

## State Technical Committee (STC) Meeting

August 17, 2022

**Welcome and Openings Comments** – Tony Sunseri, State Conservationist, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for participating. Tony stated that we had quite a year this year. We are actually closing in on the end of the fiscal year (FY) right now and our field offices (FOs) are busy wrapping up Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program and also working hard on the Conservation Reserve Program across the state. With six weeks left we have been given the opportunity for extra funding to get obligated. There are a number of items that we are working through with one being the Inflation Reduction Act which the President just signed. The discussion that is coming down through the agency regarding this act is there is going to be an increase of funding which will be a significant increase in funding for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). They are looking at having an increased start in FY2023 with an even larger increase coming in FY2024. We will have more of an opportunity in getting more conservation on the ground in South Dakota.

So this year, we did obligate close to 20 to \$22 million under our EQIP Program and for our CSP Program close to \$20 million if not a little bit more. This is an opportunity for you to work with NRCS. If you have projects out there, please come and visit with our folks at the field offices. There were a couple of other items that just recently came out. One is the announcement for the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative. There is about \$12 million of funding for partners to work towards grazing land, education, and grazing lands projects. If you have any questions or want more information, please contact Colette Kessler, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships (ASTC(Partnerships)).

We are still working across the state with COVID. Every Friday we receive an update with our restrictions that could be either reduced staffing in an office or if there is a mask requirement, and we have to respond according to what that policy is that comes out each week. This is one reason that we are not meeting in person this week. Tony was really hoping with Dakotafest going on that we would have the opportunity to meet in Mitchell and actually have this meeting in person.

Congressional Reps – No one participated for this meeting.

**Farm Service Agency (FSA) Updates** – Owen Fagerhaug, Program Manager, was not available to attend the meeting today.

**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** – Brandon Walter, State Biologist, NRCS, provided an update on what is going on with CRP and how the workload looks. Brandon shared the breakdown of the information and workload by resource unit as well as CRP Notice 979. This notice was sent out on August 3 with the timelines for completing conservation plans. The FSA and NRCS work together on CRP; however, it is FSA's program and NRCS provides the technical assistance to get conservation practices on the ground. We currently have timelines to complete. Reference the table in CRP Notice 979 for all sign-ups for CRP. Brandon provides an update on the spreadsheet that shows the workload by resource unit for the different sign-ups. Brandon also reviewed the numbers for each of the sign-ups. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is the program that we work with the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks.

**Soil Health Update** – Kent Vlieger, Soil Health Quality Specialist, stated that we would be starting a new series on soil organic matter. At the last STC Meeting, we wrapped up the No-Till series that showed the five principles of soil health. The soil matter is going to be a three-to-four-part series. Today we are going to visit about what is soil organic matter. The five principles are broke down to two things which is Protect and Feed. At the next meeting, we will visit about how we lose organic matter. If you have any questions, please contact Kent Vlieger at [kent.vlieger@usda.gov](mailto:kent.vlieger@usda.gov).

**Conservation Collaboration Grants and Cooperative Agreements (CCGA) Update** - Colette Kessler, ASTC(Partnerships), provide an update on the topic. This year NRCS had a CCGA agreement. We thought we would have more funding that we actually received. Therefore, we were not able to go down the list very far for agreements this year, but hopefully in the future things should be looking up for as far as our CCA's. Another national opportunity is the Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG). The CIG can be found on [grants.gov](http://grants.gov) and then search for NRCS and it will list all the opportunities.

[Grants | GRANTS.GOV](#)

**Conservation Implementation Strategy** – Brandon Kottke, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, provided an update. Brandon indicated that this opportunity is being offered across the state. Please visit with the local offices and or the Resource Unit Conservationists. This year we changed our process. We received a total of 42 pre-proposals and then asked for a full proposal on 20 of them. Currently the Leadership Team Review panel is going through all of the proposals and are making a selection on which projects we will be moving forward with. We are moving forward with CIS next year. We plan on getting the announcement out to you soon. A summary report will be provided at the next STC Meeting.

**Regional Conservation Partnership Program** – Krecia Leddy, Acting RCCP Coordinator, provided an update to the group.

- South Dakota (SD) is the lead state for 9 funded RCPP projects/proposals.
  - 6 RCPP Classic and 3 RCPP AFA (Alternative Funding Arrangements)
  - \$39 million received for conservation work in SD.
  
