

Notes for STC Meeting, September 3rd, 2024

9:00 am:

- Nate Goodrich (MO NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships) greets us and welcomes us to the STC.
- Turns over the meeting to Scott Edwards, MO NRCS State Conservationist. See attached slides for all information covered.
 - As of STC meeting, NRCS is at 76% obligated.
 - MO NRCS Staffing is at higher point than seen in past decade, 795 total as of the end of August 2024, to include NRCS, Pathway Students, SWCD employees, ACES/Contractors, MDC, and Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever.

9:11 am:

- Nate turns it over to Joe Aull, MO FSA Executive Director.
 - Great to see Urban Ag programs in Missouri, both STL and KC are Urban Ag pilot cities. FSA and NRCS are working well together on these Urban Ag pilot programs.
 - FSA restructuring Farm Loan programs to be more producer friendly. FSA looking to expand their loans to MO producers, please send any producers in need to their local FSA office. Next week FSA is holding Farm Loan training.

9:18 am:

- No representatives from RD have an update for the group.
- Nate turns it back over to Scott who introduces Vinci Keeler, new Forest Supervisor for the Mark Twain National Forest.
- Scott then goes over the Local Working Group Resource Concern Questionnaire Draft. There were 64 responses since last STC meeting in May. This is more a test run of the survey before NRCS publishes to the state as a whole.

9:35 am:

- Nate turns over to Chris Hamilton, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Water Resources and Easements, for an Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) report. See slides for hard numbers
 - Area Wide Market Analysis completed August 2024, and Not-to-Exceed cap of \$5,000 has not been increased.
- Please get your comments back to Scott Edwards at scott.edwards@usda.gov by September 18th, 2024.
- Frank Oberle (MO producer/farmer) asked Chris about grasslands easements (Agricultural Land Easements, ALE) which are still available, 3 of those easements in Missouri under way, which will be the first ALE easements in the state.
 - What are the payments? Perpetual easements, max NRCS payment is 50% of the appraised value. Owner can put in above and beyond that 50%. Still open to further easements, can get landowners in touch with land trust. Please send any interested parties to Chris Hamilton at chris.hamilton@usda.gov.
- Klark Bohling (Source Water Specialist, MO Rural Water Association) introduces himself to the STC, please contact him if you have any questions, at kbohling@moruralwater.org.

9:48 am:

- Nate turns meeting over to Scott. Scott reminds us that NRCS is interested in hearing from all the participants of the STC, so whether we are meeting in-person or virtually, or even outside of the quarterly STC meetings, please contact NRCS and ask questions, air your thoughts and concerns.
- Robert Stout (Strategic Outreach and Planning LLC) raises his hand and asks about various partnerships between NRCS and the owners/producers of Missouri and various state agencies. Robert is asking in reference to the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and the process of getting them off the ground; Lower Grand as an example of a future project. Scott answers how to optimize RCPP to work on projects above and beyond NRCS's annual allocations.
- Zack Miller (Preserve Engagement Manager, Nature Conservancy) if a producer has applied for a funding pool that has been capped this year, is there someone that producer can contact to raise a funding pool's cap? Scott replies that in MO we were only able to fund approximately 40% of the applications so difficult to pull money from one fund pool to another unless all applications are funded in some pools.
- Hannah Hemmelgarn (Center for Agroforestry) follow up to Zack's question, can the applications that don't make the cut for NRCS be shared to other organizations with funding, such as the USDA Partnership for Climate Smart Commodities projects? Scott replies there unfortunately is not a direct line to pass the applications to outside entities due to privacy issues. Hannah suggests NRCS can say to the producers that aren't being funded, "hey, here are these other programs you may be applicable for."
- Selma Mascaro, NRCS State Resource Conservationist, says NRCS has included all Partnership for Climate Smart Commodities projects on a Dashboard, which allows producers to see what else is out there to meet their goals. NRCS can

share the Dashboard site with unfunded program applicants. Several links were posted - <https://www.usda.gov/climate-solutions/climate-smart-commodities/projects> and https://publicdashboards.dl.usda.gov/t/FPAC_PUB/views/PartnershipsForClimate-SmartCommodities/Overview?%3Aembed=y&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Atoolbar=top

-Steve Mowry (Prairie Establishment Director, MO Prairie Foundation) brings up the question of Conservation Practice Standard 340 Cover Crops. Selma replied that a new national standard for Cover Crops will be released October 1, 2024, and states have up to one year to adopt national practice standards. The issue in the new national 340 standard relates to haying/harvesting of cover crops.

10:15 am:

-Scott turned meeting back to Nate. Skipping to Subcommittee Reports, starting with Selma Mascaro, State