

# Minnesota State Technical Committee (MSTC) Minutes

January 4, 2011

## PARTICIPANTS:

Don Baloun, NRCS	Linda Meschke, Rural Advantage
Tim Koehler, NRCS	Les Everett, U of M – WRC
Paul Flynn, NRCS	Barbara Weisman, MN Dept of Ag
Tom Meium, Congressman Collin Peterson's Office	George Boody, Land Stewardship Project
Rob Sipe, MN Dept of Ag	Wanda Garry, FSA
Greg Ostizowski, Todd SWCD	Greg Anderson, FSA
Ian Cunningham, MASWCD	Dennis Ritter, MPA
Staci Martin, MN Farm Bureau	John Mages, MN Corn Growers
Mark Kanable, NRCS	Riley Maanum, MN Corn Growers
Sheldon Myerchin, USFWS	Tim Gieske, Ag Resource Strategies
Cyd Curtis, USEPA	Kelly Applegate, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
Mark Wettlaufer, MN Dept of Health	Dennis McDougall, USFS, Northeastern Area
Kevin Lines, BWSR	Brad Redlin, Izaak Walton League
Doug Peterson, MN Farmers Union	Aaron Meyer, MN Rural Water Assn.
Jim Kukowski, MN Soybean Growers	Rick Reimer, Kandiyohi SWCD
Jerel Kilen, Farmer, Roseau County	Jodie Provost, MN Chapter of the Wildlife Society
Dave Zumeta, MN Forest Resources Council	Andrew Boyd, Mille Lacs Band (DNR)
Dave Neu, NWTF	Matt Holland, Pheasants Forever
Jason Beckler, Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever	David Rose, NRCS, Stearns County
Mike Anderson, NRCS	Rhonda Osterman, NRCS
Andrew Arends, MN DNR	

## Opening Remarks/Intro

Don Baloun, STC, NRCS, gave a brief summary of where NRCS is at, that we are still in a continuing resolution and the budget will be tough. We are looking at the cost of travel and vehicle cost.

Don apologized that we did not have a hard copy of the minutes from the meeting in September and that in the future, we will be sure to have that for the meeting. They will also be posted on the web site. Also, at the last meeting, it was decided that the meetings would be the third Thursday, every other month and that we will stick to that schedule. If Don has scheduling conflicts, he may have to miss some of the MSTC meetings, but Tim Koehler and/or Paul Flynn will fill in.

Tim Koehler, NRCS, showed the committee the MSTC web site that we're building and where we will be posting meeting information such as minutes, handouts, agendas, etc. The third Thursday, every other month are the regularly scheduled meetings.

Don also asked the committee if it they were agreeable to us posting the meeting materials on the web instead of sending out hard copy, thus saving time, money, paper, etc. We'll try to get materials posted on the web site in advance of the meetings so you can review them and possibly give recommendations.

### Bioreactors\*IOREACTORS

Barbara Weisman, MDA, introduced a request from Mark Dittrich (MDA) and Al Kean (BWSR) for NRCS to consider developing an interim practice standard for Woodchip Bioreactors. Woodchip bioreactors are receiving lots of attention lately because they are one of the easiest to implement and most broadly applicable of several emerging "conservation drainage" practices or drainage system adaptations that reduce nitrates, flows and other contaminants carried via drainage water to nearby waterways. An interim standard would facilitate demonstration projects under way throughout the state and enable EQIP cost-share for this promising water quality practice. Several meeting participants mentioned woodchip bioreactor demonstration projects in their neck of the woods. Handouts included a fact sheet on woodchip bioreactor research/demonstration projects, noting 35% to 50% reductions in nitrates, and a brochure illustrating woodchip bioreactors as one of several conservation drainage practices. Neither is available online but similar content is available at [www.admcoalition.com/Woodbio.pdf](http://www.admcoalition.com/Woodbio.pdf), and [www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/conservation/practices/consdrainage.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/conservation/practices/consdrainage.aspx). Don suggested having a presentation on woodchip bioreactors at the next meeting (STC or EQIP Subcommittee) and asked if Al and Mark had spoken to John Brach yet about drafting a standard.

***Action: BWSR & MDA will work with NRCS to investigate a Woodchip Bioreactor Standard and investigate inclusion in the 2012 EQIP.***

### Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) Easements \*

Jason Beckler, Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist, Pheasants Forever, Inc. and Quail Forever gave a presentation on the Grazing Reserve Easement Program. The objectives of the GREP are to reverse the loss of most of our once abundant pasture acres to commodity crops such as corn and soybeans. The goal of GREP is to offer alternatives to subsidize row cropping and offer a program to restore lost pasture acres and to give landowners and opportunity to change the landscape through a profitable grazing system.

***Action: Grazing Reserve Easement Program – conduct a GRP subcommittee meeting to discuss this concept, a targeted approach and future actions.***

## Landscape Stewardship & EQIP

Andrew Arends, DNR Forestry. The Northeastern Area (NA) of US Forest Service and the State Foresters in the NA are investigating how more forest landowners could be reached through the Forest Stewardship Program. The current outreach model is based on an individualized forest management plan. This model has proven to be valuable to those that get service. Unfortunately too few landowners have received the service and an accompanying management plan. NA and the State Foresters are testing how a landscape stewardship plan might work to get good land management information to forest landowners. The Minnesota DNR and NRCS, with assistance from the Forest Service, will pilot the landscape stewardship plan model in the southwest and north-central portions of the state.

