

## **State Technical Committee Meeting – 3/4/20**

**Mary Podoll – NRCS, ND State Conservationist** - opened meeting with introductions.

Mary talked about her detail to Washington DC and what she learned and the amazing opportunities that she was able to be involved in.

She spoke about our NRCS Chief, Matthew Lohr, and his new mission of feeding the world and our responsibilities of clean water and soil to make this happen.

She touched on the Chief's FY20 Priorities – North Dakota NRCS Action Plan

- Implement and deliver the 2018 Farm Bill to our Nation's farmers, ranchers, and private forests.
- Streamline our processes and program delivery to best serve our customers.
- Better understand our customer needs and improve overall customer service.

Everything we do now is about conservation for our producers. Mary talked about the Farm Bill and the importance of working and understanding our customers. She is planning to reach out to tribes on how the Farm Bill is working out on the reservations.

We are bringing in a new generation of employees as others are retiring. With our outreach efforts and connecting with other partners, we are very fortunate in ND to have so many that make soil health a priority and this is really where NRCS is heading. Mary let everyone know she has 30 months left before retiring and she has many goals to accomplish before that time:

- Leaving a legacy for conservation and natural resources sustainability – Building Bridges and Setting Standards of Success.
- Producers - Technical Assistance and Financial Assistance
- Technical - Resources and Planning
- Partnership - Finding Solutions
- Innovative and Engaged Employees - The best technically informed and trained staff – EVER
- Multifarious

The Restructure Plan was started in July of 2019 and we have already had more efficiency.

Important website with a lot of growing information: <https://www.farmers.gov/>

Sponsor Jeremy Davis – March 10-12 (Regional FPAC Coordinator with a lot of great information).

Sponsor the NCTAB in ND – March 17-18.

**Greg Link – NDGFD, Division Chief – Native Grasslands, A Problem, A Vision, An Opportunity (see presentation)**

The State Technical Committee brings us all together and offers a good opportunity to share information.

Greg spoke on Native Grasslands – A Problem, A Vision, An Opportunities and the following topics relating:

- North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan
- Species of Conservation Priority
- Endangered Species
- ESA Listed Species
- ESA Petitioned Species & Species Under Review
- Grassland Birds
- Unbroken Grasslands: Native Prairie
- State of the State – comparing today to 200 years ago in regards to Wetlands, Native Prairie and Woodlands/Shrubs.
- The factors the Contribute to Grassland Loss
- Cost of Endangered Species

“Our analysis indicates that 84% of the species listed under the (Endangered Species) Act are conservation reliant. These species will require continuing, long-term management investments.”

Scott et al., 2010

- The Meadowlark Initiative

Our State bird (Meadowlark) is very reliant on grassland. We are seeing grassland birds declining. It is important to make sure their homes are right for them to function. It is all about diversity to species to provide what these birds need. Grassland birds are taking a hit. In North Dakota, we have lost over 75% of our native prairie. We have also lost wetlands but today we are focusing on the native prairie. Many factors contribute to grassland loss and we must do a better job at managing endangered species loss.

- USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – An Opportunity
- RCPP Partners Meeting – March 4, 2020 (1:00-4:00)

RCPP – A program about natural resource concerns. Taking care of our producers is another one. RCPP is a program to kick start those concerns.

NDGFD is responsible for 115 rare, declining, or at-risk species.

When species get to point where they are resilient enough to continue to sustain in a normal state, some think they are being the protected species. There is more petitioning than there use to be,

Cost of endangered species – price tag goes up. Species that get on the Endangered Species List do not always come back. 84% of species that are listed are basically on life support. Difficult to sustain those that are on that list.

Looking at 5 elements

- When we see a problem with grasslands – it really helps that industry look out for those ranchers.
- We are trying to reinvent a statewide grassland reconstruction program. Need to keep that sustaining as agriculture. This benefits species that are becoming endangered.
- Do we balance this out?
- It is about quality of life. We all want our kids to see this.

- It is about learning how to balance and take care of our native grass.

Greg is having a meeting this afternoon with Ducks Unlimited. Discussing how to deal with these problems.

How do we get more information on species?

Reconstruction grasslands with natives in them takes time and money but many are working and coming together on this issue. On the national level, there is going to be a meeting talking about grasslands and what are we going to do about this problem. We also want to be proactive within our State among our own partners to figure out what we can do to take care of these issues. The actual “prescription” is working with ranchers and at the same time, helping protect our species.

It is more about treatments and planting methods.

There was discussion about problems with wild farrow hogs and that it has become a major priority.

**Jill Howard, NRCS, Assistant State Conservationist, PC -**

- NRCS does have a farrow swine program and they are working mostly in the southern states on problems with the wild hogs.
- The Conservation Collaboration Grants and Agreements (CCGA) opportunity will be posted to Grants.gov soon. Everyone has an equal opportunity and we are looking for information on that to be out next week. It will be open for 45-60 days. The application process has not changed. Jill will let everyone know when this is available.
- There will be a Mentoring Program for new NRCS employees (CAMP)—this will be for employees that do not come from farm/ranch background but have a passion for natural resources. Also for those employees who do come from ranches but are coming into a new State that has different practices than where they are from. We will be asking farmers and ranchers to mentor employees to help teach them. This is starting as a pilot program in South Dakota and will go Nationwide in June.

**Todd Hagel, NRCS, Assistant State Conservationist, Programs (see presentation) -**

Todd talked about North Dakota NRCS Programs for FY 2020. The new farm bill creates new opportunities. Todd Shared the EQIP budget. It is less than what we had last year. A lot of the places we put our money, we don’t have discretion on. He shared the breakdown in the new Farm Bill.

He handed out a Source Water Protection map (included in materials posted) and explained these sites are likely to be of concern. We will get more funding in this area.

He also covered the following topics:

- Priority (these are on the original list that we will be focusing on with increased cost share)
- Source Water Protection
- NWQI
- CSP 2020

- CSP – Targeted Resource Concerns
- ACEP
- Waterbank Program 2020 – Funding is pending for FY20.
- CART – This is a new tool and will be a 2-part system. If any questions, we will do what we can to help you.

**Brad Thykeson, FSA, SED** – Sign up just finished. People are retiring and it does put FSA in a spot to onboard new employees. They have new trainings in April and May. Getting more hired and funding is there for that. Producers are signing up because they want to make sure they can get every financial advantage they are able to. Adding a lot more guarantees now. We have had a couple of tough years so it has been a trying time for producers. He introduced **Wanda Barton, FSA Program Specialist**, (see presentation) to talk about the 2018 Farm Bill FSA Updates. She covered the following topics:

- CRP Changes
- Expiring CRP
- General CRP Signup 54
- Continuous CRP Signup
- CREP Signup
- CRP Haying and Grazing Provisions
- SHIPP Pilot
- CRP Grassland Program

**Matt Waclawik, NRCS, Wetlands Specialist**, introduced **Steve Stensgard, NRCS, Wetlands Specialist**, (see presentation) to talk about the Wetland Mitigation Program (first authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill.)

- For FY 20-21, \$5 million has been appropriated to the program.
- Currently working out the details and official announcement to come this Spring/Early Summer.
- Competitive Ranking Process
- Changes

See presentation materials – also posted