



USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service
Mississippi State Technical Committee Meeting
Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)
June 28, 2023
10 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
Teams Live meeting

Agenda

Moderator – Earl McMillian

Welcome	Kurt Readus State Conservationist
Easements	Jason Keenan Assistant State Conservationist, Easements
IRA Programs	Earl McMillian Assistant State Conservationist, Programs
Equity	Charles Lea Outreach / Civil Rights Coordinator
Q&A	Earl McMillian, Jason Keenan, Charles Lea
Closing Comments	Kurt Readus State Conservationist



Minutes

You can access a recording of this meeting on the NRCS – MS website or by utilizing the Teams Live meeting link bit.ly/438jxme

10:00 a.m. – The meeting was called to order, and Mr. Kurt Readus, State Conservationist, opened the meeting.

Welcome – Kurt Readus

The purpose of this meeting is centered around the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). This is a tremendous opportunity for the state of Mississippi and the landowners that we serve. It will allow us to recruit additional staff and work with our partners. We're excited about this opportunity, and we will reach out to our customers to address greenhouse gas emissions. Our farmers are some of the best stewards.

Positions at NRCS allow individuals to work with our landowners to implement conservation practices. To conduct this work, NRCS will have job vacancy announcements to fill these positions. Please share these with those that may be interested in serving in that capacity.

Civil/Agricultural Engineer <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/732091700#shorten-link>

Engineering Technician (Civil) <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/732101900#>

Easements – Jason Keenan

Discussed the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) eligibility and the IRA funding.

ACEP has two major components:

Agriculture Land Easements (ALE)

Eligible entities can apply for funding to place a conservation easement on eligible farmland or grasslands. Entities are land trusts, local county governments, or other organizations with a history of acquiring, managing, and monitoring conservation easements. Landowners are not eligible for ALE applications.

Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

Eligible landowners can apply for a 30-year or perpetual /permanent conservation easement to restore and protect wetland functions and values on properties. It's designed to take farmland, cropland, and grassland that historically was a wetland at one time and desire to return it back to a wetland state. We use a conservation easement as the methodology. Landowners are the applicants for these easements.

IRA funding for MS

There is no ACEP ALE eligibility in MS. The priorities were set at a national level.

ACEP – WRE IRA Priority Areas

We announced the sign-up period; by March 17, 2023. No eligible applications were received.

Minimal eligible applications. We did have limited ACEP WRE in Mississippi. These areas were located in the lower six counties of our state's coastal region and also a small area in north Mississippi, north of Tupelo.



We look forward to future priority adjustments and having more eligible areas in FY24. IRA funding levels will increase in subsequent fiscal years. As the funding levels increase, we hope to gain additional funds.

Only priority areas were considered for funding, and the areas defined were very limited. If an offer did not touch one of the priority areas, it was not considered for funding in FY23. Many areas were on National Forest or forested properties. They must be on private lands.

There was no ACEP – ALE eligibility in Mississippi.

No IRA funding for:

Healthy Forest Reserve Program

Emergency Watershed Protection Program – Floodplain Easements

Contact Jason Keenan at Jason.Keenan@usda.gov or Ronald McCain at Ronald.mccain@usda.gov with any easement program related questions.

Note – FY23 RCPP Notice of Funding Opportunity

July 12 Save the Date for partners

1:00 pm (CDT) – held virtually via Zoom

Mr. McMillian will provide additional details.

IRA Programs – Earl McMillian

NRCS, Climate and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) for programs in Mississippi. My presentation today will include EQIP, CSP, and RCPP.

It's great to have the opportunity to speak with you today about the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and how it fits into NRCS' existing climate-smart programs and services across America's working farms, ranches, and private forest lands.

What is the Inflation Reduction Act?

The Inflation Reduction Act, or IRA, was signed into law by President Biden in August 2022. It provides NRCS with an additional \$19.5 billion for its existing conservation programs:

\$8.45 billion Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

\$4.95 billion Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

\$3.25 billion Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

\$1.4 billion Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

\$1 billion Conservation Technical Assistance

In FY23, for EQIP IRA, Mississippi received 5.3 million. For IRA CSP, we received 10.3 million dollars.

We are currently writing contracts on those applications. As of today, we have expended 65% of that 5.3 million in EQIP, with a remaining 1.5 million. We are currently ranking our IRA CSP applications.

IRA does not create any new programs; it gives NRCS additional funds to expand its existing climate efforts and satisfy unmet demand within its currently oversubscribed programs. Funds provided by the IRA began in fiscal year 2023, and will accelerate over the next four years.

All IRA funds must be spent by **September 30, 2031**.

NRCS producers and the IRA. Agricultural producers can play a critical role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, sequestering carbon, and delivering lasting solutions to the climate crisis. NRCS supports farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners in meeting their conservation goals, regardless of the size, location, and type of operation. IRA provides an opportunity to expand this support, focusing on



climate change mitigation.

The IRA focuses on mitigation. Though climate-smart agriculture and forestry can support both adaptation and mitigation, the Inflation Reduction Act directs NRCS to use these additional funds for climate-change mitigation efforts. Mitigation practices are ones that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve carbon storage. For a current list of NRCS climate-smart mitigation activities for FY23, which are eligible for IRA funding, see nrcs.usda.gov/mitigation-activities.pdf

NRCS continually evaluates mitigation activities based on the available science and implementation approach and will update them as appropriate. On Nov. 21, 2022, USDA published a [Federal Register notice](#) requesting public input on the implementation of the funding provided by the Inflation Reduction Act and sought comments on program delivery and outreach, especially for underserved producers.

