

## USDA STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

Neal Smith Federal Building  
210 Walnut Street, Room 693  
NRCS Hugh Hammond Bennett Conference Room  
Des Moines, Iowa

### **MICROSOFT TEAMS**

September 21, 2023

1:00 P.M.

### Minutes

#### Welcome Comments

Neil Dominy, Acting State  
Conservationist

- Introductions
  - Neil welcomed everyone to the meeting.
  - Participants in the room and online introduced themselves. Attendance list is below.
- Agency Updates - General
  - NRCS – Neil Dominy, Acting State Conservationist
    - Neil's last day as the Acting State Conservationist is October 6. Jon Hubbert will be coming back, but no known date at this time. Jaia Fischer will be acting starting 10/09.
    - NRCS is working on closing out Fiscal Year 2023, which ends September 30.
    - NRCS is utilizing program funds to the fullest extent.
    - NRCS is moving ahead with business as usual, there is no word on the potential government shut down.
  - FSA – Matt Russell, State Executive Director
    - Thanks to Neil for his leadership.
    - No guidance right now for potential government shutdown. Proceeding with business as usual. Guidance will be sent if/once received. Will reach out to partners.
    - Thank you to everyone in public service that is helping put conservation on Iowa farms.
- Approval of Minutes from June 15, 2023 (*attached*)
  - Unanimous approval.
- Local Workgroup Feedback
  - None received.

#### Public Participation

- Guest opportunity to address committee and present opinion and recommendations. Written report encouraged but not required.
  - Neil opened for public comment. No comments received.

Neil Dominy, Acting State  
Conservationist

#### Presentation

- Agroforestry – SILT CIG
  - Jenn Ripp and Meredith Stamberger from the Savannah Institute introduced themselves.
  - Savannah Institute was a sub awardee of a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) through the Sustainable Iowa Land Trust (SILT).
  - Jenn and Meredith presented on Agroforestry and the CIG.
  - Question: IA was 85% treeless prairie at settlement, what steps are you taking to target this program to savanna landscapes in IA, many native birds and pollinators suffer when trees are introduced into grassland areas?
  - Answer: Remnant prairies we don't want to add trees because it is important habitat for native birds. Technical assistance team is continuing to have training on identifying remnant prairies and on pollinator species, so we don't take away space. In Iowa, focus on riparian forest buffer areas and areas where perennials were before. Another approach is taking monoculture agriculture and adding

Jenn Ripp, Savanna Institute

perennials into the landscape. It's not an either/or; it's a both/and. Not going after areas already in grassland prairies, the focus is to add perennials to the corn/soybean landscape.

- Question: Will case studies and information be available on the website?
- Answer: Yes. The website has several resources available: <https://www.savannainstitute.org/pfg/>.
- Question: Is there a potential to combine precepts into a virtuous harmony? Several million dollars coming into the state for tree plantings, agroforestry, and urban ag initiative.
- Answer: Yes. This is what we are hoping to do. Looking at Iowa strategy and hoping to partner. Working with the National Agroforestry Center and Joe Alley, NRCS National Agroforester. Working mostly with state foresters.

### **Technical Topics Submitted by STAC Members**

- Conservation Practice Standard Review

Patrick Chase

- Practice Standard updates and the process have been discussed at the last few meetings.
- States adopt the national standards, which are posted on the Federal Register for public review. Patrick highlighted the location where the public can submit comments.
- Once the national standard is updated, Iowa reviews the standard to determine if Iowa will make it more restrictive (we cannot make them less restrictive without a variance approved by the national discipline lead). If the state standard is made more restrictive, it will be posted for public comment.
- Patrick shared the process of signing up for notifications of Conservation Practice Standards posted to the Federal Register for public comment (<https://www.federalregister.gov/>).
- Patrick displayed the national NRCS Conservation practice Standards website, which has a section of notice of proposed changes to the standards (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/conservation-practices>).
- Patrick displayed the flowchart for the Iowa standard revision and adoption process. Once national standards are released, the State Resource Conservationist (SRC) and the State Conservation Engineer (SCE) will review it and assign staff to review. Once the final documents are prepared, the SRC and SCE will determine if a public review is needed. *The flowchart is an internal working document and is not for public use, so it will not be shared.*
- Question: Will redline versions be part of the new standard process?
- Answer: Yes.
- Question: When determination is made that a review is not needed, is that when the national standard is adopted without changes?
- Answer: When the standard has significant changes, we will post them for public review. If the standard is not materially changed, it will not be posted for public review. Some standards may not have substantial changes, but we will still post them for public review, like Nutrient Management.
- Question: Timing? Will this be used from this point forward?
- Answer: Yes. This process will be used from this point forward.
- Question: The redline versions are appreciated. Will the redline versions be posted on the website?
- Answer: Yes.
- Question: How often are practice standards updated?
- Answer: National goal is to review standards at least once every five years. Once the national standards are finalized, states have one year to adopt. Engineering releases standards throughout the year, quarterly. Ecological Sciences' goal is to update the standards once a year, around the start of the fiscal year to correlate with the fiscal year and programs. Some additional updates may be warranted throughout the year. National standards are posted to the Federal Register quarterly.
- Question: Is there something analogous for deciding which practices receive cost share?
- Answer: The financial assistance is disassociated from the standard update process. The payment rates are developed regionally, and states determine which payment rates are offered. Iowa has very few practices that we do not offer financial assistance.
- Question: What's behind the lack of ability to make standards less restrictive (administrative or statutory)?
- Answer: This is agency policy, as it is in our General Manual.

