

MEMORANDUM

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TO: State Technical Committee Members

FROM: Mary Drago

DATE: September 25, 2009

SUBJ: State Technical Committee Meeting

Attached please find, the minutes from the State Technical Committee meeting, held on September 25, 2009.

If there are any changes to your organizational structure, please notify Mary Drago at (603) 868-9931, x-101 or at mary.drago@nh.usda.gov.

New Hampshire State Technical Committee

September 25, 2009

ATTENDEES: USDA-NRCS – Rick Ellsmore - Chair
USDA-NRCS – Don Kierstead
USDA-NRCS – Brandon Smith
USDA-NRCS – Kim McCracken
USDA-NRCS – Carol Drungil
USDA-NRCS – Mary Drago
NH Office of Energy and Planning – Tracey Boisvert
NH DES – Eric Williams
NHACD – Cal Perkins
GCCD – Pam Gilbert
UNH Coop. Ext. – Darrell Covell
USDA-FSA – Linda Grames
NH Timberland Owners Association – Jason Stock
SPNHF – Wendy Weisiger
NH Department of Ag, Markets & Food – Vickie Smith
BCCD – John Hodsdon
HCCD – Kerry Rickrode
NH Div. of Forest & Lands – Bob Edmonds
USDA FSA – Marilyn Norton
NH Fish & Game – Charlie Bridges

Opening Comments – Rick Ellsmore:

Rick welcomed everyone, introduced himself and asked for brief introductions and partner updates:

Darrell Covell – UNH Coop Ext.: UNH is in a deficit this year. They are grateful for the agreements that they currently have, and they are writing a lot of grants right now.

Charlie Bridges – NH Fish & Game: NH Fish & Game is also in a deficit as they are still being funded with licenses and such. They have had to defer equipment and employment. It's not too bad, but it isn't good either. The new hunting digest is out, and it is in an easier to read format and less expensive to reproduce. Bear season opened on September 1, 2009, and the current harvest for bear is at 320. There has been a 10% increase over a 5 year average. Mountain lions have been reportedly seen and verified by a reliable source. NH Fish & Game received the Forest Society Conservation Partner Award.

Tracy Boisvert – DES: Easements are aging and DES is spending time working with new landowners.

Eric Williams – NH DES: NH DES is working with NRCS on ways to partner to improve functionality. They are looking at issues of restoration, such as emergency repair as well as other programs in order to best match agency goals. There has been a pervious pavement demonstration installed in front of the building. The Innovative Land Use Guide won project of the year award.

Linda Grames – FSA: FSA has moved to the Federal Building in Concord, and the phone number is the same. As of August 17, 2009, Jay Phinzey became FSA's new State Director. Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) assists land owners and operators with matching payments for the amount paid for the collection, harvest storage and transportation of eligible material by a qualified Biomass Conversion Facility. There will be 3 public meetings in reference to this; and they will take place on October 13, 14, & 15, 2009.

Vickie Smith – NH Department of Ag.: The NH Department of Ag is having the same budget problems as others. The agency hosted an international tour at Flagg Winery, and high level officials of the Department of Agriculture in 23 countries attended. The Commissioner is working with dairy farmers. Still working with GAP.

Cal Perkins – NHACD: NHACD has contracted with Susan Kessler to serve as the Envirothon coordinator. Keene High School finished 9th in the Envirothon national competition out of 44 states and a few provinces from Canada.

Kerry Rickrode – HCCD: HCCD has just acquired 501C status.

John Hodson – BCCD: Belknap County also has fiscal deficits.

Jason Stock – NH Timberland Owners Association: NHTOA is presenting a series of classes in partnership with UNH Cooperative Extension. One of the classes coming up: is Logger Training, and this will be rolled out within the next 2 weeks. Jason has a seat on "The Good Forestry in the Granite State steering committee, In conjunction with UNH Cooperative Extension, NHTOA will be sponsoring a series of "Timber Talks" for the purpose of discussing and receiving feedback on the revised draft of New Hampshire's keystone forest management document: Good Forestry in the Granite State. (This can be found on nhwoods.org and goodforestry.org). The comment period for this will be closing on November 1, 2009. White Mountain National Forest is another item of interest. There is a lot of talk in D.C. about resurrecting roadless rules, and this is of concern to NHTOA because of the impact on the wildlife habitat management practices. This is the week to file bills in the legislation, and one that belongs to NHTAO is the Timber Harvesting law. This will help in the area of creating an opportunity to fine repeat offenders. This bill was filed on Wednesday, September 23, 2009.

