**STATE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**November 9, 2017**

**Attendance roster:**

**STATE OFFICE ATTENDEES:**

Gary Roeder, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, Nevada State Office; Lauren Williams, Conservation Specialist, DCNR; Carl Clinger, chairman, Big Meadow Conservation District; Kevin Roukey, director, Washoe-Storey Conservation District & commissioner on Conservation Commission; Dick Reason, farmer from Tonopah; Heather Giger, Stewardship Coordinator, Nevada Division of Forestry; Katherine Mellan, DCNR Division of Water Resources; Teri Knight, district conservationist, NRCS Las Vegas Service Center; Jaime Jasmine, district conservationist, NRCS Elko Service Center; Maggie Orr, Lincoln County Conservation District, State Conservation Commission & President of Nevada Association of Conservation Districts; Agee Smith, chairman of Northeast Nevada Conservation District, chairman of Elko County Conservation Districts, State Commissioner, rancher; Jim Komar, NRCS State Soil Scientist; Andy Porreca, Coordinator for Humboldt Watershed CWMA; Susan Abele, USFWS; Bettina Scherer, Conservation Districts Program Manager, DCNR; Paulette Balliette, resource conservationist for programs, NRCS Nevada State Office; Jarrod Edmunds, Area Resource Conservationist, NRCS Nevada State Office; Patti Novak-Echenique, State Range Specialist/Acting State Resource Conservationist, NRCS Nevada State Office; Heather Emmons, Public Affairs Officer, NRCS Nevada State Office.

**CARSON CITY RURAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE ATTENDEES:**

Jim Gifford, district conservationist, NRCS Minden Service Center; Birgit Henson, NDEP

**WINNEMUCCA SERVICE CENTER:**

Leah Mori, NRCS; Sam Haigh, NRCS

**ELY SERVICE CENTER:**

Jake Tibbitts, Eureka Conservation District; Gary McCuin, Eureka Conservation District; Cory Lytle, district conservationist, Ely/Caliente Service Centers; Ed Sturges, NRCS Ely Service Center

**YERINGTON SERVICE CENTER:**

Angela Mushrush, NRCS Yerington Service Center; Ed Ryan, MVCD/SVCD; Ed Biggs, district conservationist, NRCS Yerington Service Center

**LOVELOCK SERVICE CENTER:**

Christie Scilacci, district conservationist for Lovelock Service Center/acting DC for Winnemucca

**ELKO SERVICE CENTER:**

Reggie Premo, Cooperative Extension, Duck Valley; Connie Lee, private lands, NDOW; Brian Thomas, rancher, Duck Valley

**FALLON SERVICE CENTER:**

Jose Rodriguez, NRCS; Debra Hoffmann, NRCS; Lex Riggle, NRCS; Francisco Orsini, NRCS; Gary Busboom, farmer

**CALIENTE FIELD OFFICE:**

Paula Barstow, NRCS

**Meeting Minutes**

Ray Dotson welcomed everyone:

Ray Dotson: Our goal is to try to get started here, and move through the meeting. So we can give you guys a chance to travel back and do what you need to do. And I want to start out with looking at the manual and talk about the purpose of the STAC. So in our manual it clearly says: in accordance with 7 CFR Part 16 C NRCS has established a committee in each state to assist in making recommendations relating to the implementation and technical aspects of natural resources conservation activities and programs. It is the responsibility of the STAC to provide information, analysis and recommendations to USDA for conservation priorities and criteria for natural resources conservation activities and programs, including application funding criteria; recommended practice program payment percentages; identifying emerging natural resource concerns and program needs; conservation practice standards and specifications; recommends state and national program policy based on resource data. Review activities of the local work groups to ensure state’s properties are being addressed locally. So I think it's important that we always start with the foundation of why we are here because it helps us align with a purpose, so that we can go about achieving our mission.

And next I would like to go to some updates. The first update is really going to be a request. And the request is going to be that if you're a part of a conservation district, that you guys go back and talk to the people that you represent. And make sure that they are aware of our staffing shortages and the impacts they cost us delivering programs as efficiently as we have in the past. So I just signed a form for an engineer who is resigning in Elko. Six months ago we had an engineer resign in Winnemucca and retire. Our SRC has been vacant now for two years now almost. We have several other people who told us they’re going to retire, or in the contemplating stage of retiring. We’re still under a hiring freeze and we have not hired anybody, other than two positions that allowed us to hire which is a range con in Ely, and a soil con in Fallon and a range con through our pathways program. So the rate of losing versus gaining is completely lopsided. So our folks are definitely communicating the pressure they are feeling to get things to you guys and we need to make sure you guys can help manage those issues as well with us.

**QUESTIONS BY AUDIENCE:**

Question by audience: Is the hiring freeze mandated by the state?

Ray Dotson: No, it's by the Secretary of Agriculture right now. Good question.

Kevin Roukey: You're still under continuing resolutions?

Ray Dotson: So, we are, until December 9, but Congress has passed a funding appropriation for the rest of this fiscal year.

Kevin Roukey: Does it look like it's going to be pretty flat again?

Ray Dotson: We don't know. We've been hearing a lot of different things and so the appropriations is where the rubber meets the road. So we don't know. I try to wait until I get an allocation letter and it tells me exactly what we have to work with.

Kevin Roukey: Is some of this impact from the re-organization that they're doing within USDA?

Ray Dotson: This is conjecture. So I would just say this is Ray Dotson talking now. This isn’t anything that I have written down anywhere. I think it has a lot to do with that. I think Secretary Perdue has come in and he's learning a lot. But he definitely has ideas about how he wants to change and maneuver things, and in the process of trying to do that, when you have 19 agencies under your leadership and you start pulling the levers, you know what you want to do, but there are unintended consequences with some of the things that you are dealing with. So I think that's just where we are. They he has a good vision. I know he wants to put us in a better position than what we are in right now. But it takes time to run the apparatus this be.

Ray – do we have what you read (in the meeting packets – re: the purpose of the STAC from the manual)?

No. We gave it out last year at the STAC. And I just felt like it was important. But that is a good suggestion. I think we should put it in there every single time. I would like to acknowledge Julie and Heather for putting together this packet. I think it's done very well. And there's also - what did you call it?

Heather Emmons: There is an annual report in the back pocket, as well as the new soil health planning calendar. Just something for you to take with you today.

Kevin Roukey: Is this information on the website?

Heather Emmons: The annual report will be. It's fresh off the presses.

Ray Dotson: Great recommendation. Alright, so we want to do now is just kind of go around the room, and out there at our remote locations as well, and ask everybody to state their name, what organization or conservation district you’re with, so that we make sure we're all comfortable with one another and then we're going to get started with the agenda. And we also have some good videos in here as well guys. I thought it was a good use of time to let you guys see some of the good work that's going on out there and not just let it be numbers on a sheet of paper. So you're going to get some videos today that we've made of local producers here in the state. So I hope you guys enjoy that. But Gary, we’ll start with you and we'll go around.

**VIDEO #1 SHOWN - Hunewill Family**

**LAST YEAR’S MINUTES – Comments/questions**

Heather Emmons: Last year’s minutes/notes. Take a look at them for a few minutes. So anybody out in the field or anybody in the room have any comments?

Kevin Roukey: On page 3: $440,000. Not much of it spent compared to the $900 million nationally. Are we not getting the word out to the producers? Or, are they just not coming in. What are we doing to get the figure up?

Heather Emmons: Kevin's referring to paragraph two – starts with CSP.

Ray Dotson: So I would agree that that probably was the case. What we have done since then, though, is we increased the counties and the number of producers who participated in the program. We took up all the resources they gave the state and we're asking for more. So we used what they gave us and we were looking for opportunities to use it more, so we increased the number of applications across the state significantly over the past few years. We did not send back funds in that program from last year to this year.

Kevin Roukey: On that same page, 2 paragraphs down, talked about the 20 staff that were trained for soil health experts. Is there a listing of those available - who to contact?

Ray Dotson: Those are all the field staff in the state. So what we did was, is we held an NEDC-level training here and brought them in, and everyone in the state got trained on soil health. And we did establish a cadre. Jim Komar is the lead of the cadre. We had several district conservationists involved in it as well.

Kevin Roukey: The paragraph beginning: “In January 2016. . . talked about Native American producers (page 3).”

Ray Dotson: So that’s FSA’s program. And I would have to defer to them.

