

USDA NRCS STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

Neal Smith Federal Building
210 Walnut Street, Room 693
NRCS Hugh Hammond Bennett Conference Room
Des Moines, Iowa

MICROSOFT TEAMS

April 13, 2023
1:00 P.M. - 3:00 P.M.

Minutes

Welcoming Comments

Jaia Fischer, Acting State
Conservationist

- Introductions
 - Jaia welcomed everyone to the meeting. Participants that joined virtually typed their name in the chat. Participants in the room introduced themselves. Attendance list is below.
- Approval of Minutes from December 15, 2022 (*attached*)
 - Jaia asked for a review of the minutes.
 - Motion by Joe McGovern, Second by Nick Baumgarten. Unanimous approval.
- Committee and Subcommittee Roles and Responsibilities
 - Review of roles and responsibilities since we have several new members and new requests. NRCS has information about the State Technical Committee on our website. Serves in advisory capacity to USDA on conservation issues related to the Farm Bill and other conservation items. Subcommittees are formed based on the discretion of the State Conservationist. The subcommittees typically meet quarterly and look closer at concerns around the state. Discussion on the relationship and connection to the local working groups across the state. CDI has been working with the Soil and Water Conservation Districts on updating 5-year resource conservation plans, required under state code. From an NRCS perspective, this aligns with the NRCS policy regarding Districts requirement of the local work group process.
- National and State Website
 - Review of the National Website. The website was updated in the fall and is more client driven. Information about the State Technical Committee, policy, federal regulation, and link to the state website.
 - [State Technical Committees | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](#)
 - Review of the Iowa Website. The website includes meeting agenda and minutes. The website does not include recordings.
 - [Iowa State Technical Committee | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](#)
- Agency Updates - General
 - NRCS – Jaia Fischer, Acting State Conservationist
 - NRCS received discretionary and mandatory funding. Received additional IRA funds. At the state level we received IRA Financial Assistance and EQIP and CSP. Announcement made shortly after we received the information, with an application deadline of March 17. We expect to fund a majority of applications received through IRA. Received Technical Assistance for CTA, EQIP, ACEP, CSP, and RCPP. RCPP and ACEP will be handled at the national level this year. RCPP is under review. Scott Cagle is part of the national review team. National RCPP opportunity this year. A lot of potential for IRA dollars to come in future years.
 - Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) funding opportunity is open through May 7th – see [grants.gov](#).

- Iowa Partners for Conservation (IPC) is waiting on approval from grants and agreements. The announcement may be shortened depending on timing of the notice and deadlines.
- Working on a notice of funding opportunity for EWP-FPE Restoration. It is still in the review process. We will send notification when these opportunities are available.
- Partnerships for Climate Smart – Iowa has had many selected for funding. National Headquarters is handling the initial contacts and communications. Iowa has a state POC that will work with the national staff. 18 were funded or in the process of being funded. More information will be available in the future.
- Staffing updates – Iowa NRCS staffing number is usually around 500. We are down about 50 staff right now. Working hard on job announcements, including Recent Grads. We were able to select 13. We are experiencing challenges filling positions. We are working hard on recruiting. Anticipate some IRA funding to go towards staffing. We are also looking at opportunities through partnership agreements. Retirement – large group eligible for retirement this year (about 50), but then the number drops to 10 or less per year after 2023.
- FSA – Matt Russell, State Executive Director
 - Hiring – met with the Secretary last week at ISU. Talked with students and one student asked about wages, as other job offers were significantly higher. Working on recruiting. We are not competitive with wages. We have great benefits and a great place to work. Retirements due to 1985 Farm Bill opportunities. We are at another historical generational opportunity. Hired 170 people last fiscal year. Have about 20 job announcements open at any given time.
 - Software changes – working together with NRCS to get information needed.
 - Disasters – loans and programs are available. Encourage people to come to offices to ask about available resources.
 - Reviewing new programs and compliance portion of programs. Working with NRCS.
 - Getting ready for crop reporting.

