

USDA-NRCS
IOWA STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING
Neal Smith Federal Building
210 Walnut Street, Room 693
Virtual Meeting - Teleconference
Des Moines, Iowa 50309

June 25, 2020 at 1:00 P.M.

APPROVED MINUTES

Present: Kurt Simon, State Conservationist-Chair, NRCS; Alicia Vasto, Iowa Environmental Council; Andrew DiAllesandro, USFWS; Anna Johnson, Center for Rural Affairs; Brent Johnson, Farm Bureau; Nick Baumgarten for Brian Hickman, IDNR; Bruce Barnhart, LICA; Christina Murphy, IAWA; Cora Fox for Matt Deppe, Iowa Cattlemen's Association; Amanda De Jong, FSA; Jamie Benning, ISU; Jamie Cook, Pheasants Forever; Jean C. Eells, WFAN; Jeff Hastings, Trout Unlimited; Joe McGovern, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation; John Whitaker, CDI; Keegan Kult, Ag Drainage Management Coalition; Kelly Schott, Meskwaki Tribe; Kelly Smith, IDNR; Kelsey Fleming, Pheasants Forever; Lori Keppler, LICA; Rick Robinson, Farm Bureau; Sean McMahon, IAWA; Stephen Hopkins, IDNR; Susan Kozak, IDALS; Susanne Hickey, TNC; Suzan Erem, SILT; Jorgen Rose, Practical Farmers of Iowa; Will Myers, IDALS.

Others not members: Curt Goettsch, FSA; Todd Bogenschutz, IDNR; Dustin VandeHoef, Senator Joni Ernst's Office; Kevin McCall, Lori Altheide, David Misek, Dan Paulsen, Shawn Dettmann, Jon Hubbert, Mustapha Abouali, Sindra Jensen, Alan Lange, Heather Friedrichsen, IOWA NRCS.

Welcome/Opening Comments – Kurt Simon, State Conservationist

Kurt opened the meeting stating his appreciation for everyone attending virtually. The Federal Building is in Phase 1 and will be entering a request to move to Phase 2 today. Guest are allowed in the office by appointment only for the next two weeks. When we move to Phase 3, we will have more flexibility. Kurt noted that Shelly Grimmus, NRCS, was unable to attend, and asked to keep her in your prayers.

Approval of Minutes from December 19, 2019

Kurt asked if there were additions or corrections for the minutes. There were no additions or corrections, and the December 19th minutes were adopted.

CRP Update – Amanda De Jong

- Iowa is in the middle of continuous CRP signup. At the last meeting, we were in the mid-100s for CRP-53. This has jumped to 852 continuous offers approved, with 360 with NRCS for plans, for a total of more than 1,200 continuous contracts. This may increase to reflect applications that haven't entered planning yet.
- General CRP-54 signup, 35 are approved/completed. To date, 9,562 offers covering 267,000 acres have been accepted by the Secretary, 7,600 are with NRCS for plans.
- CRP Grasslands Signup 202 – this closed May 15, 2020, and we are awaiting national ranking. 176 offers were submitted for CRP Grasslands.

- Signup for 400-Soil Health and Income Protection Program pilot, which is a one-year pilot program authorized in the Farm Bill, is ongoing and we do monthly ranking. So far 35 offers have been accepted, 24 are in submitted status, and 11 are at NRCS for planning.
- A question was asked about the number of acres for CRP Grasslands offers. There are 178 offers for 6,183 acres. They have gone in for ranking but nothing has been received back. Of note, there was much more interest than in the past years.