Kevin Roukey: I’m with Washoe-Storey and I don’t have any of these listings of this stuff available and I'm not aware of where to find this information. I have been asking, and Jim (Gifford) has been helpful trying to find out how many farms and ranches do we have in our district. I found some old notes that I took, way back when, that we have like 390 ranches in Washoe-Storey Conservation District. Where are they and who are they? I haven't been able to get list, because if we don't know who our clients are or who to partner with, how do we send them the information that we have. We talk about developing a brochure, and that is great. Who do we send it to? I don’t know. So trying to give that information readily available. I've been on the board for a long time as a supervisor and a consultant, and for a couple of years as director, and I'm just not getting. . . I don't feel that I'm getting the word out.

Jarrod Edmunds: I can tell you what I did one time. I wanted to do a mailing, and I know some people but not everybody. I went to the assessor’s office and they can look it up by land type, how they’re taxed, etc. and you can develop a mailing list that way. I believe that’s public knowledge. You can get that information from the assessor's office by land type, residentially.

Ray Dotson: There are other ideas that I would throw out there to chew on: as the representative of the farmers in your district, would be to utilize the systems that are already out there. So cattlemen's maybe has a list, and SRM might have a list of producers that are out there, and the other thing I always try to do is get to people who are the most vocal and show up to a lot of different things, and ask them who do I need to be reaching out to. Your list will grow so fast you will run out of ink trying to write it down.

Jarrod Edmunds: And I got lists from farmers markets.

Patti Novak: And for the number of farms, you can use the Ag Statistics Service. They have a website, and they used to maintain a Nevada office here. They put out an annual report every year on ag production.

Kevin Roukey: And same page – with regards to the organic growers. We’ve had a couple of producers who’ve tried to install an NRCS approved high tunnel and they don’t meet the local ordinances. Can NRCS or FSA reach out and get an agriculture variance, so that local people that just want to do organic tomatoes year-around can do something. I know that the farm to fork movement is really out there because people have come in and asked about it. When they got to the county level, it was just . . . they can’t spend that much money to build something like that. So is there something that, from a legislative standpoint, that we can be going to county meetings for variances of some kind for small ag users.

Jaime Jasmine: The same thing in Elko County. Some of our producers from Star Valley Conservation District actually stood up and started educating the county and they actually got the high tunnels at least waived so it doesn't require a permit. I don't know if that's what they're requiring in your county is a stamped design permit. So they actually worked and they worked for about a year and they actually got the high tunnels made. So we’re actually putting up one right now. So that was a big help and that was done by the Conservation District.

Kevin Roukey: The whole permitting process was waived?

Jaime Jasmine: You do not need a permit in Elko County anymore. In our in our housing associations they require a permit, but engineering wise you just have to pay their fee.

Dick Reason: Does that include in the towns?

Jaime Jasmine: I believe so. Yes. I don't think Elko requires anything and I know Wells doesn’t. But the county doesn’t require anything.

Jarrod Edmunds: It's a problem down in Vegas, too. You have county as one thing, and then you have the separate cities, and then you have neighborhood associations and they're requiring permits if it’s over 120 feet. Then they want an engineer design and a lot of these manufacturers will not provide you with them. So we had somebody that had to hire somebody for an as-built design. And then they wanted another permit to get electricity to it. So it's really depending on where it's at. So maybe the local conservation districts might be able to help facilitate that with the local units of government. It's a tough one. We see some towns like the city of Cincinnati put high tunnels all over the place. So some cities are real liberal with it.

Kevin Roukey: What I'm finding is that we have such a rural-urban interface now. In some of these towns, some of these ranchers have 10-acre parcels and they’re wanting to do something like that, but they're still in the city limits.

Jarrod Edmunds: We have put some high tunnels in Minden. We have them in Washoe County here, in people's backyards.

Ray Dotson: I think for the sake of moving through agenda, there is a role the districts stand in the gap for. From NRCS’ perspective, the policies, the rules for funding have been put there with the understanding we have to follow, state, federal and local laws. So helping those individuals be able to access those things in as free of burden as possible I think is a great opportunity for districts.

Heather Emmons: So anybody else have any comments on the minutes?

Carl Clinger: One. In past years, different items would be labeled, if appropriate, as action items. And I didn't see any of that.

Ray Dotson: So last year the goal was to go from not having minutes, to having minutes to get to the next phase.

Heather Emmons: We’ll make sure that happens.

Kevin Roukey: Page 5. Talks about lack of agents for crop insurance in Nevada. Is that something CD staffs could be trained to help with?

Ray Dotson: I think that’s a good question worth asking and I would refer directly back to Richard because that's exactly what we're looking for- was to just educate the districts and everybody else. That is an issue out there, with access to insurance. And I think that's the most important thing when it comes down to operating a farm is having that safety net there to make sure that you can make it through those tough times.

Carl Clinger: As far as crop insurance, there are agents in other states that are licensed in Nevada. I have a crop insurance guy from Colorado and he comes up here to chat with me. So that's another alternative.

Jan Kolvet: And there are agents here in Nevada and any crops that are not insurable, FSA does have a program for, too – the non-insurable crop disaster assistance program. We do have a few agents here in Nevada. I know there's at least one in Lovelock that we deal with on a regular basis, that FSA deals with.

Ray Dotson: Kevin, earlier you were talking about something that Clint spoke on last year, and now Jan’s here, the FSA state executive director. So I think we can try to address what your thoughts were.

Kevin Roukey: I was talking about how I don’t know how many tribal producers we have here in Washoe County. At Pyramid Lake. I’ve asked that and haven’t gotten an answer.

Jan Kolvet: And I don't know if I can give you an answer either. Yeah we can talk. I'm sorry.

Katherine Mellan: We're having issues right now with abandoned wells on federal land and some wells that need to be deepened on private land, and so we were wondering if there is a potential grant that would be available under the farm bill to fund either the private party to deepen the well if the well goes dry, or for the state to use to hire a contractor to plug the wells. The state doesn’t have funds, but we were wondering if the federal government does.

Ray Dotson: Very good question. We do have a well decommissioning practice but all our programs go through a producer so that producer or rancher would have to be the one coming in to access that. We do not have a mechanism to give those funds straight to the state for you to use them for that outcome.

Kevin Roukey: Could that be filtered through the conservation districts? Could the money come to the CD and the CD partners with the state?

Ray Dotson: I don't know the answer to that one. My intuition says no, but I think we could look at that a little bit closer. But taking the money and passing it to the state, would be passing it to someone who would not naturally be eligible for our programs and therefore that would ruin that opportunity.

Katherine Mellan: So there was a case we had where a farmer couldn’t afford to plug wells. So in the future, could we refer them to you?

Ray Dotson: Yes. Always refer them to us, and if we can’t help them, we will hopefully try to point them in the right direction. To the local field office.

Kevin Roukey: So probably thinking way outside of the box here. If we got a map that shows where all of these sites are. And a conservation district came in and said here's where all the abandoned wells were. Could you set something up programmatically again to run through the conservation district so that the state could come to the conservation district? At some point we could come to NRCS and say here are the ones we have. Here’s all the producers that are there. And again could we be the repository of funds, or would they have to go directly to NRCS?

Ray Dotson: They would traditionally have to go through NRCS. So what a conservation district could do is sit down and look at the priorities which is a fundamental goal of the STAC and through the local work group say, you know what, the resource concern we want to focus on is decommissioning wells, and you can write a local question that would be in, with points towards that and make it a higher priority, and then it could go that route.

Kevin Roukey: But the contract would have to be with the individual?

Ray Dotson: Yes.

Gary Roeder: But the district could be enrolled on the implementation, so finding a contractor and getting the materials and all of that could be the district’s role in facilitating and making this an easier process. I don't think we’ve done any of this in the last five years since I've been here.

Kevin Roukey: One of the things that I've been hearing a lot of is that ranchers are pretty busy folks and when they have to try and take the time out to fill out the applications that are necessary. What I'm thinking is that the CDs could I guess get a little bit more assistance or facilitation from NRCS. Learn how to fill out the forms to make sure that they're kind of vetted before they go in. Because some of the things I heard is that I filled out the form three times and got it back three times. Maybe that, again, could be part of our facilitation as the CD is to help them through the permit process and again through the contract.