Q: John Hodsdon – Do the E2 signs on the bridges have any implications on forestry?

A: Jason Stock – The implications are huge in reference to weight restrictions.

Q: Vickie Smith – Who determines the weight restriction on a bridge?

A: Jason Stock – Either the town or the state - it depends on the location.

Introduction of Bob Edmonds by Rick Ellsmore

The NH Forest Resource Plan has been a part of New Hampshire's tradition since 1952 which was back in the Sherman Adams time frame. The US Forest Service requires that all states have a forest resource plan, and every 10 years there is a new NH Forest Resource Plan. This plan is one of the best because everyone has input into it. This current plan is a few years late. The implementation rate has been very good with this Forest Resource Plan because people have bought into it. The Forest Resource Plan provides some funds to the state, and a lot of it is shared around. States need to show that the people want this plan in order for the funds to come into the state.

The way this is moving ahead is that there have been meetings with stakeholders, and open sessions for public and online comment. We have met with over 50 stakeholder groups and have gotten a pretty good feel from them for the way things are going on in the state. We are looking to have a variety and diverse set of perspectives put into the plan. The public can comment on the plan through the Division of Forest and Lands website. There is one more opportunity for public comment on Wednesday, September 30th, in Lancaster. Bob handed out the "Critical Issues Facing New Hampshire's Forest – Public Input Survey for the 2010 New Hampshire's Forest Resource Plan" in reference to the issues for the NH Forest Plan. There are 2 questions on fire, but there isn't a serious fire problem in NH. The best part of the plan is not the answers, but what parts of the plan are important to you and the organization that you represent. What is the desired outcome you are looking for, and who should be involved. Bob would like the questionnaires e-mailed to him at: bobedmonds@metrocast.net. Should you have any questions or concerns, his phone number is 603-312-2065. Under the 2008 Farm Bill, the State Technical Committee is required to be a part of this plan. The issues should be well articulated.

Q: Vickie Smith – Where can the general public access this?

A: Bob Edmonds – It is on the Division of Forest and Land's website – www.nhdf.org

Q: Vickie Smith – Will you accept any and all comments from the public?

A: Bob Edmonds – Yes. It is open to the world, and the objective is to be more inclusive than exclusive.

Q: Kim McCracken – If you are getting input from all the partners, is there going to be a group meeting to decide what actually ends up in the plans or who decides what ends up in the plan?

A: Bob Edmonds – Input will continue to come in through September. Bob and J.B. Cullen will write this up and put it all together by the end of the year with some things such as forest legacy in it. Susan Francher, who is the planner, is also adding an assessment and geospatial component. Some time in March of 2010, there will be a meeting to put all the components together so that the public can review and comment on the draft. The targeted date for release is some time in July of 2010, but it needs to be

approved by the Forest Service. Rick asked everyone to take the time to fill out the questionnaire and submit it to Bob.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – Brandon Smith & Don Keirstead

The Conservation Stewardship Program was once referred to as the Conservation Security Plan. A CSP fact sheet was handed out. A few things have changed, but overall the program is still the same. CSP provides financial and technical assistance to for good stewards of the land. . One difference in the stewardship program now is that the stewards are being asked to do an additional activity above and beyond what they normally do. Another difference is that CSP is now a state wide program and is no longer based on watersheds.. There are some issues such as they need to be the operator of record, have documented control of the land and all of the land must be enrolled, not just a portion. This is applicable to non industrial private forest land and agricultural operations. The program gives an annual payment for installing new conservation activities and maintaining the existing ones. A handout entitled Estimated Payment Ranges – CSP was distributed. A supplemental payment may be earned for agricultural producers if they install an enhancement called Resource-Conservation Crop Rotation. These are 5 year contracts and are ranked separately. Producers have been given a self screening checklist to ascertain whether or not CPS is the right program for them. CSP is a continuous sign up.

