

## STAC Committee Meeting

January 10, 2024

- I. **Welcome and Opening Remarks** -Walter Albarran, Acting State Conservationist
  - a. Thank you and welcome to meet with NRCS.
  - b. NRCS for as long as providing leadership in conservation in agricultural lands.
    - i. It is important to know we have been successful in partnerships.
      1. Part of that is gathering feedback.
      2. It is the most important part of this meeting.
      3. STAC Comm. Serves as an advisory capacity to NRCS and other USDA agencies of implementation for FARM bill legislations.
      4. Most important aspect is what our partners have to say.
      5. As we get feedback, as we are bound by policy and legislation flexibility may be difficult, but we always consider input and suggestions as an agency.
      6. Want to be accurate to needs and wants for local landowners etc.
      7. FY 23 had numerous challenges, storms etc., influx in funding etc.
      8. Challenges in implementing that in a short amount of time.
      9. FY 24 we will have more time but still a lot of challenges ahead.
    - ii. 24 could have the biggest challenges we have faced but the best opportunity to meet underserved providers etc.
      1. Funding projections a 40% increase from FY 23. Slight increase in ACEP. Still operating under FY 2018 Farm Bill. ACT now. Targeting specific priorities and LWG needs.
- II. **Financial Assistance Program Updates**
  - a. Summaries FY 23
    - i. Last year total 1031 contracts across all programs just around 336,000 acres with contracts
    - ii. 44.6 million in obligations acres; 770 EQIP; 258 CSP; 3 CSP-CGI
    - iii. Trends – FY22 \$35.8M; FY23 \$44.6M; This year – we have been allocated \$67.6M. Increase is due to Inflation Reduction Act.
    - iv. 109 contracts in over 4 million have been implemented,
      1. Hurricane assistance is majority.
    - v. Span 1 year to 3 years.
    - vi. CSP 5 years
    - vii. Up to 10-year contracts for Equip
      1. Comes with tradeoffs.
        - a. Commitments trade off.
        - b. Inflation
    - viii. 3-year trend
      1. Increase in the funding across nation but in Florida had a major increase.

- a. Initial allocation is 67.6 million.
- 2. Steadily increasing funding coming into Florida available to farmers and ranchers
- 3. We anticipate even more for FY 24
- 4. Bulk is coming most for the Inflation reduction act.
- 5. Program funding comes from under the Farm Bill
- ix. CSP
  - 1. 261 contracts- year contracts
  - 2. 7percent paid of 11.8 million as we only pay on an annual basis.
  - 3. 0.8 million paid out.
  - 4. GCI is special as certain criteria needs to be met in order to use.
- x. CSP HU Summary-113 Contracts
  - 1. We are required to allocate to a certain percentage to Historically underserved.
  - 2. 43% to HU
- xi. CSP updates
  - 1. Minimal annual payment for CSP increased to 4,000 and is applicable to renewal and classic.
  - 2. HU annual rates that self-certify applicants in 24.
  - 3. Additional climate smart agriculture and forestry available for CSP due to inflation reduction act
  - 4. Renewals
    - a. Sign up deadline May 3, 204 for FY 25
    - b. Final obligations FY 24 \$872,808 dollars
      - i. SCP renewals Farm bill \$724,569
      - ii. IRA- \$148,239
  - 5. Classic
    - a. Deadline 11/17/23
- xii. Equip summary
  - 1. Total contracts 770
  - 2. 214013 treated acres
  - 3. Total obligations
  - 4. HU summary
    - a. 391 contracts
    - b. 13 million obligations
    - c. 3 million paid.
- xiii. Hurricane Ian disaster recovers
  - 1. Contracts 199
  - 2. Obligated funds: \$11,049,928.67
  - 3. Paid Out: \$6,501,598.38
  - 4. Acres served 111,582.5
- xiv. Equip trend.
  - 1. FY22- 27.6 million
  - 2. FY23-32.8 million

- 3. FY24 52 million-
- xv. Classica initiatives
  - 1. Sign up deadline 11/17
  - 2. Farm bill 14.8 mill
  - 3. IRA 29.1 million
- b. FY 2024 EQIP Classic farm bill allocations

The screenshot shows the USDA logo and the title "FY 2024 EQIP Classic (Farm Bill) Allocations". Below the title is a table with two columns: "Funding Category" and "FY24 Allocations". The table lists various funding categories and their corresponding dollar amounts. At the bottom right of the table, it says "Natural Resources Conservation Service" and "nrcs.usda.gov".