Ray Dotson: There’s a role there, but when you say it that was it leaves out some things that could have happened. They could’ve applied three different times and not gotten into the program three different times as well. So that’s an evolutionary step we have to go through. So we will have to look at those a little more specifically and look at those specific instances and talk about avenues for assistance and see if it is appropriate.

Kevin Roukey: Most of the CDs are code joined with the NRCS office. And so you have better access to staff. A lot of the ranchers are out in the middle of nowhere. And it's a long ride for a rancher to come in and that was, I guess, an overriding issue that I heard.

Dick Reason: OK. I had one thing that this is out of the box on this subject and that is that possibly Division of Water Resources needs to look at what they're requiring us to do to decommission a well. It's a very extreme process and it's very expensive. And so just off the cuff some of your producers may look at convincing the Division of Water Resources that they need some of these wells for monitoring purposes and that you get out of the property, but the expense is tremendous.

Ray Dotson: So I don't want to stop the conversation but I do if we're going to get out of here. And I don't want to run us out of here either. But I would like to say this before we moved forward. Gary Roeder has been talking, ever since I've been here, about the need to have more than once STAC committee meeting a year. And the policy is very clear about using subcommittees and things of this nature. Everything you guys are bringing up could be worked on in a subcommittee and you could be coming forward with recommendations for us to act on one instead of hearing here and trying to problem solve it all here. And so I think that's something that we really need to talk about - the opportunities associated with it that can help us really direct and be ready to attack, instead of hearing it now. We're in the process of rolling out funds for this year. And we're geared up to do that. So we'll talk about that at the end, but let's move forward.

Carl Clinger: Before you move forward, since you’re on the subject of more than one STAC: last year you mentioned there were going to be some town hall meetings.

Ray Dotson: Correct.

Carl Clinger: Did I miss the announcement of them?

Ray Dotson: No you did not. So we talked about it at the time when I talked to Maggie, it was: I don't know that we're going to be able to pull it off right now. We're all very busy. And so I basically said we're going to back down and not move forward at this time.

**FSA UPDATE**

Jan Kolvet: OK, for this year for ECP we've received 72 applications, 19 of which have been approved and that’s statewide. And we requested and received $2.7 million and that's for both fires and floods. So some of the applications have not been approved because they're going through the SHPO, the environmental and all that. The majority of the applications are on this side of the state. There are a few in Humboldt County, and a few fire ones in Elko County, but the majority of those applications are on the western side of the state due to flooding in February.

Quest. from audience: Are those strictly for crop?

Jan Kolvet: No, not strictly. No, most of them were associated with crop land where head gates or the whole fields have been washed out. Those types of things.

Kevin Roukey: I'm thinking more ditch and creek maintenance.

Jan Kolvet: ECP doesn’t cover maintenance so this is an emergency program.

Kevin Roukey: So it’s repairs.

Jan Kolvet: Yes, it’s ditch repairs that have been washed out.

Kevin Roukey: Stream bank restoration?

Jan Kolvet: Yeah, and I can’t tell you how many of these are for that or for others, like flooding and debris removal and that sort of thing. There are a lot of them that are related to the ditches, and irrigation systems, and there are even some in the Carson River which is also another reason why some of these haven't been approved because there's also a permitting process and all that and they have to go through the state water people. There's a little bit of everything in there.

Carl Clinger: In the minutes: I made some comments last year after Clint spoke. There is a misconception in your office on raw milk. We can talk offline if you’d like.

Jan Kolvet: Sure.

Carl Clinger: Because people have been told they can get loans to develop a dairy to sell raw milk.

Jan Kolvet: Yeah I don't know. I don't know anything about that. I wasn’t here last year when this meeting was held so I can't speak on that. I don't know that anybody has even applied for that.

Carl Clinger: Several people have.

Jan Kolvet: Really?

Carl Clinger: Yes, and they were told they could. I don't know where it went from there.

Jan Kolvet: I will check with my loan staff because I even knew that. I’m not associated with dairies. My background is within an area within ranching, but I even knew that. Ok, I will check on that.

Ray Dotson: All right. So let's move forward, and I would like to yield the floor over to Jake Tibbitts because the CD in Elko and Eureka Counties have come together and have really done an excellent job in my opinion. Putting forth what their priorities are, and how they want us to consider directing programs. And we're going to do everything in our power to try to see if we can make those things happen the way they are suggesting that they happen. So Jake, we'll start off with you.

**LWG PRIORITY RESOURCE CONCERNS**

Jake Tibbitts: So the Eureka-Elko work group covering all of Elko County and Eureka County, all the CDs within that area, and stakeholders. We met. There is a recommendation form, or I guess, sheet before. And specifically we're asking for some local questions to address the priority resource concerns within our local workgroup area. And then another thing we're looking to address that’s kind of in addition to the resource concerns is to empower applicants/producers that are searching for program funds or for projects to work with the local conservation districts in the development of those projects and proposals. And so there is a specific question related to that as well. I’ll just step through the recommendations.

Ray Dotson: Yes, if you would. I wish we had a copy so we can see, that everybody see, too. And I think we will try to get a copy.

Jake Tibbitts: And I just know, too, that through my involvement with the Nevada Association of CDs over the last few years, I know that these concerns, or the desire of the Conservation Districts to want to have more involvement in what's going on within their boundaries, it's kind of a common theme throughout the states, so I don’t think it's just specific to Eureka and Elko conservation districts. One of the things is the proposal for a local question where the landowner or the applicant themselves is incentivized to work with the Conservation District to vet those proposals/projects and maybe come together jointly and having the backing of the Conservation District so that we suggested a question be added to the local questions for Elko and your Eureka-the local ranking questions. And so the question which we propose was the NRCS conservation plan that supports the schedule of operations developed in coordination with the local conservation district. And then we suggested that the total-no matter how the points work out- is 10 percent of the total point for the local questions be tied to this. And so this will put it on producers, you know, incentivize them to get a few more points if they want to work with the local CD in coordinating that plan and schedule of operations, but if they choose not to do that, it's not a major percentage of the points and they could still choose not to do that. I did talk to Ray a bit about it, and I tend to agree with him that this leaves a lot of open endedness, this question, if it goes forward as we've suggested because sometimes the CD can't even get a quorum together or because of deadlines or whatever they may not be able to get this done. And I don't think a producer should have to suffer if the CD simply chooses not to meet or chooses not to get together to review a conservation plan or schedule of operations. If they just can't get it done, then the producer should not be limited because of that. So perhaps there could be language, every effort practical or something like that. I don't know exactly how that will come out. As long as the producer did their due diligence to try to work with the CD in developing it, they should get those points. And then the other points to this is we did talk about that at the local work group, there has to be documentation that this was done so that would have to fall in the CD to provide minutes or some kind of form or documentation to the producer, so it can go on file and go forward with the application. And it does document that the CD – this doesn’t say they have to approve it- just that they were coordinated with the CD. So, Ray you wanted to address point by point, or should I keep stepping through the other things.

Ray Dotson: I think you can step through the other things.

Jake Tibbitts: Ok. Then we spent time looking at our specific resource concerns within the local work group and we identified water conservation is the number one concern. And water. Water quantity is a concern both in Elko and Eureka counties. So Elko County, countywide, the Humboldt River issues that are cropping up in the upper basin, which is Elko-Eureka County portions, a significant portion of the upper Humboldt Basin from water quantities is an issue in the lower basin. I know Carl's there from the lower basin. I think he’d probably concur with that. And so there is a lot of concern about water quantity in the Humboldt River basins. And then you're probably all aware Diamond Valley is the only critical management area designated by the state, as here in the state of Nevada. And we're currently really pushing forward on some management process as there is the number one concern that we identify.

So with that being the number one concern, the group wanted to add a question to the local work group questions for some ranking, and that question would be: **will the participant implement irrigation water management, which is practice 449?** And so with water quantity being the number one priority and a resource concern, we thought there should be a ranking question that incentivizes producers to implement irrigation water management-a commitment.

Then moving on, noxious and invasive weeds were listed as a high priority resource concern. The same thing: so the recommendation is that there are already questions that address this. The suggestion of the group was to add local questions 1 through 3: from the non-irrigated fund pool to the irrigated fund pool, with some possible minor re-wording. And then we spent some time looking at all of the resource concerns and wanting to identify our top four. And as I already mentioned water quantity came out as the number one concern. The second resource concern we identified as a priority was degraded plant community, excessive plant pest pressure. A lot of this is related to the noxious weed component plus just you know some of our range lands and conditions.

