



State Technical Committee

November 16, 2021

9:30 AM - Noon

USDA - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Mississippi

Agenda

Moderator: Clarence Finley

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|--|-------------------|
| 1. Welcome, Introductions and Comments | Kurt Readus |
| 2. Risk Management Agency | Roddrick Bell |
| 3. Farm Service Agency Program | Thaddeus Fairley |
| 4. Agricultural Research Service | Dr. Martin Locke |
| 5. National Center for Alluvial Aquifer Research – MSU | Dr. Drew Gholson |
| 6. National Association of Conservation Districts | Gary Blair |
| 7. Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Team | Ron Howard |
| 8. Soils Tools and Technology | James Curtis |
| 9. Ecological Sciences | Rogerick Thompson |
| 10. Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality | Natalie Segrest |
| 11. Easement Programs | Jason Keenan |
| 12. Engineering | Olguy Louis |
| 13. NRCS Programs | Clarence Finley |
| 14. Closing Comments | Kurt Readus |

Presenters

Kurt Readus, State Conservationist, NRCS

Roddrick Bell, Director, RMA

Thaddeus Fairley, Sr., State Executive Director, FSA

Dr. Martin Locke, Director, Sediment Laboratory

Dr. Drew Gholson, Assistant Professor & Extension Irrigation Specialist; MSU Coordinator National Center for Alluvial Aquifer Research

Gary Blair, Secretary-Treasurer, NACD

Ron Howard, Senior Technical Advisor, Natural Resource Specialist, Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Team, USDA-NRCS

James Curtis, Acting State Soil Scientist, NRCS

Rogerick Thompson, State Resource Conservationist, NRCS

Natalie Segrest, MDEQ, Chief, Basin Management and Nonpoint Source Branch Surface Water Division

Jason Keenan, Assistant State Conservationist, NRCS, Easements

Olguy Louis, State Conservation Engineer, NRCS

Clarence Finley, Assistant State Conservationist, NRCS, Programs



State Technical Committee Meeting

Tuesday, November 16, 2021
9:30 a.m. – Noon
Minutes

Moderator: Clarence Finley

The State Technical Committee (STC) meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. The meeting was held in a virtual platform, Microsoft Teams Live, due to COVID-19 restrictions. It was noted that this meeting would be recorded.

Mr. Clarence Finley, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, welcomed the attendees to the meeting and asked all attendees to place their name in the Q&A section to record their attendance. Attendees were instructed to post all questions to the committee for responses in the Q&A section. Those that joined the meeting by phone were instructed to send any questions to Nicholas.williams@usda.gov for a response. Attendees were instructed to post any technical issues they may have in the Q&A section. Mr. Nicholas Williams will be monitoring the Q&A during the meeting.

Mr. Finley introduced Mr. Kurt Readus, State Conservationist.

Opening Remarks

Kurt Readus

Welcomed attendees and presenters to the FY22 STC meeting and announced that NRCS has a new Chief, Mr. Terry Cosby, from Tallahatchie County, Mississippi.

We have received all our mandatory funds, EQIP and our Conservation Stewardship funds within the state and are looking at applications we have on file to begin to assess and rank. Although we can't fund everything we have on the books, we will strive to fund everything possible.

Three main points of concerns that the Secretary and Chief have stressed upon us:

- 1) NRCS' ability to assist ranchers and landowners in addressing climate change. That means we should be adopting practices that mitigate climate issues, making those farms more resilient and adapting to the change in the climate itself.
- 2) Urban conservation. In the 2018 Farm Bill, it included urban conservation in the language. In Mr. Finley's presentation he will address if you'd like to serve on the advisory committee for Urban Conservation.
- 3) Equity. There have been many executive orders signed toward equity and equality on how we administer our programs and ensuring word gets out on our programs.

We are still operating in a COVID environment, currently we're at 75% staffing in our field offices with the ability for our farmers to come in via an appointment. This is an improvement from where we were during the uprise of the Delta variant. We were down to 25% staff with no customer visits to the field office. Now you are allowed to come into the office with an appointment.

President Biden signed the Reconciliation Bill yesterday. NRCS will receive some funds, it is a nationwide fund, around 900 million dollars. Three hundred million will go to the Emergency Watershed Program and the remaining will go towards watershed rehabilitation and watershed operations.

Mr. Finley introduced Roddrick Bell, Director of Risk Management Agency.

Risk Management Agency (RMA)

Roddrick Bell



Mr. Bell expressed his thanks for allowing RMA to participate in the STC meeting and appreciates the relationship RMA has with NRCS and FSA and their diligence in ensuring RMA programs are distributed properly and they're operating properly within the state.

RMA is continually focused on securing the future of agriculture by providing world class risk management tools to rural America by listening, learning, and testing new and expanding insurance options. RMA continues to ensure that a critical safety net is available for the greatest number of farmers and ranchers in the state of Mississippi.

An overview of crop insurance was provided in the 2020 and going into the 2021 crop year. Despite the pandemic and trade wars, agriculture moved forward. Crop insurance was heavily involved in that process along with the other agencies and the programs they presented.

Preventive planning, a new rule was put into place for the 2021 crop year.

The Hurricane Protection program that was introduced as a part of last year's implementation of a disaster program, effective in the 2018 Farm Bill, started in 2020. We did have one named hurricane that impacted Louisiana and Mississippi and I will discuss how that hurricane affected payments.

I'll discuss the Pandemic Cover Crop Program, which was introduced as a part of a bundle of products as a result of trying to aid farmers during the pandemic.

Mississippi 2020 summary of business-

Soybeans continues to be our number one insured crop in the state of Mississippi and we have over 5000 policies that were sold and over 2,000,000 acres insured with 617,000,000 million dollars liability. We insure everything from soybeans to apiculture. We have 143 policies for honeybees in the state of Mississippi. Blueberries is becoming a more popular product along the coastal region due to some weather patterns that affect that area from year to year.

We have over 4,000,000 million acres insured in the state of Mississippi with close to 1.5 billion in liability. That is a lot of liability as far as agriculture. We are an agricultural state and that's not even including the livestock and chickens that are grown in this state. Based on some products that we're looking at, poultry, catfish and the shrimp and oyster industry, we may have products in place in the next few years for these types of commodities.

Statistics -

Consistent liability of over one billion dollars in our state. For this year we anticipate a higher liability, commodity prices are up, and agriculture is still strong.

The number of policies sold in 2020 was over 12,000 policies, we had over 11,000 policies sold this year. Commodity prices rising is good for our producers, but it also provides extended coverage, as far as the number and dollars that are involved.

Prevented Planting (PP) – New Rule

In 2021 we included a new rule in our common policy. It has been years since we've updated our common policy. That particular rule was that to be eligible for prevented planted payment.

The acres must have been:

Planted, insured, and harvested, or if not harvested adjusted for claim purposes due to an insured cause of loss, in at least one of the preceding four crop years.



For example, for acreage to be eligible for PP in 2021, the acreage must be planted, insured, and harvested (or if not harvested, adjusted for claim purposes due to an insured cause of loss) in 2017, 2018, 2019, or 2020.

Mississippi Prevent Plant Indemnity (PP)

From 2012 to 2021 prevented planting indemnities were losses that were paid.

There were 130 million dollars that were paid out in 2019. That means that producers, for some reason we're not able to plant a crop, but got a payment based on the crop that they said they couldn't plant. In most cases it was corn in the state of Mississippi. In 2020, it was 103 million.

We put in a new rule for 2021, it is down to 21 million. That is quite a significant drop in the number of PP payments that were paid out. We are thinking, as a result, of this new rule it effected the number of policies sold. Based on this information I think that there were probably some things going on in that PP round as far as claims that probably weren't legitimate. I think we see it in the numbers in 2021, so we'll be looking forward to seeing what happens in the future years with Prevent Plant.