Andrew routed a publication called “My Healthy Woods – A Handbook for Family Woodland Owners – Managing Woods in Southeast Minnesota.” This publication is available at:  
<https://www.aldoleopold.org/programs/myhealthywoodsMN.shtml>

***Action: Landscape Stewardship & EQIP – A committee will be established to develop the guidelines and processes for this initiative for FY 2012. If interested, please submit your name to Rhonda Osterman ([rhonda.osterman@mn.usda.gov](mailto:rhonda.osterman@mn.usda.gov)). A meeting will be planned in the near future.***

**Decision: Pilot for FY 2012 at \$1M of EQIP to implement forestry practices through the Landscape Stewardship Initiative and statewide.**

## Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) Identification of Additional/Changes to 8-digit Focus Areas

Don discussed the need to be proactive related to the addition of 08 digit watersheds in the MRBI. In addition there is a need to look at what we al have been doing in Minnesota on the watershed scale and share this with all partners. Discussion ensued and Don asked George Boody, Land Stewardship Project and others volunteer to help NRCS with this effort.

***Action: Lessons Learned – Watershed Effort – Planning, Implementation, Monitoring - George Boody, LSP, will work with NRCS to develop a concept paper and plan to provide information on watershed level planning, implementation and monitoring success stories throughout the state for use on MRBI and non-MRBI watersheds.***

***Action: An EQIP subcommittee meeting will be conducted to review existing data and other information in order to propose the next 10 – 08 digit watersheds that could be included in the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative (MRBI). List to be developed by July 1, 2011.***

## 2012 Farm Bill Preparation – Strategy and Comments from Minnesota

Barb Weisman, MDA provided a summary of the process that state agencies will use to comment on the new Federal Farm Bill.

## 2012 Farm Bill Conservation Recommendations

- Staff from four Minnesota state agencies – the Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR), Department of Agriculture (MDA), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is developing joint recommendations for the Conservation Title of the 2012 Farm Bill.
  - Specifically, staff will revisit and update the Minnesota Clean Water Cabinet Conservation Policy Recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill in light of **Minnesota’s 25-year Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment** (2010 through 2034) and other major state conservation initiatives, issues, tools in play since passage of the 2008 farm bill.
  - While much has changed since 2008, the **guiding principles** behind the previous recommendations have not changed significantly. They will be refined and used again in developing the 2012 recommendations.
  - The recommendations document will also include foundational information about the **importance of the farm bill to Minnesota**, including facts, figures and stories.
  - Agency individuals involved thus far include John Jaschke, Julie Blackburn and Al Kean for BWSR; Wayne Edgerton (just retired) and Mark Lindquist for DNR; Wayne Anderson and Bruce Henningsgaard for MPCA; Barbara Weisman, Rob Sip and Quinn Cheney for MDA.
- The main drivers of this effort are Minnesota’s position as a conservation leader, significant and expanding opportunities to influence and leverage farm bill conservation funding at the state level, and USDA’s need for public and private sector partners to help deliver farm bill conservation programs to farmers and other landowners.
- Current resources do not permit the type of extensive stakeholder process conducted for the previous recommendations. However, as before, stakeholders groups will be informed of the effort and their farm bill resolutions and platforms will be taken into consideration as the new recommendations are developed.
- If approved by new state agency leaders, the recommendations might be submitted to Minnesota’s congressional delegation as soon as March 2011.

## Summary of Feedback Meetings with Conservation and Agriculture Groups

Don Baloun covered the key points recognized at the Conservation and Agriculture group meetings in December 2010.

## **Key Points**

### **MSTC – CONSERVATION GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Need to revitalize the Local Work Groups. Do broad stakeholder meetings as well as the formal LWG meeting. The stakeholder meeting should involve all private landowners and ask for input.
2. Targeting funding/special initiatives is working!
3. Need to revitalize/expand the TSP effort in MN.
4. District Conservationists cannot be experts on everything. Need to have TSP options.
5. One-Stop-Shop should be promoted but needs to include DNR and others working on local conservation delivery.
6. MN should consider one statewide conservation partnership training conference.....Missouri was stated as the example.
7. NRCS is not attending many key meetings at the local level. Examples stated where BLMM, watershed district meetings, etc. Need to have a local presence.
8. Swampbuster provision is not working in MN.
9. MN –State Technical Committee.....last meeting was the best they participated in!  
Appreciated the request for input on key items.

### **MSTC – AGRICULTURE GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Need to identify practices that are most needed by watershed and target/emphasize these practices.
2. Caps on practices are good.
3. Need to improve communication and delivery of TSP within the State.
4. Fertilizer recommendations continue to be an issue. Would encourage NRCS-MSTC discussion and involvement of U of M.
5. Swampbuster needs to be looked at and more coordinated with the State law (Wetland Conservation Act).
6. SWCD's.....local delivery system needs to be looked.
7. NRCS development and implementation of the "farming 101" course for new employees needs to happen and should include all the partners.
8. We need to "know each other, respect each other, and trust each other". This has not always been the case in MN.
9. Local NRCS staff is not showing up at local Ag meetings.....they need to be there!
10. EQIP....need single practice options. Need to allow for technology/equipment that will meet the conservation objectives of NRCS. Example stated was flow meters on manure spreading equipment.
11. Keep your push on precision Ag practices.
12. TMDL's are a concern.
13. CSP – 5 year lease requirement is a major obstacle for many producers in today's world of escalating land rental rates. Many landowners are not willing to make commitment knowing rental rates have been very fluid.
14. NRCS-MN needs to look at Farm Managers for communication efforts with absentee landowners. This will help get conservation on the land under absentee ownership.

**Decision: Conservation and Agriculture group meeting summaries will be posted on the web site.**

**Decision: A third meeting will be scheduled to get input from government and university personnel.**

### WRP & EQIP

Tim Koehler, ASTC Farm Bill provided updates to the group on proposals for the 2011 Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and the Environmental Quality incentives Program (EQIP). Subcommittee meetings have been held for these two programs and NRCS has considered their input for the 2011 year.

#### WRP –

1. We have decided to use the same system as in the past three years to set rates for easement payments utilizing data from the University of Minnesota. These rates are township specific and are the same as that are used by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) for the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Reserve Program. The MSTC has previously recommended this methodology to set WRP payment Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC's). Due to these points NRCS submitted the rates derived from the University to the NRCS Headquarters for review and approval. NRCS in Washington approved the rates as submitted, see attached handout. The only condition that was placed on the Minnesota proposal was a hold down of \$5,000 per acre to be the limit for permanent WRP easements. This \$5,000 level is for all WRP's nationwide.
2. WRP Food Plot guidance and final draft policy was discussed, see handout. Discussion ensued and Don asked that the MSTC give NRCS a year to see if the policy, which meets the partners in the middle, is workable. We will revisit this policy in a year and see what changes are needed.
3. In 2011 WRP funds will once again be used in partnership with the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Reserve Program. This will include the 29 county Riparian Floodplain Relief special project as well as the regular RIM-WRP Partnership offered statewide. In addition, straight WRP easements will also be offered as certain situations dictate not being able to partner with RIM.
4. WRP funds have been requested for a special initiative in the Red River Basin amongst North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota. As NRCS receives word on this proposal we will keep the MSTC informed.

#### EQIP –

2011 will look much like 2010. In the fall of 2010 a work group made up of NRCS field and area staff along with state office specialists worked to identify concerns and potential changes to the EQIP for 2011. These were summarized and proposed to the EQIP subcommittee. The subcommittee agreed with the recommendations and also still supports the locally led priority setting process. The proposed changes to the 2011 EQIP practice payment schedule were reviewed with the MSTC, see attached document. The major change for 2011 that was proposed was the establishment of payment caps for all management practices. In 2010, for the first time, no caps were in place for these practices. It is felt that it is better to put a cap on these practices in order to let more producers try these practices statewide. Discussion ensued and the proposed changes were recommended to be accepted.

EQIP for 2011 will begin shortly and scoring periods will end as soon as early March. This will be done to meet national funding obligation goals of June 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative (MRBI) -

A 2010 Summary of Activities in Minnesota, see attached, document, was presented. Overall given short timeframes and a new program local NRCS, SWCD and other partner staff did a great job of obligating funds as a part of this effort. Funding has been allocated for continuation of projects into 2011.

Discussions related to MRBI edge of field and watershed scale monitoring occurred. NRCS will be working with partners on this subject after further guidance is received from Washington.

***Action: NRCS will publish on the MN NRCS web site MRBI 2011 allocation amounts for all funded projects.***

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Greg Anderson, FSA provided some updates on CRP. General Sign-up 39 and Continuous CRP highlights from 2010 were presented. It looks like another General CRP Sign-up (41) will be conducted in March of 2011. More information will be provided in the near future.

Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) – Greg also provided a summary of the BCAP. 2 new FSA Notices have been posted that deal with how a facility can be a Qualified Facility and also how a Project Area can be established.

**Decision: Standing Agenda Item for future MSTC meetings will be: CRP – FSA as presenter.**

**Matt Holland, Pheasants Forever, will prepare a letter to FSA requesting additional acres in the CRP SAFE Program.**

Minnesota Tribal Advisory Council

Don discussed the importance of continuing to have a government to government relationship with all Tribal Governments. He is proposing to initiate a Minnesota Tribal Advisory Council and will keep the MSTC updated on this effort.

***Action/Decision: Presenters at this and future meetings are requested to provide a short write-up and handouts of their presentations to Rhonda Osterman ([rhonda.osterman@mn.usda.gov](mailto:rhonda.osterman@mn.usda.gov)). For future meetings it is requested to have these submitted two weeks prior to the meeting which the presentation is schedule.***

**\*For more information on this subject, additional materials are posted on the MSTC web site. Next Meeting: March 17, 2011, St. Paul NRCS State Office.**