

State Technical Committee WHIP/WRP Subcommittee Meeting

4 August 2006

Attending: Doc Lane, Sal Palazzolo, Bill Brake, Karol Brill, Andrea Martin, Frank Toupal, Steve Smarik, Nora DeLaRosa, Lisa Pendrick

Meeting commenced at 9:15 am with introductions.

Steve discussed topics to be covered:

- 1) General discussion on WHIP program and processes
- 2) Three alternatives for implementing the WHIP Program: WHIP Statewide General Program, Essential Plan & Animal Habitat Agreements, using an RFP for WHIP
- 3) ranking criteria and process, and practice list.
- 4) Wetland Reserve Program.

General

- WHIP – you don't have to be a farmer or rancher to sign up for contract
- minimal score is 125, 250 is maximum
- Last year there was \$363,000 in contracts;

Discussion on Essential Plant and Animal Habitat Agreements (EPAH)

- Maximum 15% of state allocation for declining species (Wetland Reserve Program)
- 15 yr contracts (mandatory) because you can bump cost share up to 100%
- Separate sign up for sub-programs and set up ranking criteria process & cost lists
- Request for proposal – narrow scope or leave wide open
- Priority Watershed HDMS Species for 2002 handout
- Discussed the endangered species list:
 - What species would we consider and prioritize? What sensitive species list would we use? Group decided to prioritize by endangered, threatened, sensitive status.
- On ranking in the field to get it funded. Regarding SHPO, NEPA, T&E, customers are given NRCS assistance
- Plant & Animal Habitat Agreements – if funds are set aside and no T&E Species agreements come in, then the funds will be rolled back into the general account
- Sal – will assist Steve with the Plant and Animal Habitat Program
- When consulting on T&E, NRCS will offer assistance with Safe Harbor planning.

Discussion on WHIP Ranking Worksheet...Partner's financial contribution exceed 25% of total project cost:

- Doc suggested that it should be a graduated amount. Must be careful not to discriminate against those that can't afford to contribute more than 25%
- Smarik explained intent was to give points to those projects that had multiple, contributing partners.
- Carol – Questioned if we could prioritize certain species this year, under the Essential Plant and Animal Habitat Program, and next year focus on other species. Smarik explained that we could do that, however species-specific prioritization can be controversial. Would be better to prioritize areas with multiple T&E species.
- Andrea – Can we prioritize by T&E species in a watershed?

- Smarik said he has the breakdown by sensitive species in each watershed. He explained how we might have a graduated ranking scale based on number of sensitive species in the watershed. He suggested prioritizing species with recovery plans or where the habitat development plan was consistent with the recovery plan.
- Sal – will check into getting query on T&E species by watershed
- Lisa – Doesn't exactly see a perfect fit between the Agriculture Protection Program and Easements and the WHIP program.
- Bill – Practice list costs seem out of date. We need to ensure all practices are updated. Group explored alternative means of keeping the costs up to date- including TSP agreement.
- Lisa – questioned if the cost share list is different depending on what part of the state you are in? Smarik explained the list is a State wide list, but some of the practices have regional differences noted in the costs.
- Sal – need to eliminate items from cost share list.
- Steve – We can tweak the list to specific practices we want to fund this year. Several practices were suggested for removal- hedgerow planting, bird houses, bat houses, perch poles.

Group discussed cap on EPAH contracts. Most felt that 100% cost-share required no "buy-in" from applicants. Might inundate offices with proposals. Most felt extra effort to protect T&E should be rewarded with higher cost-share.

- Carol – suggested 85 – 90% - to make it worth the effort
- Sal – if not at 100%- not worth it
- Frank – suggested 85% and called for a vote. Majority agreed.
- Smarik explained that we need to include invasive species in the ranking criteria. How best to accomplish this? On list of noxious or invasive list, we need to identify what list we will be ranking on? **Steve will ask Bruce Munda about list.**
- It was suggested to give priority to noxious weeds and those invasives recognized by the Governors Invasive Weeds Council.

Final recommendations for WHIP:

- Cap Essential Plant and Animal Habitat contracts at 85%
- Fund Essential Plant and Animal Habitat contracts at no more than 15% of State allocation
- Remaining state allocation (85%) be split equally between General Signup and RFP
- Any unobligated money in one sub-program be moved to one with greatest need. I.E. - Unspent EPAH moved to RFP or General signup account.

Other discussion included:

- 1) Plant and Animal Habitat Agreement – suggest separate RFP
- 2) We are missing major players that would have brought different views to share with everyone present
- 3) Meet thru teleconference or email for comments
- 4) **Steve will send out a RFP skeleton for comments**
- 5) **Steve will put together a ranking worksheet** and run that out for committee review.

Wetland Reserve Program

WRP – no changes in ranking worksheet since 2003. Cost list for WRP is the same as WHIP. 1-2 applications received per year. There were no suggested to changes to the WRP program.

Adjourned at 1245