

Minnesota State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting

August 10 and 11, 2022

Kelly Inn Hotel
100 4th Ave S
St Cloud, MN 56301

Wednesday August 10, 2022

Welcome and Introductions – Keith Kloubec/Troy Daniell

Keith Kloubec welcomed everyone. He briefly went through the agenda and the updates to it. He mentioned to everyone to provide feedback during the meeting. “Let’s turn it over to our State Con Troy Daniell.”

Troy said “Thank you Keith and welcome everyone. We are trying to find a mode of meetings, virtually or in-person. We are thinking of mixing it up. There is a benefit to both. Speak up, ask questions, talk. Let’s go around the room and introduce all of ourselves.”

The next ten minutes were everyone introducing themselves.

State Technical Advisory Committee Purpose – Keith Kloubec

Keith provided a PowerPoint presentation on the purpose of the State Technical Advisory Committee. The mission is to deliver conservation solutions so agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world. The vision is a world of clean and abundant water, healthy soils, resilient landscapes, and thriving agricultural communities through voluntary conservation. What is the purpose of these meetings? Why are you here? What can you provide to NRCS and others? What would you like to know? The purpose of these meetings is for feedback from you all. We are open to ideas on the agenda, send them in for future meetings. These meetings are for balance of input from all that have a hand in Agricultural Conservation. These meetings are for open discussion and transparency. Meeting notes are posted on the MN NRCS website. We meet 2 times a year, or more as needed.

Partner Updates – Wade Jackson

“Thank you for putting this on.” Wade gave updates from White Earth Band of Ojibwe. He touched on Bison reintroduction. He gave some history of White Earth Land. He stated they want to continue their relationship with NRCS. They are trying to build trusting relationships.

Ecological Science Practice Standards Updates/Engineering Practice Standards Updates – Dave Jones

Dave provided updates to ECS Practice Standards. The MN STAC was informed of 2 Federal Register Notices for public comment on conservation practice standards. There was a federal register notice sent out to the STAC on 2/4/2022 and another one sent out to the STAC on 5/17/2022. Dave said “Make big comments. Once the Practice Standards are set, there isn’t much we can do. When you see a notice come out, make your voice heard. The 340 Cover Crop Practice Standard was not revised nationally due to overwhelming public comment to not remove haying and grazing. Good job MN!”

14 (+ or -) practices will be updated. All disciplines are involved: agronomy, forestry, grazing, water quality, wildlife.

Newly released national standards: Feed Management (592), Forest Farming (379), Range Planting (550), Tree/Shrub Pruning (660), and Wetland Creation (658).

Archived Practice Standard: Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation (650). It will be archived since it has been combined into Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment and Renovation (380).

Dave provided a handout on Engineering Practice Standards being updated. They are to roll out October 1st. Ones in bold are either used a lot in MN or pertain to STAC. If you have any input on them, I need to hear by September 20th. Dave brought up the Field Office Technical Guide online and showed important things to look for. Look at the footer. The eFOTG has the newest version. National text is in black, and MN is blue or green.

Farm Service Agency Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Update – Angela Hanson

Angela went through the statistics of CRP signup. She shared tables of offered and acceptable acres. She notified everyone of the CLEAR 30 Policy Changes Notice CRP-973. CLEAR30 provided an option to producers to select performance of maintenance activities by a third-party vendor throughout the contract period. For signup 57, FSA is putting a hold on the option for producers to choose to have maintenance completed by a third-party vendor. Producers are responsible for cover maintenance. If a producer signed a CRP-2C30 before issuance of this notice and selected Producer's maintenance performance completed by Third Party Vendor in Box 8B, they must be notified the selection is no longer an option. Producers will sign a new CRP-2C30 and receive a new CRP-1CLEAR Addendum. A future notice will provide updated forms and a template letter to explain this change to participants.

There is an Updated Practice CP33, Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds Notice CRP-975. This notice provides updated policy for continuous CRP signup practice CP33 to remove the requirement that the buffer be located around the entire perimeter of the field for new offers or at the time of re-enrollment, update CP33 size requirement policy, and clarify use of CP33 to buffer organic production.

