

**State Technical Committee Meeting
January 28, 2021**

Welcome Comments from State Conservationist – Jerry Raynor:

- Arthur Hawkins is acting as Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships while Jill Reinhart is on detail.
- Adam Heichelbech will be Assistant State Conservationist for Programs starting in March.
- Dan Shaver has been hired as the new NRCS State Forester.

Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Accomplishments – Jerry Raynor:

- See the attached presentation for an overview of FY 20 accomplishments of CSP, EQIP, RCPP, ACEP. We are starting FY 21 in the same operational status that we ended FY 20 in. We have been able to accomplish these number with our virtual environment.

Fiscal Year 2021 Program Updates: Allocation, Application #'s, Deadlines, Additional Funding Requests – Jerry Raynor:

- We have requested funding additional funds for FY 21 to balance out our programs. EQIP Application Deadline has closed.
- We have state deadlines to make sure we stay on track for national deadline.
- Indiana has one of the strongest and efficient Easement programs through NRCS.

Indiana's Fiscal Year 2021 Source Water Protection Areas: Policy/Programs (SWPA) – Adam Heichelbech/Shannon Zezula:

- See the attached presentation.
- SWPAs were included in the 2018 Farm Bill and the provision requires USDA (NRCS/FSA Programs) to protect drinking water sources by targeting 10% of national funds in identified Source Water Protection Areas. The data we used in 2020 included targeting specific well head protection areas as well as surface drinking watersheds.
- To meet 2021 national criteria, NRCS national headquarters directed states to use EPA data that targets drinking water sources on a Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) 12 level.
- States were further required to limit targeted SWPAs to no more than 20% of the state's land base.

We use the Source Water Protection Areas to track/target program funding in four ways

1. Nationally, any funding approved for practices in any of the source water areas is counted toward the 10% goal.
2. Most of our EQIP ranking pools include a ranking question that awards points for land that falls within any of the targeted FY 21 source water protection areas (goes towards 10% target).
3. In 2020, NRCS with ISTC input identified practices to offer a higher payment (High Priority Practices). States can identify up to 10 practice scenarios, and we focused on practices that have high resource benefit but haven't been used as much as others in the past.
4. We are looking at targeting the source water protection areas as the soon-to-be-released "EQIP Incentives" to target water quality as well.

5. Indiana NRCS will also be working with many of our Source Water Protection Area partners and our local offices soon to ensure farmers and others are aware of these targeted opportunities.

EQIP: Wildlife Ranking Recommendation – Adam Heichelbech:

- State Tech Subcommittee had a meeting to focus on wildlife ranking for EQIP and there was a great turnout to that meeting.
- Reviewed revisions of the 2021 EQIP Wildlife Ranking Recommendations from the Subcommittee meeting.
- No objections were made to the proposed revisions.
 - Merge three wildlife ranking pools into one pool with three categories.
 - Give higher priority to wetland restoration versus creation or enhancement.
 - Ensure conversion of cropland to trees and grass habitat are competitively ranked.

EQIP Incentives – Signup in 2021

- Reminder that the intent is to be a steppingstone between EQIP and CSP.
- Not clear yet if we will consider apps from initial signup or announce an incentives signup.
- Offer payments for EQIP practices/enhancements plus annual payments.
- Unlike CSP, it does not require entire operation to be enrolled.
- States will identify High Priority.
 - Areas:
 - Source Water Protection Areas – Main consideration.
 - Land Uses/Resource Concerns:
 - Cropland, Pasture, Forest.
 - Soil Health, Water Quality, Etc.
 - Practices/Enhancements:
 - Target management practices to address priority resource concerns.

