

Fall 2023 State Technical Committee Meeting Minutes
Held in Alexandria, La State Office Large Conference Room
Date and Time Held on Sept 28 at 9:30 am

Agenda Items that were covered:

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Chad Kacir State Conservationist opened meeting about the importance of input from partners in implementing the farm bill and state taxes. He mentioned programs such as farm bill, equip, stewardships and easements that receive funding at the local and state levels. The speaker urged attendees to provide feedback and highlighted the success of the Equip program in 2023.

Plant Materials Specialist & Co-Lead, USDA Climate Hub

Alan Casey, an employee at Greensboro North Carolina East National Technology Support, discusses his role as a technical support provider and climate coordinator. He talks about the USDA climate hubs and their collaboration with other agencies. Alan also highlights the impact of climate change on farmers and ranchers and the importance of mitigation and adaptation.

Agreements

Candace Voorhies Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Agreements, provides information on financial assistance in Louisiana partners. She also discussed the Inflation Reduction Act, which aims to reduce carbon emissions and sequester carbon. The speaker emphasized the need to convince

producers of the benefits of climate-smart conservation practices and the urgency to take advantage of available funding. The shortage of staff was acknowledged, and support from partners was requested.

State Offsite Wetland Determinations/WHEG Updates

Troy Mallach State Biologist discussed revisions to the Wildlife Habitation guide revisions and talked about the land uses of the pine systems and hardwood systems. Josh Wallow also shared information and discussed revisions to the off-site wetland compliance methods in Louisiana and proposed changes to payment percentages for certain practices in the cost-share program.

Cost-rate sub-committee report and Subcommittees

The committee discussed increasing financial assistance rates for land leveling and irrigation pipeline practices. They also consider the impact of fuel and labor costs and suggest finding ways to reduce those costs. The approval of these proposals will take effect in the future. The speaker begins by inviting participants to join subcommittees and discusses the progress of the sugar cane outreach subcommittee. They give updates on various conservation projects, including poultry litter transfer and gypsum use. The importance of conservation and collaboration with the Louisiana Resiliency task force is emphasized.

Partner Updates of New Activities

Ongoing partnerships and projects with NRCS are discussed. Bill Varnish praises the success of the RCPP and the need for additional funding. Jack Martini introduces himself as a new partner in the RCPP effort. Steve Brock and Bill Vermillion briefly speak about bird conservation and coastal grassland incentives. The Louisiana Grazing Land Conservation Initiative discusses their efforts to educate cattle producers. They hope to highlight success stories and collaborate with wildlife organizations to educate landowners. Mason Blazo introduces himself as the new addition to the Federation from the Louisiana farm. He mentions his experience in community groups related to dairy, poultry, shrimp, oyster, forestry, environmental, regulatory issues, and coastal activities. He

expresses his willingness to be a resource and friend to everyone in the room. The American Sugarcane League welcomes Mason and hopes for increased participation from growers. Mason, as the coordinator for the bar fish and wallet program, explains that they fund restoration projects for private landowners. He can partner with others if they have projects related to habitat restoration. However, he can only work in about 20 parishes currently. Mason mentions the specific areas where he can do restoration work. He encourages anyone interested to reach out to him for partnership opportunities.

Karis Ritenour from Manomet discussed their partnership with NRCS to create shorebird habitats in rice and crawfish fields. They have implemented over 45,000 acres and received a grant to expand their efforts. They have developed a wildlife habitat evaluation guide for shorebirds based on the model duck wag. Troy Mallach State Biologist is working on reviewing the guide. The Nature Conservancy reported signing a \$5 million tri-state wetland restoration project with NRCS. Doug Dale mentioned the Louisiana Hypoxia working group's regular meetings. Jason Nolde discussed the Good Neighbor Authority agreements they have signed.

Wrap-up Discussion and Closing Comments

The State Conservationist announced his retirement. He thanked everyone for their partnership and discussed the uncertainty regarding federal funding and to Keep an eye on the Congress situation and be prepared to close the doors if a continuing resolution is not passed.

Kris Davis

Acting State Conservationist