Remote Sensing Analysis of Crop Residue Levels and Cover Crop Emergence – Matt Drewitz

Matt presented on Tillage and Erosion Survey Project Update. The purpose of the project is to: develop a long-term program to systematically collect tillage data and soil erosion estimates to analyze trends in adoption and retention of agricultural soil and water management practices; track tillage trends, cover crop adoption, and land cover; quantify and track trends in average annual and daily soil loss due to wind and water and erosion; and provide data to support targeting of conservation programs. He discussed the difference of how data was collected then (Tillage transects) and how it is collected now (crop residue/cover crops). Today satellites utilize different spectral bands to detect color signatures, which can be correlated to crop residue and cover crops. Samples are taken in the field for model validation and calibration. The U of M reviews the data, runs model based on data and creates maps on the model results.

Methods developed and published on BWSR's website. He showed examples of crop residue in MN for different time periods. And compared year to year with conditions. They do not have much confidence in imagery before 2016.

Another project he spoke about was the Daily Erosion Project (DEP). They take data from remote sensation. Rainfall and erosion. He explained how the data behind the scenes is created for the DEP. You can see in field soil loss through the DEP. You can see soil loss from major storm events. They are looking at integrating wind erosion into the project, but it is more tricky or complicated to gather.

NRCS Soils Update – Joe Brennan

Joe introduced himself as the new State Soil Scientist and mentioned the soils staff in MN. He spoke of Stephanie McLain, our new Soil Health Specialist, and how it is great to have her on the team. What is Soil Health? The capacity of a soil to function as a vital, living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. It begins with basic steps to adjust management to better align with the soil health principles.

Joe gave Soil Survey updates on dynamic soil properties and MLRA projects in Southeast MN. There are soil changes, and we need to adapt to those changes.

He talked about the Initial Soil Survey Development/the Initial Soil Survey Mapping Progress in Northeast MN. They are still working on it, they are making progress, and it will be complete soon. They are looking to have all of MN mapped by end of 2026-2027.

The Agriculture Handbook 296 – MLRA Major Land Resources Areas updated in 2022. Changes were made and make everyone aware of these changes.

Joe talked about Raster Soil Surveys. He explained what they are: digital soil mapping that takes soil properties and features plus environmental data. He stated why they matter. He showed multiple websites/applications of where they are available.

There is going to be a FY 2023 Annual Soil Refresh coming October 1st, 2022.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Updates and Discussion – Various Speakers

Bill gave a RCPP program overview, explained the certification process, and mentioned the financial assistance that is available.

Duane gave an overview of RCPP. He mentioned the focus on Golden-winged Warbler. He explained that population decline is the reason of focus and that the decline is due to habitat loss of aging forests and land-use changes. Another focus is Kirtland's Warbler. They were on the endangered list but delisted in 2019 and hopes to keep them off the list. We need to rely on conservation. He mentioned the accomplishments of 2014-2020, the goals of 2021-2016 and stated partnerships lead to new opportunities.

Darren presented on Irrigation Partnership to Protect Groundwater RCPP. He gave some background on groundwater and agriculture. “Producers are the problem but also the solution.” He talked about the Project objective to protect groundwater through: Providing cost share and incentive payments for higher level irrigation BMPs and associated practices, Building technical capacity, Engaging with producers and general public for education and outreach activities, Quantifying energy consumption impacts of practice implementation, and Quantifying environmental, economic, and social outcomes. He mentioned the Project Partners and showed a list of them. He provided a map of eligible counties. An award of \$3.5M was awarded in April 2021 to help with funding of the project. He showed the budget breakdown of the project.

Keith mentioned the technical assistance available from Central Lakes College Ag and Energy Center and from AgCentric. He talked about the progress and of the project. They held the first signup May 5-17, 2022. There was a total of 56 applicants. 16 were selected for funding for a total of \$891,252 and NRCS is processing the contracts now. There are some lessons learned. The flexibility promoted in the RCPP RFP is not reality. We didn’t get what we were planning for in our application because the current NRCS system does not allow for the flexibility that is offered through the RCPP program. Due to increased costs with inflation NRCS payment rates may not be enough for producers to complete project. Payment rates for irrigation practices should be looked at and updated. There is a need for technical training for irrigation practices. Getting all the contracts and agreements in place took longer than expected. And there is a lot of behind-the-scenes activity that takes place when developing the screening and ranking tools.

