

**Minnesota State Technical Committee Meeting**  
**May 9, 2013**  
**Stearns SWCD Office**  
**Waite Park, MN**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

Participants:

Don Baloun, NRCS	Riley Maanum, MN Farm Bureau
Wayne Anderson, MN PCA	Julie MacSwain, NRCS
Rick Berscheid, NRCS	Andrew Martin, Senator Klobuchar's Office
LeAnn Buck, MASWCD	Ed McNamara, Goodhue SWCD Supervisor
Deb Caruso, FSA	Tom Meium, Congressman Peterson's Office
Dean Curran, U of MN	Linda Meschke, Rural Advantage
Steve Commerford, MN Soybean Growers	Aaron Meyer, MN Rural Water Assn
Dave Copeland, NRCS	Sheldon Myerchin, USFWS
Mitch Coulter, MN Corn Growers Assn	Colleen Oestreich, NRCS
Cyd Curtis, USEPA	Mark Oja, NRCS
Les Everett, U of MN	Rhonda Osterman, NRCS
Wanda Garry, FSA	Kevin Paap, MN Farm Bureau Federation
Jeremy Geske, MN Pork Producers	Jodie Provost, MN Wildlife Society
Jeff Hastings, Trout Unlimited	Ted Radintz, MN Milk Producers Assn
Matt Holland, Pheasants Forever	Glenn Schafer, FSA
Lea Holter, NRCS	Rob Sip, MDA
Rick Horton, Nat'l Wild Turkey Federation	Steve Sodeman, MN Corn Growers Assn
Sharon Josephson, Congressman Peterson's Office	Scott Swanberg, NRCS
Al Juhnke, Congressman Franken's Office	Myron Taylor, NRCS
Al Kean, BWSR	Dale Walz, Stearns SWCD
Ginger Kopp, NRCS	Adam Warthesen, Land Stewardship Project
Tom Kroll, MN Forestry Assn	Barb Weisman, MDA
Jim Kukowski, MN Soybean Growers	Mark Wettlaufer, MDH
Mark Kulig, NRCS	Timothy Wilson, NRCS
Les Lemm, BWSRE	Matt Wohlman, MDA
Mark Lindquist, MN DNR	Dave Zumeta, MFRC

**Don Baloun, NRCS**

- Welcome
- Introductions
- Minutes from the March 2013 meeting. Updated minutes will be posted on the web site. Let us know of any changes to be made and the final minutes will be posted on the web site.

**STC Report**

Budget: we are waiting for our final funding of several key programs - Conservation Reserve Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Wetland Reserve Program.

Positions: Don has decided to move ahead with the Red River Special Initiative positions. We are currently advertising the WRP Engineer position that will focus on the Wetland Reserve Program flood retention work in the Red River. The position will also focus on restoration work for the whole state for WRP. The Biologist will be focusing on the Red River flood retention initiative and have statewide biological responsibilities for ranking potential projects, WRP training, etc... These positions and the partnership positions for acquisition funded by BWSR will allow NRCS and BWSR to be more responsive in closing easements statewide.

The Farm Bill: The Senate and the House will be simultaneously bringing this through Ag committees and then hopefully to the floor for vote.

Al Juhnke, Senator Franken's Office, commented and reported that the Farm Bill would hopefully be brought up next week and has been set up as a high priority. Senator Franken is the chief author of Title 9 and that was introduced into the Senate, so there are some individual pieces that have been introduced and we are working on language, but overall, the bill is the exact same that came off the Senate floor last June. There are some minor changes to the commodity title to account for some of our southern crops but the balance of it and the targets should be about the same – about \$4 billion in cuts to the SNAP program which is probably the biggest difference in the House bill that we expect to see, but there will be some differences in the commodity minor title sections also.

Sharon Josephson – the House side is currently working on the bill and doing some mark up. Collin is confident that they will get to the floor of the House this summer and will get a farm bill passed by the expiration date in October. Also, the Conservation Title is still in the bill – the portion of the title dealing with some of the retention and storage projects – still in the Senate and House version.

Don - Farm Ponds/EQIP: Discussed adding to EQIP with State Tech for several reasons, the primary resource concerns being water quality and water quantity, addressing the need to hold more water in the uplands. Myron has taken the steps to ensure farm ponds will be available with the 2014 sign up. So requesting the MSTC to spread the word amongst the members you represent.

### **Jeff Hastings - Conservation Lease Project**

Over the next month or so, we will be trying to put together a committee made up of non-profits, some landowners, some renters and try to get an outline together. We will go over the materials trying to implement an absentee landowner program. We will get the committee together and come up with a game plan and try to keep the Tech Committee informed as we go along. We are open for any suggestions/ideas on the project.

Don – How do we get the operators in a position where they know that there is a commitment and how can we help those folks that don't know what steps to take. Would like to see the subcommittee be a diverse group and make sure if we start this that we make a commitment to following through. If anyone could provide names for possible committee members, this would be a big advantage to the diversity of the group. This is a great opportunity for absentee landowners and operators to get educated on what the options are. I see webinars as an education component for getting people together to learn more about the programs. Any assistance with this effort would be helpful such as newsletters, articles, etc.

