

# WATER QUALITY SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

June 16, 2023

9:00-11:30 a.m.

[Teams Recording link](#)

## **Attendees:**

Brad Soncksen, Tami Nordman, Conor Ward, Roric Paulman, Katie Pekarek, Elbert Traylor, Britt Weiser, Renee Hancock, Marty Stange, Andy Kahle, Fred Stevens, Tom Mountford, Burdette Peining, Tara Anderson, Ryan Chapman, Charles Stoltenow, Rachael Whitehair, Jennifer Swanson, David Schroeter, Dick Ehrman, Lisa Lauver, Becky Ravenkamp, Annette Sudbeck; VIA Teams: Craig Romary, Laura Nagengast, Kole Pederson, Julie Wragge, Scott Sobotka Mike Sousek;

---

## **Welcome, Introductions & What you want to learn today.**

- Goals of the sub-committee
  - Provide some guidance to specific programs to NRCS
  - Provide some created thinking & broad concepts to help our collaboration with NRCS.
- Co-Chairs
  - Katie Pekarek & Roric Paulman

## **NWQI & SWP ACTIONS NEED & DEADLINES – UPDATES ON NWQI PROJECTS:** Brad Soncksen & Fred Stevens, NRCS

- **NWQI**
  - Actions for FY24
  - Due Date: July 28, 2023
  - Must have –
    - watershed/SWPA plan or assessment that meets NRCS guidance, which informs project implementation needs.
    - watershed/SWPA plan or assessment that meets NRCS guidance, which informs project implementation needs.
  - **Update implementation plans** for watersheds that will continue in **FYs 2024 to 2028.**
  - FY23 Contract Update:
    - Did request additional funds based on the un-funded applications & we got every penny we requested.
    - FY23 Allocation \$1,200,000.00 with \$1,906.00 remaining to allocate
      - Bazille Creek Review
      - Big Sandy Review
      - Turkey Creek Review
- **Source Water Protection:**
  - Due Date: August 25, 2023
  - Refining Source Water Protection Local Priorities for FY24
  - Opportunity to update high priority areas.
    - Review & Revise

○ **Updates for the NWQI projects as of 6-15-2023**

- **Bazile GMA NWQI:** Planning to meet with Lisa Lauver after our meeting to discuss what will be needing to be submitted to National by July 28, 2023. Last week sent an email to all the partners to start thinking about practices they would like to offer for the NWQI Project. Phase of the project is implementation.
- **Big Sandy Creek NWQI:** Emails and phone calls have been made, but no not much has occurred from the last meeting. Hoping to setup an in person meeting with Little Blue NRD and other partners next week. Phase of the project is implementation.
- **Bow Creek NWQI:** Planning to meet with Annette from the Lewis & Clark NRD manager after our meeting to discuss the planning phase of the NWQI project.
- **Wahoo Creek NWQI:** Lower Platte North NRD and partners has held one meeting in person, and we have had two meetings over zoom. This week we went over documents that will be required to be sent to National, also reviewed and selected core and supporting practices to be offered for the NWQI project. Planning to meet June 26<sup>th</sup> to check progress of assigned tasks. Phase of the project is implementation.
- **Turkey Creek NWQI:** Lower Big Blue NRD and partners meet yesterday. We visited about the interest of the project in past years, we also went over documents that will be required to be sent to National, also reviewed and selected core and supporting practices to be offered for the NWQI project. Planning to meet June 26, 2023, to check progress of assigned tasks. Phase of the project is implementation.

---

**Q & A Discussion:**

~ Roric – The system piece of this, figuring out the leverage of funds, process of where the priority areas?

A: Applications has to have half the acres in the priority areas. SWP funds are set aside funds that are targeted towards those high priority well head protection areas for ground water quality.

~ Applications not approved in the water fund pool; do they then go into the general fund pool?  
YES.

~ Is there a reason Irrigation water management isn't one of those 90%?