The third priority concern was soil health and structure, which of course is the base to a lot of the higher resource concerns.

And then wildlife habitat was the fourth resource concern, and that was not just related to the sage grouse. The sage grouse was a big component of that with all of the pressure that producers are receiving because of the fire on sage grouse habitat right now.

So then we actually stepped through the questions and identified the various points and rankings and that's what you can see in all the recommendations.

Ray Dotson: So thank you, Jake. You know I just want to say that what they've done is an excellent job of how this process should really work. Their priorities are: 1) IWM; 2) pest management; and it’s tied back to the local views of what will be most beneficial with the use of funds. And they developed questions and gave us suggestions for how the flow should go and we get this plugged into the system and automatically use it. There's the logistics we’ve still got to work out on the mechanics of the administration because as soon as you say districts are going to look at the application, there is an administrative function to ensure that happens. We have to have something in the file that gives that producer the right to have their box checked to get those points and the only way we can get that is through the district. And so we're going to work that out and try to figure that out to make sure we can do this. But this is a clear-cut example of being able to service the needs at the local level. Textbook example.

Maggie Orr: Could there just be a form that says “this project was reviewed by this CD,” and all the CD supervisors present that night at the meeting could sign it?

Ray Dotson: I think there is a lot of ways to do it. Districts could also have a quorum and say they empower one person to look at it and be that person to send e-mail to the district conservationist and say by this date, here are the names who qualify to get that question answered as yes.

Carl Clinger: Several years back, the working group Gary mentioned a form that was already being signed by the producer and suggested at that time that an extra box be put on there to authorize for the producer to authorize the conservation district sees the conservation plan. And that never came to fruition.

Ray Dotson: So I would need to know a little bit more. I think we’d need to talk offline to understand. If I said something right now, it wouldn’t hold a lot of weight.

Jake: Carl, that issue came up, but the concern that we had with that the plan’s already developed and so when the producer goes to sign it, they check the box to share with the CD and we wanted to actually have the questions written so that the plan is developed in coordination with the CD. So we wanted the ability to work with producers to help develop the plan before they sign it and put it in the NRCS application so that's why we wanted the question to be, was it developed in coordination with the plan. Not that it was developed and then provided to the CD to review.

Carl: Good work. Thank you.

Dick Reason: Jake, this is Dick Reason. One thing to think about, and I haven't had time to think about all the goods and the bads, but possibly that might should come through in cooperation with a working group or the local working groups, rather than putting the Conservation District at a point that they may be at odds with some producers. Our conservation districts very much make up part of working groups. So we would still have all of the input but when a conservation district starts giving one person points and another person not, it can create a certain amount of problems for our districts as far as working with our producers.

Jake: So I think that's a good point and as I mentioned this is not the call for approval of a project. If they’re at odds, it’s still the producer approach the CD and develop a plan. The question isn't whether the CD approves a plan. So if a CD still doesn't approve of it, it doesn't mean that they won't get their points as long as they took it to the CD and tried to develop it. We saw that issue as well. We wanted to avoid those conflicts too, and I’ll point out, this is specific to Elko County-Eureka County local working groups. If other local working groups or districts want to do this, that’s a discussion for the staff. We were looking just for our local working group. If other groups don’t want to impose this on themselves, it’s their ability to do that.

Ray Dotson: So we have national, state and local questions. State are set here, and the STAC committee should be helping recommend those questions. Local questions are dealt with at the local area. At the local area, you can direct what kind of conservation practices should be first, what resource concerns should be first priority, and what questions you think and what points should associate with that to direct those funds. So that’s where that locally-led conservation comes in. I think it's important for everybody to know as well: the state gets about six million dollars a year through farm bill programs to assist producers. Local work groups help develop those questions and assess the prioritization. But for example with Eureka County, if everybody who signs up for the program, say “I don't want to take my plan over to the conservation district.” We still are going to rank out that question as a “no” and they're going to rank out where they rank out and we're still going to spend those funds. So you guys help guide the program. But still the goal is to get the funds out on the ground to assist ranchers and farmers. So I think that's an important distinction to just be cognizant of.

Agee Smith: And we really did discuss this. We really just don’t want to be in the position of saying yeah or nay. But we do think that it would be good for the Conservation District to know what's going on. And this is one of the ways that we can go. And so it is saying that they brought it to us. So it gives them an extra point to come and do that. So the other thing we were sort of trying in Elko County is we created this Elko County Association of Conservation Districts and we were energizing it. We meet pretty often during the off months but it seems like it's a natural fit to go with. The local area working group has sort of not really been very functional so we've sort of taken this association and using that meeting slot and people to go into the local area and expanding that. I mean when it's time to do the local area working group meeting. So it's just the first start. I think it's going to be a good format.

Ray Dotson: Before we move on, I just feel compelled to say this. I want to say this with the utmost respect, so I don't want anyone to get offended about what I'm saying because what I'm saying is real, is true is hard. But I have a job to do. You guys are locally elected representatives and you’re leaders and so it requires you to make tough decisions and I make decisions all the time that I personally would not make if it was my own power and will to do, but the job requires me to do that. And so when there's a lot of need and a small amount of resources, lines have to get drawn so you can target those funds to get things done. Everybody doesn't always get in. And it's a tough thing. It's hard. But we have to do it as leaders. And so I think you all agree with that. The hard part is doing it and deal with the feelings that come along with that you know. So I just applaud Eureka and everybody else for standing in the gap, and making some of those tough calls because that's what leadership is about.

Reggie Premo: I just want to mention Duck Valley Conservation District – I’ve been pushing them to reconvene their local work group. They did like two years ago. But didn't follow up on any more meetings. If we could get some assistance. I know Elko-Eureka has their work group going very well and I’m thinking we’re needing a little shove in that direction as we do have resource concerns the same as Elko-Eureka, we just cover it in a different order. So we just we just need help getting started again and getting involved.

Ray Dotson: OK. We get can assist as much as possible. All right so let's go next.

Jim Gifford: Just real quickly. Washoe-Storey LWG did have a meeting on Nov. 1. It was very well attended. I’d like to thank Bettina and everyone there in the room for attending. We had a lot of really good input. We talked about our priority resource concerns as well. Our first one was noxious weeds. The group decided to add: **noxious** and invasive weeds. We left that as number one. The group suggested adding fuels treatment and fire rehab as our second resource concern priority. That was never on the list before, but you can all understand why it hit the list now. And then we stuck with water quality as number 3. Water quantity or irrigation efficiency after that. Streambank erosion, then wildlife habitat. And then the group also added soil health and soil erosion to our priority natural resource concerns, so we have a total of seven now. And of course the fire rehab or wildfire touches on several of those other resource concerns as well, such as invasives and loss of wildlife habitat, soil erosion. We followed suit like Elko and Eureka by backing up those priority resource concerns by adding/changing the questions for the local questions on our EQIP ranking. We’ll be adding questions like “will the project address fuels reduction to address fire rehabilitation.” We added a wildlife question, worded something like will the project improve wildlife habitat by installing hedgerows or plantings. Does it create a corridor? So it was very good meeting and I'll be getting all of these questions into the minutes and getting the minutes up to the attendees of that meeting for their input and they can finalize those and we'll be sending them into the state office for approval.

Heather Emmons: Kevin, did you have anything to add?

Kevin Roukey: Well one of the things when we talk about stream bank restoration and rehabilitation: one of the critical areas in our conservation district is Steamboat Creek. It’s a bone of contention all up and down the stream. But it is such a, I'll say diverse, but that's not in a good way, because there's so many different types of reaches in such a small stream. And as you get downstream it gets worse. And a geomorphology study was done in ‘89. And the stream has morphed in the last 30 years because of development. When that report was done it was still ag land and now it's ag land but it’s grown houses. And I think it needs to be reassessed. And that's one of the things that I think we want to stress in our review of projects that go through the city and the county in the area that we review is: what are we doing to implement restoration and stabilization of that creek. We do a lot of work on the upstream end of the 97 floods but funding went up and the downstream end is now being manipulated further because of the southeast connector project. Doing a restoration on the creeks to stabilize it is daunting and I don't know if there's any funding that might be available through the NRCS for an urban stream restoration effort. I've been hitting EPA. And the state.

