

State Technical Committee Meeting

July 11, 2006

Introductions

Steve Barker

- NRCS Strategic Plan Overarching Strategies

Cooperative Conservation: We will seek and promote cooperative efforts to achieve natural resource goals.

Watershed Approach: We will provide information and assistance to encourage and enable locally led, watershed-scale conservation efforts.

Market-based Approach: We will facilitate growth of market-based opportunities that encourage the private sector to invest in conservation on private lands.

- Foundation Goals

High Quality, Productive Soils
Clean and Abundant Water
Healthy Plant and Animal Communities
Venture Goals
Clean Air
An Adequate Energy Supply
Working Farm and Ranch Lands

- Locally Led Conservation

The key to effective and efficient implementation of farm bill programs is the input and recommendations from the Local Work Groups chaired by the Conservation Districts.

The challenge is to find an effective way for local resource priorities and conservation needs to be communicated to the State Conservationist.

- Federal Agencies

Natural Resources Conservation Service
Farm Service Agency
Farm Service Agency State Committee
Forest Service
Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service
Rural Development
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Environmental Protection Agency

Bureau of Land Management
Bureau of Reclamation
Bureau of Indian Affairs
U.S. Geological Survey
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Each of the federally recognized American Indian Reservations encompassing
100,000 acres or more

- Producers & Organizations

Agricultural producers with demonstrable conservation expertise
Nonprofit organizations with demonstrable conservation expertise
Persons knowledgeable about economic and environmental impacts of
conservation techniques and programs
Agribusiness

- Other members

State water resources agency
State fish and wildlife agency
State coastal zone management agency
State department of agriculture
State natural heritage program
State association of soil and water conservation districts
State soil and water conservation agencies
Other agency personnel with expertise that the State Conservationist considers
appropriate
Groups and interests that have historically been excluded from these processes

- State Technical Committee Roles and Responsibilities

The State Technical Committee represents state and federal agencies, agricultural industry, environmental groups, and tribes who are knowledgeable about a broad range of resource issues, disciplines, and programs in Arizona.

The State Technical Committee role is to ensure that NRCS programs are coordinated with state and federally identified resource concerns and programs.
Recommend criteria to prioritize applications

Recommend eligible conservation practices

Recommend cost share and incentive payment limits

Recommend timelines for applications ranking

Recommend new conservation practices and systems not already described in the FOTG

Assist in the monitoring and analyzing performance

Coordination with federal, state, tribal, and local, public and private activities

- Next steps
Align Arizona to the new NRCS National Strategic Plan

Work to improve Locally Led Conservation in Arizona

Update Conservation District Long Range Plans to develop a vision for productive working lands and healthy environments in Arizona

Use the Farm Bill programs to implement the vision

- Locally led cooperative conservation

Conservation Districts organize local work groups to develop the vision for natural resource conservation in Arizona.

Support is provided through local partnerships that include land owners and agencies.

There is coordination and support at the state level.

NRCS Farm Bill programs and other state and federal programs implement the vision

This committee needs to

- lean toward locally led conservation, getting local districts more involved in the process.
 - work more toward the watershed approach.
 - to aim toward a market based approach.
- Provided foundation and venture goals.
 - Challenge is to find an effective way for local resource priorities and conservation needs to be communicated to the State Conservationist.
 - What I asked for at this meeting is agencies come to share things they have going and/or to bring resource issues to the table so we can send this info to the local work groups for consideration toward addressing the particular resource concern and provide feedback.

Karol Brill & Andrea Martin, Dept of Ag:

- Brochure provided on the Livestock & Crop Conservation Grant Program.
- Program began in the late 90s. In 2003, the Dept of AG was put in control of administering the program. The program is currently running on a bi-annual basis. The next round will begin in 2007. The intent is to protect open spaces. This program is designed to offer a little relief to ranches toward enhancing open spaces. Eligible areas are individual landowners on state or federal lands.
- 27 of the 56 awarded grants were matching funds for EQIP and WHIP in the 2005 cycle, for a total of \$1,056,532.80 in matching funds. These grants assisted in 8 erosion control, 23 fencing, 15 grassland restoration and 32 water development projects.
- In the process of gearing up for the 2007 cycle. We are looking to the utilization of funds as matching/cost share funds to other conservation grants. Example: if the applicant is participating in or plans to apply for, USDA NRCS EQIP grants, LCCCGP funds could be awarded for use as matching funds toward the EQIP contract.
- Proposed criteria: rancher has a conservation management plan; partnered with outside agencies to implement conservation management improvements on the ranch; for livestock management, has the rancher voluntarily reduced livestock permitted on public land allotments within the last 5 years, and is the rancher in good standing with public land management agency.
- Public comment period will be 60 days (Oct-Nov, somewhere in there). Applications will be available in January 07. Grant workshops will be held throughout the state in Jan or Feb.
- We're looking for getting the locally led workgroups so everyone understands the resources in the particular area and aim toward a united goal in the area.
- Are the ranchers going to be able to submit applications on a proposed EQIP contract or will they have to already have a contract? This program can potentially come along side to assist them with their cost share portion.
- One of the criteria was endangered species. What's been your experience in working in this area? The majority of the grantees are pretty proactive in the endangered species area. They are working to fence the areas, etc.
- So what do you want us to tell the local work groups? If they have specific concerns in their areas, we can potentially help them to address their issues. Let them know the grants are available. A lot of the applicants do not know how to complete the forms, and Dept of Ag doesn't have the personnel to cover that. The larger ranches were comfortable with
- There might be something we could work out where there could be one place where the rancher could go to fill out all the forms and be ranked all at the same time.