A: It is one of our most popular practices & it can be incentive to use that practice.

~ Combination of practices, like if you check the boxes on 10 of them is there a benefit to that? Can you up the payment rates because of that combination?

A: We can setup our ranking tool to give extra points if you have a system approach. To vary the payment rate after the fact we cannot & all our cost lists & payment schedules all have to be completed by end of September.

~ Can any of the practices be extended past the three years, especially the cover crops, can they be extended to a 6yr or beyond?

A: Yes, just this year there is a policy change that we can now switch management practices up to 5yrs & contract can be 10yrs.

~ What is the accountability of the results of these practices & what are the results, outcomes, or follow ups to that?

A: Accountability is the practice standards, so once that agreement is completed by our specifications then they get paid. Voluntary incentive based.

~ Do you have overlays of that map with sampling that exists over those areas with cropping, what GIS opportunities do you have?

A: Making efforts to get that done internally.

~ Can we show where those applications are? How many in the prior years, compared to the 193?

A: We do have a map that shows the populations of them. Since SWP started in 2020, we have always had more applications than we can approve/fund. Target is 10% of our EQIP General fund.

~ Do you have a general idea of what type of applications by practices breakout?

A: The high priority ones of course, but there are a lot of sprinkler systems. Conversion from gravity to irrigated.

~ Farmer puts in an application & it's not approved, does that get deferred to next year or do they have to reapply?

A: Yes we send them a letter saying they can cancel or roll over to the next year.

~ How does population size come into play when there are different sets of concerns?

A: There is criteria we go by. There are things we can do as far as allocations.

~ Communication with people who can help those who keep getting their applications not approved or funded?

A: Nebraska Extension can help them with it. NRCS cannot coach them, but we can help you identify problems with your applications.

---

Q: How many acres are involved in each of those NWQI projects currently? Not all HUC12's are irrigated or farmed? What is the investment we get from the Water Quality side.

A: Average HUC12 is 25,000 acres, typical project is about 3 HUUS, so 60-75,000 acres. There are 384,000 acres in the Bazile Creek. All projects are mixed dry land, irrigated, farmed. Most of the practices are crop rotation or cover crops, irrigation & nutrient management.

Q: Within those wellhead protection areas, has any of those communities considered where those recharge areas are coming from?

A:

Q: What is the sample size going to look like that we can start to make some determinations? Know Your Well Project, request well tests that mirror the NRD samples.

---

## REVIEW OF SOURCE WATER PROTECTION PRIORITY AREAS, UPDATES FOR FY23 & SWP WORKING GROUP UPDATES: Britt Weiser, NRCS

- FY20-FY22 Source Water Protection Contracts
- **NWQI WORK GROUP**
  - Achieve two things today to
    - Not overlooking someone who should be in this group. Who is missing from this group?
      - Need a geologist.
      - NRD to hire someone.
        - This person will be involved to help guide the sampling, but real interest is selling practices with the farmers & communities.
      - Katie – represent UNL or someone else who would be interested.
      - Laura Nagengast
      - NDEE to replace Tatiana.
    - What do we want to cover?
      - What data do we need to know about the wellheads that would help us to prioritize where these people need us the most?
        - Classified the wellheads with the information that Tatiana had.
        - Clearinghouse.nebraska.gov
          - Public water supply data
      - Existing water quality, but looking at big picture we need to factor in vulnerability.

**Q:**

~ Of the 500 were all 193 part of the 500.

A: No only 24 of them.

How do we think differently about what we have conventionally done?

---

## COLLABORATIVE IDEATION: Identify needs, investigating approaches for collaboration, and evaluating “parking lot” discussions from the prior meetings. **(IT’S GOING TO TAKE ALL OF US)**

- Data collection to help target where funds.
  - Need to have a massive push for more of data collection & spend more on that.
  - Ideas & Action.
  - We do keep tweaking it every year to try & make it better.
- Ranking tools
  - These practices are proven to work.
  - How do we target the funds where it will do the most good?
  - What would make one application rank higher than the other?
  - Local work groups throughout the state are heard.