- Newest RCPP project funded: Conservation Easements in the Black Hills of SD
  - Sponsored by South Dakota Agricultural Land Trust
  - \$4.2 million awarded
  - 1 of 41 projects funded nationwide, announced 8/13/2022
  - Project will protect SD farms and ranches in the Black Hills through easements; land remains in agriculture production and prevents it from being converted by urban sprawl
  
- Other RCPP activities currently happening:
  - **Big Sioux River Watershed Partnership Project**
    - Sponsor: Minnehaha Conservation District
    - 26 producer contracts in southeast SD for soil health practices
    - RCPP coordinator assisting with getting obligation packages to National Headquarters for review and obligation
  - **Belle Fourche River Watershed Project Irrigation Efficiency and Soil Health**
    - Sponsor Belle Fourche River Watershed Partnership

- Working to get commitments on conservation contracts with producers
- **Scaling Soil Health in the Prairie Pothole Region**
- Sponsored by Ducks Unlimited
- 15 applications accepted and screened down to 5 applications to fund
- RCPP is a great way to leverage partner dollars with a 1:1 match requirement
  - Notice of Funding anticipated to be announced in January
  - Proposals potentially due mid-April 2023
  - Announcement will be forthcoming

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program** -Jennifer Wurtz, EQIP Coordinator, stated that she did not have a handout because they are still working on finalizing some numbers on the \$2.5 million dollars that we received last week. We did have 31 CIS projects this year that had funds available and producer contracts. Most of the new funding is going into the Resource Units. There will be more coming to you on the new FY in moving forward with CIS at 100 percent. Jennifer will be providing a summary of final numbers to you at the next STC Meeting.

**Conservation Stewardship Program** – Joyce Threvithick, CSP Coordinator, provided an update on the program. South Dakota FOs are reminding producers to provide documentation for FY2022 activity implementation. Documentation is due to FOs September 16, 2022, in order to allow time for the FOs to certify all completed practices by September 30, 2022. Payments will be made in the first and second quarters of FY2023.

### **CSP Classic 2022**

- Application deadline was January 21, 2022
- 523 applications received
- South Dakota had an initial allocation of \$8,640,000. Funded 57 contracts
- Allocation #2 was \$4,004,000. Received May 9, 2022. Funded 19 contracts
- Allocation #3 was \$2,782,300. Funded 7 contracts
- Allocation #4 plan is \$2,168,432 and will fund 9 more applications
- Total SD CSP Classic allocation for FY2022 \$17,594,732
- These allocations will have funded approximately 92 CSP contracts.
- South Dakota spent \$1.2 million of these funds on Beginning Farmer applicants and \$1.03 million went to Socially Disadvantaged applicants.
- Obligation deadline for final allocation will be September 15, 2022

### **CSP Renewals 2023**

- Application deadline was April 15, 2022
- 333 applications received
- Obligation deadline will be after October 1, 2022
- No allocation until after the fiscal year rollover

### **CSP-GCI 2023**

- Offers sent out mid-August by FSA
- Application deadline possibly October 14, 2022

- Obligation deadline likely December 30, 2022

**Agricultural Conservation Easement Program** – Marcus Rock, Acting Easement Coordinator, reported the following:

- Tentatively planning to fund 9 WRE offers in 2022 totaling 530.3 acres
  - Including 5 from the Vermillion River CIS project area approved in FY21.
  - Other projects are from Hutchinson, Roberts, and Tripp Counties
  - Those agreements for the Purchase of Conservation Easement (APCEs) will be going out to those landowners soon.
- There has been a change in Compatible Use Authorization (CUA) haying timing. No longer a July 15 start date. It is now August 2 to align with the CRP Primary Nesting Season (PNS).
- Restoration work is progressing.
  - 4 easements (271 ac) seeded, and 5 easements have seedbed preparation in progress under both the federal contract and landowner contracts
  - 10 easements (127ac) were seeded under the Habitat Forever Cooperative Agreement (these are partial reseedings)
  - Multiple other practices have been completed including obstruction removal, herbaceous weed control, and wetland restorations.

**Water Bank Program**

- Tentatively plan on funding 11 applications for FY2022 totaling 808.3 acres

**WREP**

- Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) project proposal submissions due September 23. Announcements was sent out about two weeks ago.

