

Partners Update on MRBI Progress and Activities Meeting
August 9, 2011
10:00 am Eastern Time

Coordinator: Thank you for standing by. Today's call is now going to begin. We will feature a question and answer period at the end. At that time you can ask a question over the phone by pressing star then 1. Today's call is being recorded, if you have any objections you may disconnect at this time. I'd now turn the call over to Mr. Dave White, the Chief of the NRCS. You may begin.

Dave White: Thank you, sir. I appreciate the opportunity today, just wanted to greet everyone. It's my understanding, operator, there's about 18 or so people that are called in, would you verify that.

Coordinator: We have approximately 30 people who have dialed in right now.

Dave White: Oh, okay, I got - okay, 30. And we probably have another 30, 40, 50 here in the South - in the Whitten Building Room. But anyway, this is a follow-up to the Mississippi River Basin Initiative meeting, we periodically do that. We began this effort about two years ago. It was '09 the Secretary announced this and frankly we're pretty pleased with the progress to date, including all the partner activities that are going across the focus areas in the State.

And today we're going to cover about five different things. First, what we've accomplished in Fiscal Year '10. The lessons we've learned would be the second, from that first year of implementation. What we've added in Fiscal year '11, that's third. Fourth, we're going to give you a little update on our monitoring and evaluation because that was kind of a new thing that we started here. And then, fifth, an update on the Ag drainage water management.

And I've talked to Tom Christensen and I'm also going to toss in a sixth one here. We've been doing this for about two years now and there is starting to emerge some differences between the Upper Mississippi and the Lower Mississippi.

We'd originally started this as all water quality, all the time, and that's still very much the case in the Upper Mississippi. But in the Lower Mississippi, we're starting to see some real needs in water quantity. We've got some critical groundwater areas, I'm thinking of the Sunflower Basin in Mississippi, there's some places in Arkansas, other places in the Lower Mississippi where water quantity is becoming the overarching concern, particularly with the groundwater withdrawals. So we'll have a little bit of discussion on that.

Basically I'm going to shut up. We're going to - we really think we're on to something here, it's a partnership effort, we look forward to the future. And as part of this, I'd like to hear your ideas on how we ought to proceed and how we can collaborate even more. So with that, I'm going to turn it over to Tom Christensen who's our Regional Conservationist for the Central.

Tom Christensen: Thank you, Dave. I'm going to go through some slides, as are some of my other partners here, and we're going to move very quickly, but I will say that these slides will be posted and available to you. So we may not go through every bullet, but they will be available to you, because we do want to get to the dialogue.

So we'll start with the first slide and talk a bit. Significance of the Mississippi, obviously one of the great watersheds of the world. You all recognize its significance for both recreation, transportation, water supply purposes, et cetera, so I don't need to belabor that. But a great river basin that we're all trying to work in partnership to protect and restore.

You know, we started out the initiative, as Dave mentioned, in 2009. September of 2009 it was announced by Secretary Vilsack via a video linkup. And we started out with 12 states, we added a 13th state this year with South Dakota because it was missing when we looked at the CEAP Report and it has a significant watershed that is a contributor. And then we added two focus areas. So we started out with 41 eight digit focus areas, we now have 43.

The objective, again, is to work in small watersheds. And I really want to try to draw that out. While we recognize that success in small watersheds can certainly contribute to the success of the basin and certainly the gulf, we're focused in these small watersheds and we're interested in results in these small watersheds that mean the most to the local people. Dave mentioned we're very interested in water quality, principally nutrients, but we also have the parallel concerns of wildlife habitat and wetland restoration, and at the same time obviously maintaining Ag productivity.

Another very important point is we're using a systems approach, so it's not just single practices or random practices but we're using those practices in combination. Again, the CEAP Report has told us in the Upper Mississippi that the key is the use of practices through a systems approach.

Funding, when this was announced the target was to try to allocate and use \$80 million in financial assistance per fiscal year for each of four fiscal years. We did fall short the first year and the reason was we got a late start and the partners in some cases were unwilling in that short period of time to try to obligate and commit to some expenditure of that funding a Fiscal Year 2010. So really in the first year, we obligated somewhere under 40 million. But this year we expect to hit that 80 million target and we think we're seeing great accomplishments as a result.

Recognize that we used a couple of vehicles here. The Cooperative Conservation Partnership is an umbrella vehicle we use and then we also use the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program and of course Conservation Innovation Grants, which we'll come back to later.

Here you see the components of those various programs. When we talk about CCPI, we're really talking about EQIP, WHIP, and CSP. And then of course the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program uses WRP funding and CIG is a part of EQIP. Okay.

Okay, (Deena).

Deena Wheby: I think this is my first opportunity to meet with you folks in person. I know I met with you - some of you on a VTC not too long ago, a couple months ago maybe, when my slides chose not to work at one point. So let's hope the slides work a little better today.

As Tom said, we had a pretty good 2010. For a first year, I think we had an outstanding first year. In the end, we had over 700 EQIP, WHIP, and CSP contracts for over \$25 million; we had 18 WREP contracts; and you can see the numbers on the slide, we've got 12 CIGs and it was, as the Chief said, our first year of edge-of-field monitoring.

If you're into the numbers and you want to see all the numbers, we've got a 2010 report that's on the Web site. And I have some hard copies here today for those of you in the room. It has success stories from each of the 12 original states, and I think those are pretty interesting. They highlight not just farmer successes, but partner successes. And on the back page we've got all the numbers that I just ran over by state so you can see the state activity in the

first year, and it's got total dollars and project numbers. So before you leave today, feel free to take one of these. I'll show you in a minute where you can find it on the Web as well.

As we entered 2011, we again funded those projects that were funded in 2010. We funded them so they can continue their efforts. We put \$52 million out there for those projects that were funded last year. This year we - I'll talk a bit more later about the ones that we approved, but we have 19 new projects. That includes two WREPs and 17 CCPIs that we just funded in June. So we've got just about \$15 million out there in financial assistance that will be obligated by the end of this fiscal year for those new projects.

We'll talk a little bit more at the end of the meeting about SWAT, the Strategic Watershed Action Teams, but we have \$4 million of technical assistance that NRCS put out there and partners have come to the table with almost \$2 and a half million, \$2.4 million in MRBI. This is MRBI alone, and I'll tell you a little bit later about how much we have out there in total. And Gregorio Cruz is going to talk a little bit about what CIGs, the Conservation Innovation Grants, that have been approved this year -- or not.

You know, you can't talk about successes without talking about partnerships. And those of you in this room, those of you on the phone, those that aren't represented here – we've got a ton of partnerships. I don't think that this initiative could be a success without the input of all of you.

We put out the RFP for the proposals, and you can see the list of the type of entities that responded to that RFP. And those were the ones that actually submitted the proposals. The ones at the bottom are some of the contributing partners. And we know there are a lot more than what's actually listed in the

proposals. As we started to implement the projects we've seen partners coming from all over to assist.

Tom, I'm going to turn it back to you about some of our lessons learned this year.

Tom Christensen: Okay, thank you, Deena. So almost through Year 2 of MRBI, we believe we've learned a number of lessons. One of those lessons has to do with the right conservation concerns and the right geographic locations. And Dave has alluded to that issue with the Lower Mississippi Valley and there's also a critical issue of water supply, groundwater, et cetera.