Hurricane Insurance Protection – Wind Index (HIP-WI)

Introduced in 2020, it is an option to add coverage for hurricanes to an already-existing MPCl policy. If a person or a producer had underlying policy for corn, cotton, soybean, or any insured crop in the county, they could purchase a hurricane insurance.

It's a protection policy, as an additional coverage to that underlying policy that covers the deductible portion of the MPCl policy, not otherwise covered, up to 95% of crop value.

Must be selected by sales closing date (SCD), 9/30 for fall seeded crop and 2/28 for spring seeded crops. If a hurricane occurs during insurance period, payment is made. Premium subsidy fixed at 65% (same as for SCO). These factors determine how we come up with these payments.

National Hurricane Center (NHC) designation of a hurricane.
Part of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).
Publishes maps/data of hurricane-force wind extents.
Generally published within 2 weeks after storm event.

NHC data is used by RMA to designate which counties are eligible for HIP-WI payment. Any county, or adjacent county that has hurricane force wind. Coverage areas extend up the east Atlantic seaboard, through the Gulf of Mexico and also covers the Western seaboard. Over 70 crops are insured, and premiums are higher closer to the coast lines.

Six named storms brushed our area last year or triggered payments. Discussed hurricane Ida impacts of wind forces through Mississippi counties and Louisiana parishes. Several counties triggered for payments.

Pandemic Cover Crop Program (PCCP)

PCCP is part of USDA's Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative, a bundle of programs to bring financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and producers who felt the impact of COVID-19 market disruptions.

RMA had what we called a pandemic cover crop program, PCCP. Provided premium support to producers who insured their spring crop with most insurance policies and planted a qualifying cover crop during the 2021 crop year. The premium support is \$5 per acre, but no more than the full premium owed.



Qualifying cover crops include all that are reportable to FSA, including cereals and other grasses, legumes, brassicas and other non-legume broadleaves, and mixtures of two or more cover crop species planted at the same time. A full list is available in FSA Handbook 2-CP.

Producers automatically received the benefit by filing the Report of Acreage form (FSA-578) by June 15, 2021, at their local FSA county office. There were over 166,000 acres that received the benefit and an additional \$799,000 in subsidies.

Coahoma and Yazoo counties had the highest number of acres that participated in the program this year. This program will probably be available, based on budget, for the 2022 crop year.

Contact information was provided to meeting participants to contact if you have any questions about the programs or what I presented today.

Roddrick Bell
roddric.bell@usda.gov
601-965-4771
601-331-4228

Mr. Finley asked that those that recently joined the meeting to enter their name and contact information into the Q&A section to record your attendance. Mr. Thaddeus Fairley, the new Director of FSA was introduced and recognized.

Farm Service Agency Program

Thaddeus Fairley / Patty Roberts

Mr. Fairley, the new State Executive Director for FSA, Mississippi provided the attendees with some personal background information. His background is in banking, participating in community outreach and building relationships with stakeholders and the communities they served. He's looking to do the same thing with FSA. He introduced Patty Roberts, Executive Officer who served as the Acting, State Executive Director. She has over 30 years of service with FSA and will present for the agency at this time.

Conservation compliance GIS Division update

Provided Division staff information that work closely with NRCS and other agencies to help us deliver conservation programs in Mississippi. Amy Moore, Megan Hogue, James Smith, and Nicholas Hancock. We all work for the agency for many years and enjoy working with you.

State Technical Committee helps FSA meet CRP program delivery goals:

- improve interaction with technical partners
- increase consistency and success statewide program delivery
- improve customer service to participants
- provide updates to partners for the year

We are here to serve the farmers and agriculture producers in Mississippi.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) updates

For FY2021, ending 9/30/21, we had 6,200+/- contracts expired from CRP on September 30, 2021. Over 77K acres expired from CRP in FY21 and 31K of those acres were enrolled in highly environmental sensitive practices. The majority of those acres were what we term general contract acres. Which means they were likely pine trees or grasses.

Policy Changes

In April 2021, the Biden Administration made several policy changes that effected FSAs delivery of the



CRP program. Higher payment rates, new incentives, and a more targeted focus on CRP's role in climate change mitigation. NRCS helps us with soils, soil productivity factors that affect the payment rate that producers and the enrolled land in CRP receive. New incentives were announced with a more targeted focus in climate change mitigation. General offers were accepted through July 23, with 1.9 million acres accepted nationwide. Continuous offers were accepted through Aug 6, with over 800K acres accepted. Grassland offers were accepted through Aug 20, with 2.5 million acres accepted. FSA had the largest grasslands this year. Roughly 4,000,000 or so had been offered nationwide.

CRP Enrollment figures in Mississippi as of (09/2021)

General Contracts	272,661 ac.
Continuous, SAFE	259,117 ac.
Farmable Wetlands	11,379 ac.
MS Delta CREP	5,084 ac.
CRP Grasslands	573 ac.

Statewide Total:548,814 ac.

MS Delta CREP is limited to 8,000 acres in that part of CRP.

Conservation Data for Mississippi

Number of Farms w/ CRP	8,783
Number of CRP Contracts	13,319
Ratio of Gen/Cont acres	49/51
Ratio of Gen/Cont contracts	40/60

Annual Payments \$ 42.5M
Average \$/Acre \$ 77.55

Over 13K CRP contracts FSA administers. A 50/50 ratio of general versus continuous contracts acres. The ratio of contracts is 40/60 because continuous contracts have smaller amounts of acres within them because they are dedicated to smaller areas, such as along creeks.

In October of each year, Farm Service Agency makes, the annual rental payment for Conservation Reserve program acres. This year, Farm Service Agency has paid out over 42.5 million to CRP participants in Mississippi. The average dollar per acre for CRP acres in Mississippi has increased. If you remember that figure from last year, you'll notice that it increased significantly, because of the new changes and policies that were put into place. We now have an average rental rate of \$77.55.

Preview of FY 2022

Will have larger workload, we have more contract expiring over 7,600+ contracts expiring from CRP on September 30, 2022. That amounts to over 101K acres expiring from CRP in 2022. Last year we had 77K acres expiring from CRP. Only 9K of those acres are enrolled in environmental priority practices. We have a small amount of continuous acres expiring. These are generally devoted to pine trees and things like that.

Continuous CRP Signup 57 started for October 1, for new land offers can be made now.

General and Grassland signup dates have not been announced for FY22. When these dates become available, we will publicize them.

Thank you to the STC partners for your help in delivering the CRP program in MS. Please post any questions you have in the Q&A chat.



Mr. Finley thanked FSA for participating in this meeting and introduced, Dr. Martin Locke, Director of the National Sedimentation Laboratory, in Oxford, MS.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

Dr. Martin Locke

Dr. Locke appreciates the opportunity to present the work that ARS is conducting in the area of resource conservation. We value the partnerships with our sister agencies and look forward to continued collaborations.

ARS research is conducted from their lab and a research unit in Stoneville, MS. Research scientist involved are in National Sedimentation Laboratory (NSL) in Oxford and Sustainable Water Management Unit (SWMRU), in Stoneville, MS. The SWMRU scientists are affiliated with the National Center for Alluvial Aquifer Research (NCAAR).

Plot research we are involved with centers on a couple of projects. One is Experimental Plot Research addressing crop productivity, soil health, and water conservation

Long-Term Agroecosystem (LTAR) project assesses tillage, cover crop, and rotation practices. It has been ongoing for approximately three years and we are looking at what the long-term management effect on productivity, soil health and water conservation. ARS: Martin Locke

21-Gun Project assesses effects of tillage, irrigation management, and cover crop. Looks at runoff, soil assessments, crop production, tillage, cover crop and irrigation management. ARS: Martin Locke with MSU.

Field scale Research project that is part of the LTAR Project assesses the same aspirational Practices on larger field scale such as conservation tillage, cover crops, and irrigation management on system sustainability. ARS: Locke and Yasarer with MSU.

