

## **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**

December 7, 2023  
1:00 P.M. – 3:00 P.M.

### **Minutes**

#### **Welcome Comments – Jon Hubbert**

- Introductions
  - Thank you to Jaia Fischer and Neil Dominy for stepping in as Acting State Conservationist while away on detail to NE Region.
  - Jon introduced Keiko Sampson as his new executive assistant.
  - Ashley Utt with Pathfinders RC&D, Fairfield, IA. Introduced herself. Replacing Penny Brown Huber.
  - Participants in the room introduced themselves. Online participants were asked to type their name into the chat. Attendance list is below.
- Approval of minutes from September 21, 2023 (*attached*)
  - Unanimous approval as printed.
- Agency Updates – General
  - DNR – Steve Hopkins
    - IA Nonpoint Source Management Program Plan
    - Completed vision document on IDNR Watershed Improvement webpage.
    - Iowa 5-year Nonpoint Source Program Plan is being updated – accepting public comments through December 2023.
    - EPA also updating 319 guidelines – draft posted on IDNR Watershed Improvement webpage – requesting public comments through December 2023.
  - NRCS – Jon Hubbert
    - Initial advisory allocation to move into FY2024 under a current continuing resolution – have funds to move forward with Farm Bill Program delivery.
    - FY 2024 funding for IRA has come in and we are able to obligate all FY 2023 funds – payment scenarios should be finalized for FY 2024 by 12/8/2023.
    - RCPP – 81 new projects nationwide totaling \$1.1 billion – 5 of these included Iowa (3 AFA and 2 Classic).
    - New At-A-Glance was finalized.
  - FSA – Curt Goettsch
    - Similar situation as NRCS regarding budget – have allocations for the continuing resolution.
    - Continuing to fill open positions as possible.
    - Farm Bill extension as part of most recent continuing resolution.
    - ARC/PLC sign up coming.
    - Continuous CRP announcement coming.
    - CRP rental rate review upcoming.
    - General sign-up announced after CRP rental rate review completed.

- Question: is the \$300/acre cap statutory?
- Answer: it is for Continuous CRP and not statutory. There is a \$240 cap on General CRP that is also not statutory. The statutory rental rate cap is 90% on Continuous CRP and 85% at County level that comes off before any incentives.
- Local Workgroup Feedback
  - None received.

### **Public Participation – Jon Hubbert**

- Guest opportunity to address and present opinion and recommendations. Written report encouraged but not required.
- Jon opened for public comment. None received.

### **Presentation – Margaret Chamas, Livestock Viability Manager, Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI)**

- Grazing Infrastructure – CIG
  - Margaret Chamas from PFI introduced herself.
  - PFI was awarded a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG)
  - Margaret presented: Improved Water Quality and Landscape Change through Novel Investment in Grazing Infrastructure
  - Question: In the next round of the project will you be planning more in-depth economic analysis, especially around cover crop grazing?
  - Answer: Not in the next round, because it will be focused on peri-urban folks with less cover crops. Have applied for Federal CIG that would look at economics more thoroughly.
  - Comment: ICM conference had presentation about grazing cover crops vs. just planting cover crops and there wasn't a cost benefit. Nice to see some positive numbers that the practices can work and be economically viable.
  - Link to PFI research and analysis found here: <https://practicalfarmers.org/2021/10/research-highlights-the-economic-advantage-of-grazing-cover-crops/>
  - Comment: the work that PFI is doing can increase adoption of cover crops with other well-intended benefits. There are no planning tools, but they are in development that will help farmers and producers to determine how much forage area they need.

### **Presentation Follow-Up – Jon Hubbert**

- Role of committee is to provide input on Farm Bill Programs. Having presentation to full committee has potential as an asset or tool.
- Would like input if having presentations is valuable and proper use of time.
- Please follow-up with Jon with feedback and thoughts regarding how to handle requests for presentations moving forward.

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

- Climate-Smart update – Mike Henderson
  - Provided links to Climate Smart websites:
  - <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/natural-resource-concerns/climate/climate-smart-mitigation-activities>
    - Reasoning and basis for Climate Smart activities
  - <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2023-10/NRCS-CSAF-Mitigation-Activities-List.pdf>
    - These are the activities that have been selected for FY2024
    - All activities in this list have the practices and CSP Enhancements available.
    - Orange/yellow is new for this year.
    - If asterisk next to the activity, it is provisional.

