

## **Minutes For State Technical Committee Meeting on April 18, 2023**

Dana Shuff State Resource Conservationist started the meeting and Introduced Chad Kacir State Conservationist to the podium.

### **Chad Kacir State Conservationist started meeting with Welcome and Opening Remarks:**

First by letting all staff that attended self-Introduce themselves.

Under his Opening remarks he covered the Farm Bill and that congress is working on a new Farm Bill for 2023 and hope to pass it this year. Estimation that Farm Bill will be over a trillion dollars 75-80 percent of that will be the Food and Nutrition portion. Also covered was the Inflation Reduction Act funding and how much funding was received in NRCS which was 19 and a half billion dollars. The priority is in there for NRCS it is, carbon sequestration, methane reduction, CO2 reduction.

Discussed that the focus is going to be IRA Implementation, going to be for 2024, 25 and 26 After that \$26 can roll over and we can obligate those into contracts. On October 1st of 2031, those contracts become null and void.

### **Darren Boudreaux discussed about Programs for Prioritization Process and Financial Assistance Program Update:**

He gave an update with the current events of Programs. He talked about the local led meetings that they hold for the public. He discussed that it is just a meeting where anybody from the public can come forward and present their resource concerns and their conservation related issues, soil erosion, water quality, etc... The people voice their opinions to whatever they think, is a conservation related issue. then the local work group takes those issues and basically has a meeting that what they call the local work group and then they vote and decide locally.

He touched on EQIP and about the new process called priority practice that was authorized in the Farm Bill and gave states to pick up a 10 which is called a high priority practice and these practices get a higher cost share rate than a normal one.

He covered the areas that were under the high priority practices which were:

Residue treatment, Prescribed burning, Tillage management and No Till, Field Border, Filter strip and wildlife habitat planning. And then the three that are only applicable to table water recovery systems were irrigation pipeline, irrigation reservoir and pumping plant.

He also discussed the new thing this past year was source water protection priority. Where we're incentivizing protecting groundwater and surface water in certain watersheds throughout the state

#### He discussed the Program Update for FY23:

Says Louisiana has to date received just a little bit over \$21 million.

A lot of that money is dedicated for certain projects or certain sub accounts.

As of a few days ago, we've had 2381 applications for EQIP for this year.

And with the allocation and the cost estimates based on those applications, we expect to fund somewhere around 30% of those applications.

With CSP so far have received a little over \$12 million. We have 520 applications on file and expect to fund roughly about 30% of those applications this year.

Also discussed IRA funding update and that Louisiana has received a little over \$7 million in total IRA funds of \$2.3 million of that is going to IRA EQIP and 4.8 million is going to IRA CSP.

Under RCPP there were four projects funded this year. The first one was the open pine landscape which is in northwest Louisiana and extends up into Arkansas this project is to enhance pine forest with an open understory. The second project is Nutrient management which improves reduce the overall nutrient usage by fertilizer application. Third project is the Mid-South graduate at Water Stewardship program. This project is basically designed to reduce or improve a lot of source water converting from ground water to surface water. Last project is the conjunctive water use project it's like the third project, where it's looking at the use of groundwater and surface water, trying to implement practices to improve the water quality and reduce groundwater usage and improve surface water usage. End of Discussion. Questions?

**Given a 5 min Break at this time**

#### **Dana Shuff has re-entered podium to discuss Locally Led-Priority Resource Concerns:**

Dana addressed that the local process of every field office has a soil and water conservation district that they work with, and that soil and water conservation district has meetings yearly and invites the public they invite. Any clients they may have, the entities in the area for this local lead conservation and they rank in their area their resource concerns that they are concerned with. With the resource concerns they have 10 points to work with on ranking system

She showed on the map every LARU district in the state that are grouped together with each District Conservationist there are 13. She also briefly discussed the List of all the Air, Animals, Energy, Plants, Soil and Water Concerns for 2023.