Farm Bill Status – Jon Hubbert (Attachment #1)

There are major changes in 2020:

- New Interim Rules-are in place, working on Final Rules-emphasis on streamlining through new business tools.
- New Business Tools
 - Conservation Desktop (CD)
 - Conservation Assessment Raking Tool (CART)
 - Select Application Tool (SAT)
- Staff Training provided by webinar

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Status

1. General – 42% obligated with additional applications accepted for four funding pools:
 - a. Non-Targeted (Soil Health and Erosion)
 - b. Livestock (Non-Animal Feeding Operations)
 - c. Wildlife
 - d. Source Water Protection (Ground)
2. Prairie Pothole Initiative (PPI) – 56 applications are working through the ranking process.
3. Emergency Animal Mortality Management (EAMM) – Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) was a limiting factor and Disposal Assistance Program (DAP) offered by IDALS through the CARES Act had considerable interest with no AGI requirement (3 out of 70 selected).
4. Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) – 1 additional watershed request from IDALS, South Skunk River and Cedar Creek in Mahaska County, forwarded to National. Note: an additional watershed submitted by Missouri NRCS was later approved by IDALS and submitted by Iowa NRCS.
5. National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) – Currently looking at additional proposals provided by DNR. We need additional clarification on how future funding will look before we make our final selections.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Status

1. FY2019 payments: 3215 contracts were scheduled for payment. All but four have been paid. Reminder: the FY2019 CSP contract items are paid in FY2020.
2. 2020 Renewal Contracts: There were 337 contracts expiring this year that were eligible for renewal (111 were FY2014 contracts extended 1 year, 226 were expiring FY2015 contracts). Of those:
 - a. 187 of the FY2015 contracts extended the contract for 1 year. (Leaving 150 eligible to renew).
 - b. 117 of those eligible for renewal applied to renew. During contract development there were 45 applicant requests to cancel. There are 72 remaining renewals, for \$3.9 million dollars.

3. Classic CRP: Application deadline was May 29 and ranking deadlines is July 2 (1,058 applications in ProTracts, 25 of the 1,058 apps are RCPP-CSP Monarch apps).
 - a. As of Monday, June 22nd, there were 146 (13.8%) CSP Classic applications ranked.
 - b. These ranked applications would need \$5 million. Iowa has \$10 available. If all applications are ranked, the prorated contract estimated amount would be \$36 million.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Status

1. WRE (Wetland Reserve Easements) – 6 applications selected for funding and working forward.
2. ALE (Agricultural Land Easements) – 1 application selected for funding and working forward.
3. Easement restoration and monitoring:
 - a. 8 easement restorations completed totaling 699.16 acres (3-FY16 enrolled, 5-FY17 enrolled).
 - b. 18 easement restorations are currently in progress, with the majority likely being completed in FY20.
 - c. 11 easement repairs/enhancements are currently in progress, all of which must be completed in FY20.
 - d. 3 monarch enhancements are currently in progress with completion dates in FY21
 - e. 60.14% of easement monitoring completed – milestone by June 30 was to be 60%.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Status – FY2020-3 of 11 approved in Iowa and are working toward a project agreement. They are:

1. IDALS-DSC Turkey River - \$3,000,000;
2. IDALS-DSC Iowa Systems Approach - \$10,000,000;
3. ISA North Raccoon - \$10,000,000.

Alternative Funding Proposal (AFP), currently being reviewed.

RCPP FY2021 funding announcement scheduled for some time in July.

*Sean McMahon advised that there is a \$23 million non-Federal match for the Iowa Systems Approach.

Non-Farm Bill Program:

Emergency Watershed Protection-Floodplain Easement (EWP-FPE) tentative approved status

- a. 52 total – 40 submitted for National review
- b. 25 have approval for due diligence to be ordered-all groups of Fremont Co. approved
- c. 15 pending review
- d. 12 need submitted

Sub-Committee Reports

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – Steve Hopkins

- The committee did not meet in this quarter.
- There have been multiple conversations about all three programs (NWQI, NWQI Source Water and 10% NRCS Source Water Set-Aside).
- DNR recommends continuing its funding for “regular” NWQI watersheds (Black Hawk Lake, several watersheds associated with Lake Rathbun, Silver Creek and Howard County).

- DNR recommends continuing its funding NWQI Source Water (Spirit Lake and Cedar Lake in Madison County).
- Source Water Set-Aside - we need to make sure the map contains eligible ground water or source water protection areas that have a plan or are likely to be using the set-aside so they can access funding through one of the three programs.

Conservation Innovative Grants (CIG) – Steve Hopkins

The due date for applications is June 26th and will be reviewed July 2nd. We welcome written comments if you are not able to be present. We hope to distribute those to NRCS for review very quickly.

Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE) – Kelly Smith

The committee did not meet last quarter. We have one question for the STC: What is the understanding or answer to when landowners will receive offers for EWP-FPE lands?

*Jon Hubbert answered that there is no time frame yet. National Headquarters is working through 52 applications right now, so we are not ready to make any offers.

CRP – Sean McMahon and Curt Goettsch (Attachment #2)

- The committee met on March 18th.
- The new Farm Bill requirement allows the State Conservationist to review and decide which practices require mid-contract review and which ones can be given a waiver.
- The committee was asked to make a recommendation on FSA and NRCS staff proposals. We started with determining more technical practices, lesser utilized and the impact on wildlife.
- We did accept IDNR's proposal for CP1, 2, 4B, 4D, 21, 23, 23A, 25, 27/28, 29, 30, 33, 37, 38, 42, 43 to have the mid-contract management requirement waived.
- Kurt Simon made the recommendation to amend and Amanda followed.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – Anna Johnson

The committee did not meet last quarter, but we did meet right before the cancelled March STC meeting. We did have a series of email conversations and our main task was to select priority resource concerns for CSP for the year. The list of resource concerns has grown from 10 items to 17 items. We were tasked to prepare a list of the 5 top concerns for Iowa CRP producers. After much discussion, we have decided that the 5 are:

1. wind and water erosion;
2. concentrated erosion;
3. field sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss;
4. livestock production limitation;
5. terrestrial habitat.

Source Water Protection (SWP) – Christina Murphy (Attachment #3)

- The committee met on May 22nd to get an update from NRCS on how the signup was going and to discuss concerns that eligible areas ranked higher than priority areas in parts of the state.
- Committee recommendations were for priority and eligible areas for both ground water and surface/surface-influenced water.
- Committee discussion regarding application ranking to ensure that the priority areas are funded first before eligible areas.

- Committee discussion regarding percentages allocated to determine if recommended changes were needed.
- NRCS issued a Bulletin on June 1st clarifying how priority areas should be selected. The committee met on June 12th and worked through the impact of the change.
- The state can have no more than 20% priority area so some areas will need to drop off.
- The committee will meet again on July 8th for further discussion.

Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) - Recovery Update – Kurt Simon

- For the 2019 Flood, several counties requested repairs.
- NRCS assessed 136 sites and have obligated funds for 124 sites.
- Of those, 53 have agreements in place which is 91% of the funding obligations.
- Crawford County has 5 construction projects completed and we expect to make significant progress for the other 136 sites this summer.
- In total, a little more than \$17 million is allocated.

EWP–Flood Plain Easement (EWPP-FPE) Update – Jon Hubbert

- NRCS received a total of 393 applications and found that 361 were eligible.
- NRCS is moving forward with 52 easement applications and have submitted 40 of those for National review.
- NRCS is working on getting the remaining 12 in for review. It is a detailed process to move through due diligence and to get approval from NHQ to take the next steps.
- There has been a lot of concern expressed about the length of time it takes to move an application through this process.
- We have committed \$36 million and have requested an additional \$11 million.
- There was a question regarding the reason the process is so slow. The answer was given that the concerns have been raised at the National level but because the requirements are so extensive that the process will be slow in general.

Agency Announcements

Will Myers (IDALS)

- Legislature reconvened and passed status quo budget in advance of FY21 which begins July 1st. There may be delays in getting funding in place for cost-share.
- Program Sunsets 2021 set now for additional 2 years through 2023.
- Statewide WQ Initiative open.
- Staffing-refilling vacancies at field offices.
- RCPP-working on renewals with Midwest Ag, and other partners.
- Animal Disposal Assistance Program-Round 3 closed the 22nd -working through those.
- Contact Susan or Will with an email for specific questions/numbers. Or contact Keely Coppess, our Communication Director

Steve Hopkins (DNR)

- Lori McDaniel named the new DNR WQ Bureau Chief.
- Josh Faulk hired as eastern Iowa basin coordinator for Watershed Improvement.
- Submitting to EPA the DNR Section 319 grant application and selected 9 watershed projects, 8 existing and 1 new. We are required every year to submit a water quality success story and Silver Creek in Clayton County will be featured on the EPA webpage.