Ray Dotson: I think there could be some possibility but I think we need to talk offline. I think we all clearly acknowledge that our programs are designed to go to people who are in the ag industry who are eligible, and so when you start talking about that, the first thing that comes to mind is ownership. The other programs that can come in and assist is EWP but that comes in after bad things have happened so I think you guys want to be ahead of that.

Kevin Roukey: Well that's where most of that was done on the upstream end. Once we got down below the narrows, land issues became a concern. But there are still ag users off the stream system, but once you get upstream it’s now pretty much all in RTC’s control.

Reggie Premo: I don’t know if this is something NRCS can address, but one resource concern we have here is quagga mussels since Wildhorse Reservoir supplies all the water to Duck Valley. We always have that fear that somebody is going to land the boat in water infested since there is no boat washing check station out there. We were looking for ways how to address this issue. And it is a big concern.

Gary Roeder: I think that's a state reservoir, is that correct?

Reggie Premo: Yes.

Gary Roeder: I think you need to start with the state, the state agency that administers that and maybe look at the threats and maybe work in partnership with a number of different partners that may be able to develop some sort of strategy or a plan or something like that for that. But I think they do have the responsibility for carrying through those protection efforts. I don't mean to shove you off like that, but you know that's kind of where the rubber meets the road.

Connie Lee: I’ll work with Reggie to get that addressed.

Gary Roeder: But that is a really good concern to be bringing up at the local work group because NRCS is not the only game in town when it comes to resolving resource problems.

Lex Riggle: I’ll speak on behalf of the local work group committee for the Lahontan Conservation District. Forgive me if their present somewhere and they are waiting for their turn. Let me just share with you that the Lahontan Conservation District covers the large irrigation project in the Churchill basin and they work very close with the Truckee Carson Irrigation District. Much of the primary concern for the local work group and the conservation district remains to be water quantity and after well at least four years of lower than low allocations and then to be followed up this year with allocations that greatly exceed their 100 percent of water rights. They're all over the board in terms of being able to address broad needs and I think part of what we're also seeing is, what really focused the discussion this year, was groundwater issues. We've got fields that have tremendous variability in soil types within the same field and has it has traditionally caused some hardships in developing systems that would enable uniform watering throughout the field. So much of what this discussion will continue outside the meeting today. We are going to be looking at ground water conditions and talk about tools that will help us better recognize changes in slope- steepness of slope in the fields, irrigation times, because what we're finding is there are changes made in these fields that aren't being answered by ranking tools. They are beneficial. We're looking at greatly reducing said times so we are delivering less water on the field. And yet the results of our tools are not showing those improvements, so we reduce time, we save water for later season irrigations. But the exciting thing is that is that I think there's rejuvenated interest in reaching out and fleshing out a local work group that will bring strength to the recognition of the different resource concerns that will benefit the conservation district in many ways. But primarily they will have a better focus on what the needs are in that community. So I look forward to this upcoming year in terms of how we can capture community needs so we can modify our local questions on the ranking tool. We did discuss that in detail. That opportunity at the local work group meetings.

Maggie Orr: So, I want to make sure I’m understanding the process. So if any one of the local work groups had brought a question up that was to be a state question, then right here, right now, we would talk about that? Or because they were left at the local level, we don’t have a discussion at that point?

Ray Dotson: So the local work group should be presenting what is important to them for the STAC to look at. The STAC, which should have a membership in it, is very clear on that, which is in our agreement, for you guys to help make recommendations. So the STAC should be looking at the local work groups, what their questions and what their priority resource concerns are, and then make recommendations for the state questions.

Maggie Orr: So, we have some representatives here, and I’m really thrilled to see all the partners here today. So that's not something that we are going to do here today. So is that in the future when we complete this agreement?

Ray Dotson: Once we get the STAC set up, we're going to let them know what their charges and roles are. Hopefully we'll have more local work groups presenting the questions forward and not our district conservationist as well. So we know what those things are, and then the meeting should be more than just a three hour meeting. It should be more of a day meeting, or we should use subcommittees to say hey, look at these work groups because they’re in a similar region. What are the commonalities there? Here are the things that we think we should be looking at to help direct that.

Maggie Orr: And then when would the final resolution of anything happen? At this meeting?

Ray Dotson: Yes, at the STAC meeting. And that needs to happen well before we roll out our programs as well too. So those questions are effectively captured and reflected.

Maggie Orr: So, when do you think-August, September, when do you think? When is that schedule?

Ray Dotson: We want to do it well before we start our program rollout. So I think what we need to do is just get through that agreement. Have you guys help us recommend people, recruit people, get them on a committee, let them know what their charge is, get more local work groups, meeting, set up the local questions, see what their issues are, decide if we need to set up subcommittee, see if we need to meet twice a year to make sure we’re set up to move forward, because I think we can all acknowledge that it's very hard to direct $6 million dollars in one meeting a year you know. So giving that pound of flesh to make sure that happens in a proper manner is where we need to be.

Kevin Roukey: So you’re looking at trying to get this geared up for this year's appropriation?

Ray Dotson: This year is already – we’re headed off already. Now we're going to be putting these local questions in there. So, the next thing that we wanted to talk about was Eastern Sierra Land Trust RCPP that was awarded last year nationally. It was $8 million, Gary?

Gary Roeder: Yes it was.

Ray Dotson: It’s $8 million dollars and we have to begin trying to use those funds right now. The primary function of that RCPP is to do one of the most important strategic goals of the Sage Grouse Initiative which is try to lock up land long term from being developed or changed changes because the species needs good ground to survive and because we are under this restraint from getting any of these higher positions, the easiest way to deal with this is the field office, which has a pretty big program workload already, was to hire a term position with some technical skills and abilities, to assist at the local level with trying to implement that RCPP. And so were going to be trying to advertise that here pretty soon. And it's a joint effort between Nevada and California because the bi-state covers both states to try to move that forward. So we just want to make you guys aware of that.

Dick Reason: Is that for the entire state or the land designated with the sage grouse?

Ray Dotson: The bi-state.

Dick Reason: So it’s in the entire two states, not just the sage grouse designated areas.

Ray Dotson: So you have the greater, which is northern Nevada, and then you have the bi-state which is a little slither that covers California and Nevada. So it's for that area.

Susan Abele: Will they primarily be working on easement assistance?

Ray Dotson: Yes. Because an easement takes a monumental amount of work to get it through.

**VIDEO: COVER CROP VIDEO**

**UPDATED NRCS PRACTICE STANDARDS – Patti Novak-Echenique, State Rangeland Management Specialist**

Patti speaks on Updated Conservation Standards (see power point)

Explained practices versus standards. Showed on website where to find information. Explained about

the national handbook of conservation practices. Highlights:

* There are practices designed to address a resource concern or several resource concerns. Practices can actually work together as facilitating or accelerating practices. We continually update those with new science and technology and so on your hand out you'll see that some of these practices were updated with the new science and technology behind soil health. And we also have procedures and how we develop new conservation practice standards. One of the things we do is we evaluate across the country because the standards have to fit across the country. And then they go onto the federal register. The standards are typically revised every five to seven years. These notices are typically sent out once a year, we get the notice.
* Typically there are national standards and then we take them and put them in Nevada. We use a national standard. And then we refine it for Nevada for specific resource concerns in a specification. So for the national standard there's a life span for each practice. For example, brush management is 10 years. Fence is 20 years. Some of our irrigation practices are 20 years typically. So there is a lifespan for every practice. So if a producer receives federal funds and installs one of these practices, he has to maintain that practice for the lifespan of the practice. So with the fence - 20 years you want to maintain that.
* So the standard has a definition, a purpose. The minimum quality criteria that must be met when you install the practice. Other considerations, and some of those considerations if you look at the prescribed grazing standard, are actually best management practices. So every standard will have some other considerations as you're implementing and installing that practice you really need to go through these. There's also plans and specifications, so it's going to outline some of that information. But the typical specification is more detailed as we look at those. Operation and maintenance: that's part of every standard. And our references.
* A state can modify the national standard or develop their own state’s spec.
* A specification has to be equal or more rigorous than the national standard. It cannot be less rigorous.
* Brush management: Use ecological sites and the state and transition models as you are implementing this practice. So if you're going to schedule brush management, and you’re going to mow a sagebrush area, you look at your state and transition model in an ecological side description to see if that's the right practice. Or do you need other practices to facilitate that desired plant community, and that's way more detailed, but you just don't want to install a practice and make another resource concern. If you go mow an area and then it just comes back as cheatgrass, you've made another resource concern. So you have to look at all these considerations and your state and transition models that are part of the ecological site description to make the right decision on what to do out there.
* We updated the Nevada specification for brush management. And traded an additional one for pinyon juniper removal. So pinyon and juniper are trees, but they go into the brush management spec because they’re not part of our forestry practice. So we developed a new spec just for pinyon juniper removal as we look at thinning pinyon juniper woodlands. And also getting rid of the invasives on the sagebrush range land. Invaded sites. We include the lifespan, the scope of requirements, different treatment methods. Also you're monitoring that's required and the maintenance for that practice. Brush management is a 10 year practice.
* Prescribed grazing was revised in 2017. We had updated our standard in 2014, adding a lot more information on sage grouse habitat and management of livestock in sage grouse habitat. Last week, I was in Fort Worth working on a national team to develop a class just for the standard of prescribed grazing. And you don't even realize how much is involved when you're developing a class and going through every step.
* And then the fence: the national revision was 2013. We updated ours in May of 2017- the specification, just for a barbed wire fence. So we put things in tables. And so I organized all the materials into tables and then we added, we allowed waivers for railroad ties and drill stem pipe. One of the things with the pipes though is you have open ends. So, working with the wildlife biologist, now we're requiring caps on those pipes. So that small rodents and birds can’t go down into the pipes. This is for steel pipes. They’re metal caps.