She discussed the locally Led this past year will affect the fiscal year 24 rankings for our programs. This was the votes they got from the Top 10 resource concerns and how it was ranked: plant productivity and health by far, ranked the highest at 96, the most points throughout all the conservation districts. And then at the bottom was animals, terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrate at 25. Dana addressed to staff that the Top 10 resource concerns that were ranked, she wants staff to rank them just like the public ranks them at this time she passed out ranking sheets to everyone and explained what each resource mean. End of Discussion. Questions?

### **Tim Landreneau from Easements discussed Easement Program Update:**

Came up and discussed that he will be giving updates on easement programs from last year and where we at this year and then cover couple of things with the ranking criteria for the ACEP and Wetland Reserve Easements.

Discussed that We did restoration activities on 63 easements covering over 13,000 acres and that included new restorations for easements that had recently been enrolled. 63 easements that we worked on last year, we closed on 24 easements. So those are 24 that were probably enrolled in either 2020 or 2021. And then in 2022, we had 307 eligible applications for Wetland Reserve easements out of 451 that were received. then out of the 307 that were eligible, we enrolled 32. He brought up that we enrolled 32 new easements for 7400 acres that included 13 REP (Reserve Enhancement Partnership) enrollments. Out of 32 that we're enrolled, 13 of those were REP enrollments. So those 32 enrollments to full cost obligated was 22.5 million and that covered perched acquisition, the purchasing, the easements, all the work to acquire the ease of the boundary surveys to environmental database search, direct title and closing services and then also the restoration cost.

So, both WRP and WRE puts us at 1154 easements enrolled on 347,000 acres. Of those, 1110 are closed on 334,000 acres and of the closed acres, 320,000 acres are fully restored.

Discussed jumping forward to this year to 2023, where we're at money wise, our WRE general allocation is 13.8 million. That's 11.5 for new enrollments and then 2.2 million for stewardship. From existing projects, all the funds have been used, so we don't have any dollars available in the tri-state REP for this year from prior year projects. And then the batch year REP, we had a small amount batch year REP covers. There were some funds available from other states who were able to get our unfair share of those and pick up some of the other state funds which got us up to about 5.4 million in Batture funds available this year. Both REP projects do have proposals that have been

submitted for new projects beginning in 2023, and those are in the selection and approval process. So, he discussed now that puts us in total 19.2 million in WRE FA. we have requested more funds this year in addition to our beginning allocation of the 19.2 million and we are again unofficially advised that it's in process of being approved. But we're looking at potentially getting about 13.6 additional dollars which is in FA and that's not. So that would put us a little bit over 30 million in total FA allocation, which would be the highest that we've been in a few years.

Tim discussed update on Applications and currently, we're sitting at 224 applications, 158 of those are either pending or eligible.

Those 158 eligible applications make up about 40,000 acres and you know we're looking at having \$30 million this year for. That covers all the FA needs. Just those 158 has a total Funding need of probably between restoration and acquisition, about 125 billion dollars.

Discussed the FY 2023 Application Ranking Criteria. It falls under 2 categories. The environmental benefit considerations and then economic considerations. With the environmental benefit considerations, we prioritize applications based off of several factors. That includes location significance, wildlife habitat, T&E priority, habitat zones, and then water quality for surface water filtering, hydrology restoration, potential habitat diversity and finally Easement duration. Then Economic consideration that includes Operation and Maintenance and Cost-Benefit Comparison.

End Of Discussion. Questions?

### **Garret Thomassie discussed updates at Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center:**

There are two studies they are currently working on are *Sporobolus Virginius* and the *Distichlis spicata*. In the *Sporobolus* as an initial evaluation, we were looking at 29 different collections that were collected throughout the coast of Louisiana and southeastern Texas.

Discussed the Chitimacha tribe and from the communications they have had throughout the years and that was to help to find a lot of the cultural significant plants to reintroduce to some of their tribal lands. River Cane was the one that was originally selected. It was very successful, were looking at some other potential interests of these plants.

