

Programs Update for the State Technical Committee Meeting

Palmer, Alaska

5/26/2010

Conservation Security Program (CSP).

- There are 6 existing contracts that we administer from the 2002 Farm Bill.
- The purpose of this program is to reward agricultural producers managing their lands to a high level of conservation.
- This program was only available in selected “watershed” areas.
- All of Alaska’s contracts are on the Kenai Peninsula.
- The program was not continued in the 2008 Farm Bill.
- The total financial assistance (FA) payments for FY 2010 in Alaska were \$21,168.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP)

- This could be thought of as the new “version” of the CSP program under the 2008 Farm Bill.
- It is a continuous sign-up and is available nation-wide.
- Applications will be ranked periodically for selection for contracting with dates to be announced.
- This is an incentive program to reward the best conservation “operators of record” on agricultural lands and non-industrial private forest lands (NIPF).
- Applicants must be committed to continue their current high level of conservation systems and apply additional conservation enhancements or resource conserving crops to earn ranking points.
- Contact selection and payments are based on a Conservation Measurement Tool score using acres of land, points for existing conservation measures to be continued throughout the contract, and points for additional enhancements or resource conserving crops selected by the applicant.
- Applications are ranked in a nation-wide competition.
- So far in FY 2010 Alaska has enrolled and funded 11 contracts on 2,366 acres of agricultural land and 171,298 acres of NIPF with total annual payments to be made of \$1,177,279 per year, for 5 years.
- The first payments will be made as soon as practical after October 1, 2010.
- Alaska has more than 10% of the NIPF contracts nation-wide and is second only to Alabama in NIPF acres enrolled.
- The next ranking cut-off date is June 11.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – Will be covered by Scott Crockett, EQIP Program Specialist.

Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)

- The purpose of this program is to leverage federal funds in order to protect prime and locally important farmland soils from conversion to non-agricultural uses.
- Alaska NRCS's allocation this year was \$700,000. It is likely that this entire amount will be returned to NHQ.
- This program requires verification (account statements) non-federal matching funds, such as state, local government or private funds, by a cooperating entity as part of the application process.
- No applications have been received this fiscal year from a qualified partnering entity with verifiable matching funds.
- This program is most successful where matching state funds are available. Alaska NRCS did close on two, 40 acre FRPP easements near Palmer last week.
- These were acquired with FRPP from previous year's cooperative agreements under both the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills.
- There are now 3 FRPP easements in Alaska all in the Palmer-Wasilla area.
- The partnering entity was Alaska Farmland Trust (AFT) on all three easements.
- Sources of other funds have been the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the Palmer Soil and Water Conservation District, and a small amount of private donations to AFT.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

- The purpose of this program is to protect grazing lands from conversion to other uses.
- Alaska's initial allocation for FY 2010 was \$101,369.
- We received applications for 6 rental agreements and one permanent easement.
- We asked for and received \$165,061 from our regional equity account, enough to cover all of the applications.
- This includes \$217,794 for all of the easement applications and \$48,636 for the easement.
- For this program NRCS has the technical responsibility and Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers the payments.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

- The purpose of this program is to offer landowners incentives to address resource concerns that address wildlife habitat needs on private lands.
- Alaska's initial allocation is \$1,923,403 in FY 2010.
- So far we have signed 12 contracts for a total of \$739,024.
- We have 19 more applications on hand in various stages of processing. Our field offices are working on conservation plans, practice design work, or cost data for the remaining applications.
- Land eligibility was changed to disallow lands owned by state and local governments.
- Contracts may be for practices on private lands only.
- The impact of this is especially difficult in Alaska since the State of Alaska retains ownerships in streams below the high water mark.
- Therefore, we are unable to address wildlife and fisheries resource concerns in streams under WHIP. In certain cases we can work in streams under EQIP where the adjacent landowner is an agricultural producer or non-industrial private forest producer.

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

- The purpose is to restore and enhance wetlands that are located on agricultural lands which have been adversely impacted by agriculture.
- We received an allocation of \$1,786,255 in FY 2010.
- There is only limited potential for WRP in Alaska, mostly in the Fairbanks, Delta Junction, and Kenny Lake areas.
- Some of these areas already exceed program driven acreage caps of 25% with existing Conservation Reserve Program contracts.
- We have conducted market surveys and established Geographic Area Rate Caps for all potential areas.
- We are requiring increased outreach efforts of our field staff in any areas with WRP potential.

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)

- There are 8 designated RC&D Areas in Alaska, including Southeast Conference, Copper Valley, Yukon Flats, Mat-Su, Kenai Peninsula, Interior Rivers, Lower Kuskokwim, and Bering Straits.
- In the past year we have filled RC&D Coordinator vacancies in Wasilla, Bethel and Kenai.
- Through this program we assist designated RC&D Councils to develop and carry out RC&D Area Plans, Annual Plans of Work and Projects as developed by the local RC&D Council and agreed upon by the NRCS State Conservationist.
- One of RC&D's roles is to serve as a point of delivery for programs and services that may not be available through any other source, especially in the more remote areas of Alaska.
- These RC&D Coordinators also serve a vital role in NRCS program outreach to many areas in Alaska.
- Part of the success of the current Seasonal High Tunnel for Crop Production practice trial here in Alaska is due to their efforts.

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