Funding Category	FY24 Allocations
General EQIP - Field Offices	\$ 7,425,000
General EQIP - Livestock	\$ 2,075,000
General EQIP - Wildlife	\$ 500,000
General EQIP - Water Conservation	\$ 500,000
General EQIP - Conservation Planning Activities	\$ 100,000
General EQIP - High Tunnel System	\$ 2,000,000
General EQIP - Disaster Recovery	\$ 2,500,000
General EQIP - HU	\$ 1,350,000
General EQIP - Tribal	\$ 300,000
General EQIP - Urban	\$ 500,000
General EQIP - Organic	\$ 5,000
General EQIP - State CIG	\$ 1,000,000
General EQIP - Reserve	\$ 134,660

c.

### FY 2024 EQIP Classic (IRA) Allocation

Funding Category	FY24 Allocations
IRA EQIP - General	\$ 14,600,000
IRA EQIP - CIC	\$ 2,000,000
IRA EQIP - ACT NOW	\$ 10,000,000
IRA EQIP - Disaster Recovery	\$ 2,500,000

d.

- i. Offers opportunity for enhancements CIC.
- ii. General-the big pool of eqip IRA funding
  - 1. Application with primary practices, climate smart practices can be funded out of this pool. Narrow set of practices

### FY 2024 EQIP Initiatives (Farm Bill) Allocation

Funding Category	FY24 Allocations
Long Leaf Pine Initiative	\$ 1,697,433
WLFW Gopher Tortoise	\$ 1,941,422
WLFW Northern Bobwhite	\$ 879,085

e.

f. Equip updates

- i. In general, utilize ACT now practices.
  - 1. Process that allows NRCS to immediately approve an applicant once the application meets or exceeds threshold/ minimum ranking score to make a preapproval.
    - a. It allows for a faster process to utilize for IRA funding.
    - b. Target to smalls subset of client smart Agriculture and forest conservation practices
    - c. Early funding selections for the following ranking pools
      - i. Hurricane Idalia Disaster Relief, Hight tunnel systems
      - ii. Conservation planning activities and ACT NOW IRA
      - iii. **Deadline End of January 2024**

## FY 2024 FA Allocation Summary

Financial Assistance	Allocations
CSP Renewals (Farm Bill)	\$ 724,569
CSP Renewals (IRA)	\$ 148,239
CSP Classic (Farm Bill)	\$ 7,869,192
CSP Classic (IRA)	\$ 5,844,000
CSP Long Leaf Pine Initiative	\$ 1,000,000
<b>Total CSP</b>	<b>\$ 15,586,000</b>
EQIP Classic (Farm Bill)	\$ 17,389,660
EQIP Classic (IRA)	\$ 29,100,000
EQIP Initiatives	\$ 4,517,940
EQIP CIG	\$ 1,000,000
<b>Total EQIP</b>	<b>\$ 52,007,600</b>
<b>Total Initial Allocation</b>	<b>\$ 67,593,600</b>

- g.
- h. Ranking Changes
  - i. In response to partner feedback
    1. Utilize ranking questions based on resource concern categories identified by local working groups.
    2. Increase the weight of local resource concerns ranking questions.
      - a. Made a streamlined collection of questions to identify resource concerns.
      - b. We are ranking based on the questions.

### III. Easements Updates

- a. - Easement Update 2023
- b. \$24M – asking for additional funding.
- c. 4 ALE (trying to put as much as possible into IRA to reserve our dollars)
- d. 12 WRE
- e. \$8.3 remaining in FA & \$2.7 remaining in TA
- f. \$3M additional Stewardship Funds
- g. Upcoming request for additional ALE funds in the amount of \$24M
- h. Staffing updates – Realty Specialist; Biologist; Rangeland Management Specialist; Secretary of Easements; and ALE Programs Specialist.
- i. Preliminary Compensation Package – We will continue to request funding at 80% of the appraisal value.
- j. Ranking Updates – Please go into our website, to the ACEP Tab and cast your vote to keep 2024 ranking procedures and use of prior years' applications in an effort to fund projects quickly.

