**Idaho State Technical Committee**

**September 7, 2021 @ 9:00am**

**Welcome and opening remarks** – Curtis Elke, State Conservationist, NRCS

Attending:

* Idaho Potato Commission
* Idaho Forest Growers
* Shared Stewardship
* Idaho Dairymen’s Association
* Idaho Dept. of Fish & Game
* Office of Species Conservation
* US Forest Service
* EPA
* Bureau of Reclamation
* Iddah DEQ  
  USDA-NASS
* Sen. Crapo’s Office
* Idaho Rural Water Association
* CDA Tribal reps
* U of Idaho

COVID Update -Nezperce and Weiser Field Offices are now at 25% capacity, no **office** visits by farmers or partners permitted.

**Upcoming Fiscal year:**

Focus Areas –

* Urban agriculture will be an area of special interest, education on how to manage small acreages. This will include additional resources for soil health and community gardens.
* Soil Erosion – We are going to do everything we possibly can as it is still an issue in Idaho, both wind and ephemeral erosion. We are calling on you to help us identify these areas and help us reach those producers who will benefit from these practices.
* Hiring has been a big area for us for the past eight months. In January we were at an all-time low of 117 staff in January. We are now at 140 and looking to staff up to 180. We are using the Direct Hire Authority for entry level positions. This will mean a lot of training of new employees. And there may be opportunity for our employees to shadow our partners to learn more about what they do and our customers to learn their operations and why they make the decisions they make.
* We have doubled our engineering staff at 30 now, but the engineering demand still needs additional support, perhaps through an RFP or additional TSP. We are looking at standing up a Big Water Team that would handle large scale water management projects.
* Drought – We are focusing our attention on drought management practices and have received funding for larger water management projects. Mention of Farmers.Gov and drought monitor for those who wish to know our current drought conditions.
* Wildfire – Staff is very involved in doing wildfire impact assessments and how we can help. We have Natural disaster funds set aside to assist. We have early start waivers options where appropriate.
* The State Conservationist had the opportunity to speak with the Idaho Potato Commission last week to let them know about NRCS and what we can offer and mentioning the challenges we still face regarding soil erosion in our state.
* A meeting between the State Conservationist and Simplot to speak about a potential Memorandum of Understanding on marketing, soil erosion and no till potatoes
* Cheatgrass Challenge – It is definitely helping address the cheatgrass problem out there and it will be even more impactful as we continue with it. Currently, there are 12 projects under way.
* Locally-Led Work Groups – The State Conservationist noted his appreciation for everyone who has participated in a STAC meeting and LLWC meetings. He also encourages all others who receive meeting invitations to participate.
* Dry Hydrant as a new conservation practice in Idaho– Hopefully assist with firefighting at the interface between the wildland/urban.
* Shared Stewardship – Good Neighbor Authority: There are a lot of great works being done through this partnership not only in the two priority areas but across the state. We have really upped our Forestry management game here in Idaho.

**EQIP Changes -**Lindsay Markegard, EQIP Manager, NRCS

EQIP Incentives (Conservation Incentives Contracts),

* Pilot States – The 4 Pilot states worked with the new program and came back with a lot of input on what was and was not working. As a result, the decision was made to re-design the program utilizing comments from Committees and Pilot states.
* Redesigned program expected to roll out after start of Fiscal year.

Spike Price (Coronavirus Agriculture Relief Programs) – currently covered practices

* Roof and Covers
* Irrigation Pipeline
* Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface
* Lined Waterway or Outlet
* Livestock Pipeline
* Trails and Walkways
* Channel Bed Stabilization
* Requesting another 9 practices
  + Hedgerow Planting
  + Forage and Biomass Planting
  + Pumping Plant
  + Roof Runoff Structure
  + Access Road
  + Subsurface Drain
  + Underground Outlet
  + Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management
  + Structures for Wildlife
* Only apply to practices installed in calendar year 2021.

Funding Pools

* Beginning Farmer or Rancher
  + Irrigated
  + Non-irrigated
* Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher
* Organic
* On-Farm Energy
* Source Water Protection
* Sage Grouse Initiative
* National Water Quality Initiative
* LLWG help direct their team’s funds in each pool.
* Water Conservation (Water Management Entities)
* Conservation Activity Plans (CAPS)
* Cheatgrass Challenge
* Dairy/AFO/CAFO
* Natural Disaster
* Joint Chief
* \*NEW\* 2022: Soil Erosion
* \*NEW\* 2022: Urban Agriculture
* Local Work Groups: Each Team 1-17 will have a funding pool where their Locally Led Work Groups determines categories within their pool and distribution of funds within those categories.