Technical Topics Submitted by STAC Members

- P-Index Update Mike Henderson
 - P-Index – Updating soils and rainfall data. Review of soil type selected to run the tool. Iowa planning policy changed to the predominate HEL soil type (HEL fields) and the predominate NHEL soil type (NHEL fields). Chapter 65 of the Iowa Administrative Code states it will be the dominate critical soil type and refers to Tech Note 25 and Tech Note 29. Decision was made to wait to release the updates until the Iowa Code could be updated. Iowa Code changes have been put on hold. Worked with Jeremy Klatt (Iowa DNR) to determine if we could move forward. Language was added to Tech Note 25 to align with NRCS planning policy. Iowa DNR purposes need to refer to Iowa Code. Minor change in ephemeral gully reference. Excel was updated to the current version. Planning on releasing May 1.
- Practice Standard Updates Mike Henderson
 - Iowa adopted an Interim Organic Management Standard (823). Enhance our ability to work with organic producers. This is more of a management standard. Working on training and working with Iowa Organic Association.
 - 3 additional practices are being considered for adoption: Soil Carbon Amendment (336), Wildlife Habitat Planting (420), and Woody Residue Treatment (384). Anticipated adoption of October 1.
 - Soil Carbon Amendment – working with ISU to draft the language for usage in Iowa to align with their recommendations.
 - Wildlife Habitat Planting – seeding practice standard. We have been using Conservation Cover (327) for seeding. This practice will allow additional flexibility for small scale situations, habitat types, locations, and target species (monarch, northern bobwhite quail, etc.). Seeding can be tailored to specific species.
 - Woody Residue Treatment – Requested primarily for help with damaged timbers (tornado, derecho, etc.). Ability to help recover and restore forests. Reducing the potential for the landowner to clear the trees and convert the area.

- National office just posted a notice of funding opportunity for 6 organic technical experts through a 5-year agreement. See grants.gov for more information.
- Q&A
- 384 – Does it have to be a declared disaster? No. The standard applies to several different situations. The financial assistance is typically tied to a storm event.
- How do the payment levels of 420 vs 327 compare? The 420 allows higher payment scenarios, including seeding plugs. This will give us more flexibility.
- Will 420 work with Prairie Strips? 420 does not apply to plantings where erosion control is a primary resource concern. 327 is the appropriate practice to apply.

Status of Farm Bill Programs

- Programs Update Rubyana Neely
 - See attached report.
 - IRA funding does not have a separate application. Funding is distributed at the Resource Team level.
- Partnerships Report Scott Cagle
 - See attached report.
 - Scott is serving on a national RCPP review team.
 - Contacts on the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities are starting.
 - Recommendation to visit grants.gov for opportunities. If you have questions, reach out to Scott or Robert Mier.
- Tracking system for grants and agreements is under development. Employees will be able to select their county and see agreements available.

Sub-Committee Reports

- CSP Kate Hansen
 - See attached report.
- EQIP Nick Baumgarten
 - See attached report.
- ACEP-WRE Kelly Smith
 - Committee did not meet. No report.
- ACEP-ALE Chair
 - Committee did not meet. No report.
 - Searching for a chair and new members. If you are interested in serving, please let Jaia and Nicky know. Reminder: the chair should not have a conflict of interest.
- CRP Sean McMahon
 - Committee did not meet. No report.
 - Sharing there is interest in the House and Senate Ag Committee to make it a state led program. Changes may be in the works.
 - Updates from Curt Goettsch
 - General signup closed last Friday (4/7/23). Wrapping up offers. 4/21 deadline to process offers. Secretary will make decision after 4/21.
 - Decent participation on General CRP – similar to last couple years. About 2,000 offers and 25,000 acres.
 - Continuous Signup is ongoing. Makes up about 2/3 of CRP in Iowa. Signup will run through the end of July. August and September, the conservation plans are completed along with approval.
 - Grassland CRP will be announced in the next couple of weeks. Not big in Iowa, much bigger out west. This keeps land in pasture and rangeland status. Iowa has about 100 Grassland CRP contracts. Iowa has about 103,000 CRP contracts.
- SWP Christina Murphy
 - Committee did not meet. No report.