Indiana’s Soil Health Journey – Shannon Zezula

- See the attached presentation.
- Shannon reviewed Indiana’s commitment and support to our farmers through Indiana’s soil health strategy, and went on to review statistics and trends with the topics below:
 - Partnerships
 - Technical excellence
 - Implementation
 - Education and outreach
 - Quantifying benefits

Indiana NRCS and Partner Urban Soil Health Efforts – Shannon Zezula

- See the attached presentation.
- Shannon covered recent Indiana efforts targeted toward “Urban” conservation.
- The Partnership doesn’t have a specific definition for “Urban” but it is best defined as a unique farmer than our traditional family farmer, no geographic or size barrier on these farmers/areas.
- Shannon reviewed our new and existing partnership efforts:
 - Warrick SWCD Urban Agreement is focused on the SW area of Indiana.
 - IASWCD Urban Agreement will be using a similar set up as the Warrick SWCD on a statewide scale.
 - Marion SWCD Urban Agreement is focused on the Indy area, but also going to be helping with statewide efforts.

- Allen SWCD Urban Agreement will be focused on the Western Lake Erie Basin Watershed Counties.
- Pollinator Partnership Agreement is a statewide effort focused on pollinators on Urban, Small, and Specialty Farms.
- Purdue's many Urban Agriculture Programs and Conservation Efforts available regionally and statewide.

CRP: Indiana's new SAFE agreement – Jason Kishton

- There was a State Technical Subcommittee group that came together and presented the SAFE proposals to STC in the summer of 2020 and the National Office approved the agreements in December of 2020.
- The 2018 Farm Bill moved most states SAFE eligible practices over to general signup. This change removed many of the incentives that were available when all SAFE practices were under Continuous Signup. CP23A Wetland practice was the only remaining SAFE practice that was still available under Continuous Signup. Since the incentives for SAFE under Continuous Signup were removed, the STC subcommittee decided to remove CP23A from the new SAFE Agreements.
 - Removed all SAFE options under continuous.
 - Can only get into SAFE under General Signup.
- Results are:
 - Henslow Sparrow SAFE Boundaries (South Central)
 - CP2, CP4D, CP12
 - Established minimum of 5 acres that can be submitted.
 - Signs up under SAFE, they will be required to plant the highest EBI N1A scoring factor.
 - Food plots are allowed but not required.
 - Require mid-contract management.
 - IDNR are possibly going to be offering producers that plant the highest mix possible, they will be willing to offer \$100 per acre that meet that requirement.
 - Indiana BAT (Northern, Central, South Central, Southern)
 - CP3A
 - Contracts for Indiana bat can be 10 to 15 years.
 - Minimum of 3 acres.
 - Does require mid-contract management.
 - Authorize management activities on Indiana Bat are mowing and spraying on the trees.
 - Bobwhite Quail (South East/West Indiana)
 - CP2, CP4D, CP12
 - Minimum acreage requirement of 3 acres.
 - Ring-necked Pheasant (North West/East)
 - CP2, CP4D, CP12
 - Minimum acreage requirement of 3 acres.

General CRP Signup 56 – Jason Kishton

- Reviewed guidelines.
- Started on January 4, 2021 and runs through February 12, 2021.

CLEAR30 Pilot – Jason Kishton

- Made available under new Farm Bill.
- All of Indiana is eligible for program.

- Opportunity for producers that had contracts expiring on Sept 30, 2020 (water quality practices) to come in and sign up for a 30-year contract. Producers responsibility to maintain.
- Not going to do cost share – maintenance payments instead.
- NRCS will be going out every 3-4 years to look at practices to make sure they are meeting specs.
- If producer does work themselves or hires their own contractor who put in practice, FSA will pay 75% of the rates established by the Indiana State Technical Committee and the FSA State Committee.

Un-Approved Species – Shannon Zezula

- See the attached presentation.
- Shannon reviewed the current and proposed updates to the Indiana NRCS/FSA Unapproved Species list.
- Some concerns with including some of the proposed species were mentioned, so Shannon will follow up with our partners to obtain final input.

CRP Cost-Share Rates – Jason Kishton

- Cost-Share Rates are based off NRCS national payment schedule data.
- Leaving cost-share rates the same, the only proposed change is to increase the seed cost rate for native warm season grasses on CP21 (filter-strips).

Easements – Beth Clarizia

- 900 closed easements in the state.
- Signup deadline is February 3, 2021.