- Tracking nitrogen – options to assess effectiveness of nutrient management (tracking below root zone, tracking with APG, tracking as applied usage)
  - Inheritance Issue is not the case & communicating that with data
    - Bio Data
      - Losing stuff below the root zone & is what I am doing really working?
  - OVER APPLICATION
  - Farmers have an incentive to be as efficient as possible.
  
- Communication with CCAs and dealers
  - ADD Testing labs – Soil samples
  - CCA dealers that are specific to manure application.
  - Agronomist & Education
  - Sales & Messaging
  
- Streamlining government (NRCS)
  - Always asked “Why is the paperwork so complicated?”
    - How could we help make that easier? What can we do for the producer to make it easier?
  - Farm Bill changes – Social issue
  - Isn’t the federal government responsible for the Nitrogen Management problem?
  
- Proposing a new conservation practice – Nutrient Insurance
  - Nitrogen insurance – risk free.
  - What is the true cost of Nitrates?
    - Health issues?
    - Who is paying that cost?
    - Human cost & Financial Cost
  
- Clean Water Alliance for NE – explore Iowa Clean Water Alliance
  - What is the Iowa Clean Water Alliance?
    - <https://www.acwaiowa.com/>
  
- SWP and a focus on recharge for targeting NRCS funding – can we improve the understanding of recharge?
  
- Data – what information is missing that would be helpful for NRCS? For partners? For Farmers? For understanding of water quality contamination in groundwater.
  - More producers need to be involved.
  - Producers working together.
  - People & time
    - Farmers have the tools to do things.
  - Thetozone – expensive, energy & time intensive.
    - Geological data
    - Irrigation Management
      - Dryland farmers manage when they don’t have the extra tool for irrigation.
  - Responsiveness – CHANGE.

- Sales and messaging around water quality
    - Getting the word out & educating people. Keep messaging in a positive way.
    - NRCS field offices taking the time to educate the farmers & getting involved with Agronomist.
    - How do we bring people in?
    - Incentives
    - How do we reach more people?
    - Sales, messaging, & Marketing!
    - Public Health aspect
  
  - Identifying hurdles – to conservation adoption, how can farmers be supported in overcoming those hurdles?
    - Got great practices, so who wouldn't want to do this, but it comes back & they are always still hesitant or do not continue to do them.
      - So yes what are the hurdles, what can we do better?
  
    - Putting together a “NEEDS ASSESSMENT”
    - Katie shared a “Sources influencing adoption of Conservation Practices”
      - Who messenger is & how we distribute the information.
    - Solve a social issue with technical solutions.
    - Farm Bill, everything has been geared towards total production does not equal total profitability. Crop Insurance is based on total maximum production.
      - Farmers today need clearly define what needs to be changed.
      - Has to be an emotional hook.
      - Make it was easy as possible.
      - Rural sociologist?
      - Only way to do this is to change the incentives.
  
    - Selling the concept & selling the ideas.
      - Long term buy in.
      - Need to make it personal.
      - Where the recharge is happening faster, could get those producers involved.
      - Get neighbors & those who have long relationships together involved.
      - Iowa & Kansas farms
      - Technology is something popular with the new & upcoming farmers.
  
    - Chance right now to make an impact on the young, new & upcoming farmers.
      - Water irrigation management
      - Lots of policy changes that are going to have to occur.
  
    - Social economics that effect how producers farm.
  
    - Cover Crops are a great thing & are working.
  
    - Evaluation on what the farmers want & who they are listening too.
      - How do we educate them to do it on their own?
    - 90% of our job is sociological & physiological.
-

## NEXT MEETING DATE - ADJOURN

- Next Meeting
  - When: Within the next 4-6 weeks.
    - Notes will have a survey.
    - Think about what your priority is when you participate with us.
      - Think about practices.
      - Target & prioritize