

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
 State Technical Committee
 Meeting Agenda
 May 16, 2023
 8:00 – 4:00

Holiday Inn Temple-Belton
5247 S General Bruce Drive, Temple, Texas

8:00-8:15	Registration	
8:15-8:30	Welcome – Announcements – Overview of Meeting	Charles Kneuper
8:30-8:35	Agency Updates Natural Resources Conservation Service, State Conservationist	Kristy Oates
8:35-8:50	Natural Resources Conservation Service, Acting Regional Conservationist	Carrie Lindig
8:50-9:00	Farm Service Agency, Executive Officer	Eddie Trevino
9:00-9:10	Rural Development, Deputy State Director	Daniel Torres
9:10-9:20	Risk Management Agency, Director	Franco Trevino
9:20-10:15	Subcommittee Reports AFO/CAFO Agronomy Forestry Grazing Urban Water Resources Wildlife	Committee Representatives J. C. Essler Robert Maggiani Jason Raines Dr. Jeff Goodwin Susie Marshall Kyle Wright Cyndee Watson
10:15-10:30	Break	
10:30-11:15	Breakout sessions	
11:15-12:00	Breakout session readouts	
12:00-1:00	Lunch – on your own	
1:00-1:45	Farm Bill and Inflation Reduction Act updates NRCS	Stacy Riley
1:45-2:30	FSA	Jeff Dudensing
2:30-2:45	Break	

2:45-3:45	Public Comment and Open Discussion	Charles Kneuper
3:45-4:00	Closing comments/Adjourn	Kristy Oates

**** Written agenda item comments are encouraged.
Agenda is subject to minor adjustments.**

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. braille, large print, audio tape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy Lauren Kunce, Texas NRCS reasonable accommodation contact at lauren.kunce@usda.gov, 254-742-9933 or the USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the federal relay service at 800-877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English. Requests for reasonable accommodations must be submitted a minimum of 12 days in advance.

Shawn Anderson, acting Deputy State Conservationist, called the State Technical Committee (STC) to order at 8:15 a.m. on May 16, 2023, in Temple, Texas.

Present for the meeting were 69 STC members along with guest Carrie Lindig, acting Regional Conservationist – Central Region, and several Texas NRCS staff.

Agency Updates:

Kristy Oates, State Conservationist Texas NRCS:

- Requested input from working partners for conservation priorities.
- Discussed Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) dollars to reach people and meet goals of NRCS.
 - Equity
 - Climate smart
- Discussed Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Texas watershed programs.
- Highlighted the opportunity for partnerships to leverage resources and accomplish conservation priorities.
- Ask STC to assist with recruitment efforts.

Carrie Lindig, acting Regional Conservationist, Central Region NRCS:

- Requests input from the meeting participants about what conservation activities are important and how funds should be delivered.
- \$19.5 billion for conservation programs from IRA
- Identified three (3) goals.
 - Hiring – need more people to get conservation on the ground.
 - Estimated hiring 4,400 new NRCS employees across the US.
 - Estimated 3,000 partner employees.
 - Reaching new customers
 - Increase outreach, we have the money to help producers.
 - Requested ideas from STC as best way to reach more people.
 - Keep the farmers and ranchers farming and ranching on their land.

Eddie Trevino, Executive Officer, Texas FSA:

- Texas has a heavy workload.
- Disaster relief programs currently available.
- IRA helping delinquent borrowers.
- Dallas urban service center – NRCS and FSA partnership office.

Daniel Torres, Deputy State Director, Texas RD:

- Programs for businesses and co-ops, rural utilities, and single and multi-family housing
- Rural Energy for America
 - IRA allocated extra \$1.7 billion.
 - Quarterly funding and application schedule until September 2024
- American Rescue Plan

Franco Trevino, RMA:

- Providing insurance on crops that are not normally provided in certain counties.

- June – listening session for prevented planting.

Sub-committee reports:

Minutes from subcommittee meetings available upon request, contact Charles Kneuper, charles.kneuper@usda.gov

AFO/CAFO subcommittee

J.C. Essler, subcommittee chair, Texas Poultry Federation.

Agronomy

Robert Maggiani, subcommittee representative, NCAT.

Forestry

Jason Raines, subcommittee chair, Acorn Forestry. Recommendations provided:

- NRCS fill NRCS Forester position (co-position with the National Wild Turkey Federation) and move the location of position further south to ensure delivery of the Longleaf Pine Initiative.
- NRCS continue the EQIP CIC program, to extend the program for up to 10 years, and to end the contract upon completion of the last practice.
- NRCS add prescribed burning as a Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Mitigation Activity.

Grazing

Dr. Jeff Goodwin, subcommittee chair, Director, Center for Grazinglands and Ranch Management. Recommendations provided:

- Promotion of multispecies grazing as a facilitating practice.
 - consider the development on a CP-528 payment scenario for multispecies grazing.
 - promote the utilization of multispecies grazing to address rangeland resource concerns as a facilitating follow up practice.
- Increased communication on perimeter fencing.
 - Texas NRCS define a transparent protocol and procedure for determining financial assistance eligibility for perimeter fencing.
 - coordinate and communicate those protocols and procedures to the Zone and Field Office staff.
- Increased training and appropriate payment scenarios for prescribed fire.
 - Increased support for Prescribed Fire Training for field staff. This training should be coordinated with Texas conservation partners to leverage the unique skill sets available to NRCS across the State. This committee additionally recommends Texas NRCS increase the continued utilization of the 16-hour online awareness training and 24-hour in person trainings provided by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and other conservation partners that provide certification.
 - Texas NRCS develop payment scenarios for forest burns that take into account the complexity provided to rangeland payment scenarios, which include fuel type and terrain accommodations. Additionally, although burn unit size is a consideration for the Prescribed burn plan payment schedule, accommodations for burn unit size

should be considered in the actual payment rate for the practice as current payment schedule rates for small acreage burns are not feasible.