We also recognize the importance of drainage water management. When you look at the Upper Mississippi CEAP Report what that basically says is through the conservation that has been applied to date we've only made a 5 percent reduction in nitrogen levels coming out of the tile drainage. So therefore, we have a partnership effort underway regarding the improved management of drainage water. And we'll come back to that issue later in the agenda.

We also recognize the significance of nutrient management to the whole MRBI and we're looking for not only the basic level of nutrient management, which you know is the 4 R's (the right timing, the right placement, the right form, and the right amount), but also we're looking at enhanced nutrient management through the adaptive management approach. And we'll come back to that issue later too.

We also recognize, as Dave mentioned, we've moved out here with some efforts related to edge-of-field monitoring as a cost-shared conservation practice. But we've been working with EPA and USGS and others regarding

an overall monitoring strategy. And in fact, Ann Mills, our Deputy Under Secretary, spoke to this issue at the Hypoxia Task Force meeting last week. So we're very interested in looking at a partnership approach to the overall monitoring and assessment effort in the basin.

Technical assistance – we also recognize the critical nature of this. Deena has talked a bit about the Strategic Watershed Action Team enhancement of technical assistance and we need to make sure we've got the right skills, the right trained people in the right places.

Again, adaptive management is so critical to everything we're doing here. In conservation, the job is not done once the practice or the system of practices is applied. You have to work with that producer on a continuous basis to help them adjust and improve those practices as the operation and needs change.

And then, again, as Deena alluded to, partnerships are what this is all about with regard to success. We have to have strong partnerships, so we're interested in improving that.

So as far as next steps on some of these lessons learned, we are very much looking at the issue of consistency across our 13 states. And I'll give you an example from the list up there. It's the issue of payment schedules. That's how we pay through cost-share on a particular practice. We have some room for improvement there.

And in fact, the Chief has announced a major effort within the agency to improve our payment schedules; to look at them more on what I might characterize as a regional basis. So we're looking at, for example, the Economic Research Services' farm and ranch production regions as a

potential basis for that so we can establish more consistency within a major watershed, for example.

The issue of the focus areas; these are the eight digit focus areas, there are 43 that we currently have eligible. We're also going to reevaluate those through our state conservationists and through their state technical committee processes. What we've seen is that some of these focus areas have shown little, if any, interest, so are they the correct ones? And by the same token, we've seen others that have expressed interest in being included in the project. So we're going to undergo a reevaluation of these focus areas.

I already mentioned the management of Ag drainage water. We'll come back to that issue, but it is a very critical issue. And it has to be done in concert with nutrient management and the whole systems approach. Deena has talked about the Strategic Watershed Action Teams. She'll come back to that in more detail. And again, this effort to promote even greater and enhanced nutrient management is very critical.

Again, earlier I alluded to the fact that with Dave's direction we've made a bold move here for the first time cost-sharing on edge-of-field monitoring as a conservation practice. We'll go into that in a little more detail based on the oversight and evaluation study that we have conducted, but the bottom line is that it is just a piece of the puzzle. And we have to have the partnerships: state, other federal agencies, and NGOs stepping to the plate with regard to the in-stream monitoring and the port monitoring at the bottom of these small watersheds. So we want to continue collaboration to pursue a more strategic approach.

And then the issue of outcomes, obviously we're all very interested in the environmental outcomes. We have an effort underway in USDA to establish

outcomes for the high performing - high priority performance goals, but in addition to that we have an internal agency effort underway on all of the landscape conservation initiatives and by early this fall we should have - we will have established a series of outcomes that we can point to and the metrics that lead us to those outcomes, so we're excited about that.

Deena Wheby: I said earlier that we had an RFP for 2010 to solicit projects and we did the same in 2011. In response to that we got a number of really good proposals and you can see that we - I think I already mentioned that we approved 17 CCPIs and two WREPs.

And I know the map that you're seeing now is just kind of busy and at that scale, yes, it doesn't tell you a whole lot, but I just wanted to give you an idea. Where you see the kind of greyish colors, those are our focus areas, the 43 focus areas that Tom mentioned earlier.

And then those that have a color or a hash mark in them represent 2010 and 2011 projects. So you can see that most of the focus areas have at least one project, if not multiple projects, so the map is just to kind of give you an idea that the projects are spread around. You can see the different states this year, the 17 CCPIs where they went and the two WREPs that were funded.

In all, the financial assistance – and this is for 2011 only – remember we approve these in year one – and they've already identified how much funding they would like in future years. We'll assess them based on their activity and the available funds and determine what the funding will be. But for Fiscal Year 2011, there is little over \$14 million out there for CCPI and WREP. Most of that CCPI is EQIP.

If you want to see those projects, what - who - where they are, who the sponsors are, what they're going to do, they're posted on the Web. I hope you've had a chance to look at our new Web site. Last week it changed. We've got a new look and feel. It looks more like the USDA page.

I like it because the Mississippi River Basin is a prominent front page player there. So if you want to see the 2011 projects, click on the Mississippi River Basin link there where I've got the big red arrow and then look about to the middle of the page for the FY 2011 approved projects. There's a listing by state that has the project sponsors, the dollars, and the title of the project, as well as a little paragraph on each in that second link that you see there.

My contact information is also on that page. I failed to put it in the slideshow. But if you need to contact me, you can find my name and contact information on that page.

Now I will turn it over to Gregorio Cruz, the national Conservation Innovation Grants Program Manager.

Gregorio Cruz: Okay. Just to give you a sort of a quick overview on the CIG. CIG is a little different or Conservation Innovation Grant it's a little different than CCPI and the WREP in the sense that once we select those projects they are funded through the duration of the project. So in 2010, as Deena mentioned, we funded 12 MRBI projects for \$2.9 million.

In 2011, we ran another funding opportunity, which we received 411 pre-proposals. Out of those 411 pre-proposals, 46 were from the Mississippi River Basin area. After we did the preliminary review, we invited about 30 of them which met the basic eligibility for the program, but only 26 submitted a full proposal. Out of those 26 projects, they went through the technical review and

then provided to the Chief for selection. I don't have any big numbers for you yet because the announcement is expected to happen next week, but we're looking around close to \$4 million of funding for the MRB.

Tom Christensen: Thank you. Okay, I'm going to talk a little bit about the oversight and evaluation study we did on the use of the edge-of-field monitoring as a cost-shared practice. Remember this is the first time we've ever used this in the agency. And you can go to the next slide, Mike.

I should clarify why we used this as a cost-share practice. An alternative would be to use technical assistance funding and to enter into agreements with partners. That would probably be easier, but the challenge for us if we start to use technical assistance funding for monitoring, obviously you can see the impact that has on our ability to deliver technical experts out there to assist with the planning and the implementation of contracts. So we chose to use financial assistance, which means it has to be payments to producer because of the EQIP statutory language. And it does limit it to a 75 percent cost-share rate.

So very critical to all of this is that the reality is a partner has to step to the table through the CCPI process and identify that they're going to work with those producers and they're going to fill that gap for that producer, that 25 percent cost-share gap that we can't provide.

And a good example of this is the State of Missouri. The State of Missouri stepped up with \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2010 to basically fill that gap for individual producers and they have a pretty significant effort underway with the use of 799, the edge-of-field monitoring, in concert with in-stream monitoring, et cetera. So I can't stress that enough.