If anyone is interested on being on this subcommittee, let Jeff Hastings know. If no one has made contact in the next few weeks, Don will start making contacts to see if he can get volunteers.

**Mark Lindquist, DNR – Recommendations for Tree and Forest Establishment and Management – Minnesota’s Prairie Region**

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Soil and Water Conservation Service (SWCD) implement many Farm Bill Programs that include payments for a wide range of conservation practices, including tree planting. These recommendations are an effort to provide the NRCS, FSA and SWCDs with recommendations on where tree planting is ecologically appropriate in western Minnesota prairie landscapes by providing site-level recommendations for tree and forest establishment and management activities. These recommendations are intended to help the conservation professional and the landowner make informed decisions regarding tree planting in Minnesota’s prairie landscape. Training should accompany initial use of these recommendations to ensure their use and interpretation is clear.

***Evaluation Matrix for Tree Planting within the Prairie Landscape***

*The evaluation matrix is intended indicate the appropriateness of a tree planting project at a site level. This indication is intended to help the conservation professional and the landowner make an informed decision regarding the tree planting within the Minnesota Prairie landscape.*

*Using the Evaluation Matrix This matrix and associated guidelines do not replace or override any USDA program rules or processes. It is a tool for working with landowners to make a qualitative assessment of the impacts of tree planting on grassland conservation within the Minnesota prairie region. Assess each factor (i.e. current land cover) to determine if there is a concern at the site and the degree of the concern. The conservation professional and land owner can then weigh the number and level of concerns raised against the benefits of a tree planting project to make an informed decision regarding a proposed conservation practice. Appropriate design factors should be weighed as well.*

Accept the matrix and the guidance from the subcommittee from the MN standpoint and the second step will be the training. How do we get training out to conservation staff and others? We have the mechanism and capability to do that, who would do it – Dave, Mark and the committee? Ginger Kopp to train the trainers? Do we have it at area meetings as well as BWSR so we have both those covered? The third step would be with Sheldon and the wildlife folks. It would be beneficial if staff has this training so that when a landowner comes in and are looking at CRP, CSP, EQIP, etc., the field staff can give them recommendations and also alternatives as to where trees are appropriate or where trees would be contrary to the resource areas they are looking at.

The fourth thing would be for the subcommittee to work with Myron Taylor and other NRCS staff and see us reflected in the ranking so we’re not giving points inappropriately that would be contrary to what we should be doing in the Minnesota landscape.

**Recommendation: To move ahead with the matrix – doing so with training**

**Recommendation: The MSTC will have a chance to review the entire document for comment at the next meeting. Comments to be sent to Mark Lindquist for July 11 meeting and Rob Sip to comments from Ag folks.**

We’ll get together with Jodie Provost to coordinate a train the trainer session set up.

### **Matt Wohlman, MN Department of Ag, MAWQCP Update**

Matt gave a presentation on the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program. He reviewed the recommendations from the MSTC Certainty Subcommittee to Commissioner Frederick and MDA's review and the process to create a MOU where the Federal government and State government would work together to make this certification program work.

### **Don Baloun – Proposed 2014 Drainage Water Management Initiative**

Don showed a PowerPoint on this initiative and reviewed the concerns. This PowerPoint is posted on the MSTC web site.

Ag has assigned Warren Form as the response person for the proposal. Warren has promised a formal response in June.

**Recommendation** – we proceed with the initiative as recommended and are certain to involve the state agencies.

### **Mark Oja, NRCS & Les Lemm, BWSR – Ag Wetland Mitigation Update**

Mark and Les discussed how banking provides a market-based structure that allows for replacement of multiple wetland impacts with pre-established wetlands.

Additional information is located in the PowerPoint which is posted on the MSTC web site.

### **Wanda Garry, FSA – CRP Conservation Update**

#### **1. Conservation Authorities**

The American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 extended the authorities for FSA to administer certain programs based on the 2008 Farm Bill. On May 2, 2013, National Notice CRP -738 was issued by the National FSA Office. The notice provided County Offices with the authorization to begin accepting new Continuous CRP (CCRP) offers starting on May 13, 2013.

CCRP Signup (SU) 44 will begin on May 13, 2013 and run through September 30, 2013. The CCRP signup will run simultaneously with CRP General SU 45.

CCRP signup eligibility includes all environmental sensitive conservation practices such as Field Windbreaks (CP5A), Grass Filter Strips (CP21), Riparian Buffers (CP22), etc., along with all State initiative practices such as Farmable Wetland Programs (FWP), Duck Nesting Habitat (CP37) Wetland Restorations (CP23 and CP23A) and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE).

#### **2. Acreage Allocation for Minnesota Continuous (CCRP) Initiative Practices**

Currently, Minnesota has 396,681 acres enrolled in CCRP including Farmable Wetland Practice (FWP) and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE).

In June of 2012, Minnesota received additional acres for certain State CCRP Initiative Practices. In October of 2012, Minnesota received additional SAFE acres.