Urban

Susie Marshall, subcommittee chair, Grow North Texas. Recommendation provided:

- Allow for urban and small farms as eligible land for ag land easements.

Water Resources

Kyle Wright, government representative, NRCS. Recommendations provided:

- Add conservation practice 360 as a core practice for source water protection.
- Subcommittee support for Texas to be added to the Playa SAFE CRP program.

Wildlife

Cyndee Watson, subcommittee chair, USFWS. Recommendations provided:

- Texas NRCS support the addition of Texas counties to the multi-state CRP - Migratory Bird State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement project.
- Texas NRCS adopt Conservation Practice 643 Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities - Scenario 5, 6, 16, 32, & 51 and Conservation Practice 410 scenario 30.
- Texas NRCS consider developing a riparian buffer incentive payment for producers through EQIP or other programs.
- Texas NRCS provide training that is beneficial for wildlife including riparian and watershed restoration, upland wildlife habitat management e.g., on conservation 645 - Upland Wildlife Habitat management, 314 Brush Management, 338 - Prescribed fire and 643 - Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities.

Charles Kneuper discussed local work group meetings, the identified priorities across the state in addition to common themes and concerns expressed by local work groups.

Breakout sessions:

Groups provided questions to discuss and provide feedback.

- What do you see as successes for getting conservation on the ground, and how can the accomplishments be expanded?
 - Meaningful partnerships.
 - EQIP-CIC participation.
 - Increase outreach and social media presence to improve communication.
 - Simplify application process and allow for flexibility in program strategies.
 - Increase staff and resources for more boots on the ground.
- What barriers to conservation practice adoption and implementation do you experience or hear as concerns?
 - Inconsistency between fiscal years.
 - Limited capacity to serve clients due to being understaffed, employees not technically sound, and lack of technical guidance.
 - Lack of understanding of how practices apply to individuals, full benefits of practices, and available resources.
 - Length of time between application and contract.

- Lack of local control of funds.
- Delay with pay schedules—information is not updated and out in time.
- What are innovative approaches to overcome the identified barriers and challenges?
 - Increase methods of communication.
 - Allow transparency of priorities.
 - Increase a more highly trained work force.
 - Increase use of Technical Service Providers.
 - Provide incentives for success not just for practice implementation.
 - Increase creativity and flexibility in working with partners, especially with staffing.
 - More field days.
- With the climate mitigation conservation practices and enhancements in mind, what suggestions do you have for prioritizing resource concerns in Texas to leverage all funds for financial assistance?
 - Field days which address climate smart practices.
 - Mitigation practices to retain water and improve groundwater recharge.
 - Quantify potential impacts of climate smart practices.
 - Focus on ecosystem services.
 - Limit match requirements for partnership agreements.
- What recommendations do you have to reach new customers?
 - Quarterly roundtable meetings with new customers.
 - Improve communication between agencies.
 - Leverage community partners and volunteer programs to assist local offices with outreach.
 - Greater online resources (YouTube videos, more descriptions of practices).
 - Enhance outreach through communication training, social media, having food/meals at events, success stories on social media, neighbor-to-neighbor relationships.
 - Increase opportunities for small operations.
 - Emphasize economics of conservation planning.

Farm Bill and Inflation Reduction Act updates:

Stacy Riley, Acting Assistant State for Programs Texas NRCS

- IRA - \$19.5 billion in funding beginning FY 2023 to 2031. All contracts must be finished by end of FY 2031

Jeff Dudensing, Agricultural Program Specialist Texas FSA

- Reviewed all available programs through FSA.

Open discussion:

Ted Herrera

- California has many recognized tribes and now has designated tribal planners, getting more. Encourages Texas to look into this as well.

Mike Carter

- Playa restoration program.
- Recommending getting the Playa SAFE CRP program in Texas.

Will Newman, TPWD

- A playa restoration supporter.
- Support wildlife subcommittee requests.
- Riparian buffers need long term programs/implementation.

Joseph Johnson, Texas Agriforestry Small Farmers & Ranchers

- 5th annual meeting this year June 8-9, theme is youth in agriculture.

Rachel Seets, Hill County Alliance Outreach Coordinator

- Supports practices for soil erosion, soil health, and wildlife.

Johanna Nuding, The Soil Sisters

- Hemp production should be considered as a possibility for diversification; there is a processing facility in Wichita Falls.

Battleground to Breaking Ground

- Asked about NRCS tools to help assess the bottom line, etc. The ones currently found are not easy.

Other comments, speaker names not captured:

- Need to make stopping urbanization a priority.
- Requested that there be term easements for ACEP, no change can happen until the next Farm Bill.