**STAC MEETING 11/05/2015**

**Meeting Notes**

**Attendance roster:**

**Nevada State Office:**

* Paulette Balliette, NRCS; Sherman Swanson, UNR/CABNR/UNCE; Susan Abele, USFWS; Bill Elder, NRCS; Jarrod Edmunds, NRCS; Clint Koble, FSA

**Elko Field Office:**

* Andy Porreca, HWCWMA/NVACD; Gary Reese, NDF; Gerry Miller, Conserv. Dist. Programs; Kory Kulinsky, NRCS; Jaime Jasmine, NRCS; Chuck Petersen, NRCS; Chase Scheffer, NRCS; Rachelle Peppers, Pheasants Forever/NRCS; Aaron Romesser, NRCS; Logan Jensen, NRCS

**Yerington Field Office:**

* Ed Biggs, NRCS; Victoria Guzman, Walker River Paiute Tribe; Paula Barstow, NRCS

**Minden Field Office:**

* Katrina Krause, NRCS; J. B. Lekumberry, CVCD; Miriam Blanchette, NRCS

**Rural Development – Carson City Office:**

* Jim Gifford, NRCS; Gerry Emm, BIA-WNA; Birgit Widegren, NDEP

**Fallon Field Office:**

* Debbie Hoffmann, NRCS; Lex Riggle, NRCS; Jackie Bogdanowicz, Lahontan & Stillwater CD

**Lovelock Field Office:**

* Christie Scilacci, NRCS

**Ely Field Office:**

* Kevin Roukey, WSCD/NSCC; Carl Clinger, BMCD; Dick Reason, farmer; Tim Rubald, CD Program; Sandy Quilici, DCNR Director’s Office; Jake Tibbitts, NVACD & Eureka CD; Joe and Nancy Sicking, SCC Paradise Sonoma; Maggie Orr, CCCD/NVACD; Agee Smith, NEECD; Eric King, CDSN; Cory Lytle, NRCS; Heather Emmons, NRCS; Gary Roeder, NRCS

**Winnemucca Field Office:**

* Andy Laca, NRCS; Leah Mori, NRCS; Georgia Turner, NRCS

**Meeting Minutes**

Gary welcomed everyone and had everyone introduce themselves around the VTCS.

Gary asked if attendees had any changes to last year’s meeting notes. Carl had a change regarding RCPP: *Carl moved that a group be formed of Working Groups and or CDs along the Humboldt River as well as other interested parties such as PCWCD, HRBWA to work on project ideas to improve the health and flow of the Humboldt River.*

It was voted on by a show of hands. The group agreed.

***Local Area Working Groups reports:***

* Agee Smith went through the minutes from his meeting.
* Dick Reason said his LAWG had a discussion about hoop houses of note. They are a bridge between traditional agricultural farmers and ranchers and more urbanized populations – those interested in hoop houses are a different group to be reached. Discussed the life span of center pivots. Do them consistently. They eat up a lot of resources in the state. Priorities of the LAWG: 1) water conservation 2) noxious weeds 3) energy conservation
* Carson Valley LAWG priorities: 1) water quality 2) water quantity 3) soil health and soil erosion 4) noxious weed control. The workgroup would like discussions about: what are grasslands of special significance?

A discussion ensued regarding plowing/residue/HEL requirements. Carl Clinger (Big Meadow CD) talked about residue and the need to level the land. The only way to resolve it is deep tilling and removing residue from the top. However, this violates HEL requirement if you’re using a moldboard plow. Carl feels it’s wrong to be in violation when deep till is needed and wants an exemption.

* Joe Sicking concurs. NRCS should help with that. Rototiller is the worst tool you can use.
* Dick Reason concurs. We need to be able to do rough tillage.
* Christie Scillacci clarifies that the plowing isn’t done every year.
* Joe clarifies it’s done once every 5 years on alfalfa.
* Carl: laser leveling is part of hayland planting. Encourages NRCS to consider a waiver for 2-3 years to use or allow laser leveling practice in rotations with HEL.
* Dick concurs.

Gary concludes LAWG reports – good job. Everyone keep focusing on their priorities.

***FA Programs***

NRCS discussed progress for 2015 with regards to programs (handouts). It was mentioned that there was a smaller general allocation for EQIP. However, that was offset by an additional $1.2 million allocation midway through the fiscal year for drought recovery – 22 additional contracts were awarded in that effort. AMA: funded 12 contracts, predominately High Tunnel applications. CSP: 3 new contracts for 2015 with 4 re-enrollments. Closed 5 FY13 easement enrollments, and added 1 new ACEP-ALE enrollment agreement for Grasslands of Special Significance.

Discussion on FY 2016 funds and allocations. NRCS working under a continuing resolution. Nevada has received initial allocations.

