

**Minnesota State Technical Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**February 23, 2017**  
**Waite Park Field Office,**  
**110 2nd Street S, Suite 128**  
**Waite Park, MN**  
**9:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.**

Attendees:

Ryan Galbreath, NRCS	Angela Hanson, FSA
Sheldon Myerchin, USFWS	Nick Vira, NRCS
Sabin Adams, MN Wildlife Society	Amanda Deans, NRCS
Sarah Steinhilber, FSA	Greg Johnson, MPCA
Shannon Carpenter, NRCS	Joe Smenteu, MSGA
Carol Loopstra, ETV, NRCS	Jim Kukowski, MN Soybean Growers
Tanner Bruse, Pheasants Forever	Megan Moudry, Upper Sioux Community
Julie MacSwain, NRCS	Linda Meschke, Rural Advantage
Jim Axell, NRCS	Fawad Shah, MCIA
Les Everett, U of MN	Nathan Hylla, Stearns SWCD
Gary Watson, NRCS	Kristin Brennan, NRCS
Jennifer Sweeney, NRCS	Rhonda Osterman, NRCS
Jason Selvog, Stearns SWCD	Steve Hockett, Great River Greening
Rob Sip, MDA	Paige Guetter, NRCS
Tim Hepola, Shakopee Dakota Sioux Tribe	Richard Warner, Green Lands Blue Waters
Carissa Spencer, NRCS	Kevin Roth, Pheasants Forever
John Beck, NRCS	Steven Cole, NRCS
Lanette Dietrich, NRCS	Jeff Hastings, Trout Unlimited

**Opening Remarks: Ryan Galbreath**

- Welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

**Watershed Subcommittee Update – Greg Johnson, MPCA**

The watershed subcommittee of the State Technical Committee has reconvened with the purpose of collaborating on current and potential watershed initiative projects in Minnesota. There was good discussion and energy towards this purpose in the first two meetings. The primary role and responsibility of the watershed subcommittee is to prioritize and recommend watersheds for funding to the State Technical Committee and NRCS State Conservationist. In addition, subcommittee participants noted the need and opportunity to coordinate with partners' watershed work external to NRCS.

**Decision Point:** Send minutes of subcommittee out to all MSTC members. Contact Leann Buck to ask if she could forward them to the Watershed Districts.

**Soil Health Update – Kristin Brennan, NRCS**

NRCS has an on-going campaign to focus attention on “soil health by educating customers and the public about the positive impact healthy soils can have on productivity and conservation” (NRCS, 2012). As part of this effort, MN Resource Soil Scientists (RSS's), area technical staff, and field office staff who participated in the 2016 NEDC Soil Health Sustainability course, will act as train-the-trainers to provide soil health training to Minnesota NRCS personnel during the summer of 2017.

### **Client Gateway – Ryan Galbreath, NRCS**

Conservation Client Gateway is a secure web portal that lets you work with NRCS online. Landowners and land managers, whether operating as individuals or authorized representatives of business entities, can track their payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance, and electronically sign documents. Conservation Client Gateway provides users the flexibility to determine when they want to engage with NRCS online and when they prefer in-person conservation planning assistance.

### **EAP Programs Update – Lanette Dietrich, NRCS**

Lanette updated the committee on easement program activities for 2017. Presently, Minnesota has 20 applications that were considered and covered 2,507.02 acres. There were about 480 acres determined ineligible which would be scenarios where we can't complete wetland restoration where wetland restoration is required. At this time, there are six applications being looked at covering 714.4 acres. MN was allocated \$4.5 million in easements. There were no Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) applications, so we are turning \$553,000 back for that program. Based on the 714.4 acres contingent on acceptance, those would use \$2.94 million.

*Update on backlog of easements to close.* Previously there were over 200 easements to close and that has been brought down to four. The workload now consists of restoration on current easements.

### **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – Lanette Dietrich, NRCS**

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) encourages partners to join in efforts with producers to increase the restoration and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife and related natural resources on regional or watershed scales.

Through the program, NRCS and its partners help producers install and maintain conservation activities in selected project areas. Partners leverage RCPP funding in project areas and report on the benefits achieved.

The points of contact for this program are Lanette Dietrich (651-602-7855) and Nick Vira (651-602-7931). Pre-proposals for this program are due April 21, 2017.

### **Conservation Practice Standards 590 & 595 – Carissa Spencer, NRCS**

Comments were solicited from the MSTC and Nutrient and Pest Management staff at the University of Minnesota on these standards by February 20, 2017. No additional comments were received, so Carissa reviewed the standards and distributed with updates. She also reviewed the payment schedules.

### **CRP Tree Thinning Incentive - Angela Hanson, Agricultural Program Specialist**

Notice CRP-816 - The Agricultural Act of 2014 provided authority to offer incentives to eligible CRP participants to encourage tree thinning and other practices to improve the condition of resources, promote forest management, or enhance wildlife habitat on CRP acreage.

Recognizing the need for increased thinning and management on CRP tree enrollments, Congress authorized up to \$10 million in incentives to be used to promote savannah habitat or other beneficial resource wildlife habitat practices such as tree thinning and prescribed burning. These management tools are critical for restoring and creating diverse and healthy savannah ecosystems, and will help address the habitat needs for threatened and endangered species, candidate species, northern bobwhite and other grassland and early successional birds, state species of greatest conservation need, pollinators, and others.

This authority was integrated into 7 CFR Part 1410.42 and 2-CRP, paragraph 627.

The following paragraph has been tentatively added to the incentive:

The FSA State Committee, in consultation with State Technical Committee and State fish and wildlife agency, will develop appropriate modifications to established technical practice standards regarding frequency and intensity of the technical practices being implemented for which incentives are being made available. These modifications to existing standards will be primarily associated with the featured species being managed and local site conditions. Eligible customary forestry activities include tree thinning and prescribed burning. When prescribed burning is not a suitable or a viable management option, then disking, chemical woody and herbaceous plant control, or mechanical woody plant control may be substituted but will only earn cost-share and not TTI.

**Decision Point** – Recommendation from MSTC on what would be allowed: tree thinning and prescribed burning or both – all options available.

**Decision Point** – Mowing as a Mid-contract Management – Partners please provide letters of support to address FSA on mowing (mechanical destruction) – Michelle Page.

Angela also gave an update on CRP and CREP acres.

**Conservation Practice Standard 393 Filter Strips– Shannon Carpenter**

The standard was updated at the National Office in September 2016. The subcommittee met twice in the fall to review the standard. The subcommittee discussed the standard and the handout shows update recommendations. Comments were solicited from the MSTC on this standard by February 20, 2017. Comments received were discussed and incorporated in the draft standard as distributed.

Shannon’s presentation will be sent to the MSTC after the meeting.

Handouts were sent out before the MSTC Meeting.

Meeting Adjourned at 1:15 p.m.

Next Meeting is Thursday, May 25, 2017 from 9:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. in Waite Park.