- Shout out to Neil Shaffer, who will receive the Watershed Coordinator of the Year award and an award through the Soil and Water Conservation Society.

Todd Bogenschultz (IDNR Wildlife Bureau)

- Private Lands position filled in SW Iowa and is based out of our Atlantic Office-Congrats to Kelsey Fleming.
- We have seen an increase in our fishing and turkey hunting licensure possibly due to Covid-19.
- Congrats to Kurt on his retirement and we appreciate your leadership.

Susanne Hickey (TNC)

- We have hired Paige Frautschy as our new Iowa Agriculture Program Director. She is currently working remotely from Wisconsin.
- A lot of our events have been postponed.

Closing Comments

Kurt stated that 75 new employees have started with NRCS with many others have job offers and background checks done. NRCS is advertising an additional 105 positions on USAJobs. Our budget and staff now match our workload. Jon Hubbert is detailing to Virginia as Acting State Conservationist. Dave Misek will be detailed to us from Illinois as Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs while Jon is gone. Kurt thanked the STC members for their dedication and effort. Kurt announced his retirement on July 31st with 40 years of service, 36 with NRCS. Gratitude was expressed for Kurt's help to farmers throughout the nation and to attract resources to Iowa.

Meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Attachments (3)

Future Meeting Dates

**1:00 pm – NRCS Hugh Hammond Bennett Conference Room, 210 Walnut Street,
Room 693, Des Moines**

September 17, 2020

December 17, 2020

State Technical Committee Farm Bill Update

June 25, 2020

Major changes in 2020:

- **New Interim Rules**
- **New Business Tools**
 - **Conservation Desktop – (CD)**
 - **Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool – (CART)**
 - **Select Application Tool – (SAT)**
- **Staff Training provided by webinar**

EQIP Status (Environmental Quality Incentives Program)

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3. **EAMM** (Emergency Animal Mortality Management) – AGI (Adjusted Gross Income) was a limiting factor and DAP offered by IDALS through the CARES Act had considerable interest
4. **MRBI** (Mississippi River Basin Initiative) – 1 additional watershed added, South Skunk River and Cedar Creek in Mahaska County
5. **NWQI** (National Water Quality Initiative) – Currently looking at additional proposals as submitted by DNR and seeking clarification on future funding levels from the national level

CSP Status (Conservation Stewardship Program)

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- ISA North Racoon - \$10,000,000 –

AFP currently being reviewed

RCPP FY 2021 funding announcement scheduled to be announced in July

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- a. 52 total – 40 submitted for National review.
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CRP Subcommittee Meeting Minutes
March 18, 2020 9-10:15 AM
Via Teleconference

Attendees: Curt Goettsch, Kevin McCall, Alan Lange, Gregg Pattison, Bruce Barnhart, Brian Hickman, Matt O'Connor, Rick Robinson, Todd Bogenschutz, Will Myers, Vincent Sitzmann, Ben Gleason and Cora Fox.

Required Management Activities on CRP.

The Iowa CRP Subcommittee held a teleconference (1.25 hours) to discuss CRP policy found in 2-CRP (Rev. 6) subparagraph 428 C: Determining Required Management Activities.

C Determining Required Management Activities

SED will provide a list of existing practices with enrollment within their State to the State Conservationist by March 1 each year. The State Conservationist must review the list to determine whether a management activity is needed. The State Conservationist may ask for recommendations from the State Technical Committee. The State Conservationist must provide these recommendations to SED by May 31 each year.

Iowa FSA and Iowa NRCS have presented a joint proposal to State Conservationist Kurt Simon. Kurt Simon has asked for recommendations from the State Technical CRP subcommittee.

Curt Goettsch with Iowa FSA lead the discuss and explained the policy found in 2-CRP (Rev. 6) paragraph 427 & 428. These policies outline the requirements and differences between Required Management (Par. 428) and Practice Maintenance (Par. 427).

Al Lange presented a joint FSA and NRCS proposal to limit Required Management (Mid Contract Management) to certain practices based on wildlife benefits and impacts on practice maintenance.