- Urban Ag
 - See attached report.
 - Excellent outreach opportunities.
 - Will need to be understanding of Farm Bill rules and applying financial assistance to Urban Ag. Concerns about creating Farm Numbers.
 - Discussion on an urban ag definition.
 - Matt Russell – FSA is not the lead on Urban Ag, but fully support it. Working to create a strategy to help new clients. The tools exist to enter farm numbers into the system. The tools allow 0.01-acre crop reporting. Working with partner organizations so people are prepared to come into the office. FSA works with crop and livestock, including urban ag and small scale producers.

Tim Palmer

Member Updates

- Sean McMahon – Event next Wednesday – Wetland Restoration Field Day at DMACC Farm in Dallas County. Event starts at 1:30 pm, open to the public. Celebrating grant from Prairie Meadows and funding from IDALS to help pay for the wetland restoration. 10th anniversary of the Nutrient Reduction Strategy and Iowa Systems Approach to Conservation Drainage RCPP.
- 4 events recognizing the 10th anniversary of the Nutrient Reduction Strategy in May.
- Zachary Cassidy – Urban Ag – Working with Polk County and City of Des Moines to identify plots for potential urban ag. Considering changing easement requirements to better allow for rooftop or vertical farming. Current requirement is a minimum of 10 acres. Requirement was partially due to monitoring. However, monitoring urban sites is easier than the rural sites, due to less travel.
- Jean Eells – CIG from National. Stewardship Ambassadors trained across 8 states. Iowa Ambassadors are: Sue Keenan, Ruth Rabinowitz, Palma Strand. Women landowners who are talking about what women landowners can do to adopt conservation.
- Partner with RCPP with Cedar Rapids – Women Caring for the Land Meeting on April 18 at Prairie Woods Retreat. First full day in-person meeting since the pandemic.
- May 4 – Women Caring for the Land Meeting.
- Kate Hansen – Virtual event May 9th – Featuring Jon Swanson and the Batch and Build model. Highlight what’s been done, planned future projects, and share best practices of this model.
- John Whitaker – John will be retiring this fall, and CDI will have new leadership in September. Thanks to John for his dedicated service.
- Reminder that if you have information you would like to share, you can send it to Nicky and Jaia to distribute.

The next meeting will be held June 15.

Public participation

- None

Future Meeting Dates

June 15, 2023

September 21, 2023

December 21, 2023

Jaia Fischer

Virtual Attendees

Tim Palmer, NACD
Zach Cassidy, SILT (Sustainable Iowa Land Trust)
Sean McMahon, IAWA
Josh Divan, Pheasants Forever
Sarah Nizzi, Xerces Society
Andrew DiAllesandro, US Fish and Wildlife Service
Carlee Sabus, CDI
Roger Wolf, Iowa Soybean Association
Greg Wandrey, Iowa Corn
Brad Woodson, Practical Farmers of Iowa
Will Myers, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
Joan Fleckling, Meskwaki Nation Department of Natural Resources
Alicia Vasto, Iowa Environmental Council
Amy Crouch, The Nature Conservancy
Jordan Moser, IHSEMD, Strategic Planner, Response Division
Sara Strassman, Trout Unlimited
Blain McNabb, EPA R7 Iowa 404 State Coordinator
Ben Gleason, Iowa Nutrient Research & Education Council
Matt Dvorak, Iowa DNR
Joe Dierickx, Iowa Farm Bureau Board Representative
Roz Lehman, IA Organic Association
Joe McGovern, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Christina Murphy, Iowa Association of Water Agencies
Susan Kozak, Iowa Department of Ag and Land Stewardship
Lori Altheide, NRCS
Vince Sitzmann, IDALS
Bill Northey, Agribusiness Association of Iowa
Curt Goettsch, FSA
Chuck Isenhardt, Guest

In-person Attendees

Pat Chase, NRCS
Scott Cagle, NRCS
Kelly Smith, Iowa DNR
Shawn Richmond, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation
Matt Russell, FSA
Sue Snyder-Thomas, NRCS
Nicky Williams, NRCS
Jaia Fischer, NRCS
Mike Henderson, NRCS
Kate Hansen, Center for Rural Affairs
Jessica Downey, NRCS
Rubyana Neely, NRCS
Nick Baumgarten, Iowa DNR
John Whitaker, CDI
Angela Barker, Guest
Dan Allen, Guest