Jake Tibbits inquired about funding for wildlife habitat. It was stated that by regulation, a required 5% of all EQIP funds nationally are put aside for wildlife practices. It’s separate from sage grouse.

Gary stated that if funds are allocated as general funds, they can be utilized at the discretion of the State Conservationist. General funds are used for state and local fund pools. If it is a state pool, funds can be moved around to other state and local fund pools if there are funds left over. National fund pools: if we can’t use the funds, then we are required to send the funds back. Examples of these types of funds are: the National Water Quality Initiative and landscape conservation initiatives such as Sage Grouse Initiative.

NRCS reviewed the proposed FY2016 FA Fund Pools (handouts)

Gary went over fund pools.

Dick: Going to need bigger fund pool moving forward for drought recovery – bigger than in the past.

Carl: question: what are some practices done under drought recovery? Stock water I know. Is there a list for 22 contracts?

Gary: spring developments, troughs, pipelines, stock water are examples.

Dick: There is no assistance from FSA for livestock.

Gary: we work with FSA to see what program may be the best fit for the customer.

Kevin: Is there not documentation? – a listing of alfalfa growers who will need to start from scratch?

Christie: she’s done that. She started a spreadsheet looking at FSA and who’s out. And she did call folks about the drought assistance opportunities.

Gary: can the LAWGs help us to know what the needs are for when we have money that has a quick turnaround? What’s the magnitude? What do landowners need? You can use local funds if that’s a priority for the LAWG.

Kevin: LAWG needs to tell NRCS how many years to recover for planning purposes. Can’t do a knee-jerk reaction.

Gary: The sign up period right now for EQIP is through Nov. 20

Jake: RCPP – no state funded app – did it get sent back?

Gary: 5 proposals were submitted for national funding from Nevada, but none of those proposals were selected. None of the applicants applied for the funds set aside in the State Funding Allocation for RCPP. It was also the second solicitation. NHQ has indicated that the quality of proposals have improved from the first go round.

Tim: is NRCS refining the application process? It’s not good. The template is extremely cumbersome.

Gary: Thank you for the input. Since this is a national solicitation, there is little we can do as a state to improve the proposal format.

***314 – Brush management Specification – Bill Elder (Revised Specifications Handout)***

Sage grouse is the emerging programmatic opportunity that will expand for the forseeable future. PJ is lumped in. We’ve decided to split PJ treatment – why did we spin it off? It’s looking like it will expand. Diversity of treatment. Variability to how specification is applied. Payment is the same, but that isn’t always the case. We wanted to spell it out. We want to be consistent with public land management agencies. 314 – brush 314 A – exclusively PJ on rangeland sites.

***325 – High Tunnel Systems Specification (Nevada Bulletin Handout)***

3 year practice. Changed from interim practice to permanent practice. Can use boxes up to 10 inches high – new standard.

Dick: asked about wind bracing or higher snow loads

Paulette explained cap - $50k per practice contract limit –

This does not apply a payment limit. This limits the number of high tunnels per contract only. It does not keep applicants from getting another contract to construct additional high tunnels up to the statutory payment limit. High tunnel operation and maintenance are important, so the goal is to keep high tunnels operational and not overextending the labor requirements for smaller producers.

Kevin: can high tunnels be put in an urban setting? Replied that it depended on local ordinances, and some municipalities did not allow temporary structures.

Jim Gifford: In Washoe County – the city wants engineered designs

Jarrod: Manufacturers won’t provide engineered design – so think about that. And electricity.

Gary: Does the STAC concur that the $50K cap for practice 325 per contract be retained for 2016?

All: yes.

***Pumping plants greater than 50 HP (Nevada Bulletin Handout)***

The payment schedule for this practice has not changed since 2015. Practice payment rate is still the same. NRCS Nevada is proposing a $37k cap per planned and contracted pumping plant cap as the horsepower increase in cost is not necessarily linear as the payment schedule suggests. This is implemented to reduce windfall payments for pumping plants that exceed 120 HP.

Dick: why didn’t NRCS do a reverse graduation based on HP? Is there a way to make that more equitable?

Gary: do we need to make different categories (scenarios)? Is there concurrence from the STAC for using this cap for FY16 contracts?

All: yes.

***Client Gateway***

Jarrod explained clients can do business online, request assistance online and sign up online. They have to be a current/past customer. Showed 5 minute video. Entities (LLCs, trusts) will be able to use it in the near future.

Dick: voluntary training to be made available?

Christie: Yes, we should do that.

Gary: Is there a tutorial?

Jarrod: Yes

Dick: Requests hands-on training

Need E-Auth

Maggie: Any security classes necessary? No

Back to 314A:

Jake: 314 A – in sage grouse areas, treatment can only be in fall or early winter? That’s limiting. Why only fall or early winter?

