

Kentucky USDA State Technical Committee
Thursday, June 13, 2013

Meeting Summary

The attachments referenced in this Meeting Summary may be found on the [State Technical Committee page](#) of the Kentucky NRCS webpage under "[Presentation Materials](#)" for the June 13, 2013 meeting.

The attachments are also hyperlinked in the electronic version of this Meeting Summary document, however, they may open quicker directly from the webpage.

The Kentucky USDA State Technical Committee met on Thursday, June 13, 2013, in the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conference Room, located at 771 Corporate Drive, Lexington, Kentucky. The meeting began at 9:30 a.m. and 32 persons were in attendance. NRCS State Conservationist Karen Woodrich chaired the meeting. A copy of the [agenda](#) is attached.

Mrs. Woodrich welcomed the group and gave brief updates on the Farm Bill. She noted that on Monday, June 10, the Senate voted 66-27 in favor of the bill. The Farm Bill now shifts to the House where it could reach the floor for debate quickly.

Mrs. Woodrich announced that NRCS has hired a new State Engineer since the last State Technical Committee meeting in February, and she introduced Coleman Gusler to the group. She also mentioned that the Assistant State Conservationist for Operations position has been filled by Reed Cripps who will be joining us from Arkansas NRCS later this month. Mrs. Woodrich announced that Deena Wheby, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs is currently working on a detail assignment as State Conservationist in Maryland. In her absence, Kate Little, Resource Conservationist will be acting until Deena returns at the end of July. Mrs. Woodrich then introduced Kate Little and turned the facilitating of the meeting agenda over to her.

Kate Little introduced the first speaker, David Knopf, Director of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) in Kentucky. He thanked everyone for supporting and promoting the Census of Agriculture and reported that data collection will be completed by June 21, 2013. Analysis of the data collected will be conducted during the summer and fall. Reports will be issued by February 2014. NASS will gladly assist data users as they need to find data. Special tabulations for unpublished data can be requested.

Mr. Knopf announced that the NASS office in Louisville is now the Eastern Mountain Regional Field Office, serving Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. Each state will have a State Statistician to service local needs. Mr. Knopf introduced Scott Lemmons as the Kentucky State Statistician. Mr. Lemmons will be responsible for outreach and public relations.

The following questions and answers followed Mr. Knopf's presentation:

Q: Will we still have a call center in Kentucky?

A: The Louisville data collection center is closed. We will now get answers from one of five call centers around the county.

Q: Will you change any of the crops surveyed, specifically wheat?

A: Not at this time, but NASS is open to suggestions.

Next, Faye Brown, FSA Ag Program Specialist gave an update on the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the General Sign-up that began on May 20 and ended on Friday, June 14, 2013. Mrs. Brown reported that Kentucky currently has 301,245.9 acres enrolled in the CRP. Of that number 142,696 acres are under general enrollment with 158,549.9 acres under continuous enrollment. Kentucky currently has 8,030 acres enrolled as continuous practice CP33 Upland Bird Habitat, leaving just over 5, 500 acres available for the practice. The Kentucky project under State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) currently has 8,153.9 acres enrolled with around 3,999 acres available for future enrollment. The Kentucky Green River CREP project has reached full enrollment capacity and currently has enrolled 98,968 acres. A new continuous initiative for enrollment or re-enrollment of Highly Erodible land is becoming a very popular enrollment option for Kentucky land that has a calculated weighted average Erodibility Index of 20 or greater. Kentucky has 39,000 acres for the HEL Initiative and only about 2,000 acres currently pending for enrollment.

Mrs. Brown also reported that producers eligible to participate in CRP include those owners and operators who have owned or operated land for 12 months. The eligibility of the land is based on the determination that it is cropland, currently capable of producing a crop in a normal manner with a history of being planted or considered planted 4 of 6 years during the period of 2002-2007. Additional eligibility criteria may apply depending on the practice and the type and location of the land.

Statistical and programmatic information for CRP is available online at:

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=copr&topic=crp>

More details can be found in Mrs. Brown's PowerPoint Presentation "[Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\) Signup](#)".

The following questions and answers followed Mrs. Brown's presentation:

Q: Is land in expiring CRP contracts being re-enrolled?

A: Not as much due to the high crop lease prices.

Q: Will acres be expanded in the HEL Initiative?

A: Not to Faye's knowledge. We are only allowed to enroll 39,000 acres.

Q: Will the new Farm Bill provide additional monies to enroll more acres?

A: Not sure at this time. It is speculation that the CRP acre cap will be reduced nation-wide in the new Farm Bill.

Next on the agenda, Coleman Gussler, NRCS State Engineer, gave a briefing on the new DamWatch. DamWatch is a database for watershed dam plans, inspection reports, photographs, work plans and other related items. It is also an alert system to alert owners, EM personnel and NRCS when there is a large rainfall or seismic event in a specific watershed.

The system will also function as a maintenance management system. That is, people with access to the system can load “request tickets” for needed maintenance to the owners. The system is intended to function for all NRCS assisted watershed and RC&D dams. If a dam has reached the end of its maintenance agreement life between the owner and NRCS, it is still in the DamWatch system. The latest local sponsor and NRCS personnel information is currently being loaded into the system. It is undergoing final testing and should be fully online later this summer/early fall.