Todd Bogenschutz shared the Iowa Department of Natural Resources proposal (via email) for required of Required Management (Mid Contract Management) on the following practices; CP1, CP2, CP4B, CP4D, CP21, CP23, CP23A, CP25, CP27/28, CP29, CP30, CP33 CP37, CP38A, CP38B, CP38E, CP42 and CP43. This proposal would remove the requirement for Mid Contract Management on CRP Grass Waterways, CRP Contour Grass Strips and CRP Tree Practices.

Rick Robinson, spoke to Farm Bureau' support that control of noxious weeds without cost-share, to mow, spray or burn all CRP plantings prior to the pollination of noxious weeds, including Palmer amaranth, as needed to control their spread; maintenance of grass waterways in CRP should be based on practices designed for greatest longevity and not on considerations for wildlife habitat.

Curt Goettsch noted the removal requirement for Mid Contract Management is not a removal of Practice Maintenance. Regardless of Required Management a requirement of all CRP contracts

is that the participant will maintain the approved cover according to the conservation plan, including minimum practice seeding standards, in accordance with CRP-1 (contract) Appendix Part 4 & 5, 2-CRP (Rev. 6) Subparagraph 427A, 7-CFR 1410.20 and 7-CFR 1410.22.

Matt O'Connor spoke in support of Required Management on Wetland and Buffer practices, specifically a need on CP21 Filter Strips due to flooding. Due to flooding and storm run off silt and soil can build up in CP21 Filter Strips and many times the required management can help address that issue.

Bruce Barnhart noted that much of silt and soil due to flooding and storm run off could fall under practice maintenance, but that if not for the required management (MCM) may go unnoticed.

Gregg Pattison with USFWS, spoke in support of Required Management on Wetland and Buffer practices.

Cora Fox, with Iowa Cattlemen ask a clarification of grazing policy as a tool for required management. Can grazing be used and does it include a payment reduction of 25%. Curt Goettsch explained with the changes made in the 2018 Farm Bill grazing can be used on CRP as a tool to complete required management outside of the Primary Nesting Season (PNS) and that is no longer includes a payment reduction.

Source Water Protection Subcommittee
Report for State Technical Committee
June 25, 2020

Summary

The full committee met on May 22, 2020 to primarily discuss an update from NRCS on signups and discuss an issue where eligible areas ranked higher than priority areas in some parts of the state. The group discussed what adjustments could be made or should be considered for the next year to ensure priority application rank higher. The plan was to bring the full subcommittee back together after gathering some research. In the meantime, NRCS issued a bulletin on June 1st clarifying how priority areas should be selected. After a meeting with co-chairs, NRCS and Jessica Montana from the DNR, it was decided to pull the sub "sub" committee back together to walk thru the impacts of the bulletin on our recommendation from last year. The sub sub committee met on June 12 and walked thru the impacts of the new bulletin. The main issues are <20% of state (7,140,000 Acres) can be priority areas and the areas must be selected on HUC 12 level. This will working fine for surface or surface influenced priority areas but be more challenging to make sure we target wellhead protection areas within a HUC 12 for groundwater. The sub 'sub' committee is working thru this and we are preparing information currently. The sub 'sub' committee will be back together on July 8th to discuss further and hopefully prepare a recommendation for review by the full subcommittee. We plan to have a recommendation for the State Technical Committee in the fall.

Minutes from full committee meeting May 22, 2020

Attending via Go To Meeting: Christina Murphy, IAWA/West Des Moines Water Works; Mustapha Abouali, NRCS; Jon Hubbert, NRCS, Alicia Vasto, Iowa Environmental Council; Bill Simpkins, Iowa State; Allen Bonini, DNR; Steve Hopkins, DNR; Chad Fields, DNR; Marty Braster, RRWD; Mary Beth Stevenson, Cedar Rapids Utilities; Susan Kozak, IDALS; Laura Sarcone, AWWA/Des Moines Water Works; Randy Van Dyke, Iowa Great Lakes; Aaron Schroeder, Iowa Rural Water; Mike Gannon, Iowa Geological Survey; Jessica Montana; IDNR; Bridget Durst, SWP Facilitator;

First on the agenda was an update from NRCS. Program signups went well. Source Water-groundwater portion almost all been spent (committed) among 41 applications. On the surface water side, 21 applications have been funded out of 345 applications

The subcommittee then began discussion over an concern raised by a subcommittee member that eligible surface water application was funded over a priority surface water area in another part of the state. Jon Hubbert explained the new toolkit (CART) and some of the challenges at the state office and at the local level. The new program is meant to address multiple resource concerns that all contribute the points an application may get. This first year, the state office used ranking questions that hoped to elevate priority applications with the highest totals; however, that unfortunately did not occur in all instances.

