

## State Technical Committee (STC) Meeting

February 16, 2022

Welcome and Openings Comments – Jeff Vander Wilt, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (ASTC(P)), introduced Tony Sunseri as South Dakota's new State Conservationist effective February 14, 2022. Tony Sunseri introduced himself and provided a brief background. Tony stated that this week was declared Soil Health Awareness Week and he encouraged everyone to view the South Dakota (SD) Soil Health Coalition Web site for more information. He also stated that he appreciated everyone for participating in this meeting.

**Congressional Representatives** – Ryan Donnelly, Senator Thune's Office, Washington, D.C., reported that they are currently on the kick-off for the next Farm Bill. Conservation is a high priority. Looking to address the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) related to haying and grazing dates and grazing infrastructure. Any ideas are welcome.

Jim Selchert, Senator Rounds Office, Rapid City, SD, stated that ag is number one in the state and what we do to support conservation efforts is what we are working on. He also welcomed Tony aboard.

**Farm Service Agency (FSA) Updates** – Joseph Schultz, Acting State Executive Director, FSA, stated that they are hoping that an actual executive director will be selected soon.

**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** – Owen Fagerhaug, Program Manager, FSA, reported that the USDA Announces the CRP Sign-ups for 2022. The General CRP Sign-up will run from January 31 to March 11 and the Grassland CRP Sign-up will run from April 4 through May 13. The county offices are currently accepting applications. A total of 139,000 acres will be expiring this year and would like to get these acres re-enrolled. A News Release was issued and a link to access this information is posted below.

[USDA Announces Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2022.pdf](#)

**Soil Health Update** – Tanse Herrmann, Grazing Land Soil Health Specialist, stated that back in May 2021 he accepted this new position. Prior to accepting this position, he served as the District Conservationist in the Sturgis Field Office. Tanse provided some background on his career and also provided the three main functions of his new position. They are:

### Primary Functions

1. Soil Health: outreach, education, and training
  - landowner/operator and staff focus points, youth
2. Support and grow the partnership effort in South Dakota
3. Rangeland NRI (National Resources Inventory)
  - coordinate access requests
  - audit data collection in-field
  - review data accuracy

Members of the Committee: please reach out to Tansie to receive occasional updates with event flyers and written commentary related to soil health topics and strategies via e-mail. I included the Soil Health Awareness Week social media attachments that the Partners are using throughout the week. He also invited members to contact him to discuss the potential of including soil health demonstrations and talks at any field days, meetings, etc.

## 2 16 22 STC SOIL HEALTH UPDATE AND INTRO

Colette Kessler, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships, provided updates on the USDA NRCS National News. They are as follows:

- February 7, 2022 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is delivering on its promise to expand markets by investing \$1 billion in partnerships to support America’s climate-smart farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners.

The new Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity will finance pilot projects that create market opportunities for U.S. agricultural and forestry products that use climate-smart practices and include innovative, cost-effective ways to measure and verify greenhouse gas benefits. The USDA is now accepting project applications for fiscal year (FY) 2022.

Funding will be provided in two funding pools, and applicants must submit their applications via Grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on:

April 8, 2022, for the first funding pool (proposals from \$5 million to \$100 million), and May 27, 2022, for the second funding pool (proposals from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999).

**Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)** – Colette Kessler reported that SD NRCS is pausing the state-level CIG for one year. There will not be a FY22 CIG for SD. There are national CIG opportunities posted on www.grants.gov, key word search “CIG” “NRCS.”

**Conservation Collaboration Cooperative Agreements (CCCA)** - Colette Kessler also reported that the SD NRCS will have a FY22 Conservation Collaboration Cooperative Agreements Notice of Funding (NFO). It will be announced soon. Notice of Funding Opportunities (NFO) are posted on www.grants.gov, key word search “NRCS South Dakota” or contact Colette Kessler, Assistant State Conservationist (Partnerships), at (605) 220-1765 or colette.kessler@usda.gov. This will be open for 60 days.

Colette provided additional updates which are included below:

- SD Leopold Award nominations call for proposals are being accepted.
- Grassland and soil planners are also available. If interested, please contact our office.
- Growing Resilience – Currently working with farmers and ranchers with interviews and will be aired on all radio stations.