CEAP Beasley Lake watershed

We've been in this watershed since 1995. The CEAP project started in 2003 and we've been looking at water quality, soil health changes, practices such as CRP, and edge of field buffers to reduce water runoff. We've found significant improvements in water quality over the years due to these practices. ARS NSL: Richard Lizotte, Lindsey Yasarer, Martin Locke, and Matt Moore

CEAP legacy Phosphorus (P)

Just started this related, NRCS funded, CEAP legacy P project. It's national project and we have a portion of this project's effort. Looking at understanding P, in runoff water and what can be done to mitigate the negative impacts of adding too much P in aquatic ecosystems.

The CEAP watershed project publication can be found at this website link:

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcseprd1838430.pdf

The publication is funded by NRCS. It provides a brief summary of each CEAP watershed across the nation. If interested in a hardcopy, I can send it to those interested.

Soil water and wildlife conservation project

Working with farmers and scientists to see how timing and duration of water management influences things such as habitat and bird migration. Also looking at nutrient and erosion run off and influences on soil health. The project involves four farms. Funded by EPA and ARS.

Research conducted by both SWMRU and ARS scientists include:

- Remote sensing to quantify on farm water storage and surface water sources.
- Eddy Covariance towers that measure gas flux, to examine water use in corn, soybean rotation.



- Greenhouse Gas monitoring development of low-cost sensors.

Irrigation technology and water storage

- Tailwater recovery systems – improvements in design, quality, quantity and how this influences water quality and quantity.
- Furrow irrigation efficiency on irregularly shaped fields and how can we manipulate the field shapes to improve water use.
- Variable Rate Irrigation prescriptions to improve water use efficiency and water runoff monitoring as a management tool.

Irrigation water management

This NSL research effort, we're looking at how to integrate and improve our models. The NSL is where the RUSLE2 is housed, in terms of development, as well as, AnnAGNPS – CONCEPTS are house there. These are NRCS models.

Seeking ways to link those to other large-scale models to provide broader understanding of water management from the bird's eye view.

Groundwater transfer and injection pilot project

This NSL project is where we are evaluating feasibility of extracting water, moving it in pipeline and inject it in the aquifer. We have a research site near Shell Mound, MS. We've have installed an extraction well, about 100 yards from the Tallahatchie river, to mine the water from the river. It's water that moves through the soil, to the well, from the river. The soil filters the water, we extract this and move it two miles and inject it. It is an ongoing project, for this to come to full fruition it would be a much more expanded effort. We're looking at a pilot study.

Mr. Finley thanked Dr. Locke for the presentation and appreciates the efforts they are making in this research. Reminded participants to enter questions in the Q&A and post their names to record their meeting attendance. Mr. Finley introduced Dr. Drew Gholson, Assistant Professor, Extension Irrigation Specialists Mississippi State University coordinator for the National Center for the Alluvial Aquifer Research.

National Center for Alluvial Aquifer Research (NCAAR) – MSU

Dr. Drew Gholson

Updates specifically related to the NCAAR. We've been developing this center over the last several years and Dr. Locke has been involved.

About the National Center for Alluvial Aquifer Research – NCAAR

This is a cooperative program between USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and Mississippi State University's Delta Research and Extension Center (DREC) to produce and communicate research aimed at:

- Conservation and sustainability of water resources for agriculture.
- Development of management systems that increase profitability for the farmer, conserve water and protect water quality.

Faculty and the scientists at the MSU side in the water center:

Dr. Gurpreet Kaur (agronomy)

Dr. Gurbir Singh (soil science)

Dr. Nicolas Quintana (water economics)

Dr. Drew Gholson (irrigation; 80% Extension)

Dr. Himmy Lo (irrigation; 50% Extension)



United States Department of Agriculture

USDA-ARS faculty at NCAAR:

Dr. Chris Delhom (acting research leader)
Dr. Ruixiu Sui (precision ag)
Dr. Saseendran Anapalli (measurement and modeling of crop water use)
Dr. Amanda Nelson (hydrology)
Dr. James Kim (agricultural engineer)
Dr. Daryl Chastain (crop physiologist)

Dr. Kim and Dr. Chastain are new.

We have different subject matter experts within soil health, crop physiologist and water to look at common practices that we can obtain different angles of data to show benefits in productivity, profitability, water conservation and water quality.

NCAAR CRIS Objectives

CRIS project center will focus on these main objectives:

1) Develop robust datasets, models, and data visualization tools to determine the impact of alternate water supplies on aquifer recharge and groundwater levels in the LMRB.

Looking at alternate water supplies, on-farm storage designs, remote sensing, modeling into the future for alternate water supplying systems and how that impacts ground water within the basin.

2) Develop optimized irrigation scheduling tools for cropping systems in the basin that account for crop water requirements, impacts of water stress, and economic and environmental sustainability while minimizing water usage.

Partnering with Dr. Locke to collect data on greenhouse gas emissions, new crop coefficients to get higher level data. End result, can we develop and evaluate new sensor-based irrigation scheduling methods to simplify tools for farmers to minimize water use.

3) Develop new and novel sensor systems that include optimized telemetry, and efficiently integrate with decision support models and tools for prescription irrigation and water resource management.

As Dr. Locke mentioned the developing of new cost-effective sensors. One barrier for landowner adoption is the cost of the sensors and telemetry services and create an easy-to-use tool to predict irrigation needs on the farm.

4) Evaluate and improve current best management practices

We have conservation practices that fall in NRCS' mission, reduce tillage, no-till, cover crops, edge of field buffers that we encourage farmers to do. We're evaluating those to find a way to make them fit into our system in Mississippi. Being able to take water quality data that is running off. Not only no-till, strip till and different tillage equipment that may allow the same benefits of no-till. Trying to find mechanism to fit the farmers in the mid-south with our climate and lands we have and monitoring the results of best management practices with reduced runoff, less water usage, and water quality coming off those fields.

5) Engage LMRB stakeholders through our MSU research and Extension partners to pull all things together to engage farmers and stakeholders. We're engaging the farmers and sending out surveys to establish behaviors, awareness, attitudes to these practices and what are they currently doing. This can help drive our research and extension programming as well. How they want to receive this information and adopt practices.

Our main approaches.

Topics Irrigation Systems, Crops & Soils, Attitudes and Behaviors.



Discussed options of one-on-one consultations, peer learning, facilitating farmers together that currently do practices and giving them avenues to speak to other farmers. Programs aimed at farmer to farmer learning methods. Field days, hands on training, multiple media to get information out.

The Center's website is where you can get more information about what we're working on.

Soil moist sensor is a hands-on learning method. Different farmers adopt practices for different reasons and learn in different ways. Some want to see it work. We are working with farmers, season long to make season long decision with them. This increases their knowledge, trust, and adoption with the sensors. Last year we worked with seven farmers. Now, we have a total of 24 farmers.

Watermark fundamentals

How to install, make irrigation decisions. Will work with information via fact sheets on our NCAR website and MS extension website. Videos and handouts are available that provide information on:

1. Scientific Background
2. Measurement Devices
3. Sensor Construction
4. Sensor Location
5. Sensor Installation
6. Irrigation Triggers

<https://www.ncaar.msstate.edu/outreach>

As we develop these new researches, and working with farmers hands-on, and working with NRCS funded programs, to use this research to create a formal education program that will train farmers to certify those that participate. Match training and formal education program with EQIP dollars as incentive to them to adopt things. We hope to have long term adoption effects that work together with NRCS. I appreciate the collaboration and support from NRCS. Feel free to contact me with any questions.

Contact info:

Drew M. Gholson

Cell: 979-255-7018

Email: drew.gholson@msstate.edu

Mr. Finley expressed his appreciation of the partnership with NCAAR an introduced the Secretary/Treasurer of the National Association of Conservation Districts, Mr. Gary Blair.