### IV. Partnerships and Initiatives Updates

- a. Local Working Groups

#### What is a Local Working Group?

- Local Working Groups are composed of agricultural producers, owners/operators of nonindustrial private forest land, professionals representing agricultural and natural resource interests, and individuals representing a variety of disciplines in the soil, water, wetland, plant, forestry, and wildlife sciences who are familiar with agricultural and natural resource issues in the local community.

- b.
- c. Why?

- In accordance with 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 610, Subpart C, local working groups are subcommittees of the State Technical Committee and provide recommendations to USDA on local and state natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs.

- d.
- e. Changes for FY25
  - i. Meetings held prior to May 24, 2025. Districts will work with their DC to schedule the meeting.
  - ii. All LWG meeting information will be posted publicly on the FL NRCS website 30 days prior to meeting to meet policy.
  - iii. One per NRCS meeting

NRCS CONSERVATION PROGRAMS FY25 RESOURCE CONCERNS FLORIDA - LOCAL RANKING

WAFSA of Category	NRCS - Resource Concern	Score
1 Soil	1. Wind and soil erosion	
	2. Acid erosion	
	3. Catastrophic gully erosion	
	4. Chronic gully erosion	
	5. New erosion from streams, shorelines, or water conservation channels	
	6. Subsidence	
	7. Compaction	
	8. Organic matter depletion	
	9. Concentration of salts or other chemicals	
	10. Soil organism habitat loss or degradation	
	11. Aggregate stability	
2 Water	12. Primary and Secondary	
	13. Seasonal high water table	
	14. Seeps	
	15. Coliform count	
	16. Surface water depletion	
	17. Groundwater depletion	
	18. Irrigation outside moisture use	
	19. Inefficient irrigation water use	
	20. Nutrients transported to surface water	
	21. Nutrients transported to groundwater	
	22. Pesticides transported to surface water	
	23. Pesticides transported to groundwater	
	24. Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to surface water	
	25. Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to groundwater	
	26. Salts transported to surface water	
	27. Salts transported to groundwater	
	28. Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to surface water	
29. Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to groundwater		
30. Sediment transported to surface water		
31. Recycled water transportation		
3 Air	32. Emissions of particulate matter (PM) and PM precursors	
	33. Emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs)	
	34. Emissions of ozone precursors	
	35. Depositional acids	
4 Plants	36. Emissions of airborne reactive nitrogen	
	37. Plant productivity and health	
	38. Plant structure and composition	
	39. Plant pest pressure	
5 Animals	40. Wildlife habitat from livestock accumulation	
	41. Chemical habitat for wildlife and invertebrates	
	42. Aquatic habitat for fish and other organisms	
	43. Feed and forage availability	
	44. Invertebrate habitat viability	
	45. Invertebrate habitat water quantity, quality and distribution	
	46. Energy efficiency of equipment and facilities	
6 Energy	47. Energy efficiency of farm/production practices and field operations	

- The LWG will decide the top 10 priority resource concerns in the LWG area (NRCS Field Office Service Area).
- These will be submitted by the District Conservationist via Microsoft Forms.
- Results will be posted to the State Website.



- f.
- g. Walter-
  - i. Feedback has always been taken into account.
  - ii. Somethings we could not predict, this year we try to dig deep in all the areas so out of 5 different areas out of those 5 60 percent taken to LWG.

## V. Regional Conservation Partnerships Program Updates

- a. Created under Farm Bill 2014
  - i. Used as a tool to leverage partnerships to reach common conservation goals. It became a standalone program in 2018 FB.
  - ii. Partner drive
    1. Each project needs 1 leading partner.
    2. Lead partner is ultimately responsible for projects to be completed properly in all aspects.