But anyway, we wanted to do an evaluation early on, actually a few months into the implementation of this edge-of-field to see in real-time what lessons had we learned and what improvements should we bring to bear in our future use of edge-of-field.

We have a bunch of findings. I won't go through these in great detail because we'll make this slide set available to you. But I think I would characterize a lot of the findings as, because this was new for us, there's a lot more work we need to do internally with the provision of training, specifications, all that sort of thing is kind of spelled out on these first slide. You can go to the second one, Mike.

One of the things that we lacked was enough attention in the agreements we developed with partners to specificity, so we've got to make sure future agreements also include an operation and maintenance provision. You would seem to think that's very logical, but somehow we missed that. And then there's an annual plan of work that is required of the partner that in some cases we haven't been diligent enough about in securing.

So a series of recommendations have come out of this and some of these we've already begun to address. There's the issue of training for our staff in particular since this is a new practice. There's always the issue of adequate documentation in the contract case file because it is a cost-share practice.

We're also looking at alternatives. The edge-of-field monitoring practice that we have now is pretty rigorous, Howard (Hankin), I think typically it might run 25,000 to 30,000 dollars for the installation and that can be quite expensive, obviously. So we're looking at lower cost alternatives and hopefully we'll have some positive results there. Okay.

We also know we need to do a better job of coordination across states with what we call the payment schedule, how we cost-share on this practice. And of course we're working on that. I mentioned earlier the desire for an overarching strategy and plan with our partners. We need to give our states more templates, examples, that sort of thing. So the bottom line is a good suite of recommendations came out of that O&E study for us to improve our efforts.

So some of the actions to date, as I mentioned earlier we're exploring the less expensive monitoring systems. We have developed job sheets for the states. We did provide training, within the last month or so for the states, the second round of training. We've provided some further guidance for the states. We are working with EPA and USGS at the state level and Troy (Daniell) is going to get into that in a bit more detail.

Another policy issue that we're going to bring to the Chief for his consideration is that current EQIP policy limits the cost-sharing to three years. And that's a legacy of when we had incentive payments under the previous Farm Bill. And the challenge here is that we want this practice to continue for a long time, hopefully ten years. And can we, in fact, cost-share on this practice for a longer period of time, recognizing that most of the sunk costs is in that first year with the installation of the system. But there's ongoing operation and maintenance, et cetera, required. So that's a policy issue we're going to bring to the Chief for his consideration.

So the bottom line is we learned a lot. We're trying to make some improvements, and this will not succeed unless we get strong partner participation with the landowners and also help to fill that 25 percent cost-share gap that we cannot cover as a practice.

Troy.

Troy Daniell: Yes, thank you, Tom. Good morning everybody. I wanted to give you kind of a 40,000 foot view of our water quality monitoring strategy, as we call it. Can you hear me?

Probably about a year ago, actually before the O&E review, through some discussions internally and with our partners that are involved in monitoring, we put our heads together and at the direction of the leadership with NRCS tried to begin a collaboration process for water quality monitoring within MRBI.

And basically the need was to identify ways we could be more consistent with our protocols and complementary in our existing efforts, knowing that there's a lot of agencies and NGOs involved with water quality monitoring and we wanted our small piece, the edge-of-field monitoring, to be complementary to that and find ways that we can work together on it.

So basically we called in some folks that are actually in this room from EPA, USGS, and the Corps of Engineers, also ARS, to develop maybe a subset. We didn't want to tackle all the watersheds within MRBI, but develop a subset of places that we felt like were good to target our efforts in collaborating and building consistency.

And we wanted to seek opportunities to work together closer at the state level and regional level. The regional conservationist actually directed the state conservationists to contact the state agencies involved in monitoring, and I believe now, Tom, that all of them have engaged that process, and see how we can, not necessarily overlap funding, but put funding more targeted towards some of these watersheds into monitoring.

The screening criteria, this is certainly not everything that was involved in the screening criteria because there was a lot of wailing and gnashing of teeth to try and come up with a good criteria to narrow our focus down to just a handful of watersheds.

But we looked for existing monitoring, if there was significant baseline - for example, the Big Sunflower in Mississippi had data that goes back to the early 90s with Corps of Engineers, ARS, and other agencies, so there was good baseline data in these watersheds. Long-term, reasonable expectations for long-term monitoring by other agencies, as Tom alluded to, to fill in that three-year - beyond the three-year gap.

We wanted to, of course, look for places where are edge-of-field monitoring is already located. We wanted to look at some of the 319 projects that were out there that could be complemented. 303(d), areas with high levels of conservation systems. That was clearly an objective because we do certainly want to talk about what our conservation practices and systems are actually doing within these small watersheds. Potential for comparisons of before and after data that goes back to the baseline. And probably, last but not least, the willingness of the landowners and the willingness of the partners that are out there to continue in this process.

So that screening led down to 15 - a select group of 15 MRBI 12 digit HUCs. Now these are watersheds that have active MRBI projects ongoing that include edge-of-field monitoring. Arkansas is the L'Anguille, Point Remove; the Boone River in Iowa; the Sauk in Minnesota; the North and South Forks of the Salt in Missouri and the Lower Grand; and as I said earlier, the Big Sunflower in Mississippi, we think there's a good opportunity there; and the Upper Rock in Wisconsin.

And the next steps, we've kind of already started embarking on these two major next steps. Howard and some of the technical folks recently facilitated a Webinar and it was training and collaboration in its effort, but it was to discuss consistency methods in the way of protocols, as well as the need to make aggregated data, selections for future plug-ins into the models. So that occurred last month, I believe, Howard. There will probably be other calls and discussions on this because you can't just stop at one.

And the continued effort to work with federal and state agencies and NGOs to coordinate funding opportunities. Because we want to increase the density and increase the longevity of monitoring in these watersheds.

That's all I had.

Tom Christensen: Thank you, Troy. The next subject is the issue of adaptive nutrient management and this is something we're very excited about. And a lot of credit here goes to Suzy Friedman. I suspect almost everybody probably knows Suzy. And I see Sara (Hopper) over here too. They've been at the forefront for a couple of years, if not longer, probably at least three years, in discussing with us the issue of adaptive nutrient management and how to institutionalize that more into our programs such as EQIP.

We're very interested in this and in fact back on July 28 we had a meeting in St. Louis with Suzy and about eight or nine other partners that are very in-tune with this subject. And the bottom line was to strategize a bit, both in the context of the MRBI and also the GLRI, the Great Lakes effort, how we might bring about greater adoption of adaptive nutrient management.

So out of that meeting a number of actions have come forward. I think the bottom line is we're interested in creating a more robust action plan in the context of MRBI and how we would move this forward. There are some pockets out there through the On-Farm Network and Iowa Soybean Association and EDF where this is moving forward and we want to try to expand the use of adaptive nutrient management.

Which leads us to our 590 standard, which is still in the final stages, but I might ask Wayne Honeycutt, he's our Deputy Chief for Science and Technology, if there might be a few words he wants to say about adaptive nutrient management.

Wayne Honeycutt: Yes, sure. Thanks, Tom. Good morning everyone. Yes, as Tom mentioned, this adaptive nutrient management I think is a really exciting tool for us because I think it really can help us improve water quality by helping us essentially improve the recovery that crops are getting from the fertilizer that we're putting on. And that's - so it's really very much in line with our 590 conservation practice standard.