National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)

Gary Blair

Mr. Blair expressed his appreciation to the staff at NRCS behind the scenes conducting this meeting and appreciates being able to participate in this meeting. He is a Mississippi native and has been involved in soil conservation for many years. He recognized partnership agencies and welcomed Mr. Fairley to FSA.

The history of NACD started with the dustbowl, the Soil Erosion Service, and the Soil Conservation Act. We started in the 1930's and have continued with this mission. We have approximately 3,000 conservation districts working hand in hand in many of our USDA service centers. We are in 50 states and U.S. territories. In 1946 we started working hand in hand with NRCS and the conservation efforts across the nation and are celebrating our 75th anniversary this year.

Our mission established the conservation districts, and we are directly involved with working to secure federal funding for our natural resource conservation programs. Be it through NRCS, FSA, or any other USDA programs. We are a member- based, member driven Board of Directors and have 81 soil and water conservation districts. Currently, I chair a legislative committee within NACD working directly with the Chief, as well as throughout USDA, to make sure that our federal funding is coming together.



Our National Officers participated in a retreat in Washington state where we discussed the future of our national conservation plans. We provide one voice for conservation and advocate for our programs for funding, policy, and funding on Capitol Hill. We communicate through our publications and provide direct services to our districts that are co-located across Mississippi in our USDA service centers. We are working to develop the conservation leaders of tomorrow.

We spend much time advocating in Washington DC, and across the nation for policies that directly benefit our farmers, and we work closely to educate lawmakers. Current, areas of attention are Navigable Water Protection Rules, WOTUS. We have had briefings with EPA, and have been on conference calls related to the Waters of The U.S. We are monitoring the Reconciliation Package legislation and were recently involved with the recent Infrastructure Bill and hope to receive watershed monies from this bill. We are working closely with the administration on the America the Beautiful report, as well as 30 by 30.

Climate action

We have created a climate action task force within NACD and have worked with leaders from across the nation on climate and have submitted comments to the administration on climate action.

We have also created a groundwater task force, ARS and MSU are involved. There is a great need in Mississippi pertaining to groundwater and I'm proud to say that we have representatives from our state on that national task force.

For the last ten years, I have served on the Forestry Resource Policy group. Many of the initiatives through President Biden's administration have talked about forestry. We are working hand in hand on the forestry issues through our climate and the Forestry Resource Policy group. We work within NRCS's National Forestry Office as well as the state and local foresters and we have other partnerships. The U.S. Forestry Service and NRCS serve on our Forestry Resource group.

We publish many publications, and these should be available in the USDA service centers across the state. You are welcome to go to our website to subscribe to these publications. These publications range from weekly, monthly, and daily publications with a lot of information. I encourage you to go to the website to subscribe. We do provide many direct services, such as webinars. Tomorrow, an invasive species and climate in forestry are scheduled.

We work with soil health champions and our resource policy groups are involved with climate, groundwater, invasive species, and many other areas. Sledge Taylor is a national soil health champion from Mississippi. We have seven soil health champions in Mississippi. These are farmers and ranchers who maintain soil through cover crops. If you know of others that participate in these soil health practices, or could be involved, work through your conservation district staff to get these champions recognized.

The Technical Assistance grant program provides \$50 million back to our local districts in TA grant funds. We've awarded 9 million in grants, in the southeast, 18% of the total money was put into new employees and their training. It helps to hire additional staff to aid the NRCS team in Mississippi.

Urban grants are a major focus of NRCS and NACD and nationally we have awarded almost 5.6 million dollars to 122 conservation districts across 32 states. Unfortunately, none of these have been in Mississippi, I encouraged districts to apply for these grants. Open now for applications until January 31, 2022.

Healthy soil / healthy life

We have small district grant program opportunities for districts that would like to start a new program and may not have the funds for it. These are being funded by many soil and water conservation districts, supervisors, commissioners, and employees. This program is open until November 30, 2021 to apply and receive a grant up to \$2,500.



Stewardship and education

For next year it is Healthy Soil, Healthy Life. I encourage all to get with districts across the state and get involved with this program. We will have poster contests and many other opportunities to celebrate our 66th annual stewardship week next year. Other resources available to our conservation districts are on our website and encourage your district employees to get involved. The marketplace has merchandise opportunities. This would be a good way to recognize people, and we can put our partner's logos on these items.

We are very involved with our National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCCP) to promote and improve conservation planning. We need as much planning for the future on the ground.

Meetings -

Annual meeting is scheduled to take place in Orlando FL on February 12-16 in 2022 the theme is "Conservation defined for all."

Our next summer meeting will be in Puerto Rico, July 16 -20, 2022.

New member benefits

Please share this with your district employees. Beginning in October of this year, we have insurance programs that we are offering for these employees as well as our technical assistance employees, commissioners, and supervisors. We are trying to find more ways to provide them with benefits that they need. We have just opened this up the 1st of October and hope this will be a way to hire better staff through RTA grants and prepare them to work in the future with NRCS.

To learn more you can visit our website: www.nacdnet.org

Mr. Blair express his thanks for allowing him time to share this information today.

Mr. Finley thanked Mr. Blair and thought the urban agriculture grant would be a great opportunity for our ACs to further explore. Mr. Finley introduced, Mr. Ron Howard, Senior Technical Advisor, Resource Specialist at Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Team.

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Team (GCERT)

Ron Howard

Mr. Howard expressed his thanks for the invitation to participate in today's meeting.

Our team is stationed in Madison, MS. Dr. Homer Wilkes is the Director, and our team was formed in response to the Deep-Water Horizon oil spill.

USDA is a member of the RESTORE council and the NRDA council.

The three main funding streams associated with the oil spill is NRDA, RESTORE Act, Gulf Environment Benefit Fund and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Partnership (NFWF).

USDA has been able to receive funds for the natural resource damage assessment, for planning and implementation. We have a productive partnership with NFWF and the funds they received in response to the oil spill. We partner to leverage funds to implement projects in the Gulf.

USDA projects update

Upper Pascagoula water quality enhancement project was funded several years ago. NRCS-MS continues to implement this project in five watersheds.

Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program was funded under the RESTORE Act, USDA/NRCS - MS continues working on this project at a local level.

Apalachicola Regional Restoration Initiative is also funded through the RESTORE Act.



The Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program was funded in the initial funding and is a continuation of restoration for the project in Mississippi.

Enhancing gulf waters through forested watershed restoration, is where Mississippi, Alabama and Florida, the U.S. Forest Service and state agencies collaborate. This implementation was a collaborative effort between state and federal agencies. We have many more years to continue the restoration of the impacts to the Gulf from the oil spill. The impacts were severe, and it will take time to restore the damage that was done.

Kurt and his team could provide more information on projects implemented in Mississippi. As well as our team in Madison. I thank you allowing me to participate. If you have any questions or concerns for our team, please feel free to reach out to us.

Mr. Finley thanked Mr. Howard for his presentation and for the work they are doing across the southeast costal states and we are excited about being a part of this effort along the coastline. He advised those attending the meeting by cell phone if they had a question to send an email to nicholas.williams@usda.gov so we can respond to your questions through email. He announced the next presenter, James Curtis, Acting, State Soil Scientist.

NRCS-Soils Tools and Technology

James Curtis

Mr. Curtis highlighted recently available and soon to become available remote sensing data.

The soil survey refresh is the publishing of the soil survey spatial and tabular data. It also includes new and modified soil interpretation. The public can access soil survey data by web soil survey or soil data access. Most of the edits are related to tabular changes however there are some special edits associated with multi name map units within a single name map unit. This year and future year web soil survey refresh are anticipated to be on October 1st.

Currently we are participating in a coordinated effort to acquire leaf off high-resolution four band imagery for the entire state. The 4th band being infrared. Nine additional counties have become available in 2021, Tate, Benton, Yalobusha, Monroe, Grenada, Marion, Hinds, Rankin, and George counties. Most of this data is published at a 1- foot resolution however some areas were upgraded to a 6-inch resolution. This year we have statewide high resolution for the first time.