Went in to eFOTG to look at standards and specs online.

**NATIONAL CONSERVATION RESOURCE PLANNING CHECKLIST – Jarrod Edmunds, Area Resource Conservationist**

Jarrod goes over Resource Concerns Checklist – included as handouts for meeting. Highlights:

* Handed out:
  + nine steps of conservation planning
  + 31 Resource Concerns fact sheets

**What is a resource concern?** A resource concern is an expected degradation of soil, water, air, plant or animal resource base to an extent that the sustainability or intended use is impaired. And we also look at energy as a resource concern.

What they added that we didn't have before was the screening questions. And so if the only screening question if you answer a true to this screening question, then it's not a resource concern. If you say false, you need to move on to an assessment level. And it tells you what tool that you need to use.

And once we've identified the resource concerns, we'll have this check list, and then we can go and look at the practices that would alleviate those resource concerns. It may be one, or a suite of practices that you would need to bring to a planning criteria. And planning criteria is outlined as just the minimum level of treatment.

We have a national planning procedures handbook (Google NRCS NPPH) that goes through the nine steps of planning. Let’s all use the same resource concern lingo.

Ray Dotson: We’ll email everyone the handbook.

Gary McCuin: In the packets sent out, emailed, with the various resource concerns and it describes them: that information package, as we’re moving forward on this resource needs assessment process that we're doing, if there was some place where we could find those packages and make it available to the CDs and interested parties, it would be really helpful. And even more helpful would be developing a Nevada-specific one with things like pinyon juniper, rather than just brush. Is it available online, and where, and what would be the appetite for doing something a little more Nevada-specific?

Heather Emmons: Shows where the handouts can be located on Nevada NRCS website.

Gary McCuin: Can we get that put somewhere (other than in events and deadlines) where it’s a little easier to find?

Jarrod Edmunds: Those handouts that I gave you on the different resource concerns, they are on the exhibits on the national planning procedure handbook. So if you type in NRCS NPPH - national planning procedures handbook – on any search engine it will come up and they are all attached in that national planning procedure handbook - all those resource concerns.

Ray Dotson: The second part was can we work on something that is Nevada-specific. That’s something can work toward in the future. I don't want to give you a timeline and then lie to you, but using resources right now to do that would not be an effective use of resources for, you know. We’ve got 45 million dollars on the books we need to get out on the ground.

Gary Roeder: What we accomplished last year – went over “Summary of Programs for FY 2017 with Comparison to FY 2016” HAND OUT and Sage Grouse Trend Data HAND OUT.

Carl Clinger: I noticed some counties more than doubled their obligations, while some were cut in half.

Gary Roeder: Sometimes that depended on how much staff we had in those offices. That’s something you should be seeing, and seeing what the trends were, and asking why? Why have we not had applications?

Ray Dotson: The best way to look at that is what the appetite of the producers that are walking through the door and what the types of resource concern needs are – it could be more expensive or less expensive.

Carl Clinger: That’s my question – what those resource concern changes were.

Gary Roeder: It could be we do contracts for as little as $2,000 for a high tunnel to a $450,000 pipeline project with producers. So if you do three or four pipeline projects, that adds up quickly, whereas if you are doing a bunch of high tunnels, it takes a long time to get to $1 million.

Carl Clinger: I guess what I’m struggling with is we see the value of the projects and the number of contracts, but we don’t know what resource concerns are being taken care of.

Ray Dotson: Great point, Carl. I think we can say that in the future.

Gary Roeder: If you look at the fund pools, it kind of helps you with that.

Carl Clinger: In most counties that's pretty understandable, but when it changes 100 percent, that’s a red flag to me. I want to see what's going on.

Christie Scillaci: I can tell you on some of this, that was special funding for climate change. So that accounted for some of the more applications in 2016 and 2017.

Ray Dotson: Carl brings up a very valid point. Knowing what the changes are from one year to the next is good information to know. We can do that.

Gary Roeder: We have talked to headquarters and they have indicated that there is going to be a strike force initiative again that is targeted towards socially disadvantaged and limited resource producers. So the Secretary plans on retaining that portion from the previous Secretary of agriculture. We also plan on having the Sage Grouse Initiative in 2018 and all the fund pools are going to be very similar to what we had in 2017. I want to make one note on here under the high title system: we're adding that to EQIP and that is because the Agricultural Management Assistance Program has not been funded with appropriations for 2018. So that's been historically around $150,000 to $175,000 that we simply typically targeted toward high tunnels in the past, working with some of the smaller producers on that effort. But we’re going to have to fund that out of EQIP if we want to continue that initiative in the future.

Carl Clinger: There’s another one here on flycatchers. What is the magnitude of that?

Gary Roeder: That's part of Lincoln and Clark Counties down there, mostly along the Virgin River. We don't get much money, much allocation for that. And it’s already a listed species, so farmers and ranchers aren’t knocking down our doors to say hey, come help me with my endangered species.

And then we’ve got all of our local work group fund pools available. So it's very similar to what we were offering last year. We haven't had a drought allocation or anything like that. The other programs that we offer that are financial assistance is our conservation stewardship program. They pretty much re-vamped CSP so it’s complimentary to EQIP. And I think now CSP is easier for landowners and farmers to participate because it’s more like EQIP with suites of practices.

We had a fair number of outreach events last year. We're also planning some outreach events at the local level here this year. Probably not as many as last year but targeted to areas where CSP might be a very good fit for a lot of producers. But those are the fund pools that are available under CSP that you can see. There’s general ag lands, non-industrial private forest, which we haven't had a whole lot of that. They also offer CSP for a landscape initiative such as sage grouse. Producers who have participated in EQIP sage grouse may be well-suited to participate. Now to add to that a little bit, we have set our batching dates for EQIP. The sign up for CSP will probably be around Thanksgiving and run through February. We just completed an EQIP sign up October 20. Currently we have 175 applications in our Protracts database from all across the state. I didn’t break it down by fund pools. But again we're still evaluating those applications right now. We're hoping to have the eligibility of the first batching period by December 1, with hopefully the ranking completed by Christmas. So some folks may be getting notification of some of the preapproval the first of the year.

With the budget: we have only received a small portion of our allocations so far. So we've been running off of our funding that's 25 percent of what is normally expected.

Ray Dotson: It’s 13.7%.

Gary Roeder: Our second batch period date is February 16. And out third batch period is April 20. A lot of the fund pools get allocated out in the first batch. We don't have AMA this year, which is a big deal for people like in Las Vegas where we get a lot of applicants for high tunnels.

Last year we evaluated where we were with the National Water Quality Initiative, and our initiative had been targeted to the four watershed areas in the Fallon area to do animal waste type systems that affect the water quality maybe as a result of animal livestock areas. Beginning in 2016, we just weren’t getting applications, and last year we had no applications, so we had to send back our whole allocation. So we did some soul searching and we think we can do better with the water quality initiative. And I do believe that some of the economics of animal waste systems are very expensive to put in. And the price of milk isn’t very good. The price of alfalfa hay is not very good. We just went through five years of drought so things are pretty tight. Commodity prices are low. So we wanted to look at what we could do different. So we requested to headquarters that we withdraw all those watersheds for targeted funding. Now if you're in animal waste and you want to come in and sign up for these programs, you still can sign up for these types of practices under the local fund pools. It doesn't change the eligibility or ability to do these sorts of things. It's just that we're not going to have a dedicated fund source for that there. And when we send back FA, we also have to send back money which pays our employees. So, use it or lose it essentially.