## Status of Farm Bill Programs

- Programs Report Sam Adams
  - See attached report.
  - Question: Can monitoring be remote (easements)?
  - Answer: Yes. A protocol is in place for the remote review (1 every 5 years, no landowner change).
  
- Partnerships Report Robert Mier
  - See attached report (corrections made).
  - Question: Can you share which IPC agreements were funded?
  - Answer: Not yet. Agreements need to be signed before can share. Should be within the next 5 days.
  - Question: Is the Wetland Mitigation Bank Agreement for Swampbuster (Farm Bill Wetlands) only? Any impacts with the recent Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule change?
  - Answer: This is an ag focused mitigation bank. The WOTUS change should not have an impact.

## Sub-Committee Reports

- CSP Kate Hansen
  - See attached report.
  - Great work on getting CSP out the door. Thanks to field office and state office staff.
  
- EQIP Nick Baumgarten
  - See attached report.
  
- ACEP-WRE Kelly Smith
  - Did not meet – no report.
  
- ACEP-ALE Chair
  - Joe McGovern – ACEP-ALE has had different iterations, including FLP/FRPP. ALE is very popular nationally, especially in the west. Excited to have in Iowa.
  - Joe nominated Ryan Smith as Chair. Sean McMahon seconded the nomination. Please let us know interest.
  
- CRP Sean McMahon
  - See attached report.
  - Discussion on concerns in the report – changes to CP38 SAFE grazing policy.
  
- SWP Christina Murphy
  - See attached report.
  - Question: Are the practices listed applicable for both groundwater and surface water priorities on that map?
  - Answer: Yes.
  
- Urban Ag Tim Palmer
  - Did not meet – no report.
  - Urban Ag Leadership Team met 9/7. We need to address the name – urban ag / small scale. Discussions in last meeting on definition and setting boundaries. Small scale ag opens more possibilities. Discussions on process for signing urban/small scale producers up for programs. Matt Russell at FSA has discussed this and is aware of this.
  - Guest input on committee is very important. Reach out to Tim if you have thoughts/ideas.
  - President Biden rolled out American Climate Corps yesterday, which is the renaming of the CCC. Goal to use volunteerism and build careers.

## Reports from Committee Members

- No additional reports given.

## **Other Items**

Links shared to the group:

[https://www.fishwildlife.org/download\\_file/view/3602/368](https://www.fishwildlife.org/download_file/view/3602/368)

<https://www.3billionbirds.org/findings>

<https://www.savannainstitute.org/pfg/>

<https://silt.org/tax-benefit-calculator/>

Agroforestry demonstration farms: <https://www.savannainstitute.org/demonstration-farms/>

<https://iowacapitaldispatch.com/2023/09/14/feds-pledge-more-than-1-billion-to-plant-trees-in-cities/>

<https://civileats.com/2023/09/20/how-crop-insurance-prevents-some-farmers-from-adapting-to-climate-change/>

## **Future Meeting Dates**

December 21, 2023

Thank you to everyone. Great to see the strong partnerships in the state.

## **Attendance**

### **In Person**

Mike Henderson, NRCS

Cora Fox, Iowa Cattlemen's Association

Patrick Chase, NRCS

Sean McMahon, IAWA

Joe McGovern, INHF

Ryan Smith, IWF

Dien Judge, CDI

Nick Baumgarten, DNR

Carlee Sabus, CDI

Sam Adams, NRCS

Rubyana Neely, NRCS

Curt Goettsch, FSA

Will Myers, IDALS

Shawn Richmond, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation

Robert Mier, NRCS

Jaia Fischer, NRCS

Nicky Williams, NRCS

Neil Dominy, NRCS

### **Online**

Angela Barker, Allendan Seed

Lori Altheide, NRCS

Ben Gleason, Agribusiness Association of Iowa

Jamie Benning, ISU

Todd Bogenschutz, DNR

Bruce Barnhart, LICA

Christina Murphy, Iowa Association of Water Agencies and West Des Moines Water Works

Chuck Isenhardt, State Representative, House District 72

Jessica Downey, NRCS

Kristin Ellefson, RMA  
Christine Evans, NRCS  
Amy Fischer, NRCS  
Jake Hansen, IDALS  
Jenn Ripp, Savanna Institute, Guest  
Joe Dierickx, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation  
Josh Divan, PF  
Kate Hansen, Center for Rural Affairs  
Susan Kozak, IDALS  
Mark Heckman, Eco Engineer, Iowa Renewable Fuels Association  
Julie McMichael, NRCS  
Blain McNabb, EPA  
Meredith Stamberger, Savanna Institute, Guest  
Thanos Papanicolaou, ARS  
Dan Paulsen, NRCS  
Amber Rhode, RMA  
Matt Russell, FSA  
Sara Strassman, Trout Unlimited  
Vince Sitzmann, IDALS  
Tim Palmer, Madison SWCD  
Kelly Smith, DNR  
Courtney Nicks, Ducks Unlimited  
Matt Dvorak, DNR  
Travis Sieve, EPA  
Graham McGaffin, TNC  
Mark Jacobs, Houston Engineering

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