For 2022, NRCS founded approximately 20 counties for six-inch resolution, and we hope to have partners to expand this footprint. Steve Champlin with DEQ is the contact if anyone would like to provide funding through this project. This resolution is superior to the standard NAIP imagery.

We also updated the 2021 NAIP flights to high resolution. Next year's NAIP resolution will be 1 foot resolution. One of the problems we have with this high-resolution imagery, is storage. In the past you had to obtain it with an external hard drive or attempt to obtain it a county at a time from the MARIS website were difficult due to file size. This made it difficult to access. The MARIS tech center is the clearinghouse for the Mississippi GIS data. In February, they published this high-resolution imagery on the MARIS map server. www.Maris.state.ms.us.

In 2017 we had statewide LiDAR coverage for the first time. In 2013 we identified the need to collect Quality Level (QL) 2 data. In 2015 we had national guidance requiring QL data for certain engineering practices.

Reviewed the points per centimeter difference in QL2 and QL1 data and counties which have QL3 data available to the public. Flights in 2019 to collect QL3 data were hampered by flooding and leaf on conditions in some areas. In 2021 we were able to fly these areas again and data is expected to be available to the public in May 2022. Lidar DIM mosaic is also available on MARIS map server.



If you have any questions, please put them in the Q&A section for a response.

Mr. Finley thanked Mr. Curtis for his presentation and announced the next speaker, Mr. Rogerick Thompson, the State Resource Conservationist in charge of the Ecological Sciences Division.

NRCS- Ecological Sciences

Rogerick Thompson

My staff and I provide technical leadership to NRCS in Mississippi.

Urban Agriculture

Urban agricultural producers now have the opportunity to receive similar financial assistance for the purpose of addressing resource concerns. We have identified the top five conservation practices: high tunnel systems, composting facilities, conservation cover, irrigation, micro irrigation, and cover crops. There are other conservation practices have been designated as eligible for urban conservation and will be offered to MS producers when the practices have been approved for MS planning.

New components have been added to a number of the practices to accommodate the implementation of urban agriculture conservation practices on a small scale. Hand labor, hand tools, 600 square feet high tunnel, to name a few.

Local service providers, agricultural producers pursuing certain activities available for NRCS programs can still hire TSPs. They may offer services such as developing nutrient management plans, grazing management plans, irrigation and plans transitioning from transitional agriculture to organic.

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized the TSP program, and it was rolled out in 2003. In 2022 it has undergone a transformation to fall in-line with the NRCS 9-steps of planning. Services offered by TSPs are further designated in three categories:

- Conservation Planning Activities (CPA)
- Design and Implementation Activities (DIA)
- Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (CEMA)

Mr. Thompson reviewed the conservation assistance workflow in which the TSP workflow has NRCS oversight to certify completion of work products before the TSP moves to the next activity type.

In steps one through seven- NRCS drives conservation plans, TSPs drive CPAs.

In step eight- NRCS drives developed conservation practice design and implementation requirements, TSPs drive DIAs.

Step nine- NRCS developed evaluation and monitoring requirements, TSPs or other qualified drive CEMA activities. CEMAs includes monitor testing or determine effectiveness of cons. practice.

Conservation Planning Activities (CPA)

Is an activity that results in a conservation plan consistent with the steps one through seven of the NRCS conservation planning process. The CPA would document the client's decisions regarding selective alternatives including identification of desired or primary support practices the client would like to use to treat identified resource concerns.

Design and Implementation Activities (DIA)

Is an activity that allows for development of specific practice designs, management prescriptions or other instructions that allow the client to implement conservation practices or systems of conservation practices. It is consistent with step eight of the conservation planning process. It does not include assistance with the conservation practice installation review and or check out.

Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (CEMA)

Is an activity that includes evaluation, monitoring, testing or assessment for specific purpose to complete



practice implementation requirements or to determine the affectedness of conservation practices and activities. This is consistent with step nine of the NRCS conservation planning process but may be used at any point in the planning process.

NRCS Registry

This registry serves as the new platform for becoming a certified TSP. This platform contains information on how to become a TSP, how to locate a TSP, and activities where there are TSP service opportunities. Before you become a TSP, persons of interest should determine the services desired to offer NRCS program participants and whether the necessary skills, license, certification, and other qualifications provide the necessary services based on NRCS standards and specifications. For additional information related to TSP certification, Marion Reed is our POC. Marion.reed@usda.gov

Jamie L. Whitten- Plant Material Center (PMC)

NRCS operates 25 plant material centers, each based in an ecologically distinct area to evaluate plants and vegetative technologies to support USDA conservation programs and practices. PMCs find vegetative solutions to address a number of resource concerns. One of the greatest efforts is looking at the performances of cover crops, both warm season varieties for specialty crop producers and fall season varieties for row crop producers and specialty crop producers.

With crop production, you begin with the end in mind. A similar approach is taken when planting cover crops. Knowing what termination methods would be used prior to implementation is essential. This year, at the PMC, we are looking at cover crops. That has led to a planting and termination study of the better performing cover crop varieties. Planting dates started on the 30th of September, continuing every two weeks through the 15th of November. The termination of these covers will begin on the 15th of February through the 1st of May, every two weeks. At the end of the study, we hope to identify the ideal planting and termination dates to achieve maximum soil health benefits.

This study was established not to compare species performance, but to identify plant termination dates for species in the mid-south. Also, to look at plots that were drills seeded with Kincaid/ Great Plains cone seeder. Nutrients were applied per soil tests and plots were arranged; randomized complete block design with four replication, strip plot analysis.

Trial Grasses -crop / planting rate (lb/A)

Black seeded oats / 60

Cereal rye /100

Triticale / 100

Wheat / 100

Trial Legume species - crop / planting rate (lb/A)

Berseem Clover / 8

Crimson Clover / 15

Austrian Winter Pea / 25

Hairy Vetch / 25

Evaluation protocols by this study

Emergence two and four weeks after planting would provide information on how late fall species should be planted in addition to the amount of ground cover prior to frost will identify species that will maximize biomass production to reduce soil loss for grass and legume species that will increase nitrogen fixation prior to termination.



Preliminary data shows us the sooner we can get the seed into the ground, plus the latest of termination dates, will produce higher biomass. This will lead to water quality improvements, soil loss reduction, and increased weed suppression. For legumes there would be higher nitrogen fixations as well.

There is a new cover crop calculator developed by the PMC staff. This calculator will provide planners and producers an opportunity to assess the cost of establishing covers. Also, to aid in making program participation decisions that may be based on soil health, resource concerns, or harvest dates.

Feral swine eradication and control

We are partnered with Delta Wildlife, USDA-APHIS and MS Soil & Water Conservation Commission. This program is focused in the Mississippi delta.

Delta Wildlife – Round 1

Issaquena, Sharkey, Warren, and Yazoo counties are in this program. Delta Wildlife's role was in the trapping efforts within these counties. Included the participation of 52 landowners. Over 139K acres signed up for the trapping efforts. Sixteen traps were placed on 26 properties which includes over 79,000 acres.

USDA-APHIS

Lead the lethal means of control where the euthanized methods included firearms, helicopters, and use of traps: 273 removed using firearms, 1045 by helicopter, 1055 by traps.

MS Soil & Water Conservation Commission – Discussed the trapping methods and areas/zones on map display. Some trapping details were discussed; 16 smart traps, 18 remote view traps, cellular data, were used in trapping

In 2022, round two efforts will include these counties, Claiborne, Holmes, Humphries, Jefferson, and Washington with the same partnerships.