The committee review a few examples of applications as able without revealing private information and determined that while there were lower point totals with high contact amounts in groundwater, the practices being implemented could have a very significant impact on source water protection. The subcommittee discussed whether an adjustment to the percentages should be explored but ultimately

left this alone since it was shared and agreed by the group that is hard to find other funding alternatives to assist with groundwater protection.

The group further explored options for ensuring priority applications were funded before eligible. One potential solution is to implement a Use Category for priority areas for groundwater and surface water that would be used as part of the application ranking and sorting.

The subcommittee asked to retroactively try this approach with last years applications and the subcommittee would reconvene to see how this option panned out. There is further education at the field level about identifying resource concerns and practices

Toward the end, Christina Murphy shared some feedback from a meeting she has with other utilities for AWWA in Washington DC on observations of what other states approaches had been to setting priority areas and how other states had engaged water utilities. It was apparent that Iowa has been at the top in engaging utilities and partners on this new directive and appreciation was expressed at Iowa's leadership at NRCS in this area.

Next Steps were to allow time for Mustapha to process some of the data requests. A recommendation to the State Technical Committee will be needed at the September meeting.

Source Water Protection "Sub" Subcommittee *Minutes from June 12, 2020*

Attending via Go To Meeting: Christina Murphy, IAWA/West Des Moines Water Works; Mustapha Abouali, NRCS; Jon Hubbert, NRCS; Allen Bonini, DNR; Steve Hopkins, DNR; Chad Fields, DNR; Marty Braster, RRWD; Aaron Schroeder, Iowa Rural Water; Jessica Montana; IDNR; Bridget Durst, SWP Facilitator; Laura Sarcone, AWWA/DMWW

On June 1st, NRCS published a National Bulletin on Refining Source Water Local Priorities for Fiscal Year 2021. Jon Hubbert had shared this and after discussion, it was decided to bring the sub sub committee together to discuss the impacts of the bulletin on the recommendations that has been made last year.

Jon Hubbert then proceeded to share the new bulletin which states that high priority areas will have the following characteristics:

- 1) Should represent no more than 20% of the total land of state (Our current area is likely more than 20% with eligible areas included)
- 2) Will be delineated using HUC12 watershed boundaries (this is much different than how groundwater priority areas were recommended)
- 3) Selected HUC12s will be attributed with data indicating the type of water source addressed and the potential threats
- 4) Consideration should be given to state/utility SWPA delineation or EPA delineated SWP areas

Discussion amount the group indicated some holes in the EPA data set. For example Rathbun Watershed is not in as well as some HUC12s affecting Cedar Rapids and Des Moines River Watersheds are not included. Jon indicated he would reach out to NRCS about not using EPA.

There were concerns if the entire HUC12 is included where we had a groundwater SWP, then there might not be priority given to the specific capture zone area which would not be as effective. The group discussed adding questions to give higher ranking to wellhead protection areas within a HUC12

The group recommended that utilizing GIS, we capture the priority areas for both surface water HUC 12s then add groundwater capture zone/wellhead protection areas at the HUC12 level at first cut and see what % land we get. The subcommittee could then decide to add and subtract to get to the 20%.

The sub sub committee briefly discussed factors for adding/subtracting if it came to that.

The sub sub committee agreed to reconvene in about 2-3 weeks after the data could be compiled. Jon Hubbert announced that he is being detailed as Acting State Conservationist to Virginia on July 6. Someone will be filling in his role to help keep things moving forward. Christina Murphy will send out a doodle poll of dates.

Submitted by Christina Murphy 6-25-20