**SD Wetland Workload** – Deke Hobbick, Assistant State Conservationist for Compliance, reported on this topic.

Wetland Workload in SD as of August 1, 2022

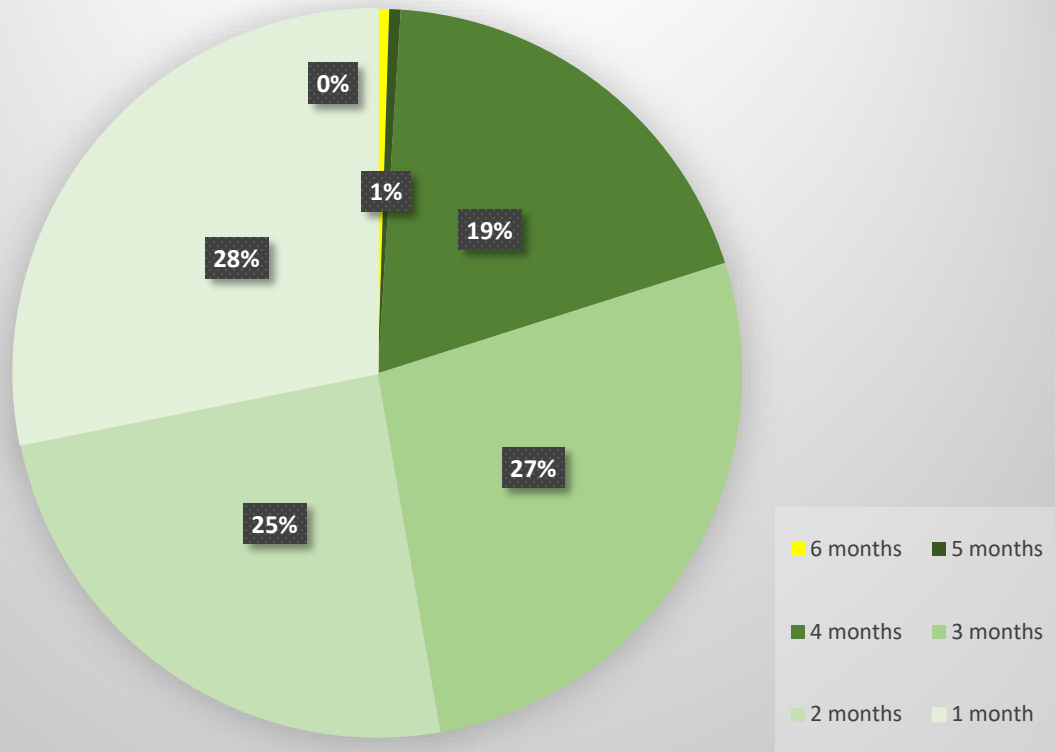
FSA-569 data from October 1, 2021: (includes carryover from FY2021)

- 16 in Progress
- 27 Completed
- 36 Received

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

- 194 In Progress
- 864 Completed
- 784 Received

## AD1026 Request Age



Highly Erodible Land Workload in SD as of August 1, 2022

HEL AD-1026 data from October 1, 2021:

- 1,561 Completed
- 19 Outstanding
- 673 New Breakings
- 164 Determined HEL

**Partnerships Updates** – Colette Kessler, ASTC(Partnerships), asked if there was anyone having any updates. Judge Jessop, South Dakota Grassland Coalition, was not available to give an update but asked Colette to remind the group that the Chamberlain Grazing School will be held on September 13-15, 2022.

Cindy Zenk, SD Soil Health Coalition, stated that the Soil health School is coming up soon and we also have been doing quite a few different field tours and we have another one scheduled in Roberts County in September. We have an events calendar that we keep updated as well as our social media. The staff has been working a lot with producers out in the field in working on conservation implementation through our 319 grants. So we do have funds for cover crop plantings as well as some grazing management practice installation as well. So, one date that I want to put on everyone's calendar is our upcoming conference which is scheduled for January 24-25, 2023, in Sioux Falls.

Pete Bauman, South Dakota State University (SDSU) – Pete reported that they had completed the initial mapping of all SD for the potentially undisturbed mapping project. The NRCS has been a huge supporter of that financially and with other resources including LiDAR. The technical part of all SD has been mapped and is going through the review and vetting process. Working in the next several weeks to distribute out a version to use in pdf, jpeg, and shapefile format through the SDSU site. Obligated the release to the final report. An intern is working on the loss in native grasslands over the last 10 years. Working to determine where to house this with the SD Department of Game, Fish and Parks for a living public access.

Bruce Toay, Ducks Unlimited - Bruce reported RCPP has been their focus. A sign-up was held and collected 15 applications across eastern SD that screened high and were eligible for funding. So, our staff spent a lot of time over that period meeting with those producers. Putting together potential plans of getting the feel of these projects. We set-up ranking criteria to score each of these applications. So we focused on areas with high wetland densities and grass restoration and soil health principles. In that process, we had five applications that really floated to the top covering approximately 6,000 acres for \$800,000 for the first sign-up. Bruce stated that they are hoping to have another sign-up in late winter.

Tony Leif, SD Agricultural Land Trust – Tony reported that they did get accepted their first easement earlier this year back in March of 762 acres of grass and forest rangeland that is located just outside of Spearfish, SD. We did have an additional two easements where the landowner is committed to donating those easements to the trust. One of those in Custer County and the other one in Brule County. Also working with projects where easements have been funded in the Black Hills. We are looking forward to working with NRCS to put together the programmatic partnership agreement to assist producers in the state. We published our first newsletter last month and it was widely distributed. Hopefully all of you saw a copy; however, if not, please reach out to me and I can send you an electronic copy.

Next meeting – No date has been determined at this time.

Thank you to our presenters and everyone for their participation. As we set the date for the next meeting, we will get that information out to you. The meeting was adjourned.

*Kathy Irving*

KATHY IRVING  
Reporter