Mississippi River basin healthy watershed initiative

Elevated nutrient contribution to the Gulf of Mexico hypoxic zones grants Mississippi the opportunity to secure additional funding to address these water quality concerns. NRCS works with farmers and conservation partners to implement conservation practices and help to trap sediment and reduce nutrient runoff to improve the overall health of the Mississippi River. To continue our efforts in Mississippi, of addressing water quantity and quality, Mississippi has made tremendous progress in 2021. Via a partnerships by completing additional hydrogeological unit cold water assessments. Partnership efforts starting in 2019, between Mississippi Soil & Water Conservation Commission, Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, along with Waggoner Engineering. Mr. Readus made the commitment to assess watershed conditions for qualifying HUC 12s.

The accomplishments of an additional seven assessments will allow landowners to address resource concerns, and Mississippi is capable of securing additional funds in the counties of Sunflower, Leflore, and Coahoma. These efforts are also applicable to the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI).

Mississippi has 32, HUC 12s. We've completed the assessments and are pursuing additional funds on four that are remaining. This is a tremendous accomplishment by Mississippi and their partners. We will continue to pursue additional funds to ensure we can continue to address these resource concerns.

Mr. Finley thanked Mr. Thompson for his presentation and participation in the meeting. Mr. Finley introduced Ms. Natalie Segrest, Chief, Basin Management and NPS Branch.



Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality

Natalie Segrest

Thank you for allowing me to participate in today's meeting. I grew up on a farm and had family members involved in agricultural production. This has helped me understand the needs and concerns of our farmers and landowners and to support our agricultural communities and how do we better tell our story. At MDEQ we have a small grant program that we leverage with NRCS. It helps us to achieve the benefits on the ground through education, and outreach.

One thing that MDEQ brings to the table is to take the conservation measures that are put on the ground in Mississippi and tell our story in a better and different way. We'll talk about how important it is to tell the story of what we are accomplishing in Mississippi. One way we do this is to quantify the practices, the money that is spent and how that correlates to environmental benefits. We have been working to provide this to our producers and we partner with NRCS where there is conservation in watersheds. Also, to monitor the efforts, to do research how we quantify the effectiveness and benefits Best Management Practices (BMP). What we have created is a published success story that is supported by water quality data in a NWQI watershed. I hope to see more in the future, this is our first.

We will communicate the data with very basic information. We took data at the watershed level, not point specific data, and ran it through a basic water quality model. This could allow us to process the information from NRCS for all 1,400 plus watersheds in Mississippi. This is an example of how we can do this. We ran it through an R5 model, from 2012 to 2020 and calculated the pounds of sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorus that we saved from running off into the water bodies. We kept that topsoil on the land, the nitrogen and phosphorus was kept in the soil. This can reduce the cost for our landowners by what they have to input into the land over time to achieve their desired yields.

We looked at North Tippah Creek and performed a biological monitoring, a biotic index. We looked at long-term indicators of water quality, we saw an 18-point increase in one station, and 38-point increase in another station. This indicates it went from a 45 to an 83 on the scale of 100. This is significant. Anything over 6 points in a biotic index is significant in water quality change. The DC in Tippah county was instrumental in assisting to develop the meta-data we need. We would like to produce more of these in our watersheds, to tell the story of what Mississippi is doing.

The hypoxic zone in the Gulf, we are always looking at what is being contributed to the Mississippi River and our state's contribution to negate this. We are doing our part, and this is one step forward to show we are doing our part. The load reductions are a single annual load reduction that is calculated that does not take into account the load reductions that would be achieved over the life of the practice. Some practices have 15 to 20-year lifespans and you could put a multiplier on that to see what you accomplish over the lifespan of these practices.

If anyone would like to work with us on this or have better ideas on how to display this information, please let me know. I would be happy to work with you to get this information out so we can tell Mississippi's story consistently in all of our watersheds.

Mr. Finley thanked Ms. Segrest for her participation and commented this does a good job of selling our conservation efforts. He introduced Jason Keenan, the Assistant State Conservationist for the Easement Program in our state office

NRCS- Easement Program

Jason Keenan

Our conservation easements are real estate transactions and the longest running permanent protection that NRCS does for various levels of habitat and property conservation.

Today, we have through a variety of easement programs, over 204,000 acres enrolled within the state. Most of those acres, approximately 185,000, are fully restored. We have approximately 21,000 remaining to restore throughout the next few years. We add from 3 to 5,000 acres each year in our program. This past year we added over 4,500 acres.



In 2021 we had 204 eligible applications and statewide we had over \$65 million in requests, this is the estimated acquisition, not restoration costs. We were able to fund 22, Wetland Reserve Easements, one ALE easement in the southern part of the state. Two Floodplain Easements from the 2019 flood, and one Healthy Forest Reserve Program easement near the Camp Shelby area. We enrolled over 5,500 acres for approximately \$19 million worth of work in the state.

Our current ranking process will stay in place, there are no changes from fiscal year 2021 to fiscal year 2022. The process has been working well for us and we'll continue to utilize it in the future.

Our payment rates for Wetland Reserve easements and Floodplain easements are not yet known for fiscal year 2022. We are still awaiting our area wide marketing analysis to be returned. Once changes are made, we will update those to the NRCS website.

One new addition this year is we are looking at the Mississippi River floodplain, south of Vicksburg down to the Louisiana state line. To see if the south delta region would be justified for a different payment rate. We are awaiting the areawide marketing analysis to tell us if it justifies an addition to a new market area.

Wetland Reserve Enhancement Projects (WREPs)

One is the batture project, lands between the levee up and down the Mississippi River. Those projects can run from the southern part of Missouri to the mouth of the Mississippi and into the Gulf of Mexico. We also have a tri-state WREP that is across Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Both of those projects have been highly successful in obtaining additional conservation to local landowners. We maintain approximately 20 applications for the batture, and 50 applications for the tri-state WREPs. We are obtaining more interest yearly for these programs. This is partner driven and I want to thank the partners on this call for your efforts to encourage these WREPs. I would like to encourage new partnerships if you are interested in helping us with gaining WREP dollars and partnership program dollars to work with us.

Easement Staff

Every easement process throughout the state is completed by the easement staff members, and I currently have two vacant positions. I have four NRCS members, with a new easement biologist in Greenwood, MS. We have a partnership with Trust for Tomorrow to provide us with three staff members as well. The \$19 million dollar workload was completed by a few people that do this work. Our field staff is instrumental in obtaining applications from our landowners and being the point of contact to these landowners.

We have the Understanding Wetland Reserve Easements brochure, and we have videos that will be forthcoming. Once these are available, we will promote the wetland management and forest management videos for NRCS easements.

In you have any questions please post them in the chat by the end of this meeting if you have any additional questions you can reach me at Jason.Keenan@usda.gov . I will be happy to help anyone that I can. Thank you for your time today.

Mr. Finley thanked Mr. Keenan for participating in the meeting and recognized Mr. Olguy Louis, State Conservation Engineer for NRCS.

NRCS – Engineering

Olguy Louis

Mr. Louis provided some background information. He started his current position in 2020, previously he worked in Arkansas as the MRBI Agriculture Engineer and was the Area Engineer in Hattiesburg. Today, he will provide watershed, technical and soil innovation updates.



In the state of Mississippi, 2021 was an active year in terms of the number of natural disasters. NRCS utilized EWP program dollars, starting with the February 12, 2021 ice storm, followed by a tornado in mid-March. In June there was flooding, which impacted the delta and some counties in central Mississippi and there were impacts from Hurricane Ida.

Emergency watershed program (EWP) was established to protect our natural resources, to assist with erosion, sediment reduction, and the protection of structures. Currently, the Rocky Carter plan is being reviewed by the National Water Management Center. We have completed the Greasy Creek plan and are working on Town Creek.

We have received special appropriation funds earmarked for the June flooding, mainly in the delta. There were a few structures damaged, and we were able to repair them using CTA earmarked funds. On the Tillatoba Creek, there were nine levee breaches that were repaired and are now protecting farmland and critical infrastructures below Highway 32.