Facilitating practices enables mitigation. In addition to climate-smart mitigation activities, IRA can also cover practices that are necessary to facilitate the function of mitigation practices. Here are some examples of climate-smart mitigation practices and the practices that could help facilitate them.

Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)

- Tree Shrub Site Preparation (490)
- Access Control (472)

Conservation Crop Rotation (328)

- Cover Crops (340)
- Irrigation Water Management (449)
- Pest Management Conservation System (595)

Waste Separation Facility (632)

- Waste Transfer (634)
- Roofs and Covers (367)

Prescribed Grazing (528)

- Watering Facility (614)
- Stream Crossing (578)
- Fence (382)
- Livestock Shelter Structure (576)

Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645)

- Brush Management (314)
- Herbaceous Weed Treatment (315)
- Prescribed Grazing (528)

Conservation systems may also provide other benefits besides climate change mitigation. Reducing risks and vulnerabilities and building resilience to climate change impacts (climate change adaptation), addressing other resource concerns like soil health, water quality, pollinator and wildlife habitat, and air quality. Although many conservation practices can provide other benefits, practices without mitigation benefits are only eligible for IRA funding if they are needed to facilitate a mitigation practice.

IRA strategy for Mississippi. In FY23, Mississippi used soil health, prescribed grazing, and agroforestry. Mississippi plans to focus its IRA funds on the following mitigation practices (and any facilitating practices).

Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) Mitigation Activities:

- Soil Health
- Grazing and Pasture
- Agroforestry, Forestry, and Upland Wildlife Habitat
- Rice



For interested producers. Everyone has a part to play in delivering climate solutions, regardless of the size, location, or type of your operation.

- If you've never applied, NRCS can help.
- If you've applied before, and were not approved due to limited funding, try again in upcoming years.
 - IRA provides additional funding for climate-smart mitigation practices
 - Your practice(s) may be eligible
- IRA is interested in locating new producers that have never participated in an NRCS program or haven't participated within the last ten years.
- NRCS is also working hard to improve producer access to its programs and provide financial and technical assistance to improve your farm, ranch, urban operation, or forest land.

Contact your local NRCS Service Center for more details.

Applying for programs in FY 23. NRCS accepts producer applications for its conservation programs year-round. Producers interested in EQIP or CSP should apply by their state's ranking dates to be considered for funding in the current cycle. <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/ranking-dates>
Funding is provided through a competitive process. IRA EQIP and IRA CSP, our deadline was extended from 3/17/23 to 5/1/23 to receive more applications.

NRCS plans to roll out the next RCPP funding opportunity in early spring, which will include IRA funds for the fiscal year 2023.

IRA and other climate-smart efforts. The IRA compliments NRCS' other climate efforts, including:

- Supporting [Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry \(CSAF\)](#) is a priority, including recent efforts to [improve nutrient management](#), [support soil carbon monitoring](#), and [streamline cover crop enrollment](#). Visit farmers.gov/climate-smart to learn more.
- [NRCS's Climate Change Adaptation Plan](#) identifies climate vulnerabilities and actions to integrate climate change into NRCS programs, operations, and decision-making.
- [USDA Climate Hubs](#) develop and deliver science-based information and technologies.
- The [Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities](#) opportunity invests \$3.1 billion for 141 projects designed to expand markets for American producers who produce climate-smart commodities.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) application deadline is 8/18/23.

SAVE THE DATE: RCPP Easement Information Session

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) invites potential partners to join an information session to hear about Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) easements. The session will focus on easement-related aspects of RCPP project proposal development, project planning, and implementation.

Wednesday, July 12, 2023, 2:00 pm ET

[Join Meeting \(Zoom\)](#)

Meeting ID: 160 940 1378

Passcode: 803806

Organizations, institutions, conservation districts, States, Indian Tribes, and other groups are invited to partner with us through RCPP. For more information about RCPP and how to apply, [visit our website](#).



Equity – Charles Lea

Equity is the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals. In January 2021; there was an Executive Order that tasked the USDA agencies towards furthering equity in our programs. Equity is in every aspect of our programs. It is important for inclusion and fairness to our applicants. We have seen results in our outreach efforts to historically underserved landowners.

I will contact the committee to address equity training and how it relates to our programs. I would like to determine what equity training and outreach within our agencies is taking place.

More information can be found on our equity link: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/priorities/equity>

Contact information-

Charles Lea
USDA/NRCS
Outreach/Civil Rights Coordinator
100 W Capitol St., Suite 1321
Jackson, MS 39269
601-863-3929 Office
601-850-0542 Cell
Email: charles.lea@usda.gov

Mr. McMillian requested attendees post any questions in the Q&A for a response.
Attendees posed no questions.

The meeting link with access to the recording will be posted on the MS NRCS website along with the program presentations.

Closing Comments

Mr. Readus thanked the presenters and the staff members that assisted with the production of the meeting.

We have been charged to meet our Chief's priorities which include:

1. Ensure equity in the delivery and implementation of all NRCS programs and services.
2. Increase assistance for climate-smart agriculture and forestry to support producers in mitigating climate change and building resiliency across their operations.
3. Expand conservation tools and support to address the unique needs of urban farmers and communities nationwide.
4. Cultivate a complete and diverse workforce that has the right tools, technologies, and training to uphold the scientific integrity of NRCS.
5. Leverage innovative partnerships to expand NRCS' ability to get conservation on the ground effectively and efficiently.

We are committed to these five priorities in Mississippi and will continue to leverage our partnerships. I appreciate all that attended today's meeting, and this meeting will be posted on our website.

The meeting concluded at 10:30 a.m.