Q: Is there an annual inspection?

A: Yes. Someone from the field office will verify that all practices have been installed.

Q: Jason Stock – How will it be funded?

A: Brandon Smith/Rick Ellsmore – by an acres allocation that is given nationally.

Q: Is it funded now?

A: There is a national allotment that is given, but funds are not available yet and the allotment can be cut.

Q: Is the funding allocation done at the national level, not the state level?

A: The acres are broken down by state with no financial attachment to that.

Q: Pam Gilbert - How is the ranking done?

A: Brandon/Kim M. - It is numerical based.

This program is still in the pilot stages, and more information will be provided as it is received. The ranking tool will help determine who the better stewards are. There can be more than one enhancement put in. This is the first year that forest land has been eligible

Q: Eric Williams - To be eligible, do you have to have a Forest Management Plan?

A: Brandon – Not sure

Q: Linda Grames – If there is continuous sign-up, is there a cut-off point?

A: Brandon – Yes there is, but it's not first come – first serve.

Q: When is the first cut-off date?

A: The first cut-off date is September 30.

Q: What is considered non industrial forest land?

A: Rural land with existing tree cover or that is suitable for growing trees. Applicants select whether or not to submit an IDF plan.

There are still a lot of questions out there, and it was recommended that interested parties contact their local field office for more information. There will be more updates as we get further into the year.

Rick mentioned the survey that was sent out by George. Everyone was encouraged to review it and send any recommendations to Patty Lawrence.

New Conservation Emphasis Areas in 2008 Farm Bill - Kim McCracken

There are several new areas of emphasis with the new Farm Bill:

Forestry - while not new to New Hampshire, the emphasis on forestry is new on a national level. One of the key elements added this year in New Hampshire is a nice storm damage scenario.

Organic Agriculture (Farming) – some work has been done in New Hampshire and across the New England states. Key elements are 6 new practices that are required to be offered: Conservation Crop Rotation, Cover Crops, Forage Harvest Management, Nutrient Management, Pest Management and Prescribed Grazing. There are also a few practices that aren't required, but NH does offer them: These are practices related to grazing systems, agronomic practices, erosion control practices and transition to organic production

Specialty Crops - There is an increased recognition that specialty crops are a key part of US agriculture. They require different knowledge and skills and may be much more management intensive. A few of the new practices offered are: Irrigation System, Micro Mulching and Pest Management.

Pollinators – NH NRCS hosted a pollinator tour of 4 farms in NH with Xerces Society and UNHCE. There have been a few pollinator habitat demonstration sites established. We are planning to provide training to NRCS staff to help them understand the key role of pollinators for agriculture and wildlife habitat.

Air Quality/Energy – Carol Drungil

There are four counties (Rockingham, Strafford, Hillsborough and Merrimack) that have been designated as ozone non-attainment areas. These counties were eligible for a special funding pool in EQIP. Practices in this funding pool include: Agrichemical Mixing facility,

Cover Crops, Irrigation Water Management, Nutrient Management, Pest Management, Pumping Plant, and Residue Management. Some of the new practices and scenarios that have been added are: One of the practices we are offering is Atmospheric Resource Quality Management with a focus on combustion reduction. This practice includes the following scenarios: greenhouse energy screens which help with increasing insulation; greenhouse horizontal air flow (HAF) fans; maple pan pre-heaters; and reverse osmosis systems.

Energy – On the National level we are working to balance the roles of NRCS and Rural Development.

NRCS is trying to focus on conservation, efficiency and land use management aspects. Most of our Air Quality practices also had an energy efficiency/conservation focus as these two go hand in hand with each other. We expect this to be an increasingly important topic in future years and are hoping to continue to see this grow. An important first step is energy audits. – A solar or wind powered pumping plant is also an air quality practice.