Mark Ferguson, NRCS State Resource Conservationist spoke next. Mr. Ferguson began his presentation with some updates and reminders from the NRCS Ecological Sciences Department. He announced that NRCS will be holding a Conservation Planning Training Course the week of September 16. Specific dates of the training have not been determined yet. This course will provide training that is required for Technical Service Providers for Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan, Conservation Activity Plan certification. The course will most likely be open for new NRCS and Conservation District field employees as well.

Mr. Ferguson presented a PowerPoint presentation on the National Blueways System (NBS). The NBS is a federally supported program to recognize river systems conserved through diverse stakeholder partnerships that use a comprehensive, watershed approach to resource stewardship. It is part of the America’s Great Outdoor Initiative. This program allows for rivers and their watersheds that are highly valued economic, recreational and ecological assets for their communities to be designated as National Blueways. There is a two-step selection process for National Blueways consisting on an application phase and a nomination phase. Nominations are reviewed by the National Blueways Committee and the Department of Interior Secretary makes the final selection decision. Benefits of having a National Blueways designation include Cabinet-level recognition, federal government MOU for 5 years and an increased competitiveness for grants and federal funding. The Connecticut River and White River have received this designation so far. Mr. Ferguson stated that NRCS was supportive of an application being submitted for the Green River. The Green River is one of the most significant freshwater eco-systems in the US, supporting 71 species of mussel and over 150 fish species. NRCS is planning to hold a meeting later in the year to gauge the interest of federal, state, local government, businesses, etc. in pursuing a National Blueways application for the Green River. Mr. Ferguson asked for meeting attendees to complete sign-up sheet if they were interested in participating in the meeting. He will send notification of the meeting once planned.

More details can be found in Mr. Ferguson’s PowerPoint presentation “[National Blueways System Update](#)”.

The following questions and answers followed Mr. Ferguson’s presentation:

Q: Is there Blueways trail work going on in Kentucky right now?

A: Not sure about specific trails being worked on, but we do know that The Nature Conservancy has been doing work on the Green River.

Q: Do you see this building on the partnership work completed in the Green River watershed in the past?

A: Yes, collaboratively we can build on the work completed in the past to make future improvements. There are a lot of acres coming out of CREP and we need to try to control the loss of acres and preserve the ecological benefits these buffers have provided so that they can continue to reduce sedimentation and streambank erosion.

Q: What would be the impact to landowners in the watershed? Will they be under any restrictions?

A: There may be opportunities for landowners to complete conservation work in the watershed and receive financial assistance to complete the work.

Q: How soon will we know whether Kentucky will receive the designation or not?

A: Not sure how long it will take. Applications are accepted twice per year, so we will need to submit an application and then wait for the results after the review process is completed.

Jerome Faulkner, Acting Assistance State Conservationist for Natural Resources Planning, gave an update on the NRCS Easement Programs. The total obligations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 were \$19.7 million total which was distributed between four easement programs with \$15 million to the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), \$2.4 million to the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP), \$1.9 million to the Healthy Forestland Reserve Program (HFRP) and \$0.3 million to the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). Over the programmatic years WRP has significantly increased financial assistance dollars while receiving a smaller percentage of technical assistance dollars to administer the program. As a result, WRP acreage in Kentucky has steadily increased over the years. The FY 2013 funding for easements was \$12.4 million for WRP, \$1.3 million for HFRP, and none for GRP new enrollments. A change in the WRP environmental site evaluation was presented to the committee. The change removed the 30 year easement option from a scoring question to a screening question and added a timber harvest question to the evaluation. Points will now be awarded to the applications that have not harvested timber in the last three years. The committee was also briefed on the FY 2013 WRP Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) and the process behind the development of the WRP GARC by Charles Kitts, WRP Biologist.

More details can be found in Mr. Faulkner's PowerPoint presentation "[Easement Program Updates](#)".

Mary Ann Sharp, Resource Conservationist, reported on the progress NRCS has made with Financial Assistance Programs in FY 2013. She reviewed the initial changes made to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) fund accounts and listed the 13 State and six National Initiatives available to applicants in FY 2013. Mrs. Sharp reviewed the EQIP application cut-off deadlines that were chosen for FY 2013. Kentucky chose to offer two application cut-offs which were January 18 and April 19. In FY 2013 NRCS received 1,825 total eligible applications for EQIP. These requests totaled over \$19.4 million dollars. Kentucky was able to fund 853 of these applications with the \$12.3 million allocated to EQIP for FY 2013. Mary Ann showed the group various charts and graphs which visually showed the relationship between total applications versus total obligations in each of the State fund accounts. Although \$1.4 million of NRCS' EQIP allocation had to be returned due to lack of interest in the National Initiatives, NRCS was able to request an additional \$4 million to fund pending eligible applications within the state fund accounts.

Mrs. Sharp gave an update on the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and its status to date. The announcement for a FY 2013 CSP application cut-off was delayed until the end of May due to

sequestration. The recently announced application cut-off for CSP is June 14 with an obligation deadline of August 23. Mrs. Sharp reported there were currently 90 applications for CSP with an expectation to receive over 100 by the end of the application period. It is not known at this time what Kentucky's acre allocation will be for FY 2013.

More details can be found in Mrs. Sharp's PowerPoint presentation "[Financial Assistance Programs Update](#)".

Kate Little thanked everyone for attending and asked if there were any questions, discussion or announcements from the group.

There being no further business or discussion, the meeting adjourned at 11:15.

The next State Technical Committee meeting is scheduled for October 17, 2013 at 9:30 a.m.