And as all of you know, we rely very heavily on the good work that our land grant universities do for us with giving us the recommendations for how much nutrients to apply for our crops, but I think you can also realize that as good as those are, they're - and many times they're not perfect because no one laboratory, no one state could prescribe the exact amount a crop would take up on a given field, on a given landscape position and, you know, that's just not realistic in terms of, you know, what the crop is up against in terms of nutrient uptake and the turnover of nutrients in soils.

And so this process here really is a way to take that university recommendation and then kind of fine-tune it essentially. For example, you

could take - if a recommendation were 200 pounds of nitrogen per acre, for example, then you might set out some strip trials in kind of a pseudo experimental way and where you might have one strip that is that recommended rate of 200 pounds of N, but right beside it might be 160 pounds of N.

And so then this - through this process, you can essentially monitor the uptake of the nutrients in the crop to see that on that field, on that farm, on that landscape position, can that farmer reduce that nitrogen by that 40 pounds per acre and achieve the same yield. And so it's just really a way of kind of fine-tuning of that university recommendation. And, again, with the same goals that we have of the 590, the improving or maintaining, enhancing water quality, but also improving nutrient use efficiency by the crop.

And another exciting thing about it is that through this On-Farm Network, which is a component of the adaptive nutrient management process, the farmers are directly engaged. They're directly engaged in sampling on their fields, on sitting down with the groups of local farmers and looking at their data, looking at the information that's been gathered, and so that they jointly make decisions on, you know, what is best for that field on their farm.

Of course that's very much consistent and in line with the way we like to do things at NRCS, working directly with farmers too and with that direct engagement. So there's some real exciting things and we think it has a lot of potential for us in improving our nutrient use efficiency and enhancing essentially our use of the 590.

Tom Christensen: Thank you, Wayne. Next we'll turn to Paul Sweeney. Paul, are you out there?

Paul Sweeney: Yes, can you hear me okay, Tom?

Tom Christensen: We can. Thank you.

Paul Sweeney: Okay. Yes, thanks for having me on the agenda today. And Tom has asked me to report out on the application of Ag drainage water management and the team activity. Just in the form of a little background, in 2010 Chief White established a Phase 1 team to look at NRCS's Ag drainage water management activities. That was a result of the CEAP Report that came out and identified the need for additional effort relative to drainage water management.

That team reported out with a number of recommendations that a Phase 2 team took on and developed a draft action plan to address. Today I'm reporting out on some of the team's progress on that action plan that's still in draft form, but some of the things that the team has taken on.

First of all, there will be a summit focusing on increasing the adoption of Ag drainage water management for conservation benefits that's scheduled for October 11 and 12 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. A hold the date memo is expected to go out some time this week by the Sand County Foundation that is assisting us in holding that summit in Minneapolis. So look forward to that memo to come out soon.

The NRCS team also put together a draft action plan that's open for partner comment until August 26. You can go to our new Web site and on the left lower side of that Web site you'll see "water" as a subject area and if you click on that and then go to the bottom of that page that comes up, you'll see the item "NRCS helps address nitrates in the Upper Mississippi Basin". If you go to that page, there is a number of places where you can bring up that draft action plan and then my email link is right there that you can make comments

to me. So I'll be collecting those comments and reporting our on that at the next meeting.

We're also in the process of improving that Web site for the Ag drainage water management activities that the team has taken on and providing additional - a wider range of information, including science resources, links to those resources and CIG reports dealing with drainage water management and that type of thing.

We're also working on our national outreach effort on drainage water management that's been drafted by the national headquarters and the states representatives. So once we get that put together and out to the states then we'll implement that.

Under the technology side, there's been some interesting developments there. We've actually identified potential acres for drainage water management as a template for the State of Illinois. Now the difference in this is that it doesn't just take slope and land use into consideration, we've factored in a number of soils characteristics like depth to ground water and that type of thing in creating this map.

Once we finalize that template that will then be extended across the six-state area and then to other states as we deem necessary to provide the field level folks with maps on where this practice is applicable. The states then can use that to look for priority areas for Ag drainage water management and also training and staffing. So we're looking forward to getting that up and running. I think that's an important development.

Then we're also working on a final for a soil suitability map system for the management of tile systems. So this is a ranking system for suitability of

certain soils for tile drainage and drainage water management. That is just another tool that producers and others can use when looking at the suitability and the management of tile drainage systems.

We've also looked at the technical standards for technical service provider qualifications. Those have been reviewed and edited and I think there's a bulletin coming out soon on that that will revise policy that helps us use technical service providers to advance drainage water management.

The last thing I'll report on is our training component. On August 18 there will be a Webinar training session rolled out for NRCS employees that once this is rolled out it will be a Web-based training that we can expand across the states to help improve our awareness by our employees on Ag drainage water management.

We've also assisted the Ag Drainage Management Coalition in certifying 20 new technical service providers in July in a training session that was held in Minnesota. These folks then are available to help producers in the planning and application of drainage water management activities.

The last thing on my list here is to encourage you folks to watch for that national summit notice, to learn more about Ag drainage water management, how that fits into a systems approach that we want to take, and the actions that the team are taking to increase that across the country.

Tom, that's it.

Tom Christensen: Thank you, Paul. I'm going to turn it back to the Chief now.

Dave White: No, Deena.

Deena Wheby: You heard us mention a couple of times Strategic Watershed Action Teams or SWATs. Somebody recently referred to the initiative as the best thing since sliced bread and I agree with that. And I said if that's the case then I think SWAT might be the butter on those slices. So, you know, it's always more fun when you do important things and fun things with other people and I think that's one of the things that SWAT allows us to do is to do even more with our partners.

For MRBI - first of all, nationwide NRCS put \$20 million of technical assistance funding across nine initiatives. Of that 20 million, MRBI got 4 million of those. The money is for entities, for partners, to hire staff. They're not federal employees. They're not NRCS staff. But partner employees to provide planning, implementation, outreach, some monitoring. The deal was that the partner had to have matching funds.

So partners came to the table with over \$2.4 million so to match with our 4 million dollars and in MRBI we have over \$6.4 million that's going to help buy 126 full-time equivalent folks. That's over a three-year period, so more than 40 each year will be added to the MRBI effort. These are boots on the ground that we'll have across the initiative. The 126, the 40 per year, are in MRBI only. Those states, if they also have another initiative, they're likely to have other staff through other initiatives that are in the same states.

Nationwide - through the initiatives, we have 90 agreements for SWATs this year and of those 23 will be in MRBI. So we've got our, I think, our fair share and I think we're going to get some really good assistance out of those boots on the ground and we're looking forward to making that work this year and seeing what we can do in the future.

Dave White: Thanks, Deena. This is Dave White again. There's only one last thing before we open this up for discussion and I mentioned it in my opening remarks. And I'm going to ask Tom to really talk about the emerging differences between the upper and lower basins. Thomas.

Tom Christensen: Thank you, Dave. Back in April, Leonard Jordan, my counterpart for the East, and myself were meeting with three of the state conservationists down in Louisiana, those being Kevin Norton from Louisiana, Al Garner from Mississippi, and Mike Sullivan from Arkansas.

One of the issues they brought forward was the critical groundwater areas in those states. And the need to try to better protect those --- the draw on that groundwater. And to more efficiently use the surface water that is available instead. So we agreed to look at this issue further in the context of MRBI.