**Conservation Implementation Strategy (CIS)** – Jeff Vander Wilt, ASTC(P), reminded the group that March 4 is the deadline to submit their pre-proposals. We changed the process a little by changing the size of the proposals being submitted. We are requesting not more than a two-page write-up for the project. Once it reviewed and tentatively selected, we will request a copy of the full proposal if needed. These proposals can be e-mailed to Jeff Vander Wilt

([jeffrey.vanderwilt@usda.gov](mailto:jeffrey.vanderwilt@usda.gov)) and Jennifer Wurtz, EQIP Coordinator, at [jennifer.wurtz@usda.gov](mailto:jennifer.wurtz@usda.gov).

**Woody Species Encroachment Draft Strategic Plan** – Jeff Vander Wilt stated that an update on woody species encroachment and how it affects our rangelands was presented by Dr. Dirac Twidwell at the November STC Meeting. Jessica Michalski, State Resource Conservationist, and Jeff Vander Wilt are trying to develop a strategic plan for SD. We want to make the best effort on how to reduce the woody encroachment outreach component to the plan on the specific practices and also see in developing program funding to assist in developing these conservation plans. We already met with South Dakota State University Extension to determine some areas in the state to focus on. We picked out seven areas to consider focusing on. Knowing these areas where we have local interest and based on Dr. Twidwell's research, where we will have the best outcome before it gets to be an issue. The seven areas are listed below:

- White River Area
- Mid-Missouri Area
- Two areas in the James River Valley
- Northeast Corner Coteau Area
- North of Pierre to Cheyenne River
- Lower Brule Grasslands south of Pierre

Our strategic plan is to develop a grassland summit this fall or winter. Partner with producers to finalize the plan on how to deal with the issue in SD. In FY2023, roll out some programs to assist producers with this issue. We are working on a three-tier approach – network with as many people as we can, build-up our technical guidance, and educating our employees. We have provided a link below to access the recording of Dr. Twidwell on the issue for your information and reference.

Conservation to Address Woody Species Encroachment in SD with Dr. Dirac Twidwell - YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuF8VTmGjPw>

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** – Jennifer Wurtz, EQIP Coordinator, reported that she did not have any handouts showing the number of applications and funding breakdown this time. We are moving forward with the pre-approvals. Jennifer reported that we are moving forward with the Cover Crop Initiative in 11 states. South Dakota is one of them. We received approximately 200 applications. We are moving forward with a few Conservation Implementation Strategy projects some new and some from last year. Approved five projects and more are getting ranked. March 4 is the General EQIP ranking deadline.

Jeff also mentioned that there is a potential threat that could affect the poultry operations in the state. We are continuing to monitor this and if it comes to SD, we will then offer something for those producers. We are trying to be prepared. The Mycoplasma Bovis disease is also affecting our bison in the state. Please know that this is on our radar, and we will keep you updated.

**Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)** – Jeff Vander Wilt reported that we have nine funded projects in SD all in different stages and getting agreements in place. Two

are holding sign-ups for producers to enroll. We have a few sign-ups on hold at this time. We have two proposals funded under the Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA). The RCPP proposals are open right now to submit to the national level. Jeff stated that the Classic and AFA announcement are together this year. You can apply for them both, but you will have to submit two proposals if interested. Any questions, please contact Jeff Vander Wilt for any input and/or assistance.

**Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** – Joyce Trevithick, CSP Coordinator, provided an update on this program.

#### **CSP 2022 Renewals**

- Application deadline was April 7, 2021
- 357 Applications received
- Allocation of \$6,628,000
- South Dakota Obligation deadline was December 17, 2021
- 44 Contracts for 131,834.1 acres and \$6,540,206.80

#### **CSP GCI 2022**

- Letters sent to eligible owners and operators from NRCS National Headquarters August 6, 2021
- Obligation deadline was December 31, 2021, for CSP-GCI 2022 applications
- 17 contracts included 1,838 acres for \$165,461.00

#### **CSP Classic 2022**

- Application deadline was January 21, 2022
- 523 applications received
- South Dakota has an initial allocation of \$8,640,000 (see below)
- Organic allocation of \$200,000
- Ranking deadline is March 18, 2022
- Obligation deadline is April 29, 2022