We expect a busy 2022 year for rehabilitation construction. Richland Creek site, #3 we plan rehab construction for this dam to reflect new NEPA requirements. Currently the design is being reviewed to work around structures in the emergency spillway. Greasy Creek has been fully authorized, and we will begin the design. Big Sand Creek, we are awaiting the sponsor to sign the agreement. Town Creek planning is being developed.

Long Beach Canal channel improvement. We are expanding the capacity of this channel to handle more water to decrease the amount of flooding to the surrounding area. The design has been reviewed and we are ready for construction when weather permits.

Rocky Carter project, we are expanding the levee on both sides of the Yazoo river, south of Yazoo City. This will provide flood protection to the south part of Yazoo City. The draft plan has been completed and reviewed by the National Water Management Center. In this plan we will take a programmatic approach, building the levees three miles at a time. This will allow time to complete the cultural resources and ecological studies in the areas where we dig. We look to complete the programmatic review by the end of the year. Public solicitation is expected at the beginning of next year.

Richland Creek project, working to complete the ecological study to identify species. This will assist us in developing our alternative plan. A draft is expected by the end of this calendar year. We are considering an alternative plan that would include the development of pedestrian trails as an area for recreation.

Practice standard revisions

Waste transfer (634)- The terminology was updated to provide clarity. Some design requirements were changed.

Livestock practices, pipeline, watering facility. There were terminology changes. These were to reflect changes to the national Engineering Manual and the National Engineering Handbook. We've also added a new requirement to ensure the air gap distance is 2 1/2 times distance of the incoming pipe. For water wells we also have an air gap requirement, the air gap distance should be twice the inside diameter of the supply pipe.

Energy practices, there were name changes.

Code 672 it is now called Energy Efficient Building Envelope.

Code 374, Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation.

Code 670, Energy Efficient Lighting System. The name changed, the practice was rewritten to focus on the energy efficiency criteria, fire and electrical safety, flexibility, and to reflect new manufacture's requirements.

Terminology changes in irrigation practices.

Micro-irrigation, the term "in accordance with" was added to provide additional clarity.



Livestock pipeline terminology was changed, sprinkler irrigation had modifications to the land slope section.

Tools an innovation updates

The Engineering Field Handbook, Chapter 2 has been updated. This is used, to estimate volume discharge. The user manual has been updated to incorporate some of the rainfall data. The National Engineering Handbook, part 634 has been updated.

The engineering sites, a tool most engineers use to design emergency spillways has been updated to the 2.1.11 version. All of these tools are available on the Conservation Engineering Division website and are open to the public

Feel free to contact me if you have questions. Olguy.ouis@usda.gov or 601.863.3932.

Mr. Finley thanked Mr. Louis for his presentation and participation.

NRCS – Programs

Clarence Finley

Mr. Finley will provide updates on the following financial assistance programs:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
- Urban Agriculture

EQIP is a voluntary conservation program that assists producers. We provide technical and financial assistance. To be eligible, participants must meet the eligibility requirements. They must work closely with FSA to be established as a farm to receive payments. Practices are applied according to our practice standards.

Accomplishments in 2021

We provided \$51 million in financial assistance in EQIP. In the Climate Smart program, we provided \$1.2 million in financial assistance. The Environmental Water Quality Initiative and Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) program, under the National Water Quality Initiative program (NWQI), we provided over \$4 million in a financial assistance. In MRBI, we provided over \$12 million in financial assistance.

NWQI, the is a national initiative that Mississippi participates in. I appreciate the efforts that the partnerships have allowed us to go in assess these watersheds. Working directly with MDEQ, we are able to get more dollars in funding to our state. This was established in 2012, working through the EPA and it addresses water pollution, specifically nutrient pollution, sediment, and pathogens in priority watersheds.

The NWQI program is for priority watersheds that are identified through our partnerships. Mississippi received over \$4 million to fund conservation efforts in those watersheds. We have nine priority watersheds identified across the state. Mr. Readus desired to expand the scope of NWQI within our state, we did that in 2021. We now have active NWQI watersheds scattered throughout Mississippi.

The Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) is also a national initiative started in 2009, primarily focusing on improving water quality. We have utilized this initiative for many years with its flexible approach of identifying watersheds, and key practices that avoid, control, and trap sediment and nutrients. NRCS and partners work together with producers to implement effective, targeted, voluntary conservation systems in priority watersheds.

In 2021 we funded all of our applicants and obtained additional dollars for our state. Currently, we have 15 eligible water sheds available for funding. All opportunities for funding in this initiative are focused in the Mississippi delta counties.



In 2022 we added four new watersheds. The partners that assist with MRBI and NWQI are, MDEQ and the Mississippi Soil and Water Commission. We've formed a coalition to get assessments done in priority watersheds so that when we request additional dollars, we have the local assessments completed. This has been a tremendous effort and now, our watersheds total fifteen. We coordinate public and private entities together and we've assisted conservation efforts totaling \$16 million within the last five years in NWQI. In the last five years over \$51 million in MRBI. This is a tremendous effort.

EQIP Conservation Incentive Contracts

This year we will implement, EQIP Incentive Contract provisions that provide for both incentive practice payments for adopting practices, and annual payments for managing, maintaining, and improving the incentive practices for the duration of the contract. You see components of EQIP and CSP in these contracts.

We've identified the EQIP incentive high priority area(s). These are areas with identified priority resource concerns that represent a significant concerns in a State or region. We've identified the three-priority resource concern for each land unit within a given area. The length of these incentive contracts will be an appropriate length to achieve the desired conservation benefits; not less than 5 years and not more than 10 years.

Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF)

A whole government wide approach to tackling the climate issues, and we are participating in our state. Each year State Conservationists are required to designate a certain amount of funding for Climate Smart. Last year we identified the funding amount, and the purpose of this targeted sign up is to prioritize the adoption of conservation practices and systems that mitigate greenhouse gases (GHG) and to ensure the availability of this assistance for socially disadvantaged producers and forest landowners. Core conservation practices will include CSP enhancements that were selected based on their availability to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon in the soil. We are allowed to remove some core practices to tailor what we need in Mississippi.

Activity Plans (CAPs)

Mr. Thompson touched on conservation activity plans and discussed Conservation Planning Activities (CPAs), Design and Implementation Activities (DIAs), Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (CEMAs). NRCS has reorganized and renamed CAPs into three new categories. NRCS broke these activities out to clarify which phase of the NRCS conservation planning process the TSP/Provider will be supporting.

Emergency Disaster Assistance

We will continue to provide emergency disaster assistance through a NRCS state emergency declaration. We follow the national and state emergency declarations. The State Conservationist can set aside funds to address these disaster situations.

FY 2022 EQIP sign up dates

EQIP classic

Sign up deadline (first batching), October 22, 2021.

We receive conservation applications for EQIP and CSP continuously. The first batching date has passed. Eligibility deadline is January 7, 2022. Obligation deadline is April 22, 2022.

Climate Smart

Sign up was announced November 8, 2021. Sign up deadline is December 3, 2021



Obligation deadline is April 22, 2022.

EQIP CIC and Urban Conservation sign up period has not yet been announced.

Conservation Stewardship Programs (CSP)

Is a flagship program in Mississippi that addresses priority resource concerns, and to improve conservation quality through our natural resources. It's all about managing and moving to that next level of conservation in the management of your farm. There are three components under the CSP program:

Classic- Where are you maintain and improve your existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority natural resource concerns.

CSP renewals -These are individuals that are already in the system during the first half of the fifth year of the existing contract term. NRCS may allow a participant to apply and compete to renew their contract for an additional 5 year. Compete to renew, is new to the program. Previously it would rollover to the next year.