Bill: Intent is to be less limiting by not putting dates.

Are we still entertaining comments? Yes – by Dec. 1.

***Programs Discussion***

RCPP – No projects were proposed for the state RCPP allocation for 2015 solicitation. Try to fit your proposals to the best funding category, State, National or CCA.

CSP: Chief looked at making more user-friendly. It was reviewed – 5 improvements made:

1. No longer have conservation management tool
	1. CMT – screening sheet
2. Ranking tool
3. Enhancements tied to practice standards
4. The program that is administered more similar to EQIP
5. Simple administration

Dick: opening it up for more flexibility? Yes

***Farm Service Agency Conservation Programs, Clint Koble***

Farm Bill implementation – disaster programs made permanent (like LFP)

$50 million in 2012, 2013, and 2014 distributed

$15 million distributed this year

Have had more emergency loan apps, more water hauling

Congress gave an extra $2 billion to help – to lend out

$13-17 million lent out in NV

CRP Grasslands Program – conservation program. Payment rates: $15/acre, 15-year contract. Applies to pasturelands, haylands, rangelands

FSA retained rental part of GRP – old program, now CRP

Talked about new Basin and Rand Organics group

Dick: on organics, he’s glad someone picked up that ball

Agee: CRP – are local offices up to speed on this?

Bill: Initial sign up round is late this month

FSA does the producer eligibility

Sherm: Have people who submitted for RCPP this year received any feedback?

Gary: Not yet.

***FY2016 Easement Programs***

NRCS proposes that for FY 2016 that Wetland Reserve Easement Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARCs) remain the same as 2015 GARC rates. Those rates were 85% of the FMV based on an appraisal. Also proposing that the caps submitted for lands greater than $5000 per acre be retained.

The proposed FY 2016 WRE ranking tool was presented. Sherm Swanson indicated that all of the criteria in question #4 doesn’t seem to fit NV

Gary: We have seasonal herbaceous and other types.

WRE Reserved Grazing Option: NRCS would like support from STAC to propose the potential enrollment for this category beginning in 2017.

Susan Abele: How does that affect the rate?

Gary: Chief sets the rate. 75% of fair market value GARC rate, basically a permanent easement paid at the same rate as a 30 year easement.

Sherm: Would prescribed grazing be appropriate to add to the list?

Gary: We’ll take a look at that.

Sherm: head cut question

Gary: we make a restoration plan. Biggest cost we have on wetland restoration is fencing.

Agee: Thinks it’s good (WRE Reserved Grazing Option)

Gary: Recorded in the deed.

Kevin: Do agencies know these are being done (NDEP, etc.)?

Gary: We just notify FSA. Entertains motion to support GARC rates and offer grazing rights option (not for FY16) and comments about ranking tool due by Dec. 1.

Joe: Makes motion for STAC concurrence

Agee: Seconds

ACEP-ALE Ranking Tool Handout

NRCS required some editing of the FY 15 ranking tool due to the regulations for ACEP being published. The regulations and the new policy manual outlined the requirements for the ranking tools.

NRCS Entity workbook (Handout): Basically a guide sheet for entities that are proposing parcels for enrollment to better plan prior to signing up. Lists all the forms and information necessary to make their applications complete. Better explains what’s required to participate in ACEP.

Grasslands of Special Significance have been interpreted primarily for grasslands that have prime or important sage grouse habitats in Nevada. We can interpret this as being not just for sage grouse but other species that rely on grasslands as well. The State Conservationist in each state makes a determination if an application is a Grasslands of Special Environmental Significance.

Jake: Important to make sure we consider lands where water is stripped (sub II)

Joe: There’s a lot of problems re: planting after water stripped.

Discussion

NRCS covered the ACEP Access Policy and the impacts of how we look at easements

Kevin: Will this allow for NRCS to have drone accessibility?

Gary: With satellite capability, maybe we’ll get there. We still need to go out on the ground, both physical and legal access to the property, since the USDA is purchasing an interest in the property.

Jake: Suggestion – there’s no language re: ROW previously. Permission from County – who has ROW? May be asking for access from an agency that doesn’t have authority. Should have something in there about roads that pre-date FLPMA.

Gary: Agrees. May need to talk to Jake more about that.

Sherm: Suggests that NRCS prioritize WREs on the basis of risk. Would suggest that NRCS incorporate “Proper Functioning Condition” principles in the WRE ranking tool.

Gary: Suggested that he work with Thad to comment on the WRE ranking tool.

Gary: Mentioned that Ray Dotson, the NRCS State Conservationist, is evaluating the possibility of conducting STAC meetings twice/year in future. The spring meeting could be more focused on the technical issues and input from the STAC.