And recently we were asked by the Coushatta tribe and was in communication with them to see what we can provide for technical support.

Next, he discussed another partnership that we signed last year was the Nicholls State Univ. Farm, also known as The Horse Farm.

And this gives us an additional planning area to look at some of these locally adapted plants,

Discussed About current vacancies- We have a biological science technician position that's currently being advertised. And it closes on the 20th.

And our agronomist position is once again vacant.

Addressed updates on Damages from Hurricane Ida the facility buildings and repairs and the demo that's still ongoing. Going to plan on rebuilding 1 greenhouse at this time, so the new footings were completed on the 11th of April.

Kimberly Walden from Garrett and Group gave an update on the Charamicos projects about the planting of second crop of blue corn recently. We planted about 550 plants from seed that was grown here on reservation resulting from the first crop that was grown at plant material center.

End Of Discussion. Questions?

### **Partner Updates Discussion:**

Kyle Soileau from Ducks Unlimited Discussed of Enhancing producer technical assistance through Right stewardship. Also reiterated discussion about the Conjunctive water use that Darren discussed earlier in the meeting to touch base on what they are currently doing with that project. Filtering out very turbid surface water it shows reductions of up to 90% on turbidity, suspended solids and the biggest benefit is the reduction in costs.

Discussed the Natural resource damage assessment program, they have two in Louisiana. Have 53 landowner agreements on over 11,000 acres.

Also Discussed about their manager of conservation programs wrote up a note on the North Catfish Lake CWPPRA project. At the end of March closed out the agreement for the North Catfish Lake Creation CWPPRA project, which was an engineering and design effort with NRCS.

Donna Gentry touched base on the Louisiana master farmer program and talked about a future training that is called new employees that will be scheduled on July 18<sup>th</sup> at the state evacuation shelter just south of LSU in Alexandria its free between 8:30-12 noon. They are not inviting producers, but really anybody else in any of the agencies, state, federal, any groups that are interested in learning more about the program.

Partner with the Forestry Association talked about the 3 biofuel plants which will reduce and put back into balance the growth of the forest resources. Also discussed that they are working with our partners in national organizations in Washington with the Partnership with US Fish and Wildlife Service and the private landowners and managing for threatening endangered species on private land.

David Breithaupt gave updates with Wildlife and Fisheries that they have realigned staff and left people in place in their Leesville office to help with Longleaf pine. Those in North Louisiana have been working with open pine and RCPP. And discussed that there will be Prescribed fire burn groups that will be working with them to implement their own prescribed fire on their property because lack of prescribed burns and to stay tuned for the information coming from these groups.

Theron Phillips from the Department of Agri Forestry gave update on feral swine pilot. Agreement with NRCS has been extended to carry us through September of this year. Also, Louisiana outdoors forever program has their request for proposals out, the deadline is May 19th. At this moment they have not received any applications or free applications for this program

Tara Morris from Louisiana Grazing Lands Conservation addressed pasture walks that they are hosting, and they have an urban and small farming based one in Greensburg. We went out to Shreveport for a pastoral walk at Sample Farm recently, and we have two more pasture walks upcoming.

Doug Bagel of the Louisiana Hypoxia working group also addressed that he wanted to give a reminder that our group meets every month usually on the 4th Thursdays at 10:00 AM

Aimee Preau with the Department of Environmental Quality discussed about the new 5-year management plan that lists priority watersheds. Also discussed, with their last few water quality assessments they have been posted online but there is a new interactive map so you can look at a map of the state and zoom in to different watersheds and see the assessment.

Kimberly Walden chimed in again about update of a tribe that applied for a Noah living Shoreline grant.

**Wrap Up and Closing Comments by State Conservationist Chad Kacir**

Thank You to the Staff and Partners

End of Meeting

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chad Kacir". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

State Conservationist