- Some practices on list are very specific in nature.
- List is fluid – if there is a practice that someone thinks should be on the list, a request to add it can be made. It will need justification as to how the practice mitigates greenhouse gas emissions. Best to get data or background information before requesting that it be added.
- Notes on the website relating to facilitating practices.
- Also lists practices and enhancements that were removed with reasoning.
- [https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2023-10/NRCS\\_CLIMATE\\_AdditionalPlannerGuidance\\_Factsheet\\_24.pdf](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2023-10/NRCS_CLIMATE_AdditionalPlannerGuidance_Factsheet_24.pdf)
- <https://www.usda.gov/climate-solutions/climate-smart-commodities>
  - Agreements that are getting implemented this year.
  - Project Dashboard link will take you to a map that can be navigated by state showing projects/practice, commodities, or lead partner.
- Comment: IRA funding statutorily required to be mitigation, not adaptation or resiliency.
  - NRCS must report back on greenhouse gas reductions and there must be data showing reductions.
  - For Producers – it does not matter if climate mitigation is the driving force.
- Question: How is process carried out to identify provisional activities? Would practices added to the list be provisional?
- Answer: Scientific data from research (university and independent research) and looking at how that fits into the comment and our tools to see how they line up.
- Question: At the state level you can add practices, and would they go on as provisional?
- Answer: We can request that practices be added, but practices can't be added to the list without national approval. Activity list is national list and may include some practices not adopted in IA.
- Question: Is there an opportunity to connect to RCPP funding coming from IRA?
- Answer: Yes, Climate Smart Activities list can be used for IRA through EQIP, CSP, RCPP, and ACEP-IRA funding.
- Question: EQIP 590 – even though it results in reduced nitrous oxide emissions, it hasn't been used to address air quality. Looking at CSP codes, there is nothing about nitrous oxide benefits of EQIP 590. Could national list be improved with this addition?
- Answer: EQIP 590 is looking at proper management of nutrient application. If proper nutrient management, there is a benefit to reduced nitrous oxide. You are managing the nutrient according to a crop need. The 590 standard doesn't have anything outside of this to address nitrous oxide and therefore doesn't currently count as a CSP enhancement.
- Question: Another CPS field operations and emission reduction – could this qualify if national reviews?
- Answer: Not related to fertilizer management at all, related directly to the operation. It could be a practice that Mike could ask about.

### **Status of Farm Bill Programs**

- Programs Report – John Paulin
  - See attached report.
  - Question: To clarify - \$6.7 million for general WRE that is Farm Bill money and unknown amount for IRA?
  - Answer: Correct, IRA funds controlled by National.
  - Question: For organizations that might want to assist with easement monitoring, is that voluntary or funded or reimbursable?
  - Answer: looking at all options. In past have had cooperative agreements with outside entities to assist with offsite monitoring. Evaluating all options due to current staffing levels and open to suggestions. Will be one of the components for Iowa Partners for Conservation funding opportunity that will be announced later.

- Comment: Regarding National IRA – a lot of applications coming in for those easement types. We have a favorable GARC (Geographic Area Rate Cap) rate and are likely seeing record number. We do have some support from national headquarters. Already have 64 applications. Many are multi-landowner and will require thought process change. National was not thinking about multi-landowner.
- Question: Do you think this is because multi-landowner projects have been too large for IA allocation cap?
- Answer: GARC rate likely a factor. Also, a National Office interpretation of policy from an eligibility perspective. We have been making case that if we strictly adhere to definition of restorable on a single-parcel level, it will impact the ability to enroll future easements in IA.
- Comment: Rather than drawing a hardline between IRA and the programs, need to view IRA as a tool. It is another avenue for funding.
- Question: Where can we find the rates for ACT NOW for IA?
- Answer: Rates are the same, ACT NOW eliminates need to wait if ranking high enough.
- Question: Are threshold scores different for each practice?
- Answer: They are different for each funding pool, not each practice.
- Partnerships Report – Robert Mier
  - See attached report.
  - One RCPP Classic is missing from report – 2857 W Nishnabotna Water Quality and Infrastructure
  - There will be three more RCPPs that we will be partner states on: two from Illinois and one from South Dakota.
  - Question: Do you have any rough timeline for IPC?
  - Answer: Getting templates together now. Looking at end of February 2024, roughly.

