

NEBRASKA STAC MEETING MINUTES

March 7, 2024

1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Virtually

[YOUTUBE RECORDING LINK](#)

ATTENDEES - Camilla Kerner, Rob Lawson, Tami Nordman, Jami Thoene, Fred Stevens, Lisa Berkeypile, Carlos Villarreal, Missy Baier, Jana Ingwerson-Laws, Elbert Traylor, Elizabeth Gray, Tim Kalkowski;

VIA TEAMS: Adam Rupe, Charles Bailey, Heidi Borg, Julie Breuer, Bruce McIntosh, Burdette Piening, Chandler Schmidt, Curt Becker, Dan Ruterbories, David Potter, David Schroeter, Devin Brundage, Dustin Wilcox, Steve Fairbairn, Bill Gresham, Timothy Griffin, Jennifer Swanson, John Erixson, Kalee Olson, Katie Hickle, Mark Brohman, Mark Frickel, Matt Smith, Dannele Peck, Jennifer Prenosil, Mary Reece, Rich Walters, Daniel Ross, Joan Scheel, William Shoup, Samantha Smith, Jara Steven, James Wright, Tyrel Iron Eyes, Sunshine, Brad Lubben, James Huntwork, Kole Pederson, Mike Crosely, Rachael Whitehair.

FUTURE Meetings: *1121 Lincoln Mall – Rm 352*

❖ JUNE 13, 2024

❖ SEPTEMBER 5, 2024

❖ DECEMBER 5, 2024

 **WELCOME & OPENING COMMENTS:** *Robert Lawson - NRCS State Conservationist*

- Agenda Review
- UPDATES ON NRCS STAFF:
 - John Mayberger is now Assistant State Conservationist (ASTC)-Programs
 - Formerly CSP Program Manager
 - Missy Baier – NEW Position as ASTC-Water Resources & Easements
 - Formerly Watershed Planning Coordinator
 - Neil Dominy has taken a new position as the Director of the National Soils Survey Center
 - Conor Ward is now Acting as ASTC-Partnerships
- Local Work Group Meetings are taking place now.
 - [Link to website](#)
- Wildfire Assistance announcement will be coming out soon.
- Conservation Collaboration Agreements - Opened March 6, 2024
 - Closes May 5, 2024

 **OVERVIEW OF THE USDA NORTHERN PLAINS CLIMATE HUB:** *William Shupe – NRCS, State Soil Scientist & Dannele Pack – ARS, Director of Northern Plains Climate Hub*

- See slides for contact information on how to contact these two presenters.
- The Climate Hubs are a network of 11 regional Hubs across the country, including a new International Climate Hub. The Northern Plains Climate Hub, outlined here, serves a six-state region, including Nebraska. The Hub's main office is in Fort Collins, Colorado, within the USDA Agricultural Research Service, but they are tasked with serving working lands throughout the six-state region, in close partnership not only with ARS, but also NRCS, the Forest Service, and other agencies, taking a “One USDA” approach.
- Northern Plains Climate Hub team seen on slide 3. Described the teams' jobs.
- The Climate Hubs' vision is robust and healthy agricultural production and natural resources under increasing climate variability and change.
- They carry this vision out through science-based region-specific information and technologies that enable climate-informed decision-making.
- What does the vision and approach look like in practice?
 - Because the Northern Plains Climate Hub is small relative to the region we cover, we rely heavily on NETWORKS & PARTNERSHIPS to help serve as many needs as possible, in large part by building bridges between worlds.
 - We build bridges between the world of climate/weather and working lands.
 - And we build bridges between science and practice. We connect and convene people across these different spaces, so they can begin to build relationships that will hopefully last long after we step away to help connect other sets of potential partners.
 - Our hope is that, when you're out in the field and encounter a weather or climate-related challenge or need that you're unsure how to address, you'll reach out to us. We have a diverse network of partners who are experts on weather and climate science! And we speak just enough of both languages—climate and working lands—that we can relay the question/need to them in a way they understand, receive the resulting scientific information, and help translate their answer in a format that is helpful to you and your clients.
- Our bridging work tends to fall into three categories:
 - 1) Science and data syntheses
 - 2) Tool and technology co-development
 - 3) Outreach, convening, and training
- The Climate Hub was involved in coauthoring one of the chapters in the recently released Fifth National Climate Assessment, namely, chapter 11 on Agriculture, Food Systems & Rural Communities. You might also be interested in chapter 25 on the Northern Great Plains.

- In the realm of tools and technology co-development, the Northern Plains Hub has helped coordinate the development of Grass-Cast, the Grassland Productivity Forecast, an example of which is shown here in this rangeland forecast map. We worked with rangeland scientists, modelers, and outreach experts at ARS and NRCS, as well as climate scientists at the National Drought Mitigation Center in Lincoln, and many university research and Extension partners, including at University of Nebraska-Lincoln to convert precipitation forecasts into rangeland forecasts.
- <https://grasscast.unl.edu>
- Starting in April of each year, and then every two weeks until the end of August, the Grass-Cast team produces these maps. The colors on the map indicate that, based on observed weather up to the date the map is made, plus future weather scenarios for the rest of the growing season, we expect grasslands in your area to produce X% higher or lower pounds per acre than the long-term average for your area.
- NRCS played a critical role in helping us develop Grass-Cast! We held a series of interactive sessions with NRCS and Extension in each of our 6 states, including in Nebraska, at the USDA Service Center in North Platte. The set of notes shown here came from a discussion with you all, alongside UNL Extension, of the question: “What info do you need to make GrassCast useful to you?” The final look of the Grass-Cast maps, as well as several outreach products, were a direct result of these workshops!
- Another example of how the Hubs is building bridges between practice and science, are these two-Story Maps, co-developed with Extension colleagues in Nebraska and others. These Story Maps bring the voices of producers to those who don’t have the time or ability to attend producer events to learn from others.
- In the Story Map on the left, you can hear from producers, in their own voices, what practices they’re experimenting with, why, and what challenges and lessons they’ve learned. In the Story Map on the right, you can learn about the social, ecological, and economic challenges that ranchers in the region are feeling. These online story maps are a great way for NRCS employees who are new to the area to get familiar with the region-specific language of agriculture and producers’ viewpoints on challenges and promising solutions—informed as always by the science that ARS and other partners are researching to help inform practices (and vice versa).
- Another great resource for staff who are early-career or new to Nebraska’s row-crop sector is this neat, interactive farmscape from UNL Extension (with funding from the Hub), as part of their Weather-Ready Farms program. This clickable website allows users to choose the season they are interested in, and then the type of weather conditions that concern them (e.g., a hot/dry summer), which changes the virtual farmscape. By clicking on the round icons, you can learn about the impacts of the extreme weather conditions on different aspects of the farm (e.g., soil moisture, pests and diseases, and crop yields).

- For each icon, basic suggestions for mitigating the negative effects are provided at the bottom of the website, along with outreach resources where you can learn more.
- There's a similar weather-ready scenario tool for livestock production, although it's not interactive.
- To say the least, Nebraska has an abundance of amazing partners in the climate and agriculture space!
- I love this Extension bulletin about how climate change affects Nebraska and agriculture across its eight climate divisions.
- And the Nebraska Climate Office at UNL has several excellent climate assessments, including the Nebraska Climate Report, which is currently being updated...so stay tuned!
- In the final category of Outreach, the Hubs do a lot of invited talks and convention booths, where we share resources from our many partners, including NRCS's programs and practices for being climate-smart and weather-ready.
- Coming up on March 18-19, 2024, in Liberal, KS, the Hubs will be helping facilitate the Ogallala Aquifer Summit, for anyone interested in cross-state relationship-building around groundwater management between scientists, practitioners, and policymakers.
- Lastly, but most importantly, NRCS and the Hubs have worked together in recent years to host virtual "Climate Conversations" for NRCS employees, including one here in Nebraska in December of 2021. Moving forward, we've been asked to work with each NRCS state office in our region to discuss any capacity-building or science-synthesis needs around climate mitigation practices. So, again, if there are any climate-smart practices in particular that you've been wanting to know more about the underlying science, please let us know!
- This is what we have typically covered in past Climate Conversations. Over the next year or two, we would like to circle back to each state to discuss your on-the-ground experiences and needs related to climate mitigation practices. Let's figure out together how our Hub can be most helpful to your efforts!
- One concrete outcome from the previous round of Climate Conversations, which Sara Thompson and Shaun Vickers led here in Nebraska, is this 1-page "Climate Quick Reference Guides" which you can find at this QR Code for your state or county. We're excited to see what ideas emerge from our next round of climate conversations!
- We look forward to exploring w/all of you what we might be able to achieve together as partners!


- Please know you can contact the Northern Plains Climate Hub Director, Dannele Peck, or me, any time you have an “ag weather or climate” need or idea. If you’re not already connected with the many amazing weather and climate partners you have in Nebraska, like the National Drought Mitigation Center, High Plains Regional Climate Center, Nebraska Climate Office, and agroclimate Extension experts, or the fantastic agricultural researchers at UNL and USDA ARS in Lincoln and Clay Center, we’re always happy to help you figure out which expert is most relevant for to meet your needs!

Climate-Smart-Navigator - Trust In Food - Here is the link to the Climate Smart Commodities navigator tool: www.trustinfood.com/climate-smart-navigator/

- The Climate Smart Navigator app intuitively steps you through finding the projects that are applicable to your needs and location.
- Quick reference Guides: <https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/hubs/southwest/topic/climate-quick-reference-guides-your-county>

Q: Are there any Programs that give incentives for farmers to collect data & promote climate smart practices?

A: CSP has more of the entire operation that can pick enhancements to do that they have never done before. Incentive for doing the work that you have already done but to take it to the next level. Climate Smart Commodities Program. RCPP is another program that we have incentives for.

 **FSA REVIEW:** Jana Ingwerson-Laws – Programs Specialist – FSA

- **SEE SLIDES & HANDOUT attached. HIGHLIGHTED Points below.**
- Nebraska CRP
 - 2,224,214 total contract acreage – ranked #3 in nation for highest contract acreage.
 - 20,457 total Contracts
 - Top 3 Practices:
 - CP88 – Grassland Permanent Grasses and Legumes
 - CP2 – Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses
 - CP25 – Rare and Declining Habitat
 - Grassland CRP Distribution vs. CRP Lands
- **CRP and Farm Bill Extension**
 - November 17, 2023, a 1-year extension of the 2018 Farm Bill was signed that reauthorized CRP through 9/30/2024.
 - FSA could not accept new offers and approve new contracts in FY2024 until a Continuous CRP Signup 61 was announced on January 12, 2024.
- **Continuous CRP SU61 Key Points**
 - Batching periods will be utilized to prevent acres exceeding statutory cap of 27 million acres.
 - Non-competitive, first-come, first-served basis
 - Offer must be submitted by March 15 for first batching period.

- Considerations:
 - Contract Start Dates – earliest possible start date May 1, 2024
 - If not under current contract, can defer start date up to 6 months from approval of contract.
- **General CRP Signup 62**
 - Announced March 2
 - Signup Dates: March 2, 2024-March 29, 2024
 - Contract Start Date: October 1, 2024
 - Max rental rate \$240/acre
- **CRP Soil Rental Rates for FY2024**
 - FY24 SRR effective 3/4/2024
 - **NASS DATA IS VERY IMPORTANT – PLEASE FILL OUT YOUR SURVEYS**
- **Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)**
 - Betty’s Way Fire
 - Lincoln, Custer, Logan
 - 71,000 acres
 - No ECP signup yet, counties in process of assessing and will have to request to implement ECP prior to starting signup.
 - Common ECP practices for wildfires:
 - EC1 – debris removal of damaged fence
 - EC3 – replacing or restoring permanent fences.
 - EC5 – emergency wind erosion control measures, such as cover crops, chiseling, contour or cross slope chiseling, deep plowing.
 - Important participant documents damage (photos, maps etc.)
 - Cost Share:
 - Up to 75% of allowable cost to implement approved restoration practices.
 - Up to 90% of allowable cost to implement approved restoration practices for limited resource, socially disadvantaged, or beginning farmers/ranchers.
 - 25% advance payment available on all practices upon application approval
 - Written approval must be granted by FSA prior to restoration work starting.
- **DAFP Emergency Haying and Grazing Authorized Use due to Wildfires**
 - **Authorized Emergency Hay and Graze Use of CRP Acres due to NE, TX, OK Wildfires**
 - DAFP Memo issued 3/6 authorized use of emergency haying and grazing for all counties in Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Wyoming.
 - Due to Smokehouse Creek Wildfire in Texas and other wildfires in Oklahoma and Nebraska.
 - Grazing rights and haying authority may be donated to livestock producers affected by wildfires only.

- Available now until beginning of Primary Nesting Season – May 1st.

Q: Interesting map – could you produce a similar map of total current enrollment in general, continuous, and grassland CRP?

A: We can work on that too.

Q: Would be interesting to see RED dots to show how much Grassland has gone to Cropland on the GRASSLAND CRP distribution vs CRP lands.

A: We will try to do that.

Q: Practice that was paid on was snow removal & Knox County says they are not familiar with that being a payable practice.

A: Have patience as there is a practice for ECP snow removal, but we are working on it with National & it will be retroactive. 10.1.2022 is how far back. Watch for a press release.

Q: What triggers ECP & the scale of it?

A: It has to be a Natural disaster & submitted by the committee. Fires are tricky as they have to be created by lighting. These are all up to the County committees & thresholds they have to meet to even be eligible for it.

 **CONSERVATION PROGRAMS UPDATE:** *Camilla Kerner - NRCS Acting ASTC-Programs, Fred Stevens - NRCS Programs Specialist, Missy Baier – NRCS,*

- **SEE SLIDES & HANDOUT attached. HIGHLIGHTED Points below.**
- Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)
 - EQIP & CSP
 - November 17, 2023 - Application Cut-off
 - ACT NOW Application Cut-Off Announcement - MARCH 1, 2024
 - **EQIP IRA Obligations**
 - 93% of funds are Preapproved in SAT
 - 40% of funds have been obligated.
 - Goal is to have EQIP-IRA apps obligated by March 31, 2024
 - IRA Implementation
 - Key Points
 - FY24 Climate Smart Core Practices & Funding (see slides)
 - FY24 EQIP IRA Allocations (See slides)
 - CSP IRA Signup
 - 232 applications received.
 - Nebraska CSP contract average is \$100,000.00
 - Projected approval of 147 contracts
 - Possibly more depending on actual application cost.
 - First come first served
 - Must meet minimum threshold score
 - Applications received and processed until IRA funds depleted.
- FY24 General EQIP
 - EQIP General Ranking Deadline April 5, 2024
 - State Wildfire Initiative
 - **Special initiative to provide funding in areas affected by Wildfires.**

- **They include funding for:**
 - **340 Cover Crop**
 - **528 Prescribed Grazing – Livestock Deferment on Grazing Lands**
 - **484 Mulching**
- **FY24 CSP Renewals**
 - Renewal obligation of \$4,799,737.00
 - 70 contracts obligated
 - NE Allocation breakdown
 - Allocation letters are being send out by the field offices now.
- **FY24 CSP Classic Signup** (See Slides)
 - CSP General Ranking Deadline May 3, 2024
- **LOCAL WORK GROUP MEETINGS BEING HELD NOW:**
 - **Dates, times and locations are available at www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-state/nebraska/technical-committee**
 - **Nebraska 2024 Local Work Group Meetings Scheduled**
 - **Items on the agenda may include:**
 - **Resource Concern Priorities**
 - **Input on Prioritization tools and Ranking Pool questions**
 - **Review Practice Payment Schedule**
 - **Preferred Application and ranking cut-off dates**
- **FY24 ACEP**
 - **Fiscal Year Allocation of Funds**
 - ACEP-WRE - \$2,014,067
 - ACEP-WRE-WREP - \$826,290
 - ACEP-ALE - \$2,821,563 with January Funds Assessment
 - ACEP-WRE/WRP Stewardship Funds - \$554,631
 - These funds are for maintenance and repair of existing easements.
 - **FY24 NE**
 - Applications received
 - **WRE Eligible Applications = 11 on 2,908 Acres**
 - **Moving forward on:**
 - Preparing funds request and offer for top ranked WRE application – 1,146ac
 - Finalizing legal boundary surveys on 3 WRE from 2023
 - Finalizing pre-payment review on 1 WRE from 2022
 - **IRA WRE = 5 on 348 Acres**
 - **WREP Eligible Application = None**

- ALE Applications = None
 - **Agricultural Land Easement (ALE)**
 - **Grasslands of Special Environmental Significance (GSS) (ALE-GSS)**
 - Applications = 5 on 10,343 Acres
 - Preparing parcel agreements
 - Finalizing 3 ALE/GSS deed reviews from 2022-2023
- **Emergency Watershed Protection Program – Floodplain Easements (EWPP-FPE)**
 - 5 Closed Easements on 235 Acres, 2 Easements pending
- **RCPP PROGRAM UPDATE**
 - **NEW Projects approved for funding for FY24**
 - AFA Projects
 - Classic Projects
 - Review of RCPP projects
 - 3256 – Kansas/Nebraska Wetland Initiative
 - 3290 – Agropur Dairy Producers Best Management Practices Project
 - 3405 – Expanding Soil Health Through Carbon Markets in RCPP
 - 3374 – Improving Grassland Health and Connecting Resilient Lands
 - 3294 – Twin Platte NRD Real-time Advance IWM

Q: Just confirming in other words, it sounds like NE will have no problem spending down the IRA funds?

A: No we will have it spent.

Mary Reece – We included 484 in our Panhandle Wildfires in 2021 and in 2024 wind erosion if needed. Note it was not used in 2021 but we had it available.

PARTNER UPDATES: -

- Tim Kalkowski – Nebraska Grazing Coalition
 - Grazing School
 - Ranch Tour in June in Broken Bow which was affected by the fires.
 - Grassland Coordinator’s job is to bring all groups together.
- Katie Hickel – new 319 Coordinator for NDEE
 - EPA granted assistance for Emergency Management Plan

WRAP UP

- Next meeting plan is to have meeting at our new facility.
 - Need to have the names of attendees coming into the building to Tami Nordman.