

**NRCS State Technical Committee Meeting**  
**10:00 Thursday, May 07, 2020**  
**Zoom Meeting**

**Agenda** and handouts attached

**Meeting called to order by Michael Sullivan, AR State Conservationist at 10:00am**

Members present:

Michael Sullivan	Amanda Mathis	Corey Nelson
Diana Colvard	Jena Moore	Samantha Barker
David Curtis	Eugene Young	Tony Ramick
Victor Ford	Cody Burcham	Ryan Benefield
Ron Seiss	Reggie Jackson	Joe Fox
Jeremy Huff	Doug McClellan	Roger Cousins
Clell Ford	Troy Heithecker	Ted Zawislak
Kevin Cochran	Dr. Karl VanDevender	Dr. Mike Daniels
Rick Williams	Karen Thompson	Clyde Williams
Mary Poling	Charolette Bowie	Lori Barker
James Baker	Edgar Mersiovsky	Doug Akin
Shanon Griffin	Troyce Barnett	Keith Scoggins
Willard Ryland	William Bartush	Walter Delp
Randy Childress	Carrie Castille	Rick Williams
Michael Klamm	Levell Foote, Jr.	Keri Neal
Oluwayinka Isly	Rick Monk	Randy Easley
Mike Cagle	Tejon Mays	Luke Lewis
Steve Brock	Bryan Rupar	Monica Paskewitz
Jeremy Wood	Breegan Anderson	Adam Shea
Jonathan Baxter	Andrew Grobmyer	Emily Woodall
Darren Spinks	Jeff Fore	Kyle Johnson
Kayley Corley	Joseph Schafer	Josh Hankins
Darcia Roth, ADH	Matt Lindsay	Dianne Schlenker
Melvin Tobin, USFWS	James McCarty	Dr. Henry English
Ryan Diener, Quail Forever	Charles Taylor	Kyle Johnson
Randall Rush, EPA	Bubba Groves, AGFC	Michael Tucker
Bill Chaney	Bryan Rupar	Bob Blanz, ADEQ
LaShica Miller	Steve Brock	

Five callers connected by phone

## **Opening Comments – Mike Sullivan**

- Thanks to the 70+ joining on the call.
- Feral Swine agreement fully executed, AR Groundwater Initiative did not receive national allocation but NRCS at state level is allocating funding, funding through PL-566 for Irrigation Projects.
- New rules and new tools like CART, magnitude of change is great and some uncertainty but anticipant that to improve
- COVID response and operational status, will use a slow and deliberate process focused on safety when reopening

## **Subcommittee Reports**

- Grazing Management – Jeremy Huff
  - Shared status of 2019 recommendations including update on new CSP enhancements available this year. No formal recommendations from the group.
- Water Quality - Roger Cousins
  - Current landscape Initiatives overview (maps included)
  - Recommendation for 4 new NWQI projects to submit as planning phase projects
    - North Fork Cadron Creek Proposed
    - Bayou Bartholomew Proposed
    - Little Strawberry Proposed
    - Cossatot River and Saline Headwaters Proposed
  - Other topics presented at subcommittee meeting included:
    - Nutrient Reduction Strategy
    - Source Water Protection Priority Areas
    - 590 – Nutrient Standard Update
    - Rate changes FY19 – FY20
    - AR Crop Phosphorus Index – Dr. Karl Van Devender
- Energy Subcommittee – Shanon Griffin
  - CAP 136 – Agricultural Energy Design Plan (new for 2021)
    - 12 new scenarios – based on the number of designed done and complexity
  - Practice Standard Updates
  - Resource Groupings with CART
  - Recommendation – look at opportunities for energy savings with VFDs for vent fans.
- Soil Health Subcommittee – Keith Scoggins
  - Reviewed status of recommendations from FY19

- Sunn hemp as a cover crop – working with ASHA and State Plant Board
  - Joint Training – scheduled for July 2020
  - Brands of equipment for cover crops for high tunnels
  - TSP Training and Certification – tabled
  - Support research on summer cover crops planted into early harvested crops
  - Continue to track number of acres of cover crops in Arkansas
- New recommendations:
  - Recommendation #1 –no funding for deep tillage practice
  - Recommendation #2 – Changes to the ranking questions
  - Recommendation #3 – Need for additional CSP enhancements to encourage producers to continue to improve cover crop usage
    - 340C might meet the criteria
  - Recommendation #4 – Practice Cap for Cover Crop Multi-Species be increased to allow for the same ac to be planted as the basic option cap
- Alternative & Specialty Crops – Troyce Barnett
  - Micro-irrigation in high tunnels – creates an environment of no nature rainfall so micro-irrigation is needed
  - Cover crops recommended for soil health and weed control
  - Meeting with different fruit and vegetable crop producers and associations and the relationship with pollinators
  - Soil Health Sustainable Training in July 2020
  - Develop a Soil Health Strategy Plan – it is being reviewed currently
- Water Quantity – Charolette Bowie
  - CART was discussed with the committee members
  - Discussed how ranking will be done as it relates to local, state and national criteria
  - New CSP Enhancement were discussed (5 new enhancements FY20 and changes to some existing enhancements to improve the results)
  - Looking at a meeting in August to determine if new enhancements are needed
  - Arkansas Groundwater Initiative – addressing the critical groundwater designation
    - Conversion to surface
    - IWMP – improve irrigation and water usage
  - Recommendation #1 - that Zoom be offered as an option for future meetings
  - Recommendation #2 – ranking and how it worked this year
    - Review as FY21 goes forward