- Tribal lands are excluded from this program.
- Funds can be used on private lands as long as it is a part of a property that includes federal lands and/or state lands – not just federal lands? Yes

Kris Randall, USFWS, [Partners for Fish & Wildlife](#)

- Overview of Private Stewardship Grant program and Partners for Fish and Wildlife program
 - Goals and accomplishments in 2006: Improve and upgrade web site; develop agreements for 06 projects; monitor and/or evaluate existing projects; and identify focus areas for Partners program.
 - Mission is to work with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.
- [Private Stewardship Grant Program](#) is focused on private land, where about half the listed species have 80% of their habitat. The program began in 2003 and must benefit species that are listed, proposed or candidate under ESA or listed as state sensitive. Projects must be on-the-ground activity.
- State governmental agencies are not eligible and the program does not fund acquisition of real property.
- We've only had 2 projects in AZ. The Malpai borderlands group was a really good project to reduce erosion. The other project with a private landowner and Bat Conservation International.
- Grant cycle usually begins in January.
- There is a requirement for a 10% match which can come from another source as long as it is not federal.
- Partners for Fish and Wildlife program is a voluntary, incentive-based, reimbursable program. Advances can be done, but must be spent within 45 days. Projects are limited to \$25000. The program is voluntary, incentive based.
- Selection criteria.
 - Benefits of the proposed project to Federal trust species with emphasis on species at risk.
 - Benefits to US FWS National Wildlife Refuge
 - Overall fish and wildlife value of the project
 - Likelihood of project success
 - Type of project (in order of preference: Habitat protection; habitat restoration; habitat creation)
 - Prevention of habitat fragmentation
 - Fostering of Partnerships/good working relationships

- Additional acres enrolled in Partners program
- Cost/acre and length of the Partners agreement
- Education and outreach
- We received high marks from OMB on our projects.
- In AZ we are working on identifying and defining habitat priorities and focus areas. We need the State technical committee to help us work out priorities our focus areas.
- Want to emphasize we like to work with private landowners. Even though they have a listed species we can work with them to prepare Safe Harbor agreements to enable using the area and maintain the habitat.
- Partners program wants to focus on these areas, so we want to share with the districts. Would we want to give them more points if they are involved with your program. If they have a listed species, and trying to preserve or improve habitat, we can work with them and develop a safe harbor agreement.
- We have staff that can meet with the district or whomever to combine efforts to improve habitat resources. It is important that we all network toward working together.
- Need to look at the potential of combining “at risk” species into one list so districts have one place to go.

Sal Palazzola

- We have authority over resident species in AZ. We keep our fingers in a little of everything dealing with wildlife and its habitat within the state.
- We are looking at working with producers on all lands toward enhancement of wildlife and wildlife habitat.
- Grassland restoration in AZ; Brush control; some seeding;
- Where I see this going is us providing technical advice and some funding that can be used as a match for some of these programs. We’ve worked with the landowners for other projects.
- Some of the hot buttons: our dept aims toward large landscape projects for larger impact; start doing things bigger. We’ve been given direction to also try to match money as much as possible.
- Relatively new is the use of EQIP on federal lands. One of our pushes is to try to coordinate what we can do to assist with cooperative
- Senate bill 1441 returns 3.5 million dollars for 5 targeted projects, Mule deer restoration, Anderson mason grassland development, White Mountain Creek allotments – to accomplish goals set forth in the plans for those areas. If we can match it with other funds to really get these projects going.

- NRCS has been helpful by providing training for Archaeology Surveys. Working together, although it costs salary for those doing the surveys, saves because we're not hiring it out.
- Alternative fuels are being talked about.
- The money received, will it be ongoing? No, it was a one-time allotment. It was something that was swept years ago that has been returned.
- Now that the statewide comprehensive plan has been completed, are they using it to make decisions? Yes, the plan is a broad document, a guiding document. There is still a lot of discussion, getting all the plans to mesh together is tough.