Priority Practices – higher payment rate

* Critical Area Planting (342)
* Residue Management, Reduced Till (354)
* Sediment Basin (350)
* Farmstead Energy Improvement (374)
* Riparian Forest Buffer (391)
* Firebreak (394)
* Pond Sealing, Compacted Soil Treatment (520)
* Range Planting (550)
* Stream and Shoreline Protection (580)
* Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)

The STAC may offer input on the practices

* Idaho Fish and Game question on what does the 520 treatment do?
* NRCS State Engineer – bentonite. Last time we used it to his knowledge was the RCPP project
* Idaho Dairymen’s Association add on – This was added last year to get more dairy participants. The practice requires a Nutrient Management Plan
  + Timing is an issue – Applications aren’t being filed before lagoons are cleaned out.
* How do we track these practices?
* How are these practices subsidized? 15% more of our rates.
* Firebreak practice clarification request. Response: Firebreak is separate from thinning, mastication and other risk reduction treatments.
* Clarification questions from Idaho Fish and Game – Do Critical Area Planting and Range Planting accomplish the same thing? No. Critical Area Planting is more versatile on land type as it is covers replanting after structure construction.

**Big Water Team** – Bruce Sandoval, State Engineer, NRCS

* Background
  + Teams have been put together on an ad hoc basis
* We have reached a critical mass on the frequency of these projects
  + Watershed Operations: PL-556: We currently have three projects that if taken all the way through the process will be $20 Million dollar projects each.
* The Draft Plan
  + 4 Additional Staff (not collateral duty) that would be part of State Office Engineering
    - Watershed Coordinator
    - Environmental Compliance and Preservation Expert
    - Hydrology & Hydraulics and/or Water Quality Specialist
    - Planning & Economics & Geology Specialist

**Legislator Update**

Casey Attebery, Senator Crapo’s Office – August recess is winding down on Congress’ agenda:

* Infrastructure
* Reconciliation Bill
* Appropriations work – likely to have CR to cover that work
* Ag committees on Climate Smart Ag and equity/inclusion

**Soil Erosion EQIP State Ranking Pool, Shawn** Nield, State Soil Scientist, NRCS

“Lose the equivalent of the thickness of a dime across a field – that’s a loss of 8 tons of topsoil to the acre.”

The Funding pool outlines:

* Set priority areas
* Practices: <https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/#/state/ID> Conservation practices are in section 4 and listed alphabetically by title

**Shared Stewardship Update** – Ara Andrea, Stewardship Coordinator, ID Department of Lands

[www.Noboundariesforestry.idaho.gov](http://www.Noboundariesforestry.idaho.gov) has a good overview of the effort.

**Easement Outcome Report for FY 2021** – Wade Brown, Easement Program Manager, NRCS

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program -2014 and 2018 Farm Bills

* Wetland Reserve Easements
* Agricultural Land Easements

Closing Easements

* 3 Wetland Reserve Easements (should have had 4, but last one received a private offer 5x greater than ours)
* 2 Agricultural Land Easements
* Additional 2 Agricultural Land Easements closing soon (Oct/November)

Applications

* 10 worth about $7.5M in total
* Accepted: 7

**RCPP Classic National Funding Opportunity for Fiscal Year 2022** – Daniel Esposito, RCPP Program Manager, NRCS

* Waiting on Notice of Funding Availability – Expected late September/early October
* Once that is cleared, NRCS will be communicating its availability to partners and the public.
* It has become increasingly competitive
* We hope to develop and fund some really good projects in Idaho

**Local Workgroup Meetings** – Lori Kassib, ASTC-Programs, NRCS

* Locally-Led Work Group are starting to have their annual meetings. Each of the 17 teams have or will be holding meetings in September and October. A few may be scheduled in early November.
* These meetings are an opportunity for local community organizations, state and federal agencies and local producers to discuss the local area’s primary natural resource concerns and make recommendations on how NRCS monies will be used to address those concerns.

**Partner Updates**

US Forest Service - Two Idaho positions advertised on USAJobs

* Forest Stewardship position
* Program Assistant for Conservation

Bureau of Reclamation funding opportunity

Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART grant funding opportunities: [www.usbr.gov/watersmart](http://www.usbr.gov/watersmart). Please feel free to send any questions [tojepeters@usbr.gov](mailto:tojepeters@usbr.gov).

Idaho Rural Water Association

American Water Works Association announced source water awareness week. Toolkit here: <https://www.awwa.org/Resources-Tools/Resource-Topics/Source-Water-Protection/Source-Water-Protection-Week/Source-Water-Protection-Week-Materials>

Additional Resources:

* [www.Farmers.Gov](http://www.Farmers.Gov) site for drought map access and all of conservation programs information and natural disaster programs offered.
* <https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/#/state/ID> Conservation practices are in section 4 and listed alphabetically by title

STAC Schedule for the upcoming calendar year –

December 7, 2021

*.*