Classic Allocation 2022		\$8,640,000.00
Beginning Farmer		\$864,000.00
Socially Disadvantaged		\$864,000.00
NIPF		\$100,000.00
Big Sioux		\$397,139.60
Coteau		\$677,112.80
Glacial Lakes		\$426,431.20
Upper James		\$729,565.20
Vermillion		\$388,284.00
Central Plains		\$320,164.00
Lower James		\$378,747.20
Lower Missouri		\$364,442.00
Mid Missouri		\$415,532.00
North Missouri		\$333,788.00
River Hills		\$441,417.60
Hills		\$482,970.80
Northwest		\$392,371.20
Prairie		\$313,352.00
Southwest		\$295,640.80
Three Rivers		\$455,041.60
Organic		\$200,000.00

**Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)** – Brandon Kottke, Easement Coordinator, provided an summary on the program. We are about three months ahead of previous years. Overall, a little down on the number of applications. We currently have 68 applications and working on making the tentative offers. In this phase of the WRE, we have two easements with reserved grazing rights and eight permanent easements for a total of 612 acres. Brandon all mentioned that other states may have slippage in funds that we can utilize. We have an increase in the Agricultural Land easement numbers. We are currently going through the offers. We hope to have more of an update by the next STC Meeting. We are hoping to receive additional funding because of the interest in the program.

<b>FY2022 WRE Applications</b>		
<b>Status</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>Number of Applications</b>
<b>Cancelled</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1</b>
30-year	-	1
Permanent	-	

<b>Ineligible</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>1</b>
30-year	-	0
Permanent	-	1
<b>Eligible</b>	<b>10,508</b>	<b>66</b>
30-year	1423	13
30-year RGR	650	5
30-year conversion	80	1
Permanent	6792	38
Permanent RGR	1563	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,108</b>	<b>68</b>

<b>Projected FY2022 WRE Agreements</b>			
<b>Fund Code</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>		<b>Number of Tentative Agreements</b>
<b>Permanent RGR</b>	176.93	\$375,748	2
<b>Permanent</b>	435.13	\$2,996,521	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>612.06</b>	<b>\$3,372,269</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>FY2022 ALE Applications</b>			
<b>Status</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>		<b>Number of Applications</b>
<b>Program Agreement-</b>	1300		6
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1300</b>		<b>6</b>

**\*\*RGR- Reserved Grazing Rights**

**New Policy for Easements** – Jeff Vander Wilt stated that we are not going to spend a lot of time today on this topic; however, there has been a change in policy that we wanted you to be aware of. History – last year in 2021 with the drought they were a lot of interest in primary nesting dates and allowing haying and grazing. There were discrepancies in these dates. This

issue was raised. What is going to happen if we make our dates align when we will be allowed for haying and grazing. The discussion was to move the dates to August 1 to match CRP instead of the July 15 date. Those who would like to discuss this topic in more detail, please let me know. Jeff's plan is to schedule a meeting for interested individuals to discuss this topic. Jeff also stated that he does not expect the policy when it comes out will have the correct wording; however, Jeff will schedule this meeting then for further discussion. He will also share copy of specific policy with the participates in our STC mailing list.

Individuals interested in participating in the discussion at the present time are listed below:

- Pete Bauman
- Jim Selchert

**SD Wetland/HEL Compliance Update** – Deke Hobbick, Assistant State Conservationist or Compliance, was not available for the meeting; therefore, Jeff Vander Wilt just referenced the handout for the Wetland/HEL Compliance summary. If you have any questions, please contact Deke via e-mail at [deke.hobbick@usda.gov](mailto:deke.hobbick@usda.gov).

### **Wetland Workload in SD as of February 1, 2022**

FSA-569 data from October 1, 2021: (includes carryover from FY2021)