Minnesota CCRP Initiative Allocations:

<b>Practice</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Total State Allocation</b>	<b>Currently Enrolled</b>	<b>Acreage Available</b>
CP23	Wetland Restoration, Floodplain	45,000.0	23,943.1	21,056.9
CP23A	Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain	112,094.0	80,122.7	31,971.3
CP31	Bottomland Timber Establishment on Wetlands	2,000.0	596.4	1,403.6
CP33	Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds	1,100.0	480.8	619.2
CP37	Duck Nesting Habitat	18,304.0	9,225.1	9,078.9
FWP	Farmable Wetland Program	100,000.0	51,244.5	48,755.5
SAFE	State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement	48,700.0	33,289.0	15,411.0

### 3. General Sign-up 45

On February 16, 2013, Secretary Vilsack announced that general CRP sign-up (SU) 45 will be held from May 20, 2013 through June 14, 2013.

SU45 will be ranked on a competitive basis utilizing the same Environmental Benefit Index (EBI) scoring process as that used for SU43 which was held in March-April of 2012. FSA collects data and score each offer based on the relative environment benefits for the land offered.

The EBI consists of 6 factors:

- Wildlife Habitat
- Water Quality
- Soil Erosion
- Enduring Benefits
- Air Quality
- Cost.

On February 27, 2013, the National Office issued National Notice CRP-733, which provided information to County Offices in preparation for SU45.

- No Changes either the National or State Conservation Priority Areas (CPA's)
- 25 percent County Cropland Limits will remain the same. All existing 25 percent county cropland limitation waivers previously approved will be extended for SU45,
- No Changes to the EBI scoring process

Interested landowners would need to contact the local FSA Office to schedule an appointment to review eligibility information and to submit an offer for enrollment during the sign-up period.

FSA and NRCS are conducting Joint Agency training on CRP General SU45 information next Tuesday and Thursday, May 14<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup>.

Information concerning CRP General SU45 can be found at the following links:

#### News Release

- **USDA Announces 45th General Sign-Up for the Conservation Reserve Program**  
[http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/printapp?fileName=nr\\_20130216\\_rel\\_0028.html&newsType=newsrel](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/printapp?fileName=nr_20130216_rel_0028.html&newsType=newsrel)

#### Fact Sheets

##### **Conservation Reserve Program, General Sign-Up 45, May 20 through June 14, 2013**

[http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/crp\\_genl\\_sign\\_up\\_45.pdf](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/crp_genl_sign_up_45.pdf)

##### **Conservation Reserve Program Sign-Up 45 Environmental Benefits Index (EBI)**

[http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/crp\\_signup45.pdf](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/crp_signup45.pdf)

#### 4. Producer Notifications

During the week of March 4, 2013, Kansas City issued notification letters to all participants with general and continuous sign-up CRP-1's scheduled to expire on September 30, 2013. The letters informed CRP participants of 3 different options for the acreage expiring. Those options were:

- a. Submit an offer to re-enroll all or a portion of the expiring contract acreage into General CRP SU45; or
- b. Submit an offer to re-enroll all or a portion of eligible acreage into CCRP prior to the September 30, 2013 deadline under CCRP SU44.
- c. Let the contract expire and pursue other program opportunities.

#### 5. County Soil Rental Rate (SRR) Review

On March 15, 2013, State and County Offices were required to review the proposed 2013 County Average SRR which was based of 2012 National Agricultural Statistic Service (NASS) Survey estimates and recommend an alternate rate, if necessary.

The National Office is in the process of completing their review of all proposed alternative SRR rates for the Nation and loading approved rates into the Soils Data Management System (SDMS). County Offices should be capable of downloading their Posted County Soil Rental Rates by Close of Business (COB), Thursday, May 9, 2013.

Approved 2013 SRR's will be available for both CCRP SU44 and General CRP SU45 starting Monday, May 13, 2013.

A maximum weighted average SRR for general signup offers has been issued in the amount of \$240 per acre and will be effective with the authorization to process SU45 General CRP offers. The SRR limitation is not effective for calculating maximum payment rate for CCRP offers, including FWP.

## 6. CRP – FY13 Expiring acreages

Currently, MN has approximately 1.4 million acres under CRP/CREP/CCRP/FWP contracts.

The breakdown for 9/30/2013 expiring contracts is as such:

GENERAL SIGNUP		CONTINUOUS SIGNUP		TOTAL	
ACRES	NUMBER	ACRES	NUMBER	ACRES	NUMBER
113,402	2,787	15,680	2,059	129,082	4,846

## 7. 2013 Cost Share Seed Rate Increase

The Minnesota State FSA Committee approved an increase to the previously approved 2012 cost share seed rates for 2013. The adjustment to the seed rates was needed due to the increase in seed costs from 2012 to 2013. This increase in seed was attributed to situations such as:

- The 2012 Drought
- Lack of pollination affecting yields
- Less growers resulting in a drop in production
- Higher demand for native seed product
- Increase in input cost for producing the seed.

The 2013 cost share seed rates became effective on May 6, 2013 and should be used for all need CRP/CCRP contracts approved after the May 6<sup>th</sup> release date.

The next MSTC meeting is scheduled for July 11, 2013 at the Stearns SWCD Office.

\*All handouts are on the MSTC website: <http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/partnerships/mstc/>