The interesting thing is that in Mississippi with the current MRBI focus areas, they feel they already have a good match in Mississippi. In other words, the MRBI focus areas identified also match with the groundwater critical areas. So that's kind of a neat thing and they may not have to do a lot of revisiting of focus areas in Mississippi. Though in Louisiana and Arkansas there is not a lot of matching up of critical groundwater areas and MRBI focus areas.

So the concept is in the Lower Mississippi the primary focus remains on water quality, but bring in the additional focus of water quantity with regard to these groundwater short areas and try to improve the efficiency of producers use of that surface water and at the same time we'll get water quality benefits through the practices that are applied.

Now at the same time in the Upper Mississippi, we recognize and we've talked about the significance of drainage water management, a huge issue up there. So that would be an additional focus up there.

But the question is what would this mean in the Lower Mississippi? It would increase the suite of core practices that would be available and it would probably entail some revisiting of some of the focus areas. Thank you.

Dave White: Thanks, Tom. That brings us to the end of the prepared remarks. Now we're going to have the whole second half of this thing opened up for any comments, any discussion, any questions, and I would like to first start with anyone in this room. Dr. Thorne. I'm sorry. I won't identify people. I will ask you to identify yourself when you - when I call on you.

Dr. John Thorne: I'm John Thorne with Crowell & Moring, representing Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance in Iowa. I have a question. If you are successful in elongating the period of time funds can be made available for edge-of-field monitoring from three to say ten years, would that same kind of elongation of funding apply to some other related conservation practices that would directly affect the monitoring outcomes?

Tom Christensen: Well, I think part of the challenge for us and one of the reasons we tend to like shorter-term practices or contracts is it does cause some challenges for us on the financial side of the equation and as you probably know, we're under a financial audit and the longer you have a contract, the more variables you introduce into that contract which can result in problems, delays, etcetera.

So at this point, we've only really proposed or will propose to the Chief the monitoring practice because we do recognize you really need up to 10 years of data to be able to show significant results.

Dave White: Did you have anything specific in mind there, Doctor? Okay, operator, are you there?

Coordinator: Yes, I'm here.

Dave White: If there's a question from the group on the phone, we'll turn to that now.

Coordinator: If you would like to ask a question, you can do so by pressing star then one on your phone. You'll be prompted to record your name so I will be able to identify your line. Once again that is star then one if you'd like to ask a question. One moment, please.

Dave White: Okay. Doesn't have to be a question, it could be a comment or discussion topic as well. While we're waiting, we have another questions here. Sir, identify yourself.

David Gagner): So thinking about...

Dave White: Identify...

(Dave Gagner): Dave Gagner), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Sorry about that, Chief, so in looking at BCPI, WREP, SWAT, CIG, etcetera, etcetera, and we all know a lot of these get created over time through all of our various iterations of farm bills.

What about the overall coordination - and I know that's one of Deena's things - the overall coordination of all those different RFPs to be in a more somehow a more coordinated maybe timed fashion, not that Congress helps us with that at all.

But to do something to give it a better maybe calendar for a lot of the funders out there, you know, the extra partners that are out there, be it a state agency, be it a conservation district, whomever, it might help them in terms of planning or in prioritizing exactly what they would like to fund.

Dr. Honeycutt: Dave, I think...

Dave White: Good question and comment.

Dr. Honeycutt: Yes, I think that's a great idea and I know National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has done yeoperson's work in getting funding matches and I want to thank you for that but the idea of a calendar where it's a more predictable model would be pretty good. Thomas?

Tom Christensen: No, I think that's an excellent point. I do believe, and Deena correct me if I'm wrong, we did WREP and CCPI at the same time this year and the difference might be CIG and that's part of the national announcement, but I think you're right. The better we can time these and give them certainty is advantageous to all of us.

Dave White: Operator, is there anyone on the line with a question or comment?

Coordinator: Yes, we do have one. It comes from the line of Susan Heathcote. Your line is now open.

Susan Heathcote: Yes, this is Susan Heathcote with the Iowa Environmental Council and I was interested in hearing more from Paul Sweeney about the kind of range of drainage management issues that you're working on. I assume that you're talking about both water quality and water quantity.

Dave White: Paul? Paul, we can't hear you.

Paul Sweeney: Yes, can you hear me now?

Dave White: Yes.

Paul Sweeney: Okay. Yes, the team is really focused on the water quality of this, the nutrient transport through subsurface waters. Well, I should say surface and subsurface. Quantity in the focused area that we're in right now is not as big an issue other than - yes, go ahead.

Dave White: You're really breaking up. Are you on a cellphone or something?

Paul Sweeney: No, I'm on a landline.

Dave White: Okay, we'll try to - we're breaking up here - you want to try again?

Paul Sweeney: Yes, let's try it again. Is that any better, Dave?

Dave White: Marginally.

Paul Sweeney: Okay, hang on a minute. Let me try to go back to speaker, hang on.

Dave White: You were real good during your report.

Paul Sweeney: Yes, I don't think you can hear me. Well, let me try this again.

Paul Sweeney: Okay. The team's focus has been on water quality, surface and subsurface drainage waters. We haven't got into the quantity issue very much. I think

there are some practices that can I'll guess serve both quantity and quality improvements but the team's focus at this point has basically been on...

Dave White: It's not working Paul.

Paul Sweeney: Okay, I'm sorry. I don't know what I can do Dave to improve the mic.

Dave White: Susan, can we get your phone number and we'll have Paul call you and you can discuss this offline because he's breaking-up awful bad.

Susan Heathcote: Yes. My phone number is 515-244-1194 extension 205.

Dave White: Okay, and Susan can you give me your MasterCard and PIN number so I can verify your - that it's...

((Crosstalk))

Susan Heathcote: That's fine.

Dave White: Okay. We have another question here Alex. I'm sorry, identify yourself.

Alex Echols: Hi, this is Alex Echols with Sand County Foundation and one of the things that I found really exciting about the Mississippi River Basin Initiative when it was announced was the intention to use it to help drive I think better conservation investment strategies.

And back when Dana York was still here, I had lots of conversations with her about standardization or at least making sure we don't have apples and oranges on data coming out of what's generated through the MRBI.

So the question is really focused around data collection, do you have systems in place that you're confident are going to give you across-the-basin performance base indicators so that you can select which practices, which places to over the long term use the MRBI to inform better outcomes in conservation.

Dave White: Thank you, Alex. I'll ask Troy Daniel to address that.

Troy Daniel: I'll do my best. Alex, we're working on that. That was this last Webinar that we had was to discuss the protocols that are being - I'm assuming water quality monitoring is what you're talking about - but we wanted to make sure we just see what's out there as far as protocols for monitoring and try and build as much consistency as possible.

And then our science and technology staff are engaged and going to be engaged on going with these entities to keep that consistency in place between the agencies and partners because there is a wide variation of who's involved in each one of these watersheds and with different backgrounds but we would like to have as much consistency as possible so when we plug it into a model, we're telling the same story. I hope that answers your question.

Alex Echols: Yes, I just hope that's a priority in particular as you're allocating your internal funding that you're thinking about it as a management tool and that the MRBI is going to help you inform where to make the investments most effectively and I know these are very, very difficult questions but I think that that's a priority that if you need folks on the outside to help you carry that message, we'd be happy to.