- Recommendation #3 – Cover crops incorporated into IWMP
- Recommendation #4 AWGI – complete test runs on the ranking in this program this year
- Recommendation #5 Red River Valley – consider how to get IWM Tech services to this area.
- Evaluation of current funding caps – committee will provide input
- Wildlife Committee – James Baker
  - Practice 643 was reviewed (historically not able to do much with it but when used it has some advantages)
    - Recommendation – make updates to the 643 Restoration of Declining Habitats Specification
- Forestry Subcommittee – Doug Akin
  - CRP manual rev. 6 provides for a process to request that certain management activities (formerly mid management activities) to be voluntary and others be mandatory.
    - The subcommittee recommends the following;
      - Grass practices must have one of the following; disking, prescribed burn, or chemical treatment
      - That tree practices have no mandated management activities
  - Updates are needed to the Arkansas “blue pages”, the subcommittee recommends the following;
    - Remove eastern red cedar, green and white ash from recommended species list.
    - Edit to reflect changes to management activities as described above
    - Allow for planting of pine outside of 180 foot buffer IF scouring outside of 180 feet can be documented.
  - Western Arkansas Woodland Restoration (map and practices shown)
  - Building Resilient Watersheds to Improved Drinking Water Quality in the Ozark and Ouachita Forests (map, practices and project objectives shown)

#### Questions and/or comments

- Karl VanDevender – Glade management – privet is more of a problem than red cedar in some areas (James Baker stated the issue is woody encroachment regardless of the type of tree; Chinese tallow, privet, red cedar, etc.)

#### **Priority Resource Concerns** – Edgar Mersiovsky (PPT presentation)

- Some changes to the names of NRCS resource concerns have occurred.
  - Major classes of Resource Concerns
- Reviewed the Added Resource Concerns in 2020
  - Ephemeral Gullies

- Soil organism habitat loss or degradation
- Aggregate instability
- Airborne Reactive Nitrogen
- Surface Water Depletion
- Terrestrial Habitat for Wildlife and Invertebrates
- Arkansas priority resource concerns will have to be updated to align with these new names. The committee was asked for input into priority resource concerns.

Resource Concern Class	Priority Resource Concerns	2020 Resource Concerns
Soil	Soil Organic Matter Depletion	Soil Organic Matter Depletion
Water	Insufficient Irrigation Water	Ground Water Decline
Water	Excess Nutrients in Surface and Groundwater	Nutrients Transported to Surface Water
		Nutrients Transported to Ground Water
Animals	Fish and Wildlife Habitat Degradation	Aquatic Habitat for Fish and Other Organisms
		Terrestrial Habitat for Wildlife and Invertebrates
Plant	Inadequate Plant Structure and Composition	Plant Structure and Composition
Plant	Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health	Plant Productivity and Health

### Questions & Comments

- Dr. Mike Daniels – consider a priority specific to soil health.
  - We need to be able to identify some indices/factors in soil health
  - Edgar M – responded positively that this needs to be address regarding soil organic matter, etc.
  - Soil compaction – staff is looking to do more to determine if deep tillage will be needed at some point
  - Dr. Matt Fryer, U of A, has collected soil estimates on 20+ fields for infiltration rates, density and soil chemical tests.
  - Edgar asked to be sent the data along with some information on infiltrations as this would give NRCS a good start
- Inefficient irrigation water use – should be added as a priority in addition to groundwater decline.

### Program Updates

- EQIP – Corey Nelson, Acting EQIP Program Manager (PPT presentation)
  - FY2020 Implementation Schedule for deadlines (chart) for all of the different programs (application deadlines, RCPP-EQIP deadlines, etc.)
  - Annual EQIP Application Summary (unofficial data)