A quick review of the contracts that NRCS has on file at this point was done, and the results are:

- Forestry - 5 storm damage practices in 2 counties
- Organic farming - 15 total practices in 4 counties which include Transition to Organic, Cover Crop Rotation, Cover Crop, Fence, Forest Harvest Management, and Prescribed Grazing.
- Pollinators - 3 field border practices
- Specialty crops – 1 micro-irrigation system for greenhouse, 1 deer fencing
- Air quality - 1 horizontal air flow (HAF) fan system
- Energy/Air Quality - 5 solar or wind powered pumps

Cal Perkins – I was not aware of certain programs. The outreach did not reach my area.

We are looking for comments on the practices that have been put together in New Hampshire and are offered to landowners. Is NRCS missing the boat in reference to the outreach? How do we get the word out in a manner that we can reach more of the landowners? The ultimate goal is to increase enrollment in some of the practices in the new conservation areas. Does anyone have any suggestions for new scenarios?

Q: Linda Grames – Does EQIP require a certain percentage to go to livestock?

A: Yes – 60%

Q: Charlie Bridges – What is a specialty crop?

A: Kim M – Anything that is not corn, beans, hay or forest.

Mark Ellinwood, who is on Charlie Bridge's staff, may have a little more information in reference to the deer fencing program. This practice was targeted towards apple producers. Initial interest was strong but has fallen off. Mark can be reached at (603) 271-2461.

Rick E. – We are going back to county allocations in 2010. WRP and FRPP may be different because they are handled at the state level.

Cal Perkins – A resource for maple can be found on line at www.NewHampshiremapleproducers.org

State Technical Committee Guidance with the New Farm Bill – Rick Ellsmore

The State Technical Committee was originally established to serve in an advisory capacity to NRCS and other agencies within the USDA, and this was reaffirmed with the new farm bill. Under the newly signed Farm Bill, new guidance includes expanded agricultural and forestry involvement on committees, local working groups are exempted from the Federal Advisory Committee Act, a renewed focus on county allocations and a review of whether the local work groups are addressing the state's priorities.

Over the next 30 days, NH NRCS would like comments from committee members on what thoughts there are as to the make-up of the State Technical Committee.

Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) - In 2009, 3 of the listed CAP's were offered: Forest Management Plans, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP) and Grazing Management Plans. In the future more will be added: Agricultural Energy Management Plans, Air Quality Plans, and Drainage Water Management plans are a few of these. Over \$550,000 in CAP's were funded in 2009.

Technical Service Providers (TSPs) – Private consultants may become TSP's. Currently, there are 11 foresters that have been certified in the system. There are online training programs required, and a sample plan must be submitted to become certified as a forestry TSP. Quality control has been an issue, and there will be spot checks. There is an option for business TSPs, but there must be at least one certified TSP in the business that can review and sign off on the CAP for other employees. There is a list in Tech Reg of who is certified for each TSP CAP category.

Q: Vickie Smith – Is there an approval process

A: No

New Hampshire has the highest rates for TSP's.

Q: Cal Perkins: Will there be liability issues?

A: Rick E – Not in the planning stage, but once the ground work has been started there may be. TSP's are responsible for all liability

John Hodsdon – I heard at NACD that only New Hampshire is using TSP's.

Q: Can Extension educators can be TSP's?

A: NRCS is working with Extension to work with TSP's.

Vermont has tried to offer forestry, but the rates are too low for foresters to accept.

Activity plans – forestry CSPs are big in Grafton County and all of Carroll County's CAPs were approved.

WHIP – Carroll County has the largest amount of WHIP

WRP- A month ago we received 19 million dollars for WRP, and there is a lot of work associated with it. There has been a lot of help from Cooperative Extension. It is a big responsibility for NRCS staff, which got another 6000 acres in permanent easements.

Check with Linda Grames (FSA) when we get another 19M, call to see if they can get thru FSA system.

Floodplain easement – has an easement associated with it.

Rick E. will talk with the State Conservationist about Local Work Group guidance.

The meeting concluded at 12:00 noon.