Tom Christensen: This is Tom Christensen with NRCS. Let me just add to that issue also. We're working with the CEAP folks, Lee Norfleet in particular, and he has a model

called APEX which can be used at the small watershed level to discuss the issue of outcomes.

And we're going to be working with him on bringing APEX down to the 12-digit HUC level at least in certain watersheds so I think that's going to be critically important too toward this issue of outcomes and results. Howard Hankin has a statement. Yes. Can you come up to the mic, please?

Howard Hankin: Just very quickly I also wanted to point out our water quality team up in Portland is also working on the monitoring issue and consistency and they'll be working with EPA and others also in developing guidance for different monitoring protocols that we're looking for from each state.

Dave White: Good enough, Alex? Operator, anyone on line with a question or comment?

Coordinator: Yes. Our next question or comment comes from the line of Shawn McMahon. That line is now open.

Shawn McMahon: Hello. First of all I would just like to thank the Chief for making those changes to the water quality monitoring. We had made some comments that we thought it would be very good to bring in USGS and EPA and ARS and the federal family to expand beyond the edge of the field for some additional in-stream monitoring so thanks for making those adjustments.

But one question I had is I know that in Iowa, we've had a pilot which Rich Sims has implanted to require that all MRBI contracts in Iowa have nutrient management mix and I was wondering in light of the increased focus on adaptive nutrient management if there's been any consideration to requiring that in all 12 eligible MRBI states. Thank you.

Tom Christensen: Shawn, this is Tom Christensen with NRCS. I want to make sure I understood your question or statement and it is that Iowa is requiring a nutrient management plan with each contract; is that correct?

Shawn McMahon: Yes. My understanding is that's a pilot that has only been implanted in Iowa so I was wondering if there are plans to expand that throughout the basin?

Tom Christensen: That's a good item for us to discuss further. You're correct in that we don't have that as an absolute requirement but I will recognize that it is our primary emphasis so the use of the 590 standard and the associated plan that would go with that is very critical, but that's an issue we can discuss further with our state conservationists at our next MRBI call.

Shawn McMahon: Very good. Thanks, Tom.

Dave White: Any - Dave White again - any other questions in this room, comment? Oh, go ahead, sir. Be sure to identify yourself.

Mitch Hunter: Hi, this is Mitch Hunter, American Farmland Trust. I just wanted to learn a little bit more about the SWAT Initiative. It's really exciting but it's so new, I just want to get my arms around it, who those 40 FTEs are, who they're working for and with.

Are they doing high-level planning? Are they working with project partners to make the specific projects better and what's their role going to be?

Deena Wheby: This is Deena Wheby, the MRBI Coordinator. They do a variety of things with all their partners. A lot of the partners are conservation districts; they're state departments of ag. I know it varies between MRBI and others. There's a

variety across all the initiatives and MRBI is mostly state government-type folks.

We have a couple of foundations that are part of it. If you'd like a list, I can provide that to you after all the agreements are signed, but the goal is to have more boots on the ground to help with implementation so they're doing conservation planning. They're doing outreach. They're helping implement contracts that are already planned and practices are ready for implementation. They're technical-type folks mostly, to help move the implementation and planning further. Does that answer your question?

Mitch Hunter: Yes, thanks.

Dave White: Would we be able to put a listing of who all the various entities are, the funding amounts, the people, that kind of stuff? We'll just put that on the Web once everything gets finalized. Is that okay, Mitch? Okay. We have another one here, sir. The green light's got to be on. There you go.

Don Parrish: <<Question was not recorded. It was about Adaptive Nutrient Management and the long-term impact on organic matter/soil quality. Dave White summarized this question later.>>

Dr. Honeycutt: Yes, I will try. First of all, of course we do not do research and so this is not looked at as a research and that's not the goal of it but again the goal of that is to fine-tune the nutrients recommendation for a given crop on a given soil on a given landscape position.

And so in order to do that fine-tuning, it does require some measurements and so we are looking at supporting the collection of those measurements in order

to reach that goal of improving nutrient use efficiency with the overall goal of protecting water quality.

So I - you may recall - that when I described it, I described it as pseudoexperimental because I recognized just what you brought up that it could be perceived as being research but it's not in my mind. It's not research kind of in the, oh, more fundamental definition of hypothesis, you know, driven types of, you know, research.

But it is pseudoexperimental in that what we are trying to do is take a recommended application of fertilizers whether it's NP or K or whatever it is that we're measuring and we are trying to say okay, based on that generalized recommendation on this farm and on this particular field here, can we fine-tune that recommendation to still meet the crop needs and still meet our yield goals.

We are just now - we have not implemented any of these yet - so but I think that it's going to help us with all of our nutrient management plans in many respects.

Dave White: Can I ask a follow-up on that, Don? Are you saying like what I'm hearing Doctor - this is Dave White - what I'm hearing Dr. Honeycutt say is this would be for a site-specific producer, the adaptive management.

So if you're a producer in the same county doing a CNNP, I don't see that affecting your CNNP at all unless you do some adaptive adjustment on your own place. I guess that would be my answer to your - I'm sorry, I didn't understand your question.

Don Parrish: (Unintelligible – mic issues).

Dr. Honeycutt: I think one aspect of that that I did not emphasize is that it also - an important component of it - is measuring and monitoring nutrient uptake and so if the nutrient uptake I think would help alleviate some of your concern because we are trying to achieve a certain nutrient uptake to achieve that yield.

But I also recognize that what you're saying is exactly true is it takes a certain amount of organic inputs to maintain a certain level of what's called labile organic matter that's more involved with the turnover of nutrients and the availability of nutrients in the soil and so you're exactly right, there is that aspect of it.

Dave White: Okay, we have a follow-up comment from a member here?

Sara Hopper: This is Sara Hopper with Environmental Defense Fund. Hi, Don so as mentioned earlier EDF has been pretty engaged in the on-farm network which is kind of part of this whole or it's an example of adaptive management and it's, I mean, just to clarify, it's a process.

We're not doing something that this whole thing is not designed to come up with a different recommendation so it's not something that is competing with and is research like the land grants are doing. It's a process as I think Wayne was saying for fine-tuning on your farm and it's an ongoing process.

So you're going to continually evaluate so it's not like you're doing a couple of years worth of research and then saying okay, I've got my new recommended rate, you know, based on - or my new rate - based on you're going to continually evaluate.

And I think that might be hard for people to, I mean, I think that's an important thing for people to keep in mind. It's just a management process and the adaptive management approach is something that, you know, is a helpful approach.

I think in terms of getting at outcomes, you know, we need to know that what we're doing is working and so a constant process of evaluating and figuring out, you know, are we addressing producers' needs in terms of, you know, what the crop needs to be doing and what their bottom lines are and are we addressing environmental outcomes.

And the only, you know, really good way to do that is to continue to evaluate and then to adapt based on that and this is just one, I mean, does that make sense? I just thought I would throw that in there.

Dr. Honeycutt: Agreed.

Sara Hopper: Mmh-hmm. Yes.

Dave White: Mr. Parrish, I think your comments are well-founded and luckily NRCS does have access to soil scientists so we will engage them with Dr. Honeycutt as we move through this adaptive, iterative process. Identify yourself.

Joe Herve: Hi, Joe Herve. (Unintelligible)...feel like 240 have gotten a higher level of efficiency at the same rate, you will achieve a process (unintelligible). You do this for a year or two, you're not going to get the same results. As I was saying (unintelligible).

