

Montana STAC Minutes

July 18th, 2023, 1:00 pm to 3:30 pm Great Falls, MT



Attendance:

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): Kyle Tackett (acting state conservationist and assistant state conservationist for partnerships), Kelley Barkell (assistant state conservationist for financial assistance programs), Justin Meissner (assistant state conservationist for easements), Keri Bilbo (assistant state conservationist for field operations – Bozeman area), Kale Gullett (state resource conservationist), Susan Tallman (state agronomist), Kevin Derzapf (state range specialist), Alex Dado (state soil scientist), Mindy Gauthier (assistant state conservationist for field operations – Missoula area), Mark Henning (assistant state conservationist for field operations – Miles City area), Stacy Eneboe (acting assistant state conservationist for field operations – Great Falls area), Joel Laliberty (Bozeman area resource conservationist), Tyler Martindale (Bozeman area engineer)

Farm Service Agency (FSA): Maureen Wicks (State Executive Director), Les Rispens (Farm Program Director)

Ducks Unlimited: Bob Sanders, Amy Humphrey

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC): Stacey Barta

Fort Belknap Indian Community: Peggy Doney, Kyle Stiffarm

Blackfeet Natural Resources Conservation District: Craig Iron Pipe

Northern Great Plains Joint Venture: Catherine Wightman, Erin Fairbank

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks: Heather Harris

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners: Loren Ruport

Heart of the Rockies: Jim Williams

Montana Association of Conservation Districts: Brenna Rietmann, Madi Larson

Prairie Pothole Joint Venture: Jacquie Evans

Western Landowners Alliance: Erik Kalsta

Chippewa Cree: Bobbi Favel

Montana Grain Growers Association: Alison Vergeront

Montana Association of Land Trusts: Marcus Strange, Brian Ohs

Montana Rural Water: Kristi Kline

Northern Plains Resource Council: Gusti Catherin-Sauer

IX Ranch: Rich Roth

Opening Remarks

Kyle Tackett, Acting NRCS State Conservationist

Kyle welcomed everyone and thanked them for their participation. Kyle will get the FY24 meeting dates and locations out soon.

Maureen Wicks, FSA State Executive Director

Maureen introduced herself and thanked attendees for showing up and looks forward to interacting with the group.

Justin Meissner, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Easements

- Justin discussed Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) – Westland Reserve Easements (WRE) ranking questions and proposed using breeding duck pair thunderstorm maps and the

sagegrouse habitat priority polygons.

- Loren Ruport (USFWS) asked Justin if they would consider additional data sets as there is more recent data available.
- Justin also discussed the Great Plains Grasslands boundary and its use in ACEP – Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) in relation to the IRA funding. He is seeking input on the boundary and if it makes sense for Montana.
- Justin clarified that NHQ sets the boundary and associated ranking questions, but we are seeking input to send to NHQ.
- Catherine Wightman (NGPJV) suggested using a map from the Grasslands Roadmap effort that also includes threat of conversion.
- Bob Sanders (DU) acknowledged the enormous opportunity ahead of us with the funding coming through IRA, but also asked if it is feasible to deliver with a bottleneck at the appraiser level.
- Brian Ohs (MALT) said that the land trust community would like to see the entire state of Montana eligible for ALE-IRA, not just the Great Plains.
- Jim Williams (HOTR) agreed with the entire state recommendation.

Alex Dado, NRCS State Soil Scientist – Updating Montana Land Evaluation Criteria for determining Soil Relative Values

- Alex gave a short presentation on land evaluations, uses, and Soil Relative Values

Susan Tallman, NRCS State Agronomist - 328 Crop Rotation Updates

- Susan started her presentation by discussing the importance of crop residue for reducing wind erosion.
- Susan explained standards and how standards work and are updated.
- Susan went through proposed changes to the 328 crop rotation standard and is seeking input from the members on the changes.
- Kyle will email out to the attendees the presentation and supporting documentation for review and comment (2 weeks)
- A question was asked about what Susan thought about the additions to the standard and how they would be accepted by producers. Susan answered that she believes it is important for our staff to discuss the importance of economics related to conservation practices. She has done some calculations on lost fertilizers to wind erosion.
- Another question was asked about how the other related standards fit in and Susan responded that when they are reviewed and updated they will be brought to the State Tech Committee for review and comment.

Grazing Subcommittee

- Rich Roth IX Ranch asked for an explanation on our payment schedule process as he is concerned that NRCS payment rates aren't keeping up.
- Kale Gullett answered by going through the payment schedule process and where landowners can play a role by submitting receipts.

Wildlife Subcommittee

- Bob Sanders thanked Justin Meissner for incorporating duck thunderstorm maps.
- Loren Ruport expressed some concern that RCPP ranking questions may be inadvertently penalizing producers in the ranking process when they are part of a partner effort. Kyle will look into this with staff.

Adjourn: 3:30pm