

## **State Conservationist Update – Alan McBee**

### **Staffing**

NRCS has experienced quite a bit of turn over in the field office. Multiple positions were field staff who moved into a state office position on the technical staff. We have one new District Conservationist (Brad Yothers) in Fairbanks and we are advertising for a District Conservationist in Wasilla. We will keep a DC on the Kenai Peninsula and a DC in Juneau.

We've had about a 90 percent turnover of staff in the field offices over the last 2 years. We have new people who are excited to be here and who are excited about their jobs.

Kristine Harper our Tribal Liaison is leaving NRCS this month and she took a job with the Forest Service in Washington State. NRCS has created a national office of tribal relations which we have never had before as an agency. NRCS is holding all tribal liaison position descriptions at this time until the new office of tribal relations is established, and new position descriptions can be developed. Alan is working with the national office on this. In the meantime, Ann Fischer and Alan McBee are available to assist with Tribal needs and Ann is the lead on agreements with Tribes.

### **Watersheds**

We received almost \$40 million for planning and design of watershed projects (watershed and flood prevention operations program). We have 18 of those projects and most of them are in rural Alaska working with villages on relocation activities.

## **State Resource Conservationist Update – Scott Crockett**

The SRC team is now fully staffed.

- Jon Oestreich is a business tools planning specialist in Fairbanks.
- Michelle Jezeski is planning support specialist in Palmer.
- Chris Tcimpidis is our new state forester in Palmer.
- Dave Ianson is our new state agronomist in Palmer.
- Dean Houchen is our new state biologist in Delta Junction.
- Karin Sonnen is our new state grazing specialist in Homer.

SRC team will be hiring an archaeologist. It will be a GS-12 position and will be advertised in the next couple of months.

The SRC team has been focused this year on training field staff. We currently only have 3 veteran planners in the state (planners with 3 or more years of planning experience). There is a significant workload to train our new planners.

All of our ecological science practice standards are up to date. Practice standards are reviewed and updated every five years and undergo a public comment period.

We recently adopted a new conservation practice called a low tunnel. It's like a high tunnel but smaller. We are beginning to roll that out and will give training to our field staff to implement that practice this coming up field season.

For hiring new planners, NRCS is shifting some of the field positions from a soil conservationist to a natural resources specialist and making those positions open to the public to broaden the pool of candidates for job vacancies. Hiring has been a challenge agency-wide and government-wide. We don't require as much traditional cropping/agricultural experience as is usually required in the Lower 48.

### **NRCS Programs Update – Amanda Crowe**

EQIP – Last year in FY22 we had 4 batching dates. Of note, we obligated 93% of our EQIP dollars to socially disadvantaged clients in FY22. This year we are looking at \$9.6M in our budget for EQIP. Last year we obligated \$7.7M in EQIP.

CSP – Last year we had a CSP deadline in March, this year we are moving that up to December so our planners have more time to work on those plans. Our goal is to continue to do outreach so that our clients are aware of the program. This year our CSP allocation is \$500,000 which is the same as it was last year.

RCPP – EQIP is for projects that were under the 2014 Farm Bill. For projects under the 2018 Farm Bill, those fall under an RCPP Land Management Contract. Last year we had 1 RCPP-EQIP and 2 RCPP-LM projects. This year all RCPP projects will use the established EQIP batching dates, unless a lead partner wants to request a different deadline in that case they may contact our RCPP Coordinator Jackie Kragel.

ACEP – Last year we had 3 applications that are in process and are moving forward, no contracts or dollars were obligated this year in FY22. In FY21 we had 1 application, 1 contract at \$794,200. Nov. 30 is the application deadline this year for easements.