Carl Clinger: So do you have a number on the percentage of dairies that have taken care of their issues?

Gary Roeder: We have worked with three or four in the last four years.

Carl Clinger: Isn’t there more like 16?

Gary Roeder: Probably closer to 20.

Carl Clinger: So there's a huge need there.

Gary Roeder: There’s a huge need and I think we'll walk into this with if we can do one-there’s a significant amount of planning that goes into this dealing with livestock waste. Nutrient management, water requirements. And those guys are either adding cows, or subtracting. It’s really a moving target. So, if we don’t have something moving forward, it really hammers us. We're always ready to do something else. We have been in contact with Nevada Division of Environmental Protection to maybe find additional watersheds that can be, or have been suspected of being impacted by agriculture. Things such as animal waste or stream bank erosion because of livestock concentration, noxious weeds of course can be worthwhile any issues. Past floods, things like that. And out of that we kind of targeted Beaver Creek in Elko County. Now we have some data that shows that there is a phosphorus impairment and there’s air temperature impairments there that are affecting aquatic life. But it's like any watershed in Nevada- there’s a lot of public land in it and probably not that many operators. So the idea was we want to assess that to see if that is a place that has potential for some additional dedicated funding. We’ll go ahead and carry out the assessment of the 118,000 acre watershed in fiscal year 18 for the possibility of implementation in 2019. We hope to get that specific district involved, some other partners and state agencies- BLM needs to be involved.

Birgit Henson: I just want to chime in really quickly about the NWQI and how the state is prepared and really looking forward to coordinating, providing monitoring support and technical support with the watershed assessment. And thank you for that opportunity should it come to pass.

Gary Roeder: Thank you. We’re excited to work with NDEP and other state agencies. This is sage grouse habitat as well. So there may be some other benefits that we can assert by really looking at this area and saying what can we do. There might be some opportunity for some wet meadow type work or some stream bank work and some other things. Livestock management and prescribed grazing. The constituents we’re looking at targeting is phosphorous and water temperature.

You had some funds are really for balance you've requested those now to be allocated for being agreed. Now we don't actually feel we have the ability to just jump in there and start to say well what do we want to study. Analyze and evaluate.

This is something that the NRC has at the national level and the EPA have been working collectively to address.

**RCPP Update:** we have four active RCPPs in the state. Shows map that will be added to website and goes over projects.

**ACEP Update:** Had to change a ranking question based off of an audit we received. Question number two which is located on page 11. That question last year had to do with landowner leverage and they said that was inappropriate to use that as a ranking criteria for ACEP-ALE. I have replaced that with some geographic region that we have been working with traditionally and historically.

With giving some points to some of those areas where we already have a lot of activity moving forward that we've analyzed, that we know we need to be there. We know there is interest there. We know there might even be some potential for some match funds. And that have to do with that points awarded for sage grouse 2.0 goals targeted towards grasslands of special significance and sage grouse habitat.

Ray Dotson: Was it a specific question?

Gary Roeder: The NRCS values particular lands that may help achieve national, state, regional, ag and conservation goals and objectives for enhanced existing governmental or private conservation projects. And that's where I've included the initiative with REPI and the protection of the area around the Navy base there as being some areas that have the 2.0 goals for sage grouse or our partnership with the military. That's the only criteria I changed on that due to an audit.

I just updated the cooperating entity part in the workbook. This is what the cooperating entities would submit with an ACEP application to NRCS.

We have updated the dates on our WRP ranking criteria from last year. We haven't made any real changes to it. I'm just presenting that to where if someone wants to comment on that or they think that the criteria may be evaluated differently or something like that, Susan, you could make those recommendations or comments to us.

GARC rates: Our GARC rates for 2018. From the state technical committee, we are supposed to get concurrence on what our geographic rate caps are for our WRE or wetland reserves. We’ve has some applications. We’ve been working through eligibility issues that may range from access issues, to endangered species issues on another. These GARCs are how we compensate our wetland reserve easements.

\*Went over three geographic areas. Based off of 85% of fair market value. And that's conducted by an appraisal. That would be for permanent easements. There’s a 30 year – compensation reduced 25 percent.

And if they want to participate in prescribed grazing, that’s written into the deed – it might be a good fit for folks with wet meadow habitats that want to enroll in the program and still retain rights to grazing. As a change from last year, I have updated what the estimated caps would be. \*Went over them.

Asking for concurrence from State Technical Committee.

We just do just one appraisal on WRE.

Dick Reason: We don't have time here to really go over it. We go over it every year and we look at that vast area of the state and maybe it's one of the things that one of these groups we’ve been talking about creating should be going into a little deeper and bringing it back. That's my thought for now and I don’t know we have time to get into it.

Connie Lee: I know that you just hosted a great Conservation Easement Workshop which unfortunately I missed. But it seems to me that if you wanted input from folks that understand the easement world, you might have the land trusts maybe help with that process. That's just an idea-a suggestion.

Ray Dotson: That’s a very good suggestion. But I think that's why we have the agreement with NVACD to try to have a STAC set up, so we make sure we get some of those people on the board, on the STAC Committee, that can help with this. But basically all we're asking for is a recommendation from you of whether or not 85% is a good percentage for a geographic area for your rate cap. So if someone's in that geographic area and they want to get into this program, we're looking at 85 percent of the fair market value.

Kevin Roukey: Based on that, I think you can leave things as they are until we get better information.

Ray Dotson: This is something we need to take a deeper dive on. I can tell with the body language. Because we're talking about a bunch of stuff that we need to get into more detail on.

Kevin Roukey: Well I think the thing is, we haven’t revised it in a couple of years. The market is going up so maybe that's something that we got to get the right people at the table to look at.

**FOOD SECURITY ACT COMPLIANCE – Jim Komar, State Soil Scientist**

Jim Komar: I want to present an information only item on the conservation compliance program part of the delivery system of conservation we have here in Nevada. The conservation compliance program is something that's been around since 1985. It is old news with respect to laws and regulations that are in place, and when we deliver a farm bill program services to our clients. This food security act, or otherwise referred to as conservation compliance program, is all about linking producer eligibility for conservation loan and commodity program payments to the adoption of on farm practices that protect our lands from excessive soil erosion whether it's by wind or water. And also the protection of the remaining wetlands we have in the nation, so that we don't do any more harm to our lands. And actually we try and turn the corner and develop plans and approaches to reduce the amount of erosion and to protect those remaining wetlands that may be out there in farmlands in the U.S.

So, just as recently as the 2014 farm bill, the conservation compliance program has been reconfirmed and actually expanded to rejoin some of the loan and insurance elements of the conservation compliance program into the farm bill program conservation compliance delivery. So I wanted you to check out the back of your book. There is a handout. I'm giving you the eight minute version of this program. You're going to find a lot more information on the particulars of the conservation compliance program on the fact sheet. It's in the back of your book.

So, let's talk about the big picture. Since 1985, and the implementation of the Food Security Act farm bill, there has been few conservation compliance programs that probably have had a broader reach had. Few that have had a broader reach than the conservation compliance program. This is something that touches all 50 states. It touches all the delivery that we give with respect to the EQIP program or the WRP program. All of it is intended to make sure that when we're working with producers, there's an exchange here. We are delivering conservation services to you in exchange for you adopting principles and values that are embedded in the conservation philosophy of working with the land and protecting our resources from degradation.

So, you look at what's been done over the number of years that we've had, for example, the EQIP program and you compare that during the same period of time of what the conservation compliance program has done. It stands toe to toe in terms of the number of acres that have been touched. It stands toe to toe in terms of the amount of erosion that has been prevented. It stands toe to toe with the amount of wetlands that have been protected. So it's been an effective means by which we deliver conservation in the country. Some of that fact is demonstrated in this slide here. The wetlands conservation component of the Act has prevented, over that period of time, loss of three point three million acres of vulnerable wetlands in the United States. And the Highly Erodible Lands conservation part of the Act has helped prevent 295 million tons of soil from being lost each year across the lands that this program is applied to.

