

Minnesota NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Notes

Sept. 20-21, 2023

St. Cloud, MN

Welcome and Introductions (Ryan Galbreath)

- The STAC is not a formal group, but is here to help provide feedback, information, and analytics from NRCS partners.
- The technical subcommittees meets quarterly to help facilitate these discussions.

Programs Updates (Kelly Heather)

- The importance of locally led workgroups in helping to determine priorities (resource concern) by county was discussed. This helps staff know where to allocate money for the resource concerns.
- Kelly also provided an update to IRA funds, MN used all funds received for 2023. \$31.5 million obligated, which is about 35% higher than previous years.
- CSP Renewals and Classic/IRA had 291/503 applications funded.
 - Top Agriculture CSP Activities include:
 - Pest Management
 - Nutrient Management
 - Cover Crop
 - Forage Harvest Management
 - Residue and Tillage Management
 - Top Non-Industrial Private Forestland Activities:
 - Forest Stand Improvement
 - Tree/Shrub Establishment
 - Brush Management
 - Structures for Wildlife
 - Conservation Cover
- EQIP Updates
 - 2226 Applications across the state, \$41.7 million funded, 30% more than usual
 - 939 contracts, 33% funded.
- IRA-EQIP
 - 384 Applications received, 27% funded for \$2.9 million, resulting in 105 contracts
- RCPP
 - ABC – Improving Forest Health, 39 applications – 37 contracts funded.
 - MN Dept. of Ag – Irrigation to protect groundwater
 - Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape
 - The 2023 Classic and AFA applications for MN were reviewed and sent to National office, still waiting to hear on who will get funded.
 - The partners who requested Renewals have been notified.
- Easements Update provided by Kaitlyn Miller
- CRP Updates provided by Ryan Galbreath for Angela Hanson from Farm Service Agency
 - 3rd in Nation for number of active contracts

- In 2023 there were 136 applications for grassland CRP for 4,124 acres
- General CRP had 618 applications for 18,312 acres. 511 were accepted for 15,868 acres.
- The question was asked, what happens to CRP if Farm Bill expires, per Troy Daniel – the answer was ultimately another notice of funding will occur.

Partner Programs and Updates

- *Audubon Society Grazing Land Certification (Dale Gentry presented, Sarah Hewitt was also present)*
 - Information was provided by Dale regarding the Audubon's program to promote bird habitat management on grazing land through a certification program that results in a certified label on products that come from these lands.
 - The program has three tenants:
 - Habitat Management (Bird Friendliness Index which can be shared with NRCS)
 - Animal Health and Welfare
 - No feedlots, USDA inspected facilities, no antibiotics/hormones
 - Broad Environmental Sustainability
 - Riparian area protection, nutrient and pest management, no broadcast spraying, supports insect diversity
 - There are protocols at national, regional, and ranch level (100 acres minimum)
 - The certification lies with the land, not the animals.
- *Minnesota Honey Producer's Association (Becky Masterman)*
 - Becky provided an update to honey production in Minnesota. There is an increase in the number of honey producers, but a decrease in total honey production (as a trend).
 - The Association has a habitat program to ensure habitat for both native bees and honey producers. Promoting floral resources and adequate nutrition.
- *Update from Molly Mehl, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Operations*
 - Molly reiterated that NRCS utilizes partner talents, resources, and connections in communities we don't normally work in.
 - The next Notice of Funding Opportunities is happening soon and Molly requested help from partners in identifying areas that need funding. Future potential funding could include:
 - Agroforesters, specialty crops, farm marketing assistance, and urban ag
 - Let Molly know of any other ideas partners have.
- *Board of Water and Soil Resources (Rita Weaver)*
 - Rita provided an update on the state's projects for structural and non-structural water storage.
 - For non-structural storage, Rita provided information that they reduce the peak and volume of the water. Rita does not work on this program, and provided more information regarding structural storage below:
 - For Structural storage, there were 13 applications for \$7 million as part of their pilot program. They were able to fund 6 projects at \$2 million. For FY24-25, the ask has been for \$17million worth of projects funded. Structural storage reduces the peak of the water flow, but the volume remains the same.

- *Minnesota Rural Water Association (Kate Breth, including Courtney Cheever from NRCS)*
 - Working with rural agricultural producers to reduce nitrates in groundwater.
 - MN well-head protection
 - Build partnerships and relationships to help with this process.
 - There are 3 priority areas.
 - Courtney provided an update on practices/enhancements and program available to assist this program.

Day 2

STAC Subcommittee Reports

- The leaders of the discipline subcommittees provided reports from their meetings.
 - Ryan Galbreath spoke for Jeff Kalin's committee in his absence. Kaitlyn Miller spoke for easements, Jeff Duchene for Grazing, Courtney Cheever for Water Resources, and Callie Bertsch for Forestry.
 - Many of the committees are moving toward a co-chair who is a partner member. This will follow suit of other committees.

NRCS Forestry Update (Callie Bertsch)

- Accomplishments of the last 5 years in forestry by NRCS and partners funded by NRCS in MN was provided. The new promotional Youtube video created by the public affairs team highlighting forestry projects was debuted.

Engineering and Energy Updates (Lea Holter)

- Lea provided an update to the new and updated engineering practices.

Ecological Practices Updates (Ryan Galbreath)

- The majority of the new or updated practices fall under Agronomy or Grazing, so Jeff Duchene and our new state agronomist Ryan Buetow helped provide updates.

Closing

- Dave Jones, Acting State con expressed gratitude to partners and employees who provided updates and action items. Suggestions for the next STAC are welcome!