- iii. How does it work?
  - 1. NFO to award new projects,
  - 2. Project agreements
  - 3. Typically, 5 years PPA
  - 4. Can request longer timeframes.
- iv. What?
  - 1. Carry out eligible activities to further conservation production under FB land.
- v. Where?
- vi. FB eligible land
  - 1. Eligible partners
    - An agricultural or silvicultural producer association or other group of producers;
    - A state or unit of local government;
    - An Indian Tribe;
    - A farmer cooperative;
    - A water district, irrigation district, rural water district or association or other organization with specific water delivery authority to producers on agricultural land;
    - A municipal water or wastewater treatment entity;
    - An institution of higher education;
    - An organization or entity with an established history of working cooperatively with producers on agricultural land, as determined by NRCS, to address –
      - Local conservation priorities related to agricultural production, wildlife habitat development, or nonindustrial private forest land management, or
      - Critical watershed-scale soil erosion, water quality, sediment reduction, or other
  - 2.
    - a. A
- vii. Targets
  - 1. NRCS funding on conservation benefits/ resource concerns in a specific project area
- viii. Support
  - 1. Broader private lands conservation efforts with FB funding
- ix. Amplify
  - 1. Impact of NRCS funding with partner contributions
- x. Types
  - 1. Classic
    - a. Traditional program FA, FB
  - 2. Renewals
    - a. Streamline app process of successful previous projects under current FB rules.
    - b. It is a brand-new agreement but easier to apply.
  - 3. AFA
    - a. Direct funding to lead partner implements NRCS requirements.

Eligible Activity	Associated Covered Programs
Land Management	EQIP/CSP ACEP-WRE & HFRP ( <i>restoration component</i> ) PL-566 Land Treatment Activities
Rental	CRP
US-Held Easement	ACEP-WRE & HFRP ( <i>easement acquisition component</i> ) * <i>Classic Only</i>
Entity-Held Easement	ACEP-ALE ( <i>easement acquisition component</i> )
Public Works & Watersheds	PL-566

- xi.
  - 1. Allows for flexibilities such as waivers, higher payment rates.
- xii. Funding Sources
  - 1. 2018-FB- 300 million Nationally per FY
  - 2. IRA authorized additional 800 million for FY24, \$1.5 billion for FY 25; and \$2.4 billion for FY 26
- xiii. Funding pools
  - 1. State multi state pool
  - 2. Critical Conservation areas
    - a. Must address at least one.
    - b. Long Leaf Area in Florida
      - i. Degrade plant example.
  - 3. Proposal needs one type.
    - a. FY23 had 3 classic and 3 IRA proposals
      - i. 2 proposals awarded under RCPP Classic.
        - 1. Funded with Climate Smart IRA funding.
  - 4. Individual project funding
    - a. FA-funds paid to an eligible program participant to support implementation of a conservation practice or activities.
    - b.
    - c. TA-Technical expertise, information, training, education, and tools necessary for the conservation of natural resources on land active in agricultural, forestry, or related uses.
    - d. Applicants may request NRC funding up to 25 percent of TA activities the rest to FA.
- xiv. Good Fit for entities
  - 1. Similar conservaiton0focused mission, “helping people help ethe land.
  - 2. Qualified staff
  - 3. Existing relationship with landowners/ farmers
  - 4. Viable source for non-federal funding
- xv. Early coordination is key.
  - 1. Strongly encouraged to meet with Coordinator Easements specialist or State conservationist.
    - a. Topic discussion
      - i. Goals
      - ii. Scale

- iii. Funding
- iv. Outcomes
- v. Project readiness
- vi. Timeline
- vii. Capacity
- viii. Technical skills
- b. Early coordination
  - i. Defining the scope
  - ii. Determining what conservation benefits can NRCS.
  - iii. What top five practices are you interested in?
  - iv. How much funding?
  - v. What skill sets do you have?
  - vi. What is the timeline in the project?
  - vii. How to plan to monitor or evaluate results.
- xvi. Additional information
  - 1. Visit how NRCS RCPP website.
  - 2. Webinars
  - 3. Partner proposal guide
- xvii. What can partner do now?
  - 1. Obtain level 2 eAuthenticaiton permission.
  - 2. Request access to portal
  - 3. Registered with SAM
  - 4. You can do all these things now.
  - 5. Schedule a meeting with RCPP Coordinator!!!