Stan Farlin, Cooperative Extension:

- There are varied stakeholder perceptions as to what the Cooperative Extension is about. To determine what is important to stakeholders, a list of Extension programs was sent to 496 stakeholders whose responses were used to set priorities for extension programs. They are represented in the Road Map shown.
- The legislature was approached this year with a request for extension support. In the negotiations, they created a separate line for the extension by pulling all extension funds from the college budget line and establishing a separate extension budget line. In the short run, little will change in college and extension operations. In the long term, the legislature could fund the college without funding extension, or vice versa. It could potentially have positive implications for extension if extension programs are viewed as good for the state.
- Dan Sander was given the additional title of Vice President for university outreach. It will offer the total university an opportunity to do a better job addressing all things the university does and to have a more focused approach to reach out to the community.
- I think we will see some interesting changes.

Peter Warren, Nature conservancy

- One of the focal areas with us recently has been grasslands in large landscape areas. The places we have these good functional grasslands are often associated with healthy riparian systems, and many of the best surviving examples are on large traditional ranches.
- One of our biggest conservation challenges is – how do we avoid having traditional ranches sold off for development. To do this, we are trying to find ways to help ranchers protect their lands
- The question is, are we serious about the idea of identifying areas to save traditional values and landscapes. If so, we need to focus resources there to help assure the sustainability of those places.
- If we continue to follow past policy of spreading the agricultural assistance funds around, we are taking the chance that all ranches will be developed. We need to

think more about how to work toward more long-term sustainability in high priority areas.

- How do you focus on an area? An example is the Malpai area, where they have put their land into permanent conservation easements.

Al Burch, BLM

- our priorities are cleaning up hazmat sites, doing evaluations on grazing allotments, partnering to improve watersheds. We want to become involved. We can help with facilitating these projects. Our role as an administrator is to become more involved with the districts and help streamline projects. We are not typically an agency to transfer money to the private sector. We, however, have one program called Challenge cost share. We transfer directly to projects on the ground as long as we find matching funds.
- So if Sal helped BLM put a project together, the AZGFD could kick in funds to help supplement EQIP monies.
- Question: How do you decide where your dollars go? Depending on where the cost share comes from, -- we are trying to use our funds to jump-start a project. We need to be more involved up front to see where we can actually help out.
- Question: What is your decision timeframe? BLM budget process is the same as other federal agencies. We are currently beginning to work on 08 funding to ask for new money. On a year-to-year basis we try to identify/prioritize projects with the first few months of each FY. I think we can start dovetailing with NRCS, Game & Fish and others.

Pat Reid, SNR (UofA)

- We do some priority work that may be helpful even though we don't have any funding programs. Have you heard about the rapid watershed?

General discussion:

- If we're going to move to a watershed based approach, then we need to have all the information, DWR can help us with that.
- The watershed areas are pretty organized. We just want to do what we can to help support them.

Chris Udall, Ag Business Council of AZ:

- Ultimate goal is to see that farmers/ranchers are profitable and not overburdened by regulations. Our goal is to lobby for agricultural interests to assist, how we can, their bottom line, and to help them as they practice good conservation measures.
- We've been actively pursuing funding for the U of A extension request and ASU Polytechnic's infrastructure request which both benefit agriculture and what we are all trying to achieve.

- Our organization is involved with the Multi-Species Conservation Plan on the Colorado River which gives assurances for water supply delivery while providing improved habitat for threatened and endangered species over a 50-year period. In addition, we are working with elected officials to improve and fund aging infrastructure, including dams and canal linings, and pushing for the operation of a desalination plant in Yuma.
- We are also involved in conservation projects on farmland in Pinal County with the assistance of NRCS and ADWR. We want to assist the goals of NRCS in promoting good conservation projects and help protect agricultural interests.

Eric Banks

- To begin to take this a step further, we will take the information provided today, the information collected from subcommittees and send it to the local working groups for consideration when they develop their ranking criteria.

Steve Barker

- Next steps:
 - Subcommittees meet within the next month.
 - Tribal subcommittee meeting next Friday.
 - Would like to get the local work groups to convene their meetings early September to consider the ideas locally
 - If you have something (a particular resource concern) what kind of weight would you give the resource concern.
 - Want the District to bring back to this team what they think the ranking criteria, etc, should be.
 - Want to provide the State Conservationist with final recommendations from this committee in October.
- Rapid watershed assessment will be a good chance to take a pilot look at what's there, what it needs, what programs can be used, etc. It may be a way to look at the state one watershed at a time.
- I would like to offer that this not be the NRCS state technical committee. That each agency assumes the initiative to call meetings for any issues they wish to bring up.
- Reconvene in October.