So a lot of it, I should mention, is wind erosion, which is of course the dominant erosion concern here in Nevada. So it is not insubstantial in any way shape or form.

Over the past year, since I came on board, I been asked to revitalize our program here in the state and to make sure that we're delivering all the services that we need for the customers we serve. And first and foremost we've wanted to catch up and make sure that we're delivering the full intent of the law that's embedded in the farm bill program in ‘85 and the subsequent farm bills and you know continuing on with the 2014 farm bill which guides our operations today. And we wanted to make sure that we build a really excellent service to our customers, making sure that we're getting back to them giving them the information they need to make decisions and develop plans that make sure we protect our wetlands and save our soil.

Of course we need to deliver this program consistent with policy so that we're protecting the interest of the producers and farmers and also the interests of the agency.

So how are we doing this? This is going to be a little bit of an effort to get us where we need to be. We've had a really good start I think over the past couple of years. The first is that there are some basic technical information that underpins the Highly Erodible Lands and the wetlands compliance components of the compliance program. And so when we are out there working with producers and talking about highly erodible lands, we have to be able to explain to them what highly erodible lands are, what are the thresholds of concern that we are acting on and what soils do they have and what are the erodibility rates for that particular soil type. And then give them a sense of whether they are dealing with higher erodible lands or not. And for example on the wetlands side, we're also talking about identifying what soil is most likely to support wetlands of the hydrophilic plants that are most likely to occur. The hydrology that is most likely to support particularly in this state, a very dry state, support long enough periods of time for that site to be classified as a wetland. So the intent is to make sure that we have all of that basic information firmly out there and in front of the public so that they have a good sense of what is expected in terms of evaluations.

The next step is to develop the right procedures. And we've been working based off of policy to make sure that we are communicating to our producers and communicating internally with our farm service agency partners, the correct interpretation of the regulations and implementing them universally across the state. And then coupled with all of that, of course, is making sure that we're training everyone on how to deliver the program correctly and effectively across the state and then be accountable to both the client and also to Congress.

There's no question that we are being watched more carefully in terms of delivery of services and the timeliness oftentimes of our services has been something of concern to Congress. And so we do have performance requirements with respect to highly erodible lands and wetlands compliance. And we're doing our level best to improve and meet those requirements.

So what does this mean for you? When we're out working with a producer and we identify their lands as highly erodible lands for wind, we're offering our assistance in developing a conservation plan which would help them through a selection of practices that they would choose for their operation, reduce the erosion rates to make sure that we’re down below that threshold level and that is causing a degradation of the resource and is causing problems, but is also contributing to erosion offsite.

The most important thing, I think, in terms of doing the planning is that we have staff where are really ready to deliver that planning component and letting producers know that there are choices in terms of how you approach the development of a plan to make sure that it doesn't appear that we're just forcing something down on them. That they're actually working with them to meet their needs.

We are also aiming to make sure that we have that level playing field with respect to the program delivery. That means that everyone is being evaluated on the same playing field and in the end, what it means to Nevada, and what it means for producers. We're getting you know clean air with respect to wind erosion concerns. We're getting cleaner water with respect to preservation of wetlands and healthier soils and we're saving the producers some money in the end because we're improving their operations by doing these kinds of activities. If you have any questions really quick I'd be happy to answer them.

Carl Clinger: When we have highly erodible lands, we have to have a conservation plan. How long is that conservation plan really good for?

Jim Komar: The conservation plan goes with the land. So it is in perpetuity. However you can make changes to that plan as your operations change, so that if you're moving into a new crop that calls for a need to adjust that plan, so will adjust as time goes on to meet your needs.

Carl Clinger: But when a producer buys a new piece of land, he doesn't get the previous conservation plan from the previous owner.

Jim Komar: So that plan can carry over, but it's up to the producer to request us to take a second look at it. The only thing that carries forward is that HEL label because we can't do substantially anything to change the designation of highly erodible land so soils are just naturally erodible.

Carl Clinger: But a producer doesn't see the previous conservation plan for that.

Jim Komar: I think that oftentimes the case depends on the relationship between the two parties.

Kevin Roukey: Is a file of the conservation plan kept in the NRCS office?

Jim Komar: Generally yes.

Kevin Roukey: So it is available if the new landowner would like to see it.

Jim Komar: With some constraints here with respect to respecting the privacy of the previous owner.

Kevin Roukey: So it could be redacted and just shown what the content is.

Jim Komar: I think there's ways in which we can meet your needs.

Jarrod Edmunds: Our saving grace here in Nevada is that in most of our crop rotations we have alfalfa, and it's a long term perennial crop that provides excellent cover. And so usually our erosion rates are below that threshold.

Carl Clinger: Two years ago there was a hiccup in that and there was a different criteria used to cover the highly erodible soil and that prevented the producers from using a plow. That sentence has been corrected. Yes we are back home on crop rotation as a means of meeting that but initially, as a producer, I was told we have to request.

Jarrod Edmunds: I think that was a little misinterpretation when they changed the standard. But you're right. If your current rotation and what you're doing with your implements is below that threshold that we need to meet, then we don't need an additional practice. If it's not, we may have an additional practice like residue use. Or other things like cover crops, or something like that.

Ray Dotson: **ACTION ITEMS:**

* Have action items for next year in meeting notes
* Reggie Premo requested assistance with getting his Local Working Group going in Duck Valley
* Using the sign-in checklist for the STAC meeting with email addresses, we’ll email out the National Planning Procedures Handbook via email to everyone
* With respect to contract dollars going up and down drastically from one year to the next: provide the STAC with what the difference was from one year to the next year, and what were the resource concerns we were addressing with those contracts
* Get the STAC set up – there’s an agreement in place to do that. We've got to make sure we have someone in there with easement knowledge.

Anything I missed?

Dick Reason: It wasn’t an action item, but I think we all agreed that we need to have some sub committees or something, or some more time to work with this. Carl and I have both said for the last three years that these meetings are getting shorter and shorter and every year we get to the point that we're trying to get done. And today, I don't know about the other being here, but I haven’t said some things that I would like to have said, but we were running, and I think we've come a long ways, some of us with these meetings, and just as your time is valuable, so is ours and we would like you to take back from us the same as we're taking back from you.

Ray Dotson: I agree with you 110%. I think there's some in trepidation that if we don't have this with the NVACD meeting, no one will show up. And so as we move forward in the future, I think we're going to have to have more meetings and we're going to be asking you guys to give us a half a day, or a whole day twice a year for us to really utilize the resources that we get in a targeted manner to get the job done.

Dick Reason: We used to be able to get back from lunch and discuss it all.

Ray Dotson: I’m a little more detailed than that.

Kevin Roukey: I would think that once we get all this information back within the minutes, that at that point you can get feedback from all of us that attended. I feel that we're going to need another meeting before the next year.

Ray Dotson: I agree. This meeting can’t even be effective if the local work groups are doing their jobs to make sure that they're feeding information to us through it and we can dissect it. And so all I'm saying is, is that the request that you're making for us to agree that we need more than one meeting and it needs to be more than half a day. So when that time comes around if we get six people in this room instead of the number that we have right now, the decisions that we make still go forward. And you're making you're decision by showing up or not showing up.

Kevin Roukey: Well I think with the use of VTC, even without the NVACD meeting, we should be able to get the same amount of participation.

Carl Clinger: You're really looking for crop producers to some large extent, and anytime between March and the end of November, the middle of November, they're pretty busy.

Ray Dotson: I agree. So when we're working through that agreement with NVACD to set up the STAC, I think those are some of the recommendations that we should be pulling back from. What is the most feasible time of year for us to have meetings, where we can garner the most amount of participation?

Brian Thomas: Requested a part-time tribal liaison to assist the tribes with resource concerns.

Ray Dotson: That position is on our list. For now, there is Keir on the national level who can represent and provide that guidance. So as a stop gap right now, I would say make sure you contact Keir a whole lot more. Request him to come out to help facilitate some of those meetings as well.

Maggie Orr: I have a request. I would not have thought of an easement person for the STAC. So, if there’s other suggestions for anybody anywhere, I would welcome those recommendations.

*Ray discusses Ed Biggs’ retirement, as well as Tracey Jean and Bill Conlin. He gives Ed the floor to share some thoughts and thanks him for his service.*

**SMITH CREEK RANCH EASEMENT VIDEO SHOWN.**