-14 in Progress

-6 Completed

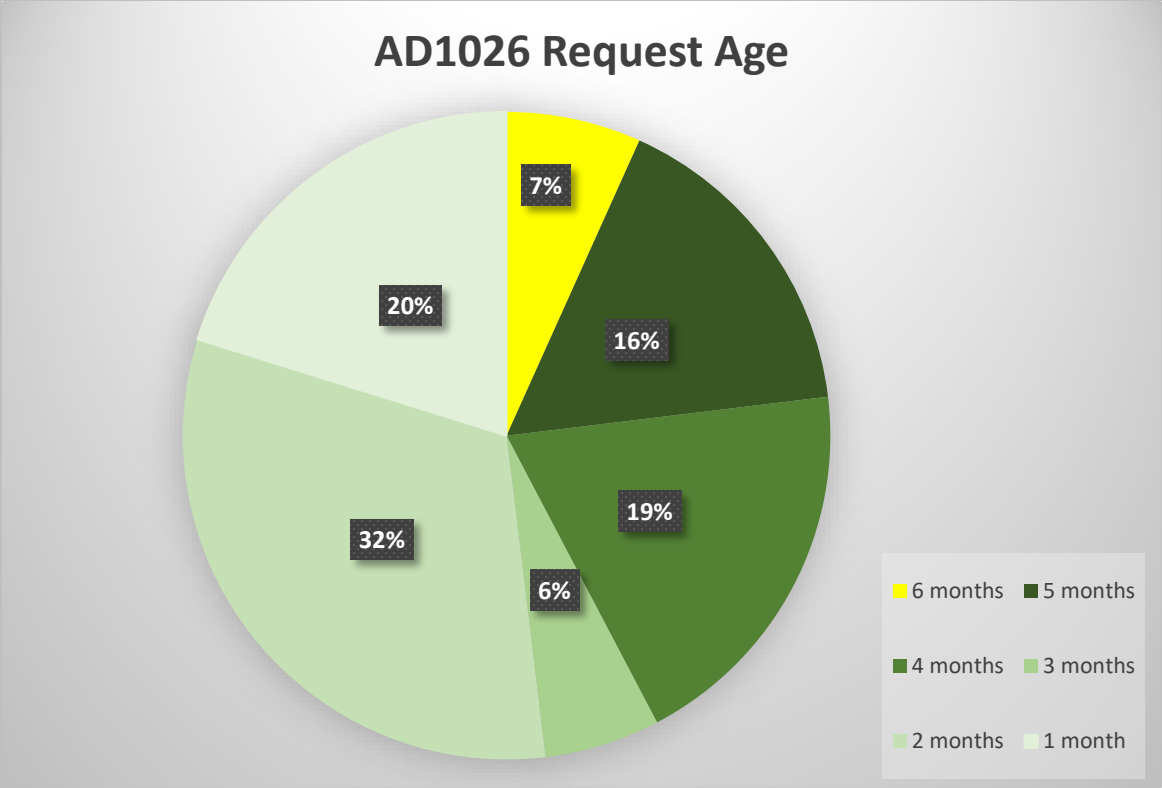
-14 Received

AD-1026 data from October 1, 2021: (Includes Carry over from FY2021)

-142 In Progress

-350 Completed

-229 Received



**Highly Erodible Land Workload in SD as of February 10, 2022**

**HEL AD-1026 data from October 1, 2021:**

- 759 Completed
- 19 Outstanding
- 383 New Breakings
- 71 Determined HEL

**Partnership Reports** – Steve Riley, Northern Great Plains Joint Venture, stated that they entered into an agreement with the CCA process to embark in a three-year agreement with NRCS. We are very excited about this partnership. Krista Erdmann, Science Integration Specialist, was hired in Rapid City. Thank you to SD NRCS.

Krista provided the group an update on her background. She stated that adapting science products for the practical use of those who need to apply them on the ground is challenging and is often a missed step that leads to missed opportunities. To that end, the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture (NGPJV) has partnered with SD NRCS to implement our new Science Integration Partnership.

Krista has a Bachelor’s degree in Biology from Augustana University and Master’s degrees in Environmental Management and Forestry from Duke University. In her previous position with the SD Division of Resource Conservation and Forestry, she worked closely with Black Hills NRCS staff on CSP, EQIP, and CIS projects.



In her new position, Krista's goal is to accelerate and amplify conservation action across SD. There are four main objectives that she'll be focusing on including:

- (1) increasing access by partners to conservation science tools, data, and research to inform conservation decisions.
- (2) identifying and reducing barriers to conservation programs.
- (3) co-producing science to address locally relevant information needs, and
- (4) bridging the gap in science and evaluations with the outcomes and measures that are needed to inform partner programs.

There is a lot of science available to us, with more being published every day. Even though the science is meant to help people working on the ground, sometimes it's just not making it there – whether it be too complex or not locally relevant. Essentially, Krista's job will be (in collaboration with NRCS staff and other conservation partners) to figure out how to bridge that divide and make science work for practitioners and producers across the state. Krista can be reached via e-mail at [kerman@ducks.org](mailto:kerman@ducks.org).

Thank you again for joining us today. The meeting was adjourned.

*Kathy Irving*

KATHY IRVING  
Recorder