- FY 17 - \$41.8 million
  - FY 18 - \$42.6 million
  - FY19 - \$46.6 million
  - FY 20 - TBD
- EQIP Policy Changes
  - Funding allocation Targets
    - Wildlife allocation – changed from 5% to 10%
    - Livestock – reduced from 60% to 50%
    - Beginning Farmers – 5%
    - Historically underserved – 5%
    - FY 2020 EQIP General Allocation Breakdown
    - EQIP Program Changes
      - Using CART for all program ranking
      - Organic payment limitation increased from \$80,000 to \$140,000 with no annual payment limitation
      - Authorizes program assistance to water management entities and for group projects to achieve greater conservation benefit than individual participation
  - EQIP Program Changes
    - Ranking pool reduced to 72
    - County pools reduced to 39 local resource area pools but each county will receive funding
    - StrikeForce from 13 to 2
    - Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative now offered under other ranking pools, no longer a stand along fund code
    - Discontinued the feral swine pilot due to the new Feral Swine Control Program
    - The AGI changed its boundaries to include a portion of Craighead Co.
    - 5 new MRBI projects with FA this year
    - New Joint Chiefs’ Initiative
    - Providing financial assistance from flooding
- FY2021 Preparation
  - Resource concern weights
  - Eligible practices to be offered
  - Ranking pool weights
  - Land uses to be included
- RCPP, MRBI & NWQI – Dianne Schlenker
  - MRBI
    - 2 Phase Process

- First year is the Readiness (planning phase)
  - Identify 3 – 4 12-digit HUCS
  - Any drinking water source in the HUC 12's
  - Watershed identified on the State list of priorities
  - Current water quality monitoring
  - Clear relationship between resource concerns in the watershed and the ability of conservation to effectively address the resource concern
  - Committed partners to leverage outreach, funds, etc.
  - Watersheds have a sufficient number of acres needing treatment
  - Producers willingness to participate
  - Map of the Priority Watersheds – MRBI 2021
  - 8 projects have asked to be considered for funding
    - County line Strawberry
    - Flathills
    - White County
    - Lower White Bayou Des Arc
    - Flat Rock Piney Creek
    - Lee County
    - Phillips County
    - Arkansas County
  - Committee is asked for input by May 15, 2020 for the June 1, 2020 submittal to HQ
- Second year is the Implementation Phase
- 5 projects are in this phase- Total - \$5.3 million
  - 2 will have EQIP sign up deadlines extended to June 12<sup>th</sup>- Cache River (Woodruff Co) Brewer Lake (Faulkner/Conway Co)
- RCPP Active Projects (map shown)
  - Two new projects with funding coming in 2021
  - Six projects now - \$3.4 million
  - RCPP Proposal solicitation will be announced in July 2020
  - \$500 million nationwide
- CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program)- Clyde Williams, CSP Coordinator
  - Program Updates
    - Allocations are now based on dollars as opposed to acres
    - Funding targets and Ranking Pools
      - Six funding pools
      - Veteran farmers and ranchers will additional ranking points when competing

- Eligibility Changes
      - Operator of record
        - No longer required to submit an operator of record waiver if listed as owner/ operator or other tenant but must be operating the land
      - Public lands associated with other eligible lands which is under the effective control of the operator may now be enrolled
      - Renewals – may apply to be renewed but if they do not opt to apply for renewal, then not eligible to apply for CSP for two years
    - Planning Updates – Planning
      - Similar enhancements have been combined.
  - Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) – Lori Barker
    - The CIG announcement is out.
      - \$150K max for a project
      - \$300K total
      - Teleconference on May 12 to discuss.
    - Priorities for FY 2020
      - Nutrient & Sediment reduction in impaired water sheds
      - Soil Health
      - National CIG Info.
        - APF deadline
        - Farm trial
  - Easements – Randy Childers
    - Overview available in packet
    - #2 in acres
    - #1 in WRE allocation
      - \$24-25M (w/WREP)
    - 2 WREP projects picked up- Tri-C and Miss River Trust
    - Flood Plain Easements 18 apps – selected 5 for funding
      - \$2.8M
    - New this year – VPA approved with Game and Fish
      - \$2.1M for next 3 years
    - Watershed- PL 566
      - \$12.5M for Bayou Meto
      - \$25M for Grand Prairie
      - Contracted out a watershed plan for Lake Bennet
    - WRE – rehab on 600 acre of pollinator habitat. Quail Forever found some existing easement areas to rehab.



## General Comments and Questions:

At the request for Diana Colvard with FSA, Amanda reminded that group that FSA is seeking input on the CRP SAFE program- whether to make changes to current program or leave it the same. Diana will be working with the Forestry/Wildlife subcommittee to obtain additional input.

Question regarding when decisions regarding the AR NRCS APF will be made? Amanda stated that decision letters will be going out within the next 3 days or so.

Question on when the next RCPP APF will be out? Amanda stated that it was expected to come out in July and offered to work with any partners who are interested.

Question on using zoom in the future for other meetings? Mike Sullivan stated that we see a lot of value in face to face meetings and the networking opportunity it affords so would not likely eliminate face to face when they can resume but can investigate opportunities to do in person with zoom capabilities.

Mike Sullivan offered closing comments. Recognize that there is a lot of change right now, would like to have more time to have more dialog. Noted that our partnership works well in Arkansas because we all work together. Thanked everyone for their help in making this meeting happen.

**Meeting adjourned at 12:25pm.**