The Grassland Conservation Initiative (GCI)

The purpose of GCI is to assist producers in protecting grazing uses, conserving and improving soil, water, and wildlife resources. In fiscal year 2021 we allocated over \$11 million under the Conservation Stewardship Program. Renewals, we renewed over \$9 million in financial assistance. Under GCI, over \$50,000 was allocated. We got a lot accomplished under the Conservation Stewardship Program.

The new enhancement and new bundles, we are preparing to release this fiscal year. We have quite a few new enhancements and bundles. I won't review them all, our presentation will be online. We have a new pastureland bundle and a forestry bundle.

Annual payments

For CSP annual payments, if a participant would like to receive their annual payments in calendar year 2021, they will need to submit CSP documentation prior to December 3, 2021. Participants who elect to receive their CSP annual payment in calendar year 2022 will need to submit their CSP documentation prior to February 11, 2022.

FY 2022 CSP sign up and timelines

CSP- GCI

Sign up deadline was October 15, 2021

Obligation deadline, November 19, 2021

CSP Renewals

Application deadline, March 31st, 2021

Assessment and ranking deadline, November 17, 2021

Obligation deadline, deadline December 17th, 2021

CSP classic

2022 First sign up announcement January 4, 2022

Sign up deadline, February 4, 2022

Obligation of funds, July 31st, 2022

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

We have been actively participating in this program for a few years. It promotes the coordination of NRCS activities with our partners that offer value added contributions to expand our collective ability to address



on farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. You can apply and address resource concerns from watershed based, from a state based, or a regional based under the RCCP. Partners apply to NRCS for RCCP project awards through the active grants and agreement program process.

We received proposals that addressed solutions that we have natural resource concern priorities targeted. Partners contribute matching contributions. It's a matching process, cash and in-kind value added to leverage NRCS - RCPP investments. NRCS' goal is that partner contributions are at least a 50/50 match of the funds we contribute. Partner contributions are given priority in the application evaluation criteria. We like to see innovation, it is one of the hallmarks of the RCPP program, and strong partnerships will strengthen an RCPP proposal.

Eligible partners are agricultural, or silvicultural producer associations, a state or unit of local government, Indian tribe, farmer cooperative, water districts, irrigation districts, rural water district or association, municipal water and waste treatment entities and institutions of higher education are eligible to apply for the RCPP grant.

Conservation activities

RCPP projects may include any combination of authorized, on-the-ground conservation activities implemented by farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners. These activities include, land management, land improvement, restoration practices, public works, entity held easements, watersheds.

How to apply

NRCS and associated conservation partners will deliver this program collaboratively. Applications may be obtained and filed at the local USDA- NRCS website. Applicants must be established farms with FSA. The funds coming to the partner, they must understand this is financial assistance funds designed to go towards conservation practices to a farmer. An entity that is set up as a farm. Use FSA forms, identify established farm records, creating certification and documenting eligibility.

An active project in Mississippi NRCS we're partnering with Mississippi Urban Forest Council on a Pollinators and Cover Crops Project. We have a project in central, south, and moving to north Mississippi with this project. We are setting up demonstration farms for pollinators and cover crops.

In FY 2022, Mississippi is partnering with the Rice Stewardship Partnership staff to implement a project addressing insufficient water and water quality in rice lands. The rice lands project builds on the success of the original 2017, Mid- South Graduated Stewardship Project and will provide funding to rice producers. For both projects, the same rules as EQIP apply.

In the Mid- South Graduated Stewardship Project, we are implementing conservation practices and management regimes targeting four priority resource concerns:

- Source water depletion
- Field sediment, nutrient, and pathogen loss
- Inefficient energy use
- Terrestrial habitat

There has been a large decrease in ground water, and with the challenges we are facing across the state, we are hoping this project will implement improved conservation practices to ensure our rice growers will have the necessary resources, and water resources needed to continue their efforts. The counties eligible to participate in the fiscal year 2022 RCCP project are Tunica, Tate, Coahoma, Quitman, Bolivar, Tallahatchie, Sunflower, Leflore, Washington, and Humphreys.

A listing of conservation practices that are eligible under the rice project were displayed. Notice most of them are Land Management practices such as no till, cover crop, reduced till. Many irrigation management practices as well.



RCPP fiscal year 2022 sign up

Announced on November 8, 2021

Application deadline is December 3, 2021

We encourage parties interested in applying to contact Nicholas Williams at the state office. He will be the state program manager for RCPP and can work with and assist you with the application process.

Establishment of Urban Agriculture subcommittee

Mr. Thompson mentioned some of the practices and the efforts we will make on the technical side of urban agriculture. We are establishing an urban conservation agricultural subcommittee. Anyone that is interested and participating in this subcommittee to help us get urban agriculture implemented in the state please contact me, or Nicholas Williams. We are looking for advisors, to provide information, guidance, technical advice to me on the financial side and, to Rogerick on the technical side. We will need your assistance identifying local urban needs, emerging practices, resource concerns, and other potential partners that may not be in this meeting today. We need your help identifying barriers that may come up, and we want to develop recommendations and strategies on how to best implement urban agriculture in Mississippi.

For more information on how to become a member of the Urban Agriculture Subcommittee please contact Clarence Finley or Nicholas Williams at:

Clarence.Finley@usda.gov

nicholas.williams@usda.gov

If you wish to be added to the State Technical Committee mail out list please send your name and contact information to: alexandria.wilcher@usda.gov

If you have questions for me, post them in the Q&A. I will turn the meeting over to Mr. Readus for his closing comments.

Closing Comments

Kurt Readus

I want to thank everyone for participating today. There was a lot of information in today's meeting. We will post all of the slides on our website so you will be able to view them and have that for future reference. I would like to thank the presenters with us today. I know they have spent much time putting these presentations together for today's meeting so that you can be informed, and you can inform us on how you would like these programs run throughout our state. We value State Technical Committee comments, advice, suggestions, and recommendations.

I want to encourage you to apply and participate in our Urban Conservation State Advisory committee. This language was placed into the Farm Bill and we will adhere to that law.

I would also like to thank Laura Anderson, Aaron, Alex, Nick, and Leslie for the work that was done in the background to put this production on in a virtual setting. I hope we can have this meeting face-to-face next year. We will get past this pandemic at some point in time in the future.

I want to thank all the partners. We could not do the amount of assistance that we provide throughout the state if it was not for you requesting those additional dollars, sending proposals for national headquarters to request those funds, and providing additional boots on the ground so that we can get this work done with our landowners in Mississippi.

Whether it is the Long Leaf Pine initiative, Mississippi River Basin initiative, National Water Quality initiative, Working Lands for Wildlife, Gopher Tortoise, we have much to be thankful for.



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I would like to mention the partners for the Wetlands Reserve Easements, the work that you all do is outstanding. They get the people in the program and help us to restore those lands. I can't say enough, we appreciate all that you do.

I would like to end with two successes. We entered into an agreement with the Executive Director for the Mississippi Soil and Water Commission. We will receive another 15 individuals, located in the field offices, to provide boots on the ground. That could not have happened without Nick Ivy, we thank you for that.

Also, all the funding that has come in through NRDA, RESTORE, the Gulf Benefit Fund. We thank you all for all that you have done to enhance, what I consider, what would have come from national headquarters to us.

I do have exciting news pertaining to Mr. Clarence Finley. Sad news for us, but at the same time he has committed to continue to assist us in his next chapter of life. Clarence has announced that he will retire at the end of the year. I want to thank him publicly for all that he has done for Mississippi-NRCS as well as for the partners. He is a great asset and has stated he will be assisting us in his retirement. I do want to say thank you to him publicly, for all that he has done.

To the Directors of the USDA agencies that were on the call today, we know how much time it takes away from your normal duties to join our State Technical Committee meeting. We appreciate all that you do for us as well.

One USDA helping people in every way, every day. I believe that is how President Lincoln, coined it when he created The United States Department of Agriculture. With that, I will say thank you and I hope you have a great day.

Meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.