**Idaho State Technical Advisory Committee**

**June 7, 2022 @ 9:00 am – 12:20 pm (MST)**

Minutes

**Opening Remarks and NRCS update** – ***State Conservationist, Curtis Elke, NRCS –***

Curtis welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the STAC meeting today, briefly went over the agenda, gave a COVID update, and is happy to report that our office is back 100% in the state of Idaho, we will continue to take cautionary measures with our travel and overnight travel, and in person meetings. It’s nice to have our partners back into the office with us again, as well as having in person meetings during the day.

Curtis stated to empower our people, we’re achieving a vision of building an equitable and climate smart food and agricultural economy, to support rural communities and to ensure all people have the opportunity to succeed in the communities they love.

As we achieve this vision, our efforts will help support farmers improve the health, nutrition, and quality of life for all Americans and Idahoan’s, and yield healthy lands, forest, and clean water. We want to empower our people in the field, our partners out there.

On behalf of USDA mission, USDA has set 5 strategic priorities –

1. Addressing Climate change, and Climate smart ag, forestry and clean energy.
2. Advancing racial justice, equality opportunity and rural prosperity.
3. Creating better market opportunities.
4. Tackling food and nutrition insecurity.
5. Making USDA the best place to work for everyone.

We’re near the ending of this farm bill that we are currently operating under, 2023 Farm Bill is right around the corner. The Farm Bill provides an opportunity to address urgent challenges faced by farmers, worker, family’s rural communities and partners, Curtis is committed to leveraging our expertise and meaningful data to give feedback and provided a better understanding on how our programs work, to better address the needs and challenges across the state of Idaho.

Curtis wants to make USDA the best place to work, he’s committed by recruiting, onboarding a diverse and talented workforce. We’re currently at 155 staff, with goal to hire an additional 43 within the next 2 years. We continue to staff our 37 service centers in the state, we have added a second public affairs officer, Carly Whitmore, we will bring on an outreach coordinator and an urban conservationist.

We will put rural America at the heart of solutions for public and food production and building a fair and more equitable food system.

This year we were given 13.6 million dollars for the General EQIP, 7 million dollars to the CSP Classic, and an addition 3.5 million for CSP Renewals, 2 million for sage grouse, we continue to ask for more funds as we have more interest and demand. Many existing USDA program provide a lot of assistance; we have a lot of programs to offer.

**Erin Whorton - Water Supply Specialist –**

Curtis welcomed Erin to give us an update on our water supply, she sent out an email with the water supply outlook report on June 6, 2022, this is the last one for our winter season, we have been fortunate to have a really wet spring, but we’re not out of the woods in terms of drought, we have low reservoir volume, and projections for a warmer summer, but things look much better than they did on April 1st.

She also shared some snapshots of the current condition, that were included in that email that was out on June 6th. [https://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/ftpref/support/states/ID/wy2022/wsor/borid622.pdf](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov%2Fftpref%2Fsupport%2Fstates%2FID%2Fwy2022%2Fwsor%2Fborid622.pdf&data=05%7C01%7C%7C9da443fd33d44837a77208da47de5eef%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697%7C0%7C0%7C637901317810570989%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=bPzwDSzDD%2BSUKDaKyTScOYVV6lNeASz3FUw5jfG83Mc%3D&reserved=0)

**FSA update** **–*Matt Gellings, State Executive Director, FSA***–

Matt thanked Erin for her update and is excited to announce FSA’s first in person training in two years, with Jenny Peirsol on Farm Program Training in Lewiston, ID.

FSA is hiring, they’re trying to get their offices fully staffed, going to get the word out, do a little travel to let folks know USDA is a great place to work*.*

Matt also gave a conservation update, CRP SU58 513 offers totaling 81,786 acres. Grassland CRP SU204 42 offers totaling 41,948 acres pending results.

**EPA update** – ***Nick Peak, Region 10 Agricultural Advisor, EPA*** *–*

Nick gave an update on Region 10, on May 9th, Casey Sixkiller was named EPA’s Region 10 Administrator, he served as Deputy Mayor of the City of Seattle, he was the first indigenous person in the city’s 107 year history to serve in that position, He was also the Chief operating officer for King County, he’s a proud father of 3 kids, Nick plans on meeting with him in the near future.

Nick touched on the Waters of the United States, there’s been a series of regional round tables going on, to give feedback from a variety of stakeholders, the two that would be at most interest for folks in Idaho, one being hosted by California Farm Bureau, there will be some Idaho Reps on that round table, and on June 24th, the last round table being hosted by Wyoming County Commissioners Association, Montana Association of Counties, and Idaho Association of Counties, there will be some Idaho Reps on that as well. Nick shared a link for those Virtual Round tables; <https://www.epa.gov/wotus/public-outreach-and-stakeholder-engagement-activities#Roundtables>.

EPA put out a public notice seeking new nominations for the Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Federal Advisory Committee (FRRCC), the Administrator also put out a new charge topic, Advancing Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for U.S. Agriculture.

Nick has some nominations to review by the end of the week, for folks from the Pacific Northwest to be put in the hat to be on that committee.

**Legislator Updates – Mike Mathews –**

Curtis introduced Mike Mathews to the meeting, Mike gave an update, the senate is working on nominations for Bidens nominees, the big issues going on right now is gun control, its an issue that will continue to play out over sometime as it moves forward, Senator Risch has always been a strong supporter of the 2nd amendment and wanting to keep people safe. he will continue to be through all this.

There’s been a lot of discussion on the January 6 committee, another big issue that were hearing about is Inflation, and how that’s going to affect the agriculture. Fertilizer, and fuel prices have increased, all that factors in and makes it harder for farmers, producers, and operators to operate with inflation, the Senator wants to help to improve the economy the best we can.