#### **Subcommittee Reports**

- CSP – Kate Hansen
  - See attached report.
- EQIP – Nick Baumgarten
  - Did not have meeting last quarter.
  - Will have more to report at next meeting.
- ACEP-WRE – Kelly Smith
  - See attached report.
  - Recommendation: continue FY23 GARC values for FY24
    - No comments or concerns – Jon will consider and act.
- ACEP-ALE – Ryan Smith
  - Did not meet past quarter.
  - Will have more to report at next meeting.
- CRP - Sean McMahon
  - Met September 11, 2023 and reported at September 21, 2023 meeting.
- CRP update – Curt Goettsch
  - 1.6 million acres on 102,401 contracts enrolled in CRP.
  - Paid \$402 Million in CRP rental payments.
  - Net increase of 225 with net decrease of 3,686 acres.
  - Have 27 million acre cap and nationally we are close to 25 million acres currently.
- SWP – Christina Murphy
  - Did not meet this quarter.
- Urban Ag – Tim Palmer
  - See attached report.
  - Recommendation: Add small-scale farming to the definition with urban ag to broader define areas we can go as districts/agencies.

- Comment: focus on not limiting definition to “urban” or within city limits, but more on practices. Better to include now.
- Comment: Will need to define the location of urban and small-scale producers. Some producers may not have a farm or tract number.
- Comment: Appreciate recommendation of including small-scale in the definition. It is a struggle at the national level. Jon wants to keep it as broad as possible from IA perspective. Some small-scale producers are coming to farmer’s markets and that connectivity makes sense for IA. This is also concern in other states.
- Comment: regarding how to locate, USDA likely still going to use farm and tract numbers. Will be able to assign a farm/tract number to a yard. Can do down to 1/100<sup>th</sup> of an acre.
- Comment: As we try to expand program delivery, a strong part will be how to do outreach so new customers are aware of programs. Any help with outreach will be appreciated. Needs of many producers go beyond just conservation.
- Question: Is it possible to think about who small-scale producer’s product might be serving?
- Answer: Something we need to consider, but not sure how. Sometimes small-scale producers are supplying products that are culturally important and not available in normal markets.
- Comment: Have some experience on Conservation District level of doing outreach, not necessarily urban community, but with specialized farmers, PFI, FSA.
- Comment and Question: When we added high tunnels to EQIP there was a lot of learning. Payment rate per acre may not make it worth an urban or peri-urban farmer to come to the NRCS office to get cost-share for practices. Do we know if there has been work to be more welcoming to producers that are not traditionally coming into NRCS/FSA offices?
- Answer: Payment scenarios are being explored and should better reflect small-scale producers. Will have a sub-acre measurement. CSP minimum payment amount has been increased and this will hopefully make it more enticing to some producers. There has been training related to acceptance – always need to work and improve. Want to figure out how to have people act as ambassadors for new people. Want to get staff to point of being openly accepting and invitational, not rushed. Want staff to be responsive and attentive to all customers.

### **Reports from Committee Members**

- No additional reports given.

### **Future Meeting Dates**

March 21, 2024

Please contact Jon with any ideas that will help us move forward. Input is appreciated. Thank you to everyone for coming.

### **Attendance**

#### **In Person**

Jon Hubbert, NRCS  
 Mike Henderson, NRCS  
 Nicky Williams, NRCS  
 Pat Chase, NRCS  
 Keiko Sampson, NRCS  
 Shawn Richmond, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation  
 Sean McMahon, IAWA  
 Robert Mier, NRCS

Ryan Smith, Iowa Wildlife Federation  
 Joe McGovern, INHF  
 John Paulin, NRCS  
 Kelly Smith, IDNR  
 Will Myers, IDALS

## Online

Lori Altheide, NRCS

Carlee Sabus, CDI

Sarah Nizzi, Xerces Society

Kate Hansen, Center for Rural Affairs

Dien Judge, CDI

Paige Frautschy, The Nature Conservancy

Nick Baumgarten, IDNR

Curt Goettsch, Iowa FSA

Todd Bogenschutz, IDNR

Steve Hopkins, IDNR

Steve Konrady, IDNR

Amy Fischer, NRCS

Andrew DiAllesandro, USFWS

Amber Rhode, St. Paul Regional RMA Office

Matthew Dvorak, IDNR

Greg Thessen, USDA, NASS

Ashley Utt, Pathfinders, RC&D

Courtney Nicks, Ducks Unlimited

Julie McMichael, NRCS

Travis Sieve, EPA

Bruce Barnhart, IA LICA

Catherine DeLong, ISU Extension

Margaret Chamas, PFI, Guest

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

Scott Moats, The Nature Conservancy

Thanos Papanicolaou, ARS

Tim Palmer, NACD

Joan Flecksing, Meskwaki Tribe

Vince Sitzmann, IDALS

Chuck Isenhardt, State Representative

Katrina Ferry, EPA

Joe Dierickx, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation