

State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
Sub Committee Meetings Minutes
Forestry Wildlife Subcommittee
February 27, 2024
9:00 am to 10:30 am

Moderator: Don Barker

Welcoming comments were given to everyone in attendance of the meeting. Don will be discussing closure of Canton Mill in Haywood County. It has really affected a large area out in the western part of the state and in multiple states especially when it comes to that pulpwood market. Forestry has one or two positions to help set up those areas to help write forestry management plans to offset loss of work for loggers.

Increase Applications in lesser used Pools- Aquatics and Pine Savanna pools. We've had an application in Aquatics pool for multiple years. The number of applications need to increase. If we are not going to use them, something needs to be done. It's causing confusion in CD and CART. We really need to be focused on those pools, especially Aquatics with all the interest in new species that are up for review listing. Not to mention all of the ones that are probably on the State Wildlife Action Plan, ones that are on review on the federal side.

The Pines Savanna is also important, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. We need to start getting folks in that pool especially when it comes to burning and some of these forestry practices. We could do a lot more work in those pools. We are not getting applicants that we want and the way the pools are set up, either modify those pools or get rid of them.

Comments/Questions

John Ann Shearer- I thought that maybe since there's a lot of people on this call and you're brought up this need for more applications that maybe you could just hit the highlights of what types of projects, particularly in the Aquatics well. But in both of those pools, that would. Would be fitting.

Response: Don Barker- So for the Aquatics pool, anything that has to do with and in my opinion, anything that has to do with a stream or a water body.

So, we have an opportunity to do for a perched culvert or a low water crossing.

Some work that would be done on a road that needs to go in and one of the main obstacles is a wash Culvert anything that's going to impede Aquatic movement. So, I would assume that it's wide open.

And then for the Pines Savannah. We're just looking to get applications in there that I think what the pool calls for is almost a Pine Savannah. Now, what I would like to do is, I would like to open that pool, if we have somebody that wants to go to that Pine Savannah instead of having the basal area

low to get into there. Why not have it open so that people who have and want to get to that low level and work towards that Pines Savanna, can also get into that pool.

Morgan Harris- I think the aquatic pool, there are two main things that you must have and one of them is aquatic organism passage or wetland improvement. So, it is not quite as wide open for like aquatic improvements in general.

Response: Don Barker- And is that something that we need to change?

Because, you know we control that. And for lack of a better term, we control what goes into these pools. I mean, if it's not being used and that is a barrier to anything being put into that pool. We need to edit it. Do we need to edit it and make it more so that we can get more applicants into the pool?

Morgan Harris- Yes, we have 2 applications going in it this year. I think it did go unused last year and we had three the year before I believe. The main thing I mean like I think the aquatic Organism passage is a good focus to have. The only problem is that we don't have partners out there focused on that. I guess you know so that makes it harder to bring in. So yeah, I mean, I'd be open to discussion on changing that one for sure.

Liz Rutledge (Wildlife Federation)- I just want to also kind of back that up. I think there's a really strong need for these. I think for some of us, communicating that information correctly and knowing exactly knowing how much money is available, knowing exactly what the pools are intended for. And I may have just missed this in previous meetings, but is there any way for the group to be sent like links directly to the website that explains each pool and what the landowner requirements are?

Things like that?

Response: Don Barker-Great question and I am not sure that there is a website specifically to the pools. There is a NRCS website that I think you can go to, and it has links of participant eligibility. It is general not specific to these pools we had years ago. Developed a document that was given to the partners and explained each pool and what each pool was intended for. One of the reasons I brought this up is because I'm trying to revamp that document and get that back out to everybody and they do exactly what you said, explain what needs to be, what the participant would need to do or. How can we utilize that pool more? It's not completed. I've got a ton of edits that are being done to it. Hopefully, I can get it out here maybe within the next month.

Liz Rutledge- I just think that's critically important to the partners being able to fully understand what's available and what we should be doing our outreach on. But I do want to say, I think all of these pools that were created for wildlife are exceptional and they're very needed. We just need to be able to understand the information and kind of how to guide that process.

John Isenhour- we talked a little bit earlier in the year about some applications for establishment of native warm season grasses in forage systems. It gets really complicated for somebody who's trying to be innovative and plant some native warm season grasses. Do they have to have cattle on the site? Can they hay it? Can they graze it? You know what's the stocking rate? Is there a way that we could get around some of the prescribed grazing requirements for folks that are willing to try native warm season grasses on the landscape in a production situation. I think we could get some additional applications in that early succession, grassland, pool.

Don Barker- OK, any more questions

John Ann Shearer-We are sort of making homework for you, Don, but I do think I do think that just a simple paragraph like we just like you just verbalized. I would really address what Liz is talking about because you've got your team of, you know, 20 people on this call who can share all that? If we say it the right way, we don't want to set people up for failure, we want to make sure that it's a proper match.

Don Barker- We've got all the pools and I'm just going to scroll through it. We've renamed a couple of them. I've got some examples on there. This is part of what I'm doing right now is making sure that the practices that I have on this list are the same practices that you will see available when you go when the field staff goes through the cart rankings. There's the Aquatics pool. These are things that are going to be prioritized in this sub pool.

I'm not sure I have anywhere in here that you're required to have aquatic Organism passage in the contract to be included in this pool.

Wildlife Fund Pools 10%

For each of the years 2018 through 2023, at least 10% of the funds made available for payments under EQIP must be targeted at practices benefitting wildlife habitat. The National Office will track wildlife practices and their associated funds to address the 10% wildlife statutory requirement. Under Title 440 Part 306.3 – *Guidance for Implementing Agricultural Management Assistance and Environmental Quality Incentives and Programs*, State Conservationists (STCs) are encouraged to establish at least one wildlife-related subaccount with dedicated funding and approved practices to support wildlife habitat. North Carolina NRCS is establishing 74 separate funding subaccounts (ranking pools) under EQIP to satisfy this requirement.

Wildlife 10% will have 74 distinct funding pools – **Early Successional Grassland Bird and Pollinator Habitat, Forest Land Bird Habitat, Wetland Habitats and Aquatic Organism Passage, Eastern Hellbender Initiative**. The applicant's objective will determine which funding pool(s) to place their application(s). If, for example, an applicant is interested in Early Successional and Pollinator Habitat; AND Forest Habitat, then Field Offices only need to accept one application and enter two separate applications in ProTracts. The guidance below outlines each pool available, their associated core and supporting practice codes, and details the specific requirements.

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Core Practices Which Will be Prioritized in this Sub-pool

- 327 Conservation Cover
- 338 Prescribed Burning
- 340 Cover Crop
- 384 Woody Residue Treatment
- 386 Field Border
- 390 Riparian Herbaceous Cover
- 422 Hedgerow
- 511 Forage-Harvest Management
- 512 Forage and Biomass Planting
- 647 Early Successional Habitat Development & Management
- 420 Wildlife Habitat Planting

Supporting Practices

- 472 Access Control
- 314 Brush Management
- 342 Critical Area Planting
- 382 Fence

Wetland Habitats and Wildlife - Aquatic Organism Passage Sub-pool

Significance:

North Carolina has a wide variety of aquatic and semi aquatic species which require unique wetland habitat types to survive. Likewise, mobility throughout an aquatic system is necessary for many species to complete their life cycle and produce the next generation of their kind. While focus is often placed on the aquatic and semi-aquatic species, many terrestrial and insect species use wetlands and riparian areas. Rapid human population growth and changes in land use trends have greatly impacted many aquatic and wetland obligated species. It is vital that efforts be made to enhance these habitat types on privately owned tracts where landowners are willing and able to implement proper management practices.

This sub-pool will allow for EQIP to more regularly fund establishment and management of wetland habitats as well as install and retrofit culverts and other instream obstructions to promote higher quality aquatic and wetland habitats. Designation as a 10% Wildlife funding pool will allow partners to better recruit EQIP applicants who are willing to improve wetland habitats and aquatic organism passage. Improving wetland and in-stream condition can greatly benefit Federal T+E species, species petitioned for listing under the endangered species act and species of greatest conservation need identified in North Carolina's 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan.

habitat and practices to maintain the habitat.

Core Practices Which Will be Prioritized in this Sub-pool

- 643 Restoration and Management of Rare and/or Declining Natural Communities
- 645 Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
- 647 Early Successional Habitat Development-Mgt
- 396 Aquatic Organism Passage
- 657 Wetland Restoration
- 658 Wetland Creation-Ephemeral Pools

Morgan Harris- But see under the box the criteria for inclusion. Perched culvert or another barrier? Or ability to install or manage wetland feature?

Criteria for inclusion in this specific funding pool:

- Enrolled area has an existing perched culvert or other barrier to aquatic organism passage. **Or** Willingness and ability to install or **manage** a wetland feature on land controlled by applicant.

Note: Management plan prepared by Wildlife Biologist (TSP or Partner Biologist) or NRCS personnel. The plan must include location of the practice, the practice used to create the habitat and practices to maintain the habitat.

Don Barker- OK, maybe this is something that I mean if you guys like it, that's fine or maybe we can reword it or add another box or? I just want you to know I'm working on it. Trying to get it updated because a lot of information has changed.

Morgan Harris- you know like for me, what I what I use most of the hellbender pool because you know that's my priority area and we've got that so like the aquatic Organism passage of wetland, I think, would probably be a better decision for other partners and other parts of the state where the hellbender initiative is not a thing.

Don Barker- Yes. So, what I'm hoping to do is, once I get this internal information and get in; get some comments or have some other folks look at it; and then we'll hopefully get it sent out to this whole list. And I know that we are trying to do a better job in getting more inclusive email list for who is on the subcommittees of the Forestry and Wildlife, Easement, Urban Ag and then the full stack. And just so you guys know, I think we are we are leaning on the side of keeping the full stack. When we send out information, sending it to the full stack and if it doesn't pertain to you, you can go ahead and hit the delete button. So just having so many of these subcommittees to manage, along with everything else. It's just made it's easier for us to make sure everybody gets it, than to miss somebody and have somebody, you know, miss a good opportunity.

John Isenhour- Don, I know you had mentioned trying to get more folks in on that forestry. The Pines, Savannah and I thought we had made some changes of that a few years ago, so that if the contract included a thinning for wildlife practice, it could still qualify there. But you know that's one we've struggled with for years because of trying to time a timber harvest with an EQIP contract is very challenging and you know the typical landowner that. You know that can be a struggle to time that so that they don't wind up getting into a contract. Their logger doesn't show up. Their Forester can't make s sell happen or the market just goes South and then they're stuck with a contract they can't implement.

Don Barker-That's it right there. So, I think this is the one, this is the one that had just had so many. I thought we had a Pine Savannah one. That's the wildlife forestry one. Go back Liz's question?

She asked how much funding? 10% of our funds each year are supposed to be in wildlife, and then it can be divided up amongst these pools. But that amount of money varies every year based on how much funding we received. So, we can't give an exact amount.

Liz Rutledge- OK, thank you. So just knowing there's a substantial amount available, I guess for 2024 is good.

John Isenhour- That maybe to address Liz's comment or question. As far as the 10% that can be based off of practices in other pools as well. So is there any motivation or any way that we could somewhat ensure that these 10% pools that are, it's not just a prescribed burn, it's a series of activities that impact wildlife in a beneficial way and impact species of greatest conservation need.

Is there any way that that there's any assurances that these 10% pools would be funded instead of simply pulling practices from other pools such as forestry or some of the local pools to meet the 10% requirement?

Don Barker-currently and I can go back and pull some reports or look, but we fund just about everything that gets put into most of our wildlife and forestry sub pools.

Bill Edwards- Yeah, if it makes it all the way through, John and I got all the eligibilities and everything, I think programs has been funding all of them.

Don Barker- I mean, they just before Morgan steps up before Morgan steps.

Jessical Schmelz- Yes, you're correct.

Don Barker- If somebody has hellbender stuff, is it, but most of those get funded and that's why it's underutilized.

Morgan Harris- I was about to say, I've had a few go unfunded.

Don Barker-Well, other than under there more than yes.

Morgan. Don't count.

Yeah.

Morgan Harris - Expensive, but the other ones if there's an application and it's in there and it makes it all the way to the ready to be obligated, it gets funded.

Jessica Schmelz- You guys were correct this, this is Jessica. I'm in the programs team and yes, we prioritize funding all the wildlife ones and obviously that's important to us and you know they're usually not so many that we can't do it but also because of the fact that part of our mandate is to do 10% in wildlife. So, the other pool where we can get a lot of wildlife is also in the longleaf pine establishment and management. And this year, for EQIP that is not very high right now, we don't have very many. So, we are, and I wanted to say this now since we have you guys together here. We are having a second sign up for EQIP and it's really to capture especially ones that we are we missed on the first round for some reason. And, to you know, get more of our wildlife in.

So, we are aiming for around a March 22nd somewhere around there sign up.

It may be push out a week. We're not sure, but March 20 seconds be the earliest deadline, so if you do know people who are still interested, please have them contact their local field offices as soon as possible and let them know that just signing up is not enough. They must also do the eligibility,

that's not going to be due until probably in May, but still let them know they don't want to slide on that. Being proactive is being successful.

So, I just want to let everybody know that, if you have people out there, especially on wildlife, please have them apply. Please have them contact their local field offices as soon as possible. Thanks.

Don Barker- Thank you Jessica. Anything else?

Let me check my notes, go ahead John.

John Isenhour- I think the overarching thing on most of the wildlife centric especially things that are really focused on some of these declining species and significant species is just the amount of money that's available to the participant compared to what it actually cost for them to implement the practice.

And that would be establishment, that could be management, or that could be the income that is foregone by making the choice to manage their property at a higher level for wildlife compared to other options. And I know that there's a lot of things in the language of the 2018 farm bill that limit the amount of foregone income that can be paid and some other things.

I do think some kind of statement or some kind of acknowledgement from whoever, whichever partners can be involved or even if it can come from NRCS state office, that the payment rates don't consider the actual cost to the landowner to conserve these declining habitats, and these declining species. I know we worked through **afford** to try to get that message across.

But you know anything we can do to find the right channel to voice that back to NRCS National Office I think would be great for us to be able to do that.

Don Barker- And it's common occurrence. I'm not a common occurrence, but it is that is a common comment, and we keep saying it.

So, one other thing that I did want to bring up. Hopefully you guys will.

Top Forestry/Wildlife CSP Enhancements Contracted in NC				
Enhancement Number	Name	Description	NC Supplement information	Additional Guidance National and/or State NC FOTG/Section
E 314A	Brush Management to Improve Wildlife Habitat	Brush management is employed to create a desired plant community , consistent with the related ecological site steady state, which will maintain or enhance the wildlife habitat desired for the identified wildlife species. It will be designed to provide plant structure, density and diversity needed to meet those habitat objectives. This enhancement does not apply to removal of woody vegetation by prescribed fire or removal of woody vegetation to facilitate a land use change.	YES	NOT INVASIVE SPECIES = approved desired plant
E 315A	Herbaceous weed treatment to create desired plant communities consistent with the ecological site	Mechanical, chemical, or biological, herbaceous weed treatment will be used to control targeted, herbaceous weeds to create, release, or restore desired plant communities that are consistent with achievable, ecological site, steady state descriptions.	NO	NOT INVASIVE SPECIES = approved desired plant

View my shrink this down.

I know you can't.

You might not be able to see it, but.

This is an updated document that I developed to try and get to the field. It just gives, I think 12 & 13 of the top forestry and wildlife CSP enhancements that were contracted in North Carolina. So that the field doesn't have to go through. I think we have a total of 170, 175 or 178, something like that. Enhancements for them to choose. This is just a quick reference guide for them. It just gives the number, what the name of it is. A quick description of what it is supposed to be, whether there is a North Carolina supplements and these are hyperlinked. And then, some additional guidance that I just put in there to help the field staff, partners, anybody who looks at this quickly, reference "Well, is this going to be something that I want to do?" Because sometimes the name does not reference 100% what the enhancement are, or the practice should be. So, the first one is brush management to improve wildlife habitat. The biggest thing for this is to create a desired plant community and one of the things that you can see it's in bold. I've had multiple calls, over the years.

Top Forestry/Wildlife CSP Enhancements Contracted in NC				
Enhancement Number	Name	Description	NC Supplement Information	Additional Guidance (This does not replace the National or the State Enhancement Addendum)
E 19A	Brush management to improve wildlife habitat	Brush management is employed to create a desired plant community consistent with the desired ecological site state map, which will maintain or enhance the wildlife habitat desired for the identified wildlife species. It will be designed to provide state structure, density and diversity needed to meet those habitat objectives. This enhancement does not apply to removal of woody vegetation by prescription or removal of herbaceous vegetation or logging of herbaceous wood material.	12A	NEED INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL. See state state approved desired plant community.
E 19B	Herbaceous weed control to create desired plant community consistent with the desired site	Use herbicide control to create, enhance, or restore desired plant communities that are consistent with inventory, ecological site, or state descriptions.	NEI	NEED INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL. See state state approved desired plant community.
E 19C	Logging residue pile construction and placement to create wildlife habitat	Implement a log residue pile which allows a portion of logs to be left in place or processed to provide food and cover for wildlife during winter. Piles may be constructed from one or more piles of logs a maximum of 18 inches. Piles will be left through winter and into spring providing valuable winter cover and forage for wildlife opening into summer and through the following winter.	12A	Minimum of three different logs, max. 12 feet per 10 acres, have standing log pile.
E 19D	Prescribed burning to improve wildlife habitat	and forage while improving wildlife habitat, wildlife food supply, and reducing the risk of damage from insects, severe wildfires. The time interval between prescribed burns is not often achieved. To improve the effectiveness of prescribed burning, the frequency of prescribed burning is increased appropriately, for a specified time period, to help remove ecological conditions in forests and woodlands. Short rotation interval prescribed burning is used to regenerate desirable tree species, improve the condition of fire-adapted plants and open herbaceous vegetation, improve wildlife food supply and forage quantity and quality, create wildlife habitat cover and desirable insect, lower accumulation of competing vegetation including non-native species, and reduce the future risk of catastrophic prescribed burning beneath a forest canopy (ground fire).	12A	When field must meet 10 in row stubble height.
E 19E	Use of fire to create a desired plant community	Burning a portion of the area each year to create a ground fire in	12A	Using from a 2.5 year rotation to 12 year rotation, burn plan required.

This is not invasive species control and there are a lot of times I will get a plan in and look at a plan and it will tell me how they are going to control privet, kudzu, any of the other Japanese stilt grass, any of these other things, and nowhere in that plan does it ever tell me what the desired plant community is or what we are going to do to enhance that community once we have removed or diminished the invasive species. So, those two right there are big on that. You know, 612 B.

You know the old planting for carbon sequestration, it's just quickly, you got to have two species. And I also wrote in there make sure that they look at the state supplement. Pollinator habitat, they've got to use the WEG and it's a half-acre for every 40 acres. Just little things like that.

So, this is the new updated version that I had already sent out to the whole STAC.

I believe the whole stack and now that I didn't do any of this, I didn't hyperlink any of this army from our ECS staff.

Did all that so.

This will be sent out also to everybody so that you can print it, forward it, send it to anybody who's you think could use this.

Questions on that.

John Isenhour- Don, you wrote a brush management and I've got a CSP that has got a bamboo infestation in about an acre and half, adjacent to a crop field, is that going to be a waiting plant for carbon sequestration. So, if we use it, it's in a forested stand with a fairly dense patch of bamboo.

If we use the forest management enhancements, with the goal that we're going to improve hardwood species diversity within that area after the bamboo is under control, is that a suitable way to use CSP?

Don Barker- Yes,

Bill Edwards- because you defined where you were going. Most people stop with the control and don't say where they're going.

Don Barker- I just looked at one the other day and that in his in in the person who wrote the plan, their comment was you need to go back and check and control any spot areas every year, not anywhere. Did it say anything like you just said they weren't going to enhance the hardwoods?

They weren't going to enhance the grasses.

They weren't going to enhance the pine.

They weren't going to do anything.

They just wanted the landowner to keep going out there in spraying it. You know, that's like buying a boat, but money into it every year.

But it sits in the driveway.

Bill Edwards- And John, we knew where he was going, but he just didn't state it.

Don Barker- Yeah. So, I sent it back to him.

John Isenhour- Right. Well, that might have been mine, but kind of well, well, I did have one that got kicked out in a long leaf where we're converting a slash pine stand to long leaf over a long period of time. But the comment I got back was that wisteria is not included on the list of species for the waiver. So how can we add species to that waiver as we see that we need to be able to treat other species on the ground?

Don Barker- Josh is not on here right now, but I believe the waiver went away. I believe the waiver went away a couple of years ago or so. Let me know where it's at, and it could be that they're working off of old news or old guidance.

So let me know where it's at and let's see if we can't work through that, because I believe that the waiver is no longer a requirement once they change the lifespan of the practice.

So, we're really again we, may or may not need it.

So, I don't want to say too much because if I'm wrong, so contact me and we can work this out.

John Isenhour- Alright, thanks.

Don Barker- Any more questions, comments? What's your opportunity to let us know what we're doing right or what we're doing wrong? Anything you want to see changed? The full STAC meeting will be you probably be this is March 13th.

John Isenhour- At I've got one other statement then to voice a concern. I guess what?

What's been the percentage of CSP and this might be a Jessica question. CSP applications that have been an approved and made into contracts.

Jessica Schmelz- So in previous years, it was usually about somewhere in the neighborhood of around halfish to a third. Last year was 100% and we had to send money back. We just didn't have enough. This year, people have gotten very, very excited about that E612B. Unfortunately, a little too excited, because I think a lot of them are giving up their opportunity to get funded in EQIP, because we currently have, I think, over 1600 applications.

And based on how many we funded last year, even with sending money back, even if we double, even if we tripled last year, which was like somewhere in the 200 range, yet still only about a one third chance being funded this year. And they have, I don't know if you guys have heard this in CSP, but they have increased the minimum payment that people will get every year, from \$1500 to \$4000. So instead of people having a maximum \$7500 contract, they can have their minimum \$7500 contract.

They now have a minimum \$20,000 contract, so I will say now again that so the I'm estimating at this point that there's about a one third chance being funded this year based on the number of applications. Now that includes pending eligible. So, we won't know the answer until we get to that eligibility deadline. But if you have people interested in doing forestry, CSP is not the only game in town.

And while you might get less in EQIP overall, you're going to get funded, and you might actually get more depending on what kind of things you're doing because. It just depends on really depends. So, I certainly want to encourage people to absolutely go for CSP if that's what they're really, dead set on.

But just know that if you're in the long leaf pine category, you will be funded at this point like we have, we have barely touched the amount of money we got this year. So, you know and again, it's not for us to make the decision for our producers, but it is up to us to give them the information and let them make the decision that sits best with them.

So that is a story right now.

John Isenhour- What and I guess you know my comment was based on that 612B and if they are, I mean more or less you're paying folks \$2000 and they're going to pocket \$2000.00 an acre to establish a production-oriented pine plantation. And in most instances and you know if there's a way in the black box that is the CSP. Screening, ranking, and evaluation tool to reduce the priority of that.

You know, we could certainly stretch, or you could certainly stretch that CSP dollars to more acreages with more diverse conservation. Compared to more pine plantations that would be very similar to putting in somebody's perimeter fence and buying them cattle or paying for their corn seed for a production crop, because that's why there's 1600 applications for that because it's a huge financial gain for participants to do something that they would have probably done anyway from a timber and forestry investment standpoint.

Jessica Schmelz- And I don't disagree with you, but unfortunately, we're part of the Appalachian region. So, we would have to have that discussion with the rest of the other states within that region because a national decision too. Like one of the things, they did this year was they were having a lot of problems with and getting the payment schedule together.

So, all practices are in there now. They opened it up. This has been a little bit of a building year. We'll call it anyway. So, I understand what you're saying, but you know it's a discussion.

Bill Edwards- Well, John understand the IRA money is tied to climate and carbon sequestration. Is a major goal at the high level and this being pushed down on all programs to do carbon sequestration. It's not being pushed down as hard to do wildlife as it is carbon sequestration. And that's set way above North Carolina.

John Isenhour- Well, at least when after raise that question the DC it the inverse was stated, was that you know it did come back to the states to be able to select practices or enhancements that they might exclude.

But there again, I know you're not going to exclude that, but if there's a way to adjust the ranking so that you know, \$2600 an acre can cover a lot of other conservation across the state, that could be more meaningful for other resources.

There's just something to look at.

You know, if there's ways to address the ranking criteria and I do know that that stewardship evaluation is not as simple as the EQIP ranking, but just a way so that all the money doesn't go to something that more or less is a really a good money-making venture for a landowner there.

Again, that's doing something that is not, most land owners would have done that anyway to get their next rotation of timber established. But just a statement of, if possible, it would be nice if that was not a priority for CSP ranking and screening questions.

Don Barker- OK. And I know I saw a hand come up and got put down.

I don't want to miss anybody.

So. That's it.

Go ahead.

Stesha Warren- this is my first time here. Can you hear me?

Don Barker- yes, we can.

Stesha Warren- Excellent. Thank you. My name is Stesha Warren and I'm with Appalachian Sustainable Development. Thanks for letting me join in today. Hope to join in with future meetings?

Find all the Super fascinating. I just wanted to let you all know that we are here with the Appalachian sustainable development. I'm teaming up with North Carolina State University and going to offer a free workshop on July 30th for forest farming practice 379.

I did this in Virginia this past year, which ultimately ended up leading to 379 being turned on in the state and I'm working closely with Virginia and NRCS right now.

Reviewing all the practice standards and schedules and whatnot, and have started doing joint site visits with them, which I'm also offering to North Carolina now.

So, if anybody is kind of questioning side assessment, how to go about **feeling that practice**, I'm a complete available resource willing to go out in the site and help you get familiar with that practice. I'm available, but this workshop it's part of a series we're offering. It's called Agroforestry trainings for natural resource professionals.

It's a specifically designed for NRCS DOF Cooperative Extension. Anybody who is working specifically with producers to achieve natural resource concerns and goals.

We've got a series of workshops planned.

We've got the forest farming, one that's coming up later this year.

Next year, we're doing alley cropping and silvopasture, and then we've got a series of online curriculums courses as well. We have six of them, one of which is how, however, forestry can work within our NRCS. But if you'd like to learn more about that, I will drop my email in the chat and open to any questions that you have about it, and we will also be trying to get CPUs for anybody who would like to receive those for this workshop as well.

Umm and yeah so thanks.

Don Barker- Thank you.

And that I guess that'll be a great segue, thanks Stesha, into our last piece on the agenda and it was just we have plenty of time.

So, I was just going to open it up if there is any of the partners.

Anybody here would like to do the same?

That session did to give us an update or any information you think the folks on this meeting could benefit from.

Morgan Harris- I'll just throw out there.

I'm just now starting the process, but Conservation Management Institute received an "America the Beautiful" grant, actually with Appalachian Sustainable Development as a partner on it, to do Riparian Agroforestry work which is multifunctional riparian buffers with food, and some kind of crop producing species in the riparian buffer, native woody species. So that's something we're going to be working on over the next three years and that'll be in Western North Carolina and the range of the hellbender working as wildlife initiative.

Don Barker- Great. Thank you, Morgan. And anybody from the Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife.

John Isenhour- The Wildlife Commission also got "America the Beautiful" grant as part of a multiple state long leaf pine management, and we'll be working with land owners to establish under stories both in established stands and in stands are being planted. Using local ecotype, local species and trying to get more diverse understory in stands that been impacted by previous land uses. We're still working on the details on that as well, but more information will be coming out about that.

Don Barker- Thank you. It is and you said, is that going to be on private land owners or is it in a multi game lands and private lands? Or do you know?

John Isenhour- Yeah. We're going to prioritize private lands. Got a substantial chunk of money and if we can get suitable projects on private lands, we're going to work that route. If we must go back on to game lands, there's opportunities to use it for assistance with burning on game lands.

That kind of thing.

But we really wanted to focus on private lands and understory diversity.

Don Barker- Right.

Well, alright.

Anybody else got updates? Comments.

OK.

Well, I appreciate everybody attending the meeting, you should be getting something, or you will be getting something. Mark it on your calendar.

Well, mark it on your calendar, March 13th, we will have the full STAC meeting.

And if you have anything for future meetings, please don't hesitate and don't wait.

Send comments.

And John, I appreciate you bringing up the two items that you did.

I know that those were sent previous. In what this was kind of late and I will tell you this, this kind of last minute, the folks who generally run these meetings.

Got told to be in two different places, so I'm kind of just filling in last minute so I didn't have that stuff, so I'm glad you brought those two items up, John and same with anybody else.

If you got anything you would like us to talk about, send us, myself, Jeb, or Julius an email.

And we'll try to bring it up at the next meeting.

With that said, hope everybody has a great rest of your day and great rest of your week.

Thank you.

Ended at 10:08am

State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting

Sub Committee Minutes

Easements

February 27, 2024

10:30 to 11:30

Moderator: Brian Loadholt

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting and announced that the meeting was being recorded. This meeting is an informal subcommittee meeting to updates of where everyone is at in the current Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24). Welcome to the easement subcommittee meeting for STAC.

I'm Brian Loadholt, the easement coordinator.

We do not have a whole lot on the agenda today, so I won't take up too much of everyone's time.



The slide features a dark olive green background. On the left, the text 'Easement Subcommittee' is displayed in a white, sans-serif font. Below this, a numbered list of six items is presented in a smaller white font. On the right side of the slide, there is a large white oval containing the text 'A LOT GOING ON AT THE MOMENT' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The word 'A LOT' is in red, while the rest of the text is black.

Easement Subcommittee

1. Funding Opportunities
2. Current Application Numbers
3. GARC FY 25
4. ACEP ALE Ranking
5. WRE Pool Expansion
6. Actively Active Parcel Contracts

A LOT GOING ON AT THE MOMENT

But while the agendas are light, we do have quite a bit going on in the easement world, I don't normally have a whole lot of pictures or anything on my slide.

But today I thought was appropriate to have that a lot going on at the moment attached to this presentation. Today, we are going to be talking about all our various funding opportunities, current application numbers, our GARC for FY25, talk about some potential changes to our L ranking and a WRE expansion and a little bit about what's going on with some of our active applications.

Right now. Just won't let everyone know that we do have a new addition to our staff.

Gavin Thompson there's a new easement coordinator.

So, he's joined me on the sinking ship that we have.

We also have Bill Edwards and Terry Foreman on the easement staff here, so we're trying to push things along.

But like I say there, there's a lot going on.

Funding Opportunities

1. General ALE
2. ACEP-IRA-ALE
3. ACEP-IRA-WRE
4. RCPP-Forever Farms
5. RCPP-Upper Cape Fear
6. RCPP-Upper Neuse
7. 2 new agreements being finalized



So, I mentioned all the funding opportunities that we have here right now.

Current Application Numbers

Program	Applications	Number Pending	Total Funds
ACEP-ALE	34	3	\$2,528,000
ACEP-IRA-ALE	26	3	\$3,582,750
RCPP (4 Agreements)	32	TBD	\$14,020,972
ACEP-IRA-WRE	3	1	\$8,156,731
ACEP-WRE	9	TBD	TBD
RCPP-14	4	TBD	TBD

This past fiscal year, we had opportunities through our General ALE, ACEP IRA for ALE ACEP IRA WRE. We have RCPP agreement. We identify as Forever Farms located in the mountains.

We have the Upper Cape Fear RCPP agreement, the upper Neuse RCPP agreement, and we got two more that we're finalizing hopefully sometime soon. One would be located in Eastern North Carolina

and the other one of located around the Triangle with North Carolina. We have seen the largest number of applications we have ever had.

All right, now we got we got 34 ACEP ALE applications.

We receive 26 IRA applications, 32 applications with RCPP.

That's over 4 different agreements, 9 WRE, and 4 RCPP Farm Bill 14 applications that we're currently processing.

That's a lot.

We have received some funding for our general pools.

We still had a potential to receive some additional funding throughout the fiscal year, so we're not done yet.

So, what you're looking at right now is out, we'll have the total funds and some of our guaranteed funding for this fiscal year. And it could be more coming.

So, I'm very thankful that we have Gavin on the team.

We have some applications that we've had on in our hands for quite some time and I think we're able to move those along here smoothly or I shouldn't say smoothly, but we're able to move those we couldn't before.

WRE Expansion

- **Mountain Bog-** in North Carolina are mountain wetlands found in relatively flat spaces at the base of slopes, where long-term soil saturation makes an ideal situation for a range of wetland plants, many of them unique non-woody plants. Bogs are typically small and many may be an acre or less. The thick deposits of organic soils allow endangered plants like mountain sweet pitcher plant, green pitcher plant, swamp pink, and bunched arrowhead to grow, as well as unique wildlife like the endangered bog turtle. Bogs also support extensive mats of sphagnum moss, in accumulations not found in other natural landscapes. Walking in a bog feels like walking or bouncing on a wet sponge. These sites have been drained for pasture and crop production. The drainage has lowered the water level from at or near the soil surface to several feet below the soil surface. The target hydrology would be to reestablish the water levels at or near the surface. The target restoration vegetation would be native non-woody plants. Some of the practices or activities used to restore the site are ditch plug, water control structures, culverts, fencing, native wetland vegetation, native warm season grass buffer. Managed grazing is used on many sites in order to control the woody vegetation on these sites if recommended by USFWS in management plan for bog turtles.

The other topic that we have that's kind of hot right now that we've been working on currently is something we've talked about for several years and that's the potential expansion of WRE.

It's been noted that primarily most of our funded projects in the last few years have been in Eastern North Carolina and we've been looking at opportunities with some of our partners on the potential availability of WRE in Western North Carolina or other locations in the state.

So, we got a small committee together to kind of look at some resource concerns, resource issues, particularly in Western North Carolina, to gather our thoughts on a potential pool existing one day

that would allow us to further spread some funding and treat some resources in Western, North Carolina.

Bill Edwards- And make it so that mountain bogs didn't compete against the rest of the states in WRE applications, it would be a special pool.

Brian Loadholt- And with that, we're hopeful that we might have some idea of how we're going to move forward perhaps for FY25. We got a lot of work ahead of us to make that happen. To make that determination happen. But potentially, by the time we have our last Easement Subcommittee meeting of the fiscal year, we can have a talk about what that might look like and maybe some concurrence from all the officials that need to agree on that potential pool moving forward.

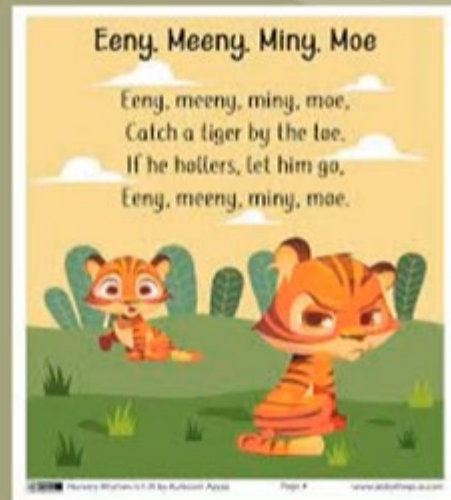
If anyone has any questions on that potential pool, please feel free to email us at any time and you know we will try our best to answer that.

But like I said we got quite a bit of work ahead of us to develop the ranking and priority areas and things of that nature and to move forward.

The other thing that's kind of been on our plate a little bit lately, I've wrestled with the rankings that we've had under the General ALE, the last couple years and noted that the ranking score for many of our parcels tend to be pretty close.

ALE Ranking Changes

- Prime, Unique and local soils
- Production land/Farmstead Homestead ratio



I like to see some more parity in our ranking.

So, I've kind of explored the thought of potentially having a "LESA like" question return to our ranking, we removed it two or three years ago, really based on the amount of work it took to answer that question and the number of applications we have in.

So, that saved us some time in processing applications, but by removing that question.

Bill Edwards- It jumbled up some of our rankings.

Brian Loadholt- I started noticing some of the scores becoming a little bit close.

So, kind of weed out and separate, some of the better soils or better parcels from others.

I'm kind of considering some type of prime unique local soils.

Question that would be similar to the "LESA" question. I know we have a question that that, relates to Prime soils that I think it's the first question on our ranking document, but that one doesn't clearly identify the differences between all those better soils that we might be looking at trying to potentially obligate.

So that's one potential change that I may suggest later on.

Also in the past year, we've had a few projects come in with pretty large farm stairs identified on the on the parcels and in a manner what that does is negate all the potential to protect those soils.

A land owner would have the option to build any type of agricultural facility all over a parcel.

If the whole parcel was designated farmstead. I think that changes the demeanor of the application and you're not really protecting the agricultural, all the agricultural values by designating the total farm as a farmstead.

We don't have a policy that restricts any of that.

So, the other way to sort of kind of manage those things is to perhaps have a ranking question of you know, maybe you sent it around for stay at Homestead versus a versus open agricultural lands. So, I'm kind of wrestling with a question like that.

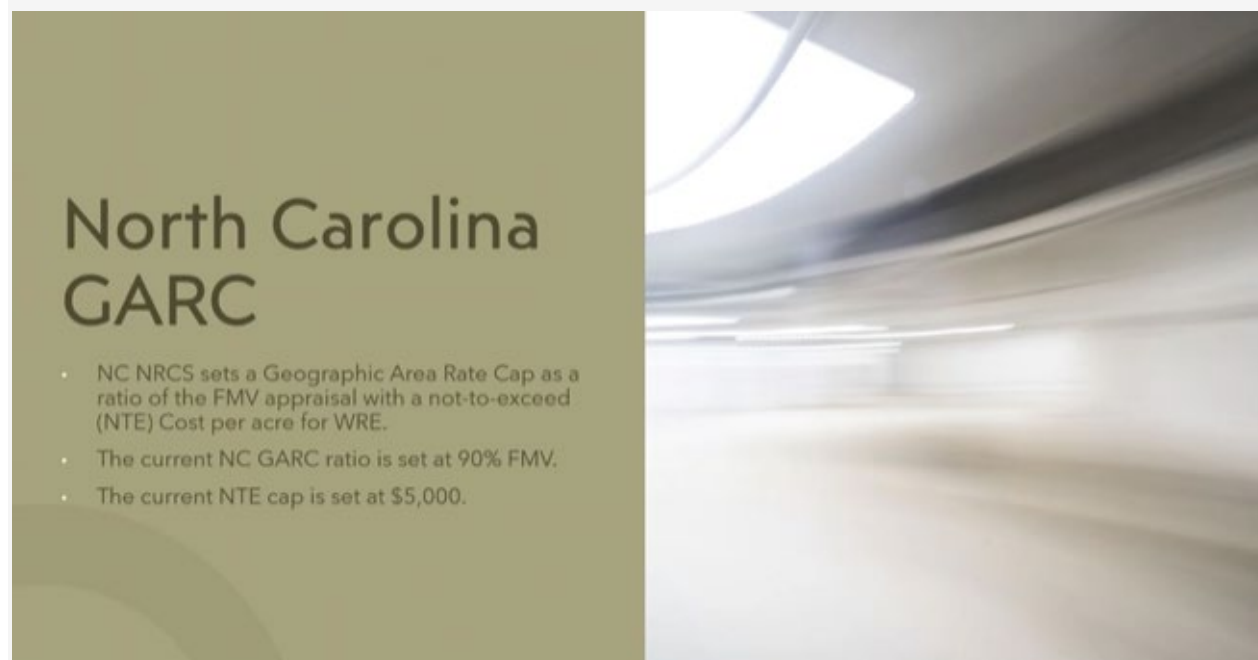
It may be a question that deducts points based on that ratio.

I'm not certain yet, but I'm open for any suggestions anyone has.

You know, please feel free to offer if you got any ideas, but that is something that I find to be a little bit perplexing and bothersome when it comes to some of the applications that we have coming in.

Bill Edwards- and it comes down the point spread is so tight; it is almost minuscule of how it separates applications.

Brian Loadholt- Yes. Yeah, so any ideas?



The next topic I have is our GARC for FY25.

We're looking at keeping our GARC the same.

Bill Edwards- Right now we're at 90%. Well, we updated our GARC two years ago, I believe because we found out that we were lower than the states around us. We were at 85 and everybody else was at 90. All of the states that touch us, so we ask everybody agreed and we upped our GARC to 90% of the appraised value.

Right to match those neighboring states.

Brian Loadholt- But we're looking at keeping it the same for FY25. No real change there during our STAC Committee will present this again so that we can officially document that unless anybody has any objection to it or questions.

Actively Active Easements

- 17 active ACEP ALE projects
- 8 active RCPP-ALE projects
- 7 active WRE projects
- Stewardship easements (collecting monitoring reports, responding to potential violations, amendments, etc)



Alright, finally.

This is what we have currently on the books.

17 active ACEP ALE projects, many of which I'm hoping to close sometime soon, before we bring on anything new. I would like to get rid of some of the older stuff. So, we got 17 active ACEP ALE projects, 8 RCPP ALE projects and 7 active WRE projects.

Bill Edwards- and those are just active acquisition not stewardship restoration management. Those are just in the process of closing the easement.

Brian Loadholt- So, as you can see, we have a lot going on, not to mention stewardship. There are over 300 active easements that we have currently acquired which require some type of stewardship management and monitoring reports coming in. So that it's growing quickly over here and as you can see with the number of applications we've got coming in, that the number is going to jump from 300 quickly.

Bill Edwards- it's pushing 100,000 acres real fast total.

Share Your World!



I have a floor open for any comments or questions.

Eboni- will you be sharing the PowerPoint?

Brian Loadholt- I can send that out if you would like.

Any other questions or comments out there?

So, at any time, if anybody has any questions or thoughts on those questions, please, please feel free to give me an email or many of you have my cell phone number.

So please feel free to give me a call.

I guess I should be that open, but you know we look to try to improve this program every year with as many requests for fundings that we have with we're trying to make sure we do obligate as many as we have one of the biggest problems that we that we're seeing though is just trying to keep up with land value as we receive more funding that the cost for land is going up on is tremendously.

So, it doesn't take long to eat up \$1,000,000.

In some of the most threatened areas you could, you could easily be looking at a parcel that's worth \$1,000,000.

So, it goes quickly.

I'm thankful that we have the RCPP agreements that we have that has allowed us to spread out the funds and capture a few more parcels that we probably wouldn't be able to do on the general funding, and we also were able to get some IRA funds this year that that secured some parcels for us.

I'm looking to have our hopefully have IRA on our plate again next year, and there's going to be another announcement for RCPP funding sometime soon and potentially they'll be some projects that are centered around easement supplying for those funds.

That's just going to increase the opportunity for our land owners out there and our in our entities, but that's all I got for today, folks.

No one has any questions.

I'm looking to have our hopefully have RA on our plate again next year, and there's going to be another announcement for RCPP funding sometime soon and potentially they'll be some projects that are centered around easement supplying for those funds.

That that's just going to increase the opportunity for our land owners out there and our in our entities, but that that's all I got for today, folks.

No one has any questions.

Dewitt Hardee- Going back to your question dealing with farmsteads, home places on easements, what are you looking for something or information like a percentage of crop land vs percentage of Easements versus the ratio with a homestead on it or farmstead, is that what you're looking for some comments?

Brian Loadholt- yes, yes. Thoughts are common. Is there because we really don't have policy that refrains it. Land owners are entities from establishing, the total easement being a farmstead.

So, we're looking at potentially allowing the ranking to set the standard there.

Dewitt Hardee- OK. And to help those are on your easement programs that you're trying to close. If anybody needs additional funds to help in that process of doing that, just to let you know that the NC State Grange does have funds available for application now through end of 31st of March.

If you want to apply for if you haven't already, for example if you need additional money to appraisal or whatever, it's up to \$3000 per project.

So, if you want to do it, please apply that same Land Trust or soil, water district or whoever's you've got a contract with USDA ALE.

Brian Loadholt- Where do you find that information to apply?

Dewitt Hardee- I'll send it to you again.

Dewitt Hardee - So you just to everybody, but you go to the instance State Grange website and do it also. <https://www.ncgrange.com/scholarship-program>, go to grants and pick it up there.

Brian Loadholt- Alright, thank you. Any other thoughts or questions out there?

Corey Hoilman- Brian, this is a Corey with farmland preservation of we have our 15% cap right now. We do not have that as a scoring question ourselves as far, maximizing the amount of the property that winds up being farmable, that they're in the easement rather than restricted for building.

So, that I think that's a great idea and that's something that we might explore ourselves just because we do have some entities that are trying to go as close to the 15% as they can right now.

So, when you're dealing with a 300-400-hundred-acre tract, you know that's a sizable amount that they're setting aside there for that purpose.

Brian Loadholt- Right, that's the only thing that kind of gets me on the percentage part is you know it may not be much on a smaller parcel, but you get on a large parcel, you still can eat up quite a few acres of productive farmland with that percentage. So, I'm sort of wrestling with how to approach it, but I think exploring it through the ranking. But it's my understanding, is the 15% in your policy?

Corey Hoilman- Correct. So, they could go up to that and it very well could be that, if we were to decide to turn that into a scoring item for us. That it could be say maybe 00 to less than 5%, less than 10% and try to at least maximize the amount that winds up.

Brian Loadholt- Yes.

Dewitt Hardee- Corey, is that only for your state funds dealing with the present use value program or is that for all easements for **ADFP**?

Corey Hoilman- that's for all easements.

Brian Loadholt- I appreciate that, Corey. We'll keep that in mind and may reach out to you to talk to a little bit more about that, but it any other questions or comments out there?

Thank you all.

Minutes end.

State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting

Sub Committee Minutes

Urban

February 27, 2024

1:00p to 2:00p

Moderator: Jessica Schmelz

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting and announced that the meeting was being recorded. This meeting is an informal subcommittee meeting to updates of where everyone is at in the current Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24). Welcome to the Urban subcommittee meeting for STAC.

I am Jessica Schmelz, part of the Program Team. I know that usually Jeb Minarik is the one giving this presentation, but he is currently not in the office, so he has asked me to give this presentation and hopefully I will be able to do him more than justice.

Our ability to address our urban farming community is still fairly new within USDA. So, all of NRCS are always looking for input and insight in how to better reach and to better serve our urban farmers.



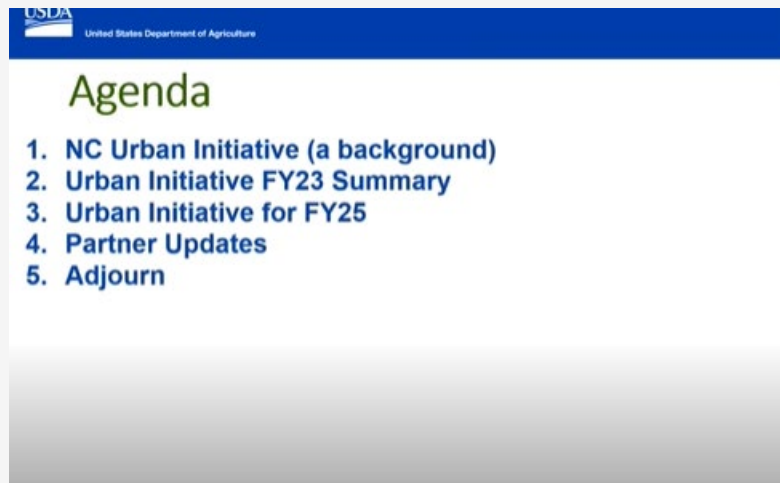
So hopefully this will give you some good information and I'd love to hear from you.

Definitely at the end, but if you have any questions as we go through it, please do not be shy. I should be able to see questions, but if you want to break in and give a comment, then please feel free.

Again, this is the Urban subcommittee, and we will spend the next hour discussing the topic of urban agriculture. I'd like to kind of help you remember what our statement they came to NRCS and FSA leaders and signed by the chief and the FSA, NRCS chief and the FSA administrator.

Ag culture is not defined by the location of the farm or the size of the plot. Agriculture is the source of our nation's food and fiber, and it continues to grow. It impacts and importance in our urban areas.

As such, USDA is committed to understanding, investing in, and supporting the needs of our urban agricultural producers.



Here's our basically agenda. We're going to give a kind of brief background on the urban initiative for North Carolina. We'll give a background on how 2023 went. Urban initiative for FY25? We are currently in a course FY24. There are no changes currently.

1. NC Urban Initiative-



USDA-wide

- New advisory committee which will identify barriers and advise USDA on urban agriculture policies and outreach practices.
- Grants that target areas of food access, ed., business and start-up costs for new farmers....and other urban production needs
- Cooperative agreements...municipal compost plans and food waste reduction
- **Technical/Financial Assistance**
- FSA urban/suburban county committees

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

The Advisory Committee which will identify barriers and advise USDA on urban agriculture policies and outreach practices, initiated here.

They've got there are grants out there, the target areas of food access, business startup costs for new farmers and other urban production needs. There is a new one that I will share at the very end.

Cooperative agreements, municipal compost plans and food waste reduction, technical financial assistance, FSA urban and suburban county committees.

So basically, the Secretary Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture, this was a committee made up of ag producers and representatives from areas of higher education, extension programs, nonprofits, business, economic development, supply chains and financing.

It included a significant investment over 43 million in grants and cooperative agreements.

The county committees for urban agriculture, so the USA selected 17 county committees in metropolitan areas across the country. The closest is Virginia.

There's not one in North Carolina at this time, so just an FYI and you can find those.

You can Google it online.

Then the urban and suburban county committees will work to encourage and promote urban indoor and other emerging AG production practices.

Additionally, the County committee may address areas such as food access, community engagement, support of local activities to promote and encourage community compost and food waste reduction.

USDA
United States Department of Agriculture

North Carolina

- Created State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) Urban Subcommittee.
- Partnership meetings to help with outreach
- Joint FSA/NRCS coordination meetings
- Urban Initiative announcement

2. Urban subcommittee-


We set up some partnership meetings to help with outreach.

Always work with our wonderful FSA partners to coordination of our different programs and urban initiative announcement, that we are actually funding.

We are funding quite a bit of urban out here in North Carolina, which has been great.

Landuses

- CART Guidance:
 - Applicable Landuses
 - Crop
 - Farmstead
 - Modifier
 - Urban
- If neither of the applicable land uses with the Urban modifier are attributed, the Assessment – Ranking Pool match will not occur.



- CART guidance, if you don't know CART is? It is our ranking system and how we prioritize who we're going to fund. So absolutely land uses for people applying under urban is both crop and farmstead.

- Modifier is urban, so the way we kind of categorize things is a crop farmer, but also did grazing. You might have a modifier of grazing to go with that, you apply under this, you have to be an urban farmer doing crop in farmstead. So, it says that if you don't have that, you won't match with this funding pool. Of course, there's many other funding pools that people will be eligible for.

So, this is a third year and so we're asking for continued input to improve and reach out even more of our urban farmers.

Just so you know, though, the reason why these two are selected is this was part of our stakeholder and partner meetings. I want you to know doing forestry on a small-scale urban would be a bit more difficult and challenging but not impossible. So, if you have some good ideas on that front, we're always open to here and have those discussions.

USDA
United States Department of Agriculture

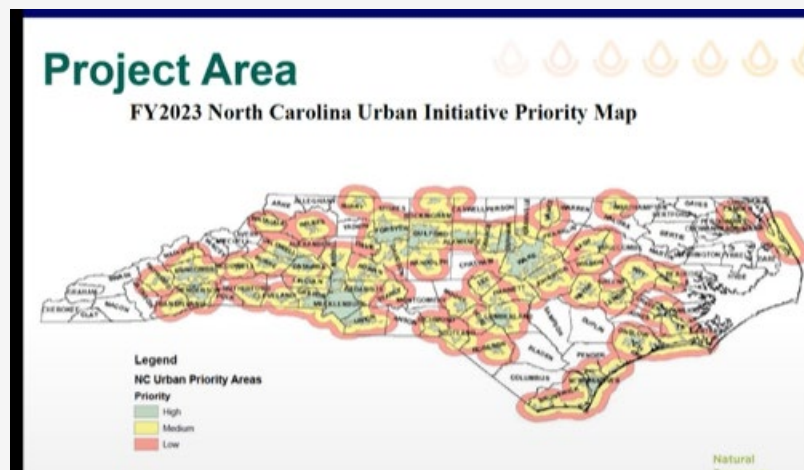
Resource Concerns

- CART Guidance continued:
 - Target Resource Concern Categories (RCCs)
 - Degraded Plant Condition
 - Soil Quality Limitations
 - Storage & Handling of Pollutants
 - Terrestrial Habitat
 - Wind & Water Erosion

If neither of the applicable RCCs are selected, the Assessment – Ranking Pool match will not occur.

Natural Resources Conservation

3. Resource Concerns- The only resource from categorization say were selected based on the ability to address typical concerns within urban producers and what they might encounter. These were the main resource concerns categories that we are looking at for our urban farmers. That would great plant condition for quality limitation, storage, and handling of pollutants. Habitat and wind and water erosion. Again, you have to at least have one of those issues on your property in order to be eligible for this fund pool.



4. We prioritize is what we do is we looked at the US Census, this is this from the 2017 census and we created these different geospatial layers that would be based on our urban

communities and what's been identified in the census as the urban communities and urban clusters. We had different levels. So, if you're within that inner part and then you go out high, medium, or low now, does not mean in priority, in terms of we'll only fund the highs, and we will not fund the mediums or lows. This is based on our ranking and get more points in the ranking for being in the high category, but since we do fund quite a few we definitely get into the low also so don't feel that just because you are on the outermost edge of an urban cluster, an urban area that you won't be funded. So, with the deal was that of course around there is about a five-mile radius, and then the medium is another 5 miles out, and then the low was another 5 miles out from that.

Practices

- Contracts developed will be focused to the following practices.

Practice Code	Practice Name
317	Composting Facility*
325	High Tunnel System*
327	Conservation Cover*
328	Conservation Crop Rotation*
342	Critical Area Planting*
420	Wildlife Habitat Planting*
430	Irrigation Pipeline*
436	Irrigation Reservoir*
441	Irrigation System, Micro-irrigation*
449	Irrigation Water Management*
558	Roof Runoff Structure*
561	Heavy Use Area Protection
570	Stormwater Runoff*
587	Structure for Water Control
590	Nutrient Management*
595	Pest Management Conservation System*

Only the above listed conservation practices will be available in the Urban Ranking Pool.

*Denotes Conservation Practices with Urban identified scenarios as identified in the FY2023 User's Guide.

- Practices-We are focused on our urban. Contracts or burn applications? And there is a STAR (*) beside the practice. It denotes a practice with urban identified scenarios, so again for those of you that are pretty familiar with how NRCS works. In case you are not, the way it works is that we have these overarching practices, like high tunnel system for instance. They call them scenarios and what they are is like Gothic to the scenario, but there's two different kinds. And then you can identify, specify and then we have different costs associated with the different types. While there are these urban scenarios, it doesn't mean that might be the most appropriate one, even if you're in an urban setting. So, it's important that our planners, along with the producers that are working with, make sure they select the scenario that be most appropriate for their situation. And there's a few specifics we'll point out next.

FY23 Successes

- 42 Contracts (funded all eligible applicants)
 - 2 Veterans
 - 2 Limited Resource Farmers
 - 5 Socially Disadvantaged
 - 30 Beginning Farmers
 - Approximately \$150,000 in payments made to date
 - 12 completed contracts
- Approximately \$500,000 contracted

6. this their successes, last year we funded all eligible applications. Last year, all of the 42 of those, two were veterans who were limited resource farmers. And again, if you're not as familiar with how NRCS defines a limited resource farmer, that is someone who makes less than 50% of the median income for their county. 5 socially disadvantaged and 30 beginning farmers and beginning farmer again to find to someone who has farmed less than 10 years.

We've done about \$150,000 in payments so far for those, and of those twelve were completed already. So about \$500,000 were contracted and we put a good amount of money out there. We anticipate that this year we'll have even more.



7. FY25- We really do want to make sure we're reaching out as much as possible to all types of land owners and especially those who might have felt as welcomed into the more traditional way of looking at things.

I would like to open a moment, anybody have any thoughts, want to share and the considerations you might want us to start thinking about for going into 2025?

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

James Davis (FSA)- I just want to make a comment, Jessica, just to let everyone know , if anyone that has gone into your local NRCS office and they may not think they can't get a farm or track number and they have run into any problems with the FSA office locally, that wouldn't give a track number, that's definitely something that I would like to hear about. Or if anyone come in the office or anyone not getting service in our service center offices, to just let us know, we can zero these tracks down to very small acreage. It's no problem. That a farmer can get a track number. I just want to throw that out there.

Jessica Schmelz- Thank you so much, James. I really appreciate you saying that yes, it is very important. I think a lot of times people are like, I just have a little tiny backyard plot, that still counts. It says very clearly in our manual, **there is no minimum or maximum size**. You have a tiny 10th of an acre and you're growing crops out there, then that still counts. So, we still want to hear from those people.

Curtis Smalling- You had mentioned on the earlier call today that there was going to be a second EQIP sign up late March or something. Is that going to apply under urban as well any of the any of the practices there?

Jessica Schmelz- Yes, it's open to everybody.

One of the things that we found is that either:

- a. people just didn't realize that they were eligible; or
- b. they didn't know and didn't complete all their eligibility.

And that's something that I think we always try to do a better job of, is informing all of our applicants. They have a need with FSA because FSA does all our all the eligibility for us which we're very grateful for. But it does mean there's kind of the separation where, we send them off to FSA to go work with them and then sometimes we're not, it doesn't track back that they haven't done everything they need to do. We wanted to make sure that we didn't miss out on anyone who might have, missed the eligibility deadline for some reason, or heard about it later than our last, that our initial application receiving date, or for some reason had decided to defer it. First, one of the things I mentioned earlier on the call was that a lot of people got very excited about getting into CSP because some of our payment rates. Which is wonderful because we definitely want to fund people in CSP. But it now means that instead of the usual 500 applications, we usually get in five or 600, we get in CSP. We now have like over 1600. So, the chances of being funded in CSP have gone quite a bit down. So sometimes people are getting too excited about going at CSP and didn't really consider that they could have easily been funded in. Yeah. I think the win for CSP, but then we don't want anybody to miss out on still being funded for this year. If you can be funded in EQIP, yes, it's open. It's open for people so and you can still get in, while we don't have an urban fund pool in CSP, we definitely, you still be funded in there as an urban producer.

Or it's just you did, but the but an equipped we do have this dedicated pool, so the chances of being funded are much higher.

Anybody else, and again, if you know you think of something later, please do feel free to email me or Jeb, when find our emails easily.

It's just, you know, jeb.minarik@usda.gov or jessica.schmelz@usda.gov .
So please do don't hesitate to reach out if you have thoughts later also.

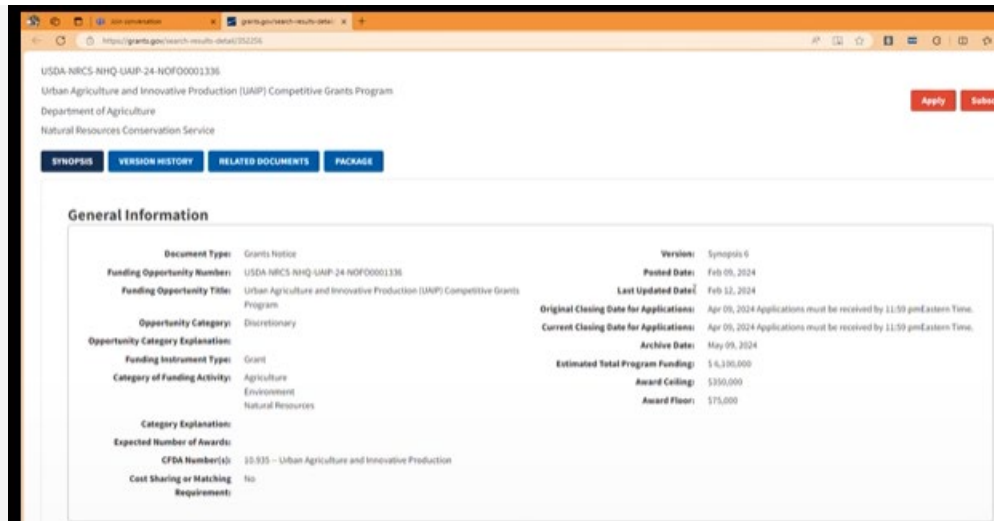
Dewitt Hardee (NC State Grange)- Is there a particular scoring system you're using to prioritize in case money does come limited, or how is that going to work?

Jessica Schmelz- We fund everybody who was eligible in round one. as my you know as possible it was as possible. And we did this year, create something called an **ACT NOW**, we could fund people earlier then we don't have to wait for everybody. But based on certain score, so we're funding almost everybody in urban at this point.

So, what's going to happen, is that anyone who comes in later now, the second round of funding will be considered round two. So whatever money is left, we will just be using the same ranking score, ranking criteria that we had for round one. Again, there's still money out there. So, people should still come in and apply if they are interested in this year. If you're not ready for this year, that's fine too. There is going to be around next year, so not a problem.



8. Partner Updates- Hopefully you didn't miss too much, but I'm also happy to chat about anything that you know you have questions about.



Josh put something in there, but I also I this is find it there it is now put this over here.

This is a of a grant opportunity for urban agriculture, innovative production, competitive grants. You can see it's on our grants.gov website.

You can see it was posted on February 9th. The closing is April 9th, so no, everybody should you know, if I look at there's about 6.1 million available, you can get between 75,000 and 350,000 for it.

And there's some information here, but you know, feel free to please go look about, if it so this if might be interest to you or any of your partners that you also work with.

So just wanted to let you know this is available out there.

There's still time, before FY25 comes along, but the sooner that you get to us with your ideas and thoughts for you know, any different way you know how to better reach out to our urban producers, ideas of how to improve the program so that there's more accessibility for them.

Most people who apply are usually applying for the high tunnels or seasonal high tunnels, which is fantastic.

Practices

- Contracts developed will be focused to following practices.

Practice Code	Practice Name
317	Composting Facility*
325	High Tunnel System*
327	Conservation Cover*
328	Conservation Crop Rotation*
342	Critical Area Planting*
430	Wildlife Habitat Planting*
430	Irrigation Pipelines*
436	Irrigation Reservoir*
441	Irrigation System, Micro-irrigation*
449	Irrigation Water Management*
558	Roof Runoff Structure*
561	Heavy Use Area Protection
570	Stormwater Runoff*
587	Structure for Water Control
590	Nutrient Management*
595	Pest Management Conservation System*

Only the above listed conservation practices will be available in the Urban Ranking Pool.

*Denotes Conservation Practices with Urban identified scenarios as identified in the FY2023 User's Guide.

These are the practices we kind of are.

But you know, there could be other ones out there that you think you know, this really would be a huge, benefit to our urban producers. It's not that they can't do other practices, it's just that these are the ones that we really focus on. And just the thing to keep in mind, when you're thinking of practices, you just wanted to make sure that they're very much a tied to a one of our resource concerns. I think a lot of times people were like oh a fence would be great, right?

To keep out deer, but that's more of a production side, that's not, as much on the resource concern side. It has its place and can do both, but we have to make the best argument for that.

Just want to always think about how much is it landing on the resource concern side versus the production side.

We're always, of course, happy to help our producers improve their production, but as long as it has that very high level, a resource concern, benefit first.

Dewitt Hardee- I got a quick question talk about resource concerns. Does that mean that the applicant has to be active already in production? Or is this something somebody could just say I'm wanting to start something I and begin production? And what is the limitations on what can be considered for production?

Jessica Schmelz- We've had people call sometimes and say I'm planning on getting cows, for instance, and so I really need cross fences and water development because, you know, I know that I'll be helpful to the land. The problem is, unless there's already something going on the land, there's no resource concern. So, if they're not doing anything, what's our resource concern right thereby eventually be one, but until the actual operation is going, there's nothing we can hang our hat on to say.

So that's not to say that you have to be in any kind of high level, a backyard farm, that still is something that will be helpful for our program because we can say, OK, yes, they're doing something and ohh, this is the resource concern they need to address. So, we always have to hang our hat on that. That's what's the priority. We hope they don't come to us so late, that there's a major resource concern, but you know that does happen too.

But that's the thing you must have something going on 1st, otherwise there's nothing to address.

Dewitt Hardee- And this is the way the wisest followed question to James, in designation for a farm number or whatever, does it have to be active production then at the time or piece of property or land?

James Davis- It doesn't have to be active at the time, but if they planned on putting it in production, then we can go ahead on this, establish that farm number for them. Then once they get established that farm tract number. Once they get established, then we can go forward from there. Far as them having an active crop report and everything of that nature.

Jessica Schmeltz- And because one of the things you must do is when you're doing your eligibility for FSA, we have something called a 902 which basically they felt that there's for individuals or entities and they have to fill that out. It's basically asking them lots of questions about what their current operation is and what's going on. And so, you don't have to be making money on it per se.

I'm not saying if you're losing money, just could be your own subsistence type operation. But there must be something agriculturally based for you to move forward with letting FSA know what it is. And then again, that's going to also translate to us. But I don't know. James, you want to do a little bit more information on that or not?

James Davis- I am going to yield this over to one of my co-workers, Chiquita. She is on and she had those eligibility for the state and Chiquita, do you mind tapping in on this? Just talk about eligibility briefly, please.

Chiquita McDowell- Sure. OK, so the 902 that she's referring to, that's the Farm Operating Plan. And has she stated, it requires information regarding the capital that you provide, the land and equipment on. We're also looking at whether or not you're doing active labor, active management, and that's why the operating plan as it relates to NRCS. NRCS programs do not require an active engaged determination and that's a determination FSA makes for one of our programs that we actually implement where we're trying to see if they're providing commensurate contributions in order to be actively engaged, because we don't want to pay somebody who's not actively engaged in farming.

So, NRCS programs, when it comes to 902, we do look at stuff like foreign person to stand to change coming attribution. There are certain eligibility items that we do look at, but we also take that form operating plan to determine status.

And I think that's what NRCS requires, that the end for that 902, there are other eligibility documents as well as the 1026 as well as the 941, the API certification.

Jessica Schmelz- Thank you Chiquita. That was great. It's always good to have like an actual expert on and again, so that's something.

The slide is from the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) and is titled "Resource Concerns". It features a decorative header with water droplets. The main content is a bulleted list under the heading "• CART Guidance continued:". The list includes "• Target Resource Concern Categories (RCCs)" with sub-bullets: "• Degraded Plant Condition", "• Soil Quality Limitations", "• Storage & Handling of Pollutants", "• Terrestrial Habitat", and "• Wind & Water Erosion". A yellow highlighted box at the bottom states: "If neither of the applicable RCCs are selected, the Assessment -- Ranking Pool match will not occur." The USDA logo and "Natural Resources" are visible in the footer.

9. Main Resource Concerns-We identified, and part of this committee is also to think of other ones that might be applicable that you think we should look at and again, I can always send out you know our full list, it's quite extensive. So soon as you have to read into them to make sure that it really does apply, but might say, you know what about pest management, right? Like that sounds like one that makes sense for urban farmers. We want to make sure that you know that pest management makes sense for the resource concern side, not the production side. Those are the kind of things that sometimes can be a little confusing, even sometimes for us. And then NRCS, we're like, that makes sense. And then you really more about it and be like well, does that though? So, if you guys ever need the full list, please let me know and I can always send that out.

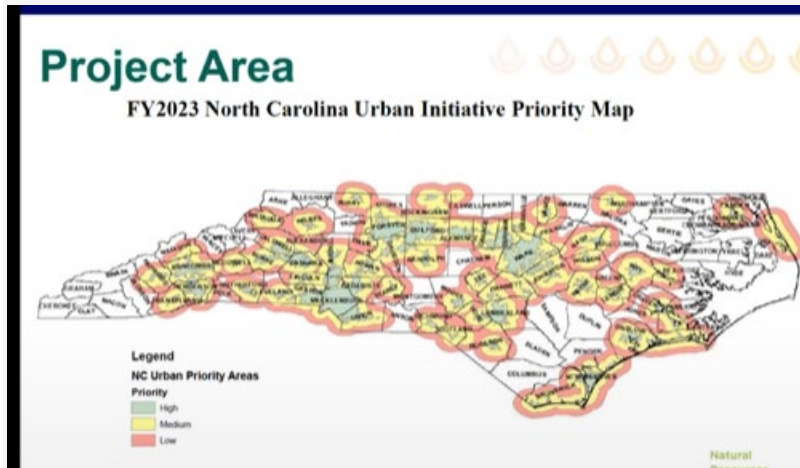
Dewitt Hardee- Again, another comment or thought is it possible to provide or share your slides today for everybody to be able to look at again and regurgitate or use?

Jessica Schmelz- absolutely yes, I can. In fact, I think I even have them. You have them open right now. So, and what if I could kind of put them in the chat or just maybe put them in?

Dewitt Hardee- Could you just send them through this to the tech committee wants to see or just say we could get review by email.

Jessica Schmelz- I have them in in a PDF document so I will do that.

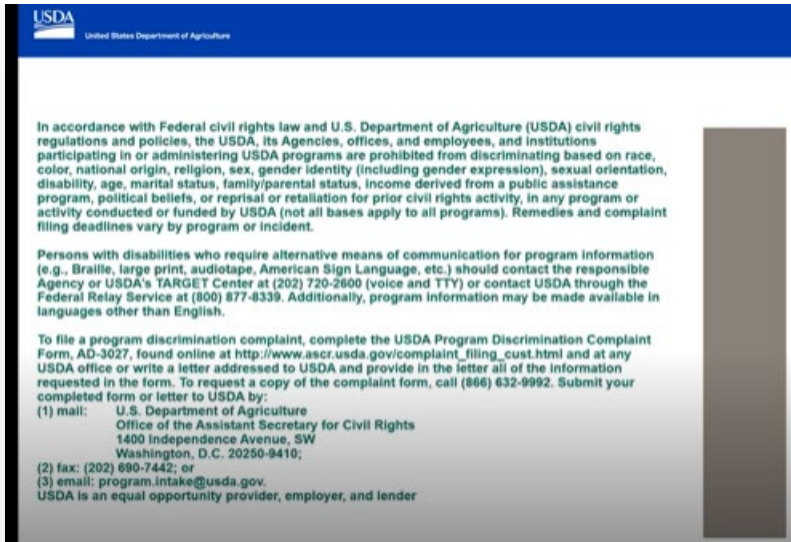
Dewitt Hardee- And one other question was thought was looking at the circles where you have urban area.



They're called. Designated areas. What if there is an existing farm that's been there still farming? Do they fall under this, or they not considered for like a like a cattle farm or some kind of vegetable production farm? That's already existing.

Jessica Schmelz- No, no, no. Of course, you can still apply into the urban there's it's more limited sometimes in the practices and the resource concerns, so they may do better in another fund pool, but there's certainly not eligible for the urban fund pool. They certainly can be, they might be eligible in the crop pool. Might be also eligible in the CAFO pool. They might be also in the forestry pool. It might be you know, whatever it is. So just because you're in these areas does not mean you're going to apply for multiple pools and be eligible for different ones? I guess the other thing is we had to use the most defensible system of designated urban areas so that that is why we use the 2017 Census.

Because that we could say, OK, the census identified these as urban areas and we will use that. But again, if there's areas that you felt like are being missed out, perhaps that should be included. If you think there's a different way, we could use a more defensible system to identify urban areas, you there are always open for those discussions. We never want to leave someone's idea out there without giving it its due consideration. Now, is there anything else anybody has?



I will send out this presentation to the Urban subcommittee, am I guess I'll just use the list that was on the invite again. Usually, Jeb is the one who takes care of that. I'll let you know.

So, for those who do not know, I do want to kind of put this out there for anybody.

I am also the RCPP coordinator for North Carolina and I also deal with NWQI, which is the National Water Quality Initiative program. So, if any of you, if you want to put this out there, we're always looking for both new RCPP proposals and in fact there should be an announcement for more funding opportunities coming out soon. And then NWQI for those who don't know, that is where a partner can come to us and identify a watershed that they want to see. More funding goes toward to address resource concerns and that's the way it works. Is that a partner will propose a watershed and then we will fill out some paperwork. There must be a watershed plans there. There must be some kind of impairment on the water already that we can identify, and we request from our National Headquarters can this watershed be designated as part of an NWQI watershed.

If they agree, then it is the responsibility of the partner who's requested it to then do an assessment, which is kind of like. It's almost like a watershed report. We do have some funding to help out with that creation and once that assessment report is done, then we submit that to our national headquarters. Once that is approved, then it gets designated as an end NWQI watershed, and that means special money is set aside to only fund the agricultural producers within that watershed.

So, I want to put that out there because we're always looking for, you know, new watersheds because right now for those, I'm sure you all know that the IRA, we had the IRA money, the Inflation Reduction Act money, which has been great, but that will go away soon enough and then.

So, if we have more NQWI watersheds, that means we'll still get more money coming to North Carolina to work on some of our impaired watersheds, and so it's all based on the HUC 12.

So, you can do as many HUC 12s within a watershed. You can even combine watersheds, so right now we have four in the state.

We have the East Fork of the Roaring River in the Middle Fork of the Roaring River.

We have the Indian and Howard's Creek watershed, and we have the Coharie, up in northern Sampson County. Upcoming being worked on right now is going to be the Chowan. So hopefully that will become available either in FY25 or FY26 and that unfortunately is being held up a little bit by our inability to have funding. That's a government thing. So, nothing we can do there. If you are interested and if that sounds like something you wanted to discuss with me, I would be available to talk about that and kind of give you more information on what that entails.

I'm also, right now I'm transitioning out of being the CSP.

A point person to Brandon King, who just came on our programs team and wanted to kind of put that out there but I'm familiar with all the programs. So, if you have any questions or any more thoughts, I'm going forward about urban or any of our other funding pools.

Please don't hesitate to reach out and we're always help. Like I said, happy to discuss that with you. If there is nothing else, I'm going to conclude this meeting.

James Rodriguez- For the grants that are that we shared deep below that those are meant for individuals like individual producers. To be eligible or applicants would be nonprofit. It's the right.

So, if you're working with a currency, run a nonprofit, you're eligible to apply for those. And in my experience, just I wonder with them here. If you do intend to apply to one of those, make sure you start working early and getting your paperwork in order and follow to the letter every instruction that is asked. They're very strict about them and if you miss something, or make a mistake, then you you're going to be out. You're competing with other folks also, so make sure you start working on the application early.

Also, following up with one of the questions that was asked earlier, if you're a brand-new producer and you know you do not have any production going on yet, but do have questions and you need assistance with anything? You are more than welcome to reach out to us, NRCS. Even though you're not eligible for programs at the moment, we can still help you with technical assistant.

Well, that was the one thing I wanted to mention.

I think that's about it.

Jessica Schmelz- Well, this is the end of our meeting. Thank you all.

End of minutes.