Mike gave an update on the Farm Bill, as we move forward, it needs to be address, the senator wants to know what the people of Idaho would like to see in the farm bill, he asks that you reach out and let him know what your concerns are.

Drought was another topic Mike discussed, Senator Risch is a part of the Energy and Natural Resource Committee, they’ll be having a hearing on drought this week, as well as keeping an eye on the fire and how things will roll out during the summer. Matt asked everyone if they have any questions, to reach out to him.

Cutis mentioned NRCS has set aside over 1 million dollars for Natural Disaster Funding.

**NRCS** **Source Water Protection Priority Areas and Practices** **– *Maureen Pepper, Water Quality Specialist, NRCS –***

Maureen shared a presentation on Source Water Protection Priority, she also shared a link to the [NB 300-22-42 LTP – Refining Source Water Protection Local Priorities for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023](https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/viewerFS.aspx?hid=48329).

Maureen went over some of the proposed changes to Eligible Practices that can be viewed in her presentation that will be included with these minutes.

The National Water Quality Initiative proposals announcement went out several weeks, those proposals are due June 10th, if you missed that deadline, work with Maureen if you want to propose some watersheds for the National Water Quality Initiative, if anyone has any questions for Maureen, please reach out to her.

Curtis wanted to thank Maureen for her hard work and support with all our National Water Quality Initiatives, historically we have funded half a million dollars each year, but that number has declined because of the lack of applications received, Curtis is asking for everyone help to market, and get the interest out there.

**NRCS** **Programs: Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)** **–**

***Daniel Esposito, State RCPP Program Manager, NRCS*****–**

Dan shared a presentation on RCPP, it is now a standalone program, Dan went over the quick history, RCPP Pillars, eligibility, activities, funding, and the outcomes. Dan stated RCPP is a fantastic opportunity to bring additional NRCS dollars into Idaho, to address targeted resource concerns on a targeted landscape, Dan askes if you have any questions, to please reach out to him. His presentation will be included with these minutes.

**NRCS** **Programs: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), High Priority Practices** –

***Lindsay Markegard, State EQIP Program Manager, NRCS***–

Lindsay shared her presentation with an update on where we are with our 2022 funds and some consideration to provided comments on FY23.

We are wrapping up applications that were contracting for our first signup, we’ve obligated over 11 million dollars so far, and that’s a little over half of our total EQIP budget of 20.7 million dollars. 2nd sign up for EQIP has closed and were working through eligibility, ranking, and preapproving those contracts for funding in a few more weeks.

Lindsay also shared the EQIP Priority Practices, EQIP/EQIP-CIC/CSP Proposed timelines, and briefly went over what the ACT NOW is, still a lot to review and line out before we’re ready to roll this out. The presentation will be included with these minutes, as well as the Index of Conservation Practice Standards. If you have any questions or comments for Lindsay, she asks that you reach out to her.

**NRCS** **Programs: Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Enhancements and Resource Concerns** –

***Chelcey Larsen, State CSP Program Manager, NRCS***–

Chelcey introduced herself, she shared a presentation on CSP, which will be included with minutes. She went over the Priority Resource Concern categories, there are 17 of them, each state is required to choose 8 of the 17 to focus on.

Chelcey is asking for two things to be completed for the CSP review –

1. review state priority resource concern categories and recommend changes is desired
2. review FY 2022 CSP enhancement list and provide feedback by September 30, 2022
3. Chelcey thanks everyone for the support!

**NRCS** **Programs: EQIP Conservation Incentives Contracts, Fiscal Year 2023 High Priority Areas** –

***Josh Miller, Acting State EQIP CIC Program Manager,******NRCS* –**

Josh introduced himself, and shared a presentation, overview on EQIP CIC, it was a new enrollment option for Idaho in FY22, EQIP CIC received 35 eligible applications with an estimate of 4.2 million dollars.

For FY23, Josh is asking for input on the high priority areas identifying land uses and identifying 3 resource concerns to target for each land use. There are some staff recommendations for 2023 as well, those will be able to view in his presentation that will be included with these minutes. All comments and feedback welcomed.

**NRCS** **Programs: Easement Programs Timelines, Fiscal Year 2023** – ***Nick McGuire, Easement Specialist, NRCS* –**

Nick introduced himself, went over the Easement Program timelines for FY23, they’re making a few changes to the application cutoff dates for FY23-FY24, those dates will be in his presentation and shared with minutes.

The reasoning for moving up those dates is to better align our administration process with the seasons in Idaho.

Nick and Diane are looking for any comments, and feedback on the minor changes, please reach out to them with those.

Curtis commented, we take our Easement Program very seriously, and we’ve been fortunate to bring on 2 additional Easement Specialist for Idaho. Curtis thanks Nick for his presentation.

**Round Table-**

Lori opened the roundtable for discussion, Tanya Hibler – Idaho Dairymen’s Association, asked if the District Conservationist position in Twin Falls, ID was filled.

Curtis answered, interviews have been conducted, and in the process of making that selection, and filling that position.

**Closing Comments –**

Curtis wanted to mention TNC is a close partner of ours and wanted to get the word out that there’s a position for a TNC Director in Montana.

Curtis hopes all the information shared during this meeting is valuable, and useful. He appreciates, and thanked everyone for their support, and taking time to attend the meeting today.

Lori thanks Curtis for his closing comments and reminded everyone in the meeting if they have any questions or comments for the presenters, to reach out to them directly.

**Next Meeting - Tuesday, September 6, 2022**