### **xviii. RCPP Easements**



1.
  - a. Only available through classic
2. Eligibility
  - a. Mirrors ACEP-ALE entity eligibility types
    - i. State local government
    - ii. NGO
  - b. Entity requirements
    - i. Authority to purchase
    - ii. Establish land protection program.
    - iii. Demonstrated commitment.



- iv. Capability and staff capacity
- xix. Partner Input – Area, resource concerns, conservation values, land uses, ranking, application bundling
  - a. Can bundle.
    - i. Partner needs to systematic ability
    - ii. Ability to select parcels.
  - b. Regulations covered programs don't necessarily apply to RCPP.
  - c. Planning process payment schedules are used to scientific rigor and integrity.

2. Deed Terms

- a. Highly restrictive
  - i. Restoration protection of native habitat ins natural historic conditions
  - ii. Minimal disturbance, no agricultural use
- b. Moderately
  - i. Management of specific habitats to provide conservation benefits.
  - ii. Conservation activities to manage/maintain conservation values.
- c. Minimally
  - i. Protection of agriculture uses, including grazing uses.
  - ii. Rights relate.
- d. Deed requirements
  - i. Entity Held

Must attach or incorporate one of the RCPP minimum deed terms to eligible entity's conservation easement deed.

RCPP Minimum Deed Terms for Protection of Conservation Values (Highly Restrictive)

RCPP Minimum Deed Term for Conservation Use with Compatible Agricultural Use (Moderately Restrictive)

RCPP Minimum Deed Terms for Agricultural Use (Minimally Restrictive)

Two versions of the terms are available, one with and without terms related to a right-of-enforcement by the United States.  
 Partner may propose to use an easement template approved under ACEP-ALE with appropriate adjustments made for RCPP authorities, funding, and project purposes.

- 1.
- ii. US held.

Must use one of the RCPP easement deeds:

1 RCPP Warranty Easement Deed for Protection of Conservation Values (Highly Restrictive)

2 RCPP Warranty Easement Deed for Conservation Uses (Moderately Restrictive)

3 RCPP Warranty Easement Deed for Working Lands (Minimally Restrictive)

A partner may request in their proposal that NRCS use a US-held easement deed available under another NRCS easement program:

- Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
- Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE)
- Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP)
- Emergency Watershed Protection Program – Floodplain Easements (EWPP-FPE)

NRCS will incorporate RCPP authorities into the selected program deed

- 1.
- e. Evaluation, federal, share, contribution
  - i. Easement value

- Before/After appraisals obtained by the eligible entity following NRCS appraisal specifications

**Federal Share = NRCS maximum contribution**

- 50% of easement value – with US Right of Enforcement
- 25% of easement value – without US Right of Enforcement
- Where easement will directly facilitate purchase of lands by historically underserved landowners, Federal Share may be:
  - Up to 75% for easements with US Right of Enforcement
  - Up to 50% for easements without US Right of Enforcement

**Non-Federal Share = Remainder of Easement Value**

- May be comprised of:
  1. Eligible Entity case for easement payment to landowner
  2. Landowner donation or qualified contribution that reduces easement purchase price

1.

f. Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibilities	Responsible Party	
	Entity-held Easements	US-held Easements
Easement Holder	Eligible Entity	United States <i>By and through NRCS</i>
Co-holders	Other Entities <i>If identified by Eligible Entity</i>	None
Third-party right holders	Other entities <i>If identified by Eligible Entity</i>  United States <b>Right of Enforcement</b> <i>If selected, RCPP Classic only</i>	None

i.

Responsibility	Responsible Party	
	Entity-held Easements	US-held Easements
RCPP Funds for Easement Purchase are Provided	To Eligible Entity for their purchase of a conservation easement from an eligible landowner.	To Landowner by NRCS for the sale of a conservation easement to the United States.
Easement Purchase Agreement	Between Landowner and Eligible Entity <i>aka. Written Pending Offer</i>	Between Landowner and NRCS <i>aka. Agreement to Purchase Conservation Easement</i>
Obtain and Pay for Easement Acquisition-Related Items <i>(e.g., appraisal, survey, title, recording, etc.)</i>	Eligible Entity	NRCS

ii.

