

## Minnesota State Technical Committee Meeting/Teleconference 9/29/2010

A Minnesota State Technical Committee (MSTC) meeting/teleconference was held on September 29, 2010. State Conservationist, Don Baloun chaired the meeting, see attendance list for participants.

### Attendees:

Gregory Anderson, Farm Service Agency  
Wayne Anderson, Minnesota PCA  
Andrew Arends, Department of Natural Resources - Forestry  
John Baker, USDA Agriculture Research Service  
Don Baloun, MN State Conservationist  
Julie Blackburn, BWSR  
Staci Bohlen, Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation  
Robert Borchert, Director, Area 7 MASWCD  
LeAnn Buck, MASWCD  
Sid Cornelius, NRCS-ECS  
Dean Current, College of Natural Resources  
Paul Flynn, NRCS-ECS  
Wanda Garry, FSA  
Tim Gieseke, Ag Resource Strategies, LLC  
Linda Hennen, State Executive Director, FSA, USDA  
Bruce Henningsgaard, Minnesota PCA  
Matt Holland, Pheasants Forever  
Eric Jackson, CONSERVIS  
Al Kean, BWSR  
Loni Kemp, Kemp Consulting

Tim Koehler, NRCS  
Ginger Kopp, NRCS-ECS  
Jim Kukowski, Farmer  
Benjamin Lang, President/CEO, MN Crop Improvement Assn.  
Bob Lefebvre, Minnesota Milk Producers Association  
Kevin Lines, BWSR  
Riley Maanum, MN Corn Growers Association  
Julie MacSwain, USDA NRCS  
Robin Martinek, NRCS-ECS  
Tom, Meium, Congressman Collin Peterson's Office  
Sheldon Myerchin, US Fish & Wildlife Service  
Thom Petersen, Minnesota Farmers Union  
Doug Peterson, Minnesota Farmers Union  
Brad Redlin, Izaak Walton League of America  
Steve Sodeman, MN Corn Growers Association  
Myron Taylor, NRCS-SO  
Dale Walz, Stearns SWCD  
Barbara Weisman, Minnesota Department of Agriculture  
Doug Wetzstein, Minnesota PCA

### Welcome and Introductions

Don welcomed everyone and thanked them for taking time from their busy schedules to participate. Since this was Don's first MSTC meeting he provided a brief career history for the group detailing his time in both Iowa and Wisconsin.

### 2011 MSTC Details

Discussion about regularly scheduled meetings dates, locations and use of the NRCS website for meeting documentation and announcements was conducted. Don wanted to hear what is working and what is not working related to the MSTC and all of the subcommittees.

Generally participants feel that the MSTC meetings offer a great opportunity to provide input and explain their points of view to a diverse audience. It was felt that having a regularly

scheduled meeting date would be best and to utilize the website to its fullest for posting meeting agendas, minutes and handouts.

**DECISION - MSTC meetings will be held every other month on the third Thursday. Agendas, notes and handouts will be posted on the MN NRCS website. Facilities will be investigated to consider more out state locations.**

Discussion also occurred related to MSTC Subcommittees and should they be changed to resources or land uses rather than predominantly by programs. Much discussion ensued and Kevin Lines from BWSR and Barbara Wiseman, MDA both spoke in full support of keeping the subcommittee structure the way it currently is.

**DECISION – MSTC Subcommittees will stay as currently formulated. NRCS will look at having some combined subcommittee meetings and/or morning and afternoon meetings of similar subcommittees to minimize travel by participants.**

**ACTION - MSTC Subcommittee member listings will be sent by NRCS to all MSTC members for review and to propose changes.**

Discussion then moved to Local Work Groups (LWG) and the desire by Don to reinvigorate this effort. LeAnn Buck, MASWCD stated that local SWCD's will continue to be supportive of the LWG process. She also stated that it would be good to have LWG meetings earlier in the year to provide input into the next year and then again after final EQIP processes are set for 2012.

#### Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP)

The CEAP was discussed and results from the Upper Mississippi River study were shared with the group. Bottom-line is that landowners have made great strides installing conservation practices. The study found that some erosion control practices can potentially lead to nutrient infiltration and offsite lose. On some sites and certain soil types resource managers need to consider additional planning needs for nutrient management. Additional work is needed to increase nutrient management, plan and install Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) and take a more holistic approach to conservation.

CEAP handouts were distributed and Don requested that members provide comments to him related to the report and proposed actions that NRCS could take.

Les Everett, U of M/MES expressed the feeling that NRCS should target additional resources to focused watersheds and problems, like the MRBI.

#### Tribal Consultation

NRCS will continue to support the MSTC desires to provide Farm Bill resources to tribal government on a nation to nation perspective. Don will work with the tribes in the state to propose a Tribal Advisory Committee. This has been very successful in Wisconsin.

November 8 and 9 will be Tribal Farm Bill Consultation meetings held in Minnesota and sponsored by USDA.

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative (MRBI) –

Highlights of the MRBI were discussed. Given the short timeframe that was given to local staff and partners \$1.6 million of EQIP with 38 producers and \$534,000 with 4 landowners of WRP was obligated.

**ACTION – Summary information will be provided to MSTC members.**

**MRBI – CCPI – EQIP**

| <b>Name</b>  | <b>#</b>  | <b>\$</b>          |
|--------------|-----------|--------------------|
| Green Valley | 3         | \$ 22,006          |
| Rush-Pine    | 9         | \$383,933          |
| Upper Root   | 1         | \$300,000          |
| Watson Creek | 5         | \$507,488          |
| Sauk River   | <u>20</u> | <u>\$405,286</u>   |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>38</b> | <b>\$1,618,713</b> |

**MRBI – WREP – WRP**

| <b>Name</b>  | <b>#</b> | <b>\$</b>        | <b>Acres</b> |
|--------------|----------|------------------|--------------|
| Lower Root   | 3        | \$397,560        | 148          |
| Green Valley | <u>1</u> | <u>\$136,002</u> | <u>84</u>    |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>\$533,562</b> | <b>232</b>   |

Al Kean, BWSR requested that NRCS continue to offer technical assistance funds to local partners to assist with implementation of the MRBI.

**DECISION – NRCS will consider funding local TA needs through contribution agreements once they receive their budget and funds are available.**

Don discussed the need to work with local partners and determine what worked and what did not in 2010. This will be beneficial to make the program better.

**ACTION - LeAnn Buck, MASWCD, Jeff Hastings, Trout Unlimited and Tim Koehler will work with partners to plan and conduct meetings in November.**

Julie Blackburn, BWSR discussed the need to report outcome oriented progress from State Clean Water Funded efforts in the MRBI watersheds. A lot of discussion ensued related to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requirements and what data can be released and how to get it. Landowners can be requested to sign release forms and then information related to their projects can be released. Bob Lefebvre, MN Milk Producers Association, stated that this must be voluntary and not a requirement of participating landowners.

**ACTION – Julie and Tim Koehler will work together on the subject and propose and implement a process to secure data.**

#### General Farm Bill Program Updates

Tim Koehler and Paul Flynn provided program updates. A number of handouts were distributed to the group. A few points that were highlighted:

1. Greater than \$72 million of Farm Bill program contracts were obligated with MN producers.
2. Conservation Security Program (old Farm Bill CSP) – All contracts will expire by 2013. Payments will be made over the next few years by NRCS.
3. Conservation Stewardship Program (new Farm Bill CSP) – 2 sign-ups in 2010 yielded nearly 1600 contracts with payments over \$20 million. About 50% of applications were funded. Next sign-up will be conducted in early FY 2011.

A lot of discussion ensued about the positives and negatives of the new CSP.

Steve Sodeman, farmer, TSP and MN Corn Growers Association - voiced concerns about too much paperwork, questionable conservation benefits, a social engineering experiment and problems with future payments, that are not guaranteed.

Bob Lefebvre, MN Milk Producers Association, - Thanked NRCS from Dairy farmers. He felt that the majority of producers like the program and small changes could be made to make CSP better, but an entire overhaul is not needed.

4. Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – Greater than \$28 million was obligated with nearly 1200 producers. 68% of these obligations were made to all types of livestock concerns.
5. Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) – obligations for 70 new easements were made for over \$14 million. The Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) – WRP Partnership managed by BWSR and NRCS and implemented with help from SWCD's, Ducks Unlimited and other partners continues to be a huge success.
6. Technical Service Provider (TSP) – over \$1.1 million of Farm Bill Technical Assistance (TA) funds was obligated with public, private and non-profit partners to assist NRCS implement conservation practices.

Don discussed the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) and the options of using easements in addition to rental contracts that could be utilized with willing landowners to continue to manage their grasslands. He asked for comments and did not receive any negative reaction to MN NRCS trying to utilize easements as an option of the GRP.

**DECISION – MN NRCS WILL INCLUDE EASEMENTS AS AN OPTION WITH THE GRP IN 2011.**

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Greg Anderson from FSA provided a number of updates on CRP. There are 1.6 million acres of CRP in MN and FSA makes over \$100 million of annual CRP payments. About 500,000 acres will be expiring from now until 2013. The recently completed General CRP Sign-up #39 yielded over 1100 contracts. Conservation plans/contracts will be developed by 12/31/10.

FSA State Executive Director, Linda Hennen and Don discussed a Reload MN Program. This effort will work with partners to secure funding to provide additional technical assistance to promote CRP and other farm Bill Programs. Kevin Lines, BWSR discussed the Farm Bill Assistance effort that has provided TA resources to promote Farm Bill programs and has utilized resources from SWCD's, BWSR, DNR, Pheasants Forever and state appropriated funding from the legislature. This effort should be tied into for the Reload effort.

**ACTION – NRCS AND FSA WILL CONTINUE TO INVESTIGATE THE RELAOD CONCEPT. UPDATES WILL BE PROVIDED DURING FUTURE MSTC MEETINGS.**

Red River Basin Initiative Update

Don discussed a new initiative in the Red River Basin in MN, North Dakota and South Dakota that NRCS has undertaken with various partners. Flooding concerns, water quality, soil quality affected by soil erosion and loss of wildlife habitat are being looked at and solutions proposed. NRCS has been asked to work with partners and utilize Farm Bill programs in a directed way to treat these concerns.

Many exceptional conservation efforts have been planned and implemented in the Red River basin by a variety of partners and producers. Focusing Farm Bill program resources could have a bigger positive impact on treating environmental concerns, especially flood water retention.

**ACTION – DON AGREED TO INFORM THE MSTC OF THE ACTING NRCS COORDINATOR FOR THIS EFFORT IN CASE ANYONE WANTS TO CONTACT HIM FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION –**

**Keith Weston  
Acting Red River Basin Coordinator  
701-282-2157  
keith.weston@nd.usda.gov**

Farm Bill Programs for 2011

NRCS will be developing program rules and processes for the 2011 year. Subcommittee meetings and MSTC meetings will be held to seek input. Program sign-ups will be occurring in the first few months of the fiscal year.

### Miscellaneous Discussions

1. Linda Hennen, FSA, CED mentioned a new FSA Conservation Loan Program that has been recently authorized. Producers who have a NRCS approved conservation plan or contract can apply for a loan to assist with the implementation of practices. A landowner can go into any local USDA Service Center office to learn more about the program.
2. Les Everett, U of M, felt that hydrologic and water quality benefits of the WRP are important and should continue to be considered when evaluating applications.
3. Don asked the attendees to let him know if you have video teleconferencing capabilities. We may use this technology in the future for MSTC meetings.
4. Potential future meeting topics should be submitted to NRCS for consideration at future meetings.

**ACTION – MSTC MEMBERS SHOULD SUBMIT AGENDA ITEMS TO RHONDA OSTERMAN AT [rhonda.osterman@mn.usda.gov](mailto:rhonda.osterman@mn.usda.gov)**

**The next MSTC meeting will be held November 18, 2010 if agenda items are submitted and other input is needed.**