Tom Christensen: Okay. I'm sorry. Go ahead. Well, thank you. That's a good point you raise and it may lead to John's earlier question about are there other practices that

may be appropriate to go beyond the three-year period so we'll obviously have further discussions with the Chief on that but I wanted to add something to this discussion.

About a month ago I was in Indiana and I had a chance to spend a couple of days with groups of producers there, Jane Hardisty our state con had arranged this and I was really excited to see what they were doing.

This was basically producer-led and they call it a conservation cropping system initiative but they're really focused first and foremost on what we call soil health: the structure of the soil, the biology of the soil, the organic matter content, et cetera.

And then from that they're incorporating, you know, in this case they're using no-till and a lot of these producers call it never-till because they never do till the soil.

They're looking at the cropping sequence, they're looking at the cover crops so they have the whole true systems approach and it's really exciting because these producers are really energized about this and they're learning from each other, which I think is a form of adaptive management.

And I think that model what I saw in Indiana has great potential and we would hope to see that expand throughout the basin because again, it's producer to producer the most effective way to establish long-term conservation.

Dave White: I would just say Bill and Don you brought up a big point. We do not want to - there's always unintended consequences - we don't want to damage something in the name of helping something so you've got some of our top people here.

We've taken notes and we will follow-up and try to address the concerns you've met - you've raised - I'm sorry. Operator, any questions online?

Coordinator: Yes, we do have one question from the line of Susan Heathcote. That line is now open.

Dave White: Go ahead, Susan.

Susan Heathcote: I wanted to let you know that we're hearing - the folks on the phone - are not hearing the discussion and questions from folks in the room. We can hear the answers but we can just barely the discussion and questions from your audience there in the room.

Dave White: Okay, Susan, we will make a special effort to get real close to the microphones on any discussion in here, okay?

Susan Heathcote: Thank you.

Dave White: Was there anything else on the line, operator?

Coordinator: At this time I've had no other questions or comments come into queue.

Dave White: Okay, all right. Identify yourself and swallow the microphone when you talk.

Mark Gorman: This is Mark Gorman with the Northeast Midwest Institute. As I understand the original intent of the MRBI was to target conservation efforts to achieve the most nutrient reduction - nutrient (unintelligible) reduction - for the money where the problems were most acute.

So when I hear discussion of things like reevaluating the original focus areas which were based on that premise in at least some part towards areas where there's more interest in being involved in the MRBI and then analogous discussions about shifting the end goal in the southern states toward quantity issues as opposed to quality issues, I'm concerned a little bit that the original intent of targeting for nutrient reduction, we're drifting away from that.

And in effect we won't be targeting effectively toward that original goal in a time of limited funds where we realize that the targeting is a laudable approach toward an end. That does raise a red flag for me so that's more a comment than a question.

Dave White: Okay.

Tom Christensen: I think it's a good comment and there's certainly tremendous validity to that. I will say for the original 41 and then 43 focus areas, certainly the nutrient loading to the Gulf was one of the key issues I believe principally through the SPARROW modeling; but there were other factors that were brought to bear, issues related to potential partner interests, readiness, that sort of thing.

So it wasn't exclusively based on "scientific criteria." There are other social considerations and I guess in response to that in part, you know, some of these watersheds have been there for at least two years without partner interest and we know we have other watersheds, some of which probably are equal contributors.

I think Wisconsin has given us a couple of examples so we would like the opportunity to revisit that with the state tech committees. Our goal still remains the same, water quality improvement in local watersheds, no question about,

And I think with regard to the Lower Mississippi, perhaps I haven't articulated that correctly. Water quality is still our goal but we believe that by adding the issue groundwater conservation in some of the critical areas and better use of surface water and the right conservation systems, we can achieve both goals: improve water quality and hopefully protect some of that critical groundwater.

Dave White: Good point, Mark. We have another question. Madam, if you'll be kind enough to identify yourself and speak closely with the microphone.

Michelle Perez: Hi. This is Michelle Perez with the World Resources Institute and I really want to commend the Chief and his team for a great series of initiatives and actions today. I'm always - constantly - being impressed even more every day with what you guys have come up with so congratulations.

Dave White: Michelle, we're just trying to give you the illusion we care about your issues.

Michelle Perez: Thank you. It's working. I am being lulled.

Dave White: Well, I can leave now.

Michelle Perez: To follow-up on Deena's focus on reporting results out and Tom's focus on outcomes, I'm wondering and thanks to Mark Gorman for reminding us, you know, this was originally was all to help address downstream Gulf hypoxia issues and along the way focus on cleaning-up local water quality.

Is there a focus of the existing projects to report out perhaps quantitative nutrient reduction goals that they may be setting for themselves and progress towards those goals?

If it's a systems approach that we're all aiming for and we hope that materializes in implementation, I think we would be able to translate maybe so the, you know, rough and tumble guesstimate approaches, then even better, edge-of-field approaches, then entering approaches. What do we think we're actually accomplishing at each project level? Thanks.

Tom Christensen: Michelle, a very important question you've asked and I would say our answer is yes to that and the reason I say that is really two-fold. Through this agency-wide effort on the initiatives and the environmental outcomes, we will establish some measures, for example reduction in nitrogen loading might be a potential one in this context.

But what gives me more confidence even than that is the CEAP process through the APEX modeling which is that model that we believe we're going to be able to bring down to the smaller watershed scale and then evaluate results and then hopefully from the monitoring, calibrate and see if we're really having the results that the model would indicate we should be having, at least at edge of fields. That's the area where we're focused.

Dave White: Michelle, this is Dave White. We are really, really getting close to be able to quantify stuff and it's mostly because of what has occurred in the CEAP, the Conservation Effects Assessment Project. If you look at that where we've looked in the Chesapeake Bay, we've done the upper Mississippi. We're about to release - what's the next one out?

Dr. Honeycutt: Great Lakes.

Dave White: Great Lakes, then there's like, I don't know, 12 more coming but if you look at these, we've looked at these points - NRI points, National Resource

Inventory points - where we know what the soil is and when you know what the soil is - you know what the soil chemistry is - so you know how things move through it or don't move through it or how the R, the K factors, all that kind of stuff so you know the soils. You know the crop that's grown there.

You know the production method under which that crop was grown, whether it's conventional or never-till. You know the conservation practices so for the first time ever, we can link those four things together, the soil, the crop, the production method and the conservation practices.

And Dr. Lee Norfleet is really able to kind of show what's occurring so it's pretty exciting what we're going to be able to do in the future and the CEAP has really opened the door for a lot of us. That okay?

I'd like to go here to - no - you were done. Any other questions on the line, operator?

Coordinator: One moment. It appears a question is coming in right now.

Dave White: Very well. Hey operator, remind me to go back and give Susan Heathcote a better description of the discussion we had where she couldn't hear or the people on the line couldn't hear.

Coordinator: And we do have our question from the line if you're ready.

Dave White: Sure.

Coordinator: That question or comment comes from Joseph Britt. That line is now open.

Joseph Britt: Yes, good morning. I had a question for Paul Sweeney and the question is is the interaction between nutrient application, subsurface drainage and groundwater on the drainage task force's radar screen? That's a pretty significant issue in eastern Wisconsin.

Paul Sweeney: Yes, my answer to that would be - this is Paul Sweeney - the answer to that is yes, we are looking at that and trying to gather up any science that we can find relative to that and that'll be part of that linkage that we're going to try to have on our Webpage. Hopefully you could hear me clearly on that.

Joseph Britt: Just fine. Thank you.

Dave White: We did, we did.

Paul Sweeney: Thank you.

Dave White: Let me follow-up with when Susan said she couldn't hear some of the dialogue and Bill, Don, Wayne, Sara, correct me if I mess this up but essentially the discussion revolved around the adaptive management.

Kind of a concern was expressed, are we looking beyond just nutrients like what is the long-term impact on, you know, the soil organic matter for example? Just because you can reduce it for a year or two, if you continue that, what are you doing to the soil?

So that was the basic discussion point Susan and the outcome was that Dr. Honeycutt, the Initiative people will get with our soils and we'll try to make sure we don't have any unintended consequences from this process. Okay, is that fair enough, guys? Okay. All right. Any other questions in the room here? Yes, Mary Anne, be sure to identify yourself.

Mary Anne Rozum: Okay. Just an announcement for those...

Dave White: Hold it. Start over. Identify yourself.

Mary Anne Rozum: This is Mary Anne Rozum with USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. For those of you in the room, I just wanted to make an announcement and I've got flyers for you. I wanted to mention a precision agriculture field day.

This is another opportunity to manage nutrients more carefully. This will be August 30th in Denton, Maryland, and it will be featuring about five of our top national ag engineers from Oklahoma, Louisiana, Tennessee, Iowa State and Virginia Tech so see me after the meeting and I'll be glad to give you a flyer.

Thank you.

Dave White: Operator, are there any questions online?

Coordinator: At this time I have no questions in our queue.

Dave White: Are there any questions in the room from anyone on any subject? Ah, Mr. Parrish?

Don Parrish: (Unintelligible).

Dave White: Mr. Echols, the floor is yours. Be sure to speak closely to the microphone.

Alex Echols: I will do my best and Paul Sweeney, please amplify and correct and Tom and Dave as well. The meeting will be a two-day session. It'll be approximate to the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport so that people can get in and out.

It will begin at about 11:00 on the 11th. It will start with an overview so that people begin to understand more about what agricultural drainage is and what the management of it is. It'll be followed that afternoon with a field trip of about three or four hours to go out and look at practices on the ground.

So the people understand how many thousands of miles of tile lines we have underlying the millions of acres of ag lands and the relationship between that hydrology, the alterations to the landscape and how nutrients move off of it and importantly the opportunity to use a series of management practices to hold that nutrient load in the field where it's available for the crops to uptake it.

Then the next day will be a series of breakout sessions where we will talk about - I'm sorry, not breakout but concurrent sessions - where we'll talk about the opportunities for drainage management, the specific techniques available, the incentives available, the impediments to it and the challenges going forward.

The purpose of this is to do a couple of things. First, help people understand what ag drainage is. Second, understand the opportunity afforded by the management of it. Third, I think to help NRCS better inform the policies that they're developing on it to both enhance farm economic viability and reduce nutrient loss.

Don Parrish: (Unintelligible).

Dr. Honeycutt: Right, great question. First this is...

Coordinator: I'm sorry, this is the operator. I don't mean to interrupt but we didn't hear any of that question once again over the phone.

Dr. Honeycutt: The question and if I can paraphrase it and correct me if I'm getting it wrong, the question is are you going to focus on drainage water management specifically and will you include other techniques such as wetlands that might achieve some of the similar objectives.

And the answer is yes, we want to include discussion of both conventional drainage water management as well as innovations and other practices such as one of the things that we talked about in this room about two months ago was where drainage management could be applied and the numbers that were thrown out I think looked at edge-of-field management structures.

They didn't talk about automatic structures that might be buried in-line so that's I would describe it as a conventional but an innovative practice. We also will cover things like bioreactors, strategically-siting wetlands, wet buffers and other kinds of practices so there'll be at least sessions on innovations and emerging technologies.

Dave White: Operator, are there - I'm sorry - do you need to follow-up?

Dr. Honeycutt: Yes, the question was will we cover nitrogen stabilizers and my short answer is no. The longer answer is the meeting is going to focus on a systems approach to nutrient management and clearly things like nitrogen stabilizers and fertilizer calculations and strip testing and all of those kinds of things are very important to it.

So there will be in the context of a systems approach but we will not focus on things that are aside from the hydrology, this part of the central program of the issue so there'll be a lot of the other issues that particularly you'll see in the field trip.

There'll be cover crops and there'll be questions about the implications of soil till with drainage management, with cover crops, etcetera, but the program will focus on that hydrology aspect.

Dave White: Is that adequate, Mr. Parrish? Okay. Operator, any questions online?

Coordinator: At this time we have no questions in our queue.

Dave White: Are there any - I got to get with the right terminology - are there any questions in the queue here in this room? Okay.

Man: John has.

Dave White: Oh, I'm sorry. We have one here.

John Thorne: John Thorne, just a follow-up. Earlier you mentioned, Tom, the 590 standard. Can you give us an idea of the timeline on that?

Dave White: Well, I can give you an idea of the timeline. This is Dave White. Dr. Thorne is asking about the timeline for announcing the revision of the 590 nutrient management standard. I think I have all the data now. Staff has met every request I could think of for more information.

The big stumbling or the big issue is of course the frozen soil application. I think that's the biggest remaining one and of course from the comments we've

got, some folks in one community say it's nothing but a giveaway to big ag and folks in the other community say you spineless swine, you caved to the tree-hugging enviros.

So somewhere in the middle there is where we're going to come out and those comments were all related to what was published in the Federal Register. Now my timeline, the goal is late this summer to - because to be real honest with you - I'm going to own this and when it comes out, if you want to apply a boot somewhere, my posterior will be available for that. Okay.

Okay, anything in the queue there, operator?

Coordinator: At this time I do have nothing in queue.

Dave White: We have another follow-up here.

Don Parrish: (Unintelligible).

Dr. Honeycutt: That would be terrific. In fact, we've asked some of that group...

Coordinator: I'm sorry, I apologize again, but once again we were unable to hear that on the phone.

Dr. Honeycutt: It was Don Parrish from Farm Bureau that had asked a question about the group in Indiana that was using never-till conservation cropping system, soil health, etcetera, and his interest in a briefing for those here in Washington, D.C., and we'll certainly extend that because we do intend to bring some of that group back to brief the Chief and others here in the agency so that's a great idea and we'll certainly extend that invitation.

Dave White: Okay. Any other questions in the room? Operator, are there any in the queue?

Coordinator: There are none in the queue at this time.

Dave White: Okay. Last call. Okay, we'll wrap this up. I want to thank everyone for patiently listening, for bothering to call in and spend all this time with us, for coming here to the South Building and participating.

I want to thank you a lot for that. I think this is a pretty important topic. We're certainly investing a lot of time and your resources - these are all taxpayer funds we're using here - so we definitely appreciate your counsel and guidance to better inform us.

And basically if you can find another federal agency that does this kind of stuff, let me know who it is and with that I want to thank you so much for coming and unless there's anything else operator, we'll call this a day.

Coordinator: That will conclude today's conference. Thank you for your participation.

Dave White: Thanks. Bye bye.

END