of rations/diet formulation, sample of feed, sample of manure and compare formulated, actual and what is in manure. Yes, reduction will be measured.

Q: what credit is given to feed management now?

A: based on nitrogen and measured pH levels. The issue is the linkage between data collected and DEP. With arrangement with PSU can possible work that out.

- **Air Quality (Dan Dostie, NRCS):**
 - Met in early May. Each partner gave a report.
 - EPA study in dairy is now available.
 - Also ARS process-based dairy gas emissions model provided – which will evaluate emissions on dairy farms.
 - ARS discussed work being done with PSU looking at reducing ammonia emissions thru manure ejections.
 - Will be a field day on June 22nd.
 - Report on Feed Management success story as well as odor management.
 - Need plan on regulated CAFO or CAO.
 - Have the Conservation Innovation Grant program that helps demonstrate innovative technology.
 - National component and statewide component – set aside \$300,000 to fund small, low-cost priority projects in PA.
 - Received 9 applications – 5 are eligible.
 - Will release those selected for funding when national has made the decision.
 - No-till and 29 other standards released. Will look closely at soil tillage and new technologies for injecting and incorporating manure.

Karl Brown: EPA funded a series of 24-28 studies on animal housing units. Trying to analyze data, have requested additional data on air quality. EPA is not clear on timelines and intent. Group will ask EPA to do seminar/webinar in the fall to find out where they are headed. Manure incorporation on no-till systems – where do we stand on treatments and technologies in relationship to NRCS standards. We need to find a way to incorporate manure, on a collision course between manure and air/water quality issues.

- **Forestry (Andy Duncan):**

- Successful year with funding.
 - Had \$720,000 allocated for EQIP forestry; obligated all.
 - Received more funding – over \$400,000 for EQIP forestry – obligated 66 contracts for over \$1M. Over 4200 acres.
 - Have 43 remaining unfunded applications.
- Forestry Management plan – allocated \$30,000 obligated all plus \$11,000.
 - 36 contracts covering over 2500 acres with 18 remaining unfunded applications.
 - Had one successful TSP training in Mansfield. Another session on July 13th in Bloomsburg. If successful want to have another centrally-located session.
 - Have 17 approved TSPs to write CAP 106 management plan.
- Forest Stewardship Committee meeting 2 weeks ago, receptive to CAP 106 plan.
 - Possibly moving it forward and making changes centered around structure (forest stand inventory requirements).
- Stroud session training was in May. Having meeting prior to July 16.
 - Was told this was one of the most beneficial trainings. Several new service foresters said same thing.
 - Another session to be held on June 28th.
- Had training on agro-forestry looking at certified organic farm in Columbia County.
 - Owner is also a consulting forester.
 - Primary topic is silvo-pasture, which is catching on throughout state.
 - Would like to see CIG grants on this in the future.
- Bureau of Forestry working on cost estimates for CAP 106 plans, seen only one almost completed plan.
 - Service foresters working with TSPs are asking what total cost is to provide to landowner.
 - MOU being worked on. May be stalled in legal department.
- Forestry/Landowner workshop in Conewago possibly scheduled the evening of July 28th.

- **Wildlife (Mike Pruss):**

- Meetings in Clarion (Apr 5) and York (Apr 12), with field trips showing NRCS practices.
- Recognized the grant applied for by Indiana University of PA for the golden-winged warbler was awarded and will start working on this.

- Hoping to see that application become approved. Waiting for apportionment request.
- Game commission also has pool of money that could be used as match or in-kind.
- NFWF grant for outreach training on golden-winged warbler workshop (handout).
 - Targeted to natural resource professionals writing conservation plans for implementation; training on BMPs.
 - 2-day trainings -- Aug 18/19, Aug 25/26, Sept 12/13.
- CREP and Game Commission established wild pheasant populations across the state.
- In the spring, Franklin County, will provide one or three year deferment program.
- Game Commission and Pheasants Forever funded positions from TA for CREP delivery and are in place in Potter and Tunkhannock.
- Starting to do planning for CREP.

2012 Funding Cycles (Barry Frantz) (handout):

- Asking for comments on targeted habitat proposals (Golden-Winged Warbler and Massasaugua rattlesnake).
- Guidance for workgroups (LWG): may propose cost-containment practice cap (how much is spent on any practice).
 - Could also reduce the payment percentage below the current 75% maximum.

2012 Conservation Program Options (Barry Frantz/Katrina Thompson, NRCS):

- CSP: wrapped up 2011 sign-up 1 – no sign-up 2.
 - In 2011, contracted almost 27,000 acres on ag land, 93 contracts on cropland and 37 on forestland.
 - Have a total of 689 CSP contracts statewide, over 200,000 acres.
 - Most popular enhancements are: cropland – pest management, wildlife, pollinator habitat (forestland and crop/pastureland), use of cover crop mixes, plant tissue testing, applying controlled release nitrogen fertilizer. Forestland – forest stand improvement, wildlife structures, multi-story cropping, agro-forestry.
 - Also offer research and development/demonstration project enhancement.
- In preparation for 2012, not many changes, keeping same geographic regions.
 - Each region could pick up to 5 priority resource concerns.
 - LWGs may want to shift some priority resource concerns in CSP.

Denise: CSP is a complex program to manage. This is well suited for grain/cropland producers with big acres. PA producers who have small acres with livestock do not receive exceptionally high payments because the payments are acreage based. . Any help getting information to specialty crop producers would be helpful. Need help in outreaching to producer groups and communities.

Open to suggestions/recommendations by the end of July.

FSA Update (Chrystal Fetzer, FSA):

CRP

- General CRP sign-up #41 was March 14 – Apr 15.
- 3.8M acres offered, 2.8M acres accepted.
 - Brings total enrollment up to 29M acres and leaves room for 32M cap.
- PA had 24 offers for general CRP in 11 counties.
 - 21 out of 24 deemed acceptable and can go to contract.
 - Secretary selects EBI score of 221.
- \$38.97 is the average rental rate per acre.
- PA CRP Totals: 13,474 acres on 471 contracts.

CREP

- 206,000+ acres on 11,000 contracts.
- Over 178,000 acres within the Chesapeake Bay.
- Average contract size remains at 18.3 acres.
- Have over 20,000 acres expiring this year.
- NHQ authorized local thresholds to determine enrollment eligibility.
- Re-enrollment must be in compliance.
- CREP Technical Committee made threshold recommendations to FSA state committee and were approved.
- FSA and NRCS issued joint memo to field offices and TA providers.
- Both agencies conducted joint training session in May.
- This is the 1st year that CREP has not been able to compete with grain prices.

Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

- PGC received \$1.5M grant in 2010, and the PA Fish and Boat commission received a \$500,000 grant yesterday.

Hispanic and Woman Farms/Ranchers Lawsuit, Denise Coleman, NRCS):

(Power Point presentation)

- USDA has a lawsuit filed by Hispanic producers and women producers.
- \$1.3B available who allege USDA discrimination between 1981 and 2000.
- In PA, Lancaster County out of 7900 farmers, 1800 are women.
- Outreach target is those who were not able to get information.

Closing: Denise thanked all for attending and providing opinions and feedback.

Next Meeting: September 19, 2011