Closing Comments – Troy Daniell

I want to mention the importance of talking to each other. I don’t want to be the driver of all the ideas in MN. During this meeting I wrote down all the ideas you mentioned today. Thank you everyone for coming today. Thank you to Ryan for putting these meetings together.

Thursday August 11, 2022

Welcome and Introductions – Ryan Galbreath

Welcome and thank you for coming yesterday and thank you for coming today. Ryan gave a run down of the agenda for the day. Thank you again for coming. For our next meeting make sure to bring people, bring a producer, bring a friend. We want feedback.

MN Agricultural Statistics (Trends in MN Agriculture) – Dan Loftus

The Ag census counts. He explained who National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is and what they do. The census of agricultural is the most complete Ag data available. The only source of uniform, comprehensive, and impartial ag data for every county in the nation. Info on

land use and ownership, producer characteristics and demographics, production practices, income and expenditures, and more. The Census of Agriculture is a complete count of U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them. NASS conducts the census of Ag in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa. The census definition of a farm is any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year. NASS will mail the 2022 Census of Agriculture questionnaires to ag producers in November/December to collect data for the 2022 calendar year. Producers can respond online or return their completed questionnaires by mail. Responses are due by February 6, 2023. In the Spring the census is released. Dan showed a map of response rate for 2017, a graph of mode of return in 2017, a graph of land in farm changes, sales chart of 2017, and the 2017 census results. NASS collects a census every 5 years.

Minnesota Agricultural – Lucas Sjostrom

We are at a moment of a big transition with dairy. In MN there are 450,000 cows. There is an average of 4.2% fat and 3.6% protein in the milk in MN. 78% of MN's milk goes to cheese. As long as we have cheese plants, we will have cows. There is room for more cheese plants which will bring more cows. Applying manure with a drag line system is getting a lot of interest. There is a benefit of drag lines. They are elevated and reduce compaction risk from the weight of heavy manure tanks. Are we going back to dry (dry manure application)? They process the manure, and it could have the opportunity to grab/extract the nutrients from it. A manure building could be 1/4 or 1/5 the size of a lagoon. It would make more room for more cows.

NRCS Conservation Programs and Local Work Group Priorities – Keith Kloubec/LeeAnn Buck/Kaitlyn Miller

LeeAnn talked about the MN local working groups and MASWCD's role. The Local work groups have elected board members. One of the things we do is have local working groups for resource concerns. We use public involvement by bringing in working citizens and farmers and we identify resource concerns, and we are there to facilitate. Other groups we have are Local Working Group – Programs and Local Working Group – Civic Engagement. We are looking to meet landowners needs. I encourage you to encourage your members to reach out and be involved. We are in it together.

Keith thanked everyone for being here. He gave program updates. He talked about Local Working Groups, and you can find info on the NRCS website. He showed a table of the number of resource concerns assessed in 2022 on various concerns. He addressed CSP updates and expressed there was a ton of interest in the program. He mentioned EQIP and CARP updates and touched base on CIG and RCPP. He also touched base on the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.

Kaitlyn gave ACEP updates. She talked about Geographic Area Cap Rate. She showed 4 different options and requested feedback on which option is best to find the max rates for Fiscal Year

2023. She touched base on Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) and Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP).

USDA NRCS Notice of Funding Opportunity Awards – Ryan Galbreath

Two notices for funding were sent out to the STAC in 2022. NRCS awarded MN Grazing Lands Conservation Association, Pheasants Forever Prescribed Fire Coordinator, and MN Ag Water Resource Center. Fiscal Year 2023 opportunities we are looking at: Urban Ag and connecting Ag retailers with conservation delivery. We are needing feedback for other opportunities for State Con consideration.

Urban and Small-Scale Farming in MN – Ryan Galbreath

The National Planning Procedure Handbook brought in land use modifier (Urban).

Ryan talked about coordinated assistance and partnering. I am asking for help. I am looking to start a subcommittee. I will be reaching out. Let's pull our resources together.

Closing Comments – Troy Daniell

We appreciate the feedback, even if it's challenging feedback. We like feedback. Bring a friend, farmer, rancher. Bring a producer. I would like to announce Molly's new position. I am pleased to say she has taken the position for Assistant State Conservationist - Partnerships and Operations. Thank you for coming.