Responsibilities	Responsible Party	
	Entity-held Easements	US-held Easements
Funds for Required Easement Restoration	None	Restoration costs must be included in project budget.  Highly and Moderately Restrictive Easements only.
Monitoring, Stewardship, and Enforcement of Closed Easement	Easement Holder <i>Eligible Entity</i>	NRCS

iii.

g. Concerns/Benefits/Values

i. Resource concerns

1. Specific natural resource problem that is likely to be addressed successfully with implantation of eligible activities.

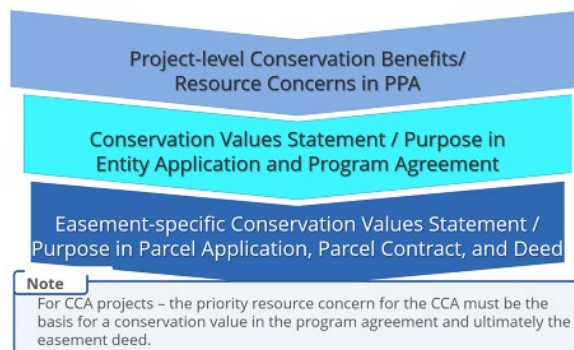
ii. Conservation benefits

1. Improvements in the status of the resource concerns and other similar goals in the RCPP project area

iii. Conservative Values

1. Establish specific purpose of the specific purpose of the RCPP easement.

h. Conservation Values



i.

▪ **What are Conservation Values ?**

- The natural resources being protected and the resource concerns being addressed consistent with the conservation benefits identified at the RCPP project level and as agreed-to in the individual RCPP programmatic partnership agreement (PPA).
  - RCPP easements further the restoration, protection, management, maintenance, enhancement, and monitoring of those conservation values on eligible lands.
  - Specifically identified in Individual Conservation Easement Deed
  - Derived from RCPP PPA Conservation Benefits/Resource Concerns

i.

3. Best Practices

**Tips to help ensure an efficient process!**

- ✓ Meet with NRCS State Conservationist, State RCPP Coordinator and State Easement Programs Staff early and often.
- ✓ Easement holder is responsible for its own due diligence.
  - For entity-held easements, the eligible entity is responsible to conduct and pay for its due diligence.
  - For US-held easements, NRCS is responsible to conduct and pay for its due diligence.
- ✓ Submit your proposed RCPP Easement Deed as early in the process as possible (preferably at time of proposal).
- ✓ For Entity-held easement: Be ready to identify all the eligible entities, co-holding entities and third-party entities that may be identified in the easement deeds.

a.

**Tips to help ensure an efficient process!**

- ✓ Identify the RCPP Easement type and Deed selection.
  - ✓ Entity-held Minimum Deed Terms
  - ✓ US-held Warranty Easement Deed
- ✓ Clearly identify the Conservation Values and explain how the selected easement option will successfully address the resource concerns.
  - ✓ Draft the Conservation Values Statement(s).
  - ✓ For CCA funding, identify the priority natural resource concern(s) the easement activity address.
- ✓ Identify clearly with name and location any known targeted parcels (does not guarantee eligibility).

b.

**b. Current Projects**

**i. 6 Projects so far**

1. 3 with ACT
  - a. Surface to Springs-Classic
  - b. Forest to Gulf-Classic
  - c. Lake to Lagoon-IRA funding, Classic, land management entity held.
2. 2 with NFLT
  - a. Ocala to Osceola Wildfire Coordination-classic
  - b. Corridor to Coast-Classic under IRA funding pool
3. 1 with TT
  - a. Red Hills to Coast- Classic, funded state/multistate with GA

**VI. General Discussion, Reports, Comments, Questions**

- a. HU Information will be posted with the meeting minutes.
- b. Communication and working with NRCS staff to learn about RCPP.
- c. Walter
  - i. Funding pools
    1. Equip classic with IRA CSP
      - a. Challenges of logistics in funding pools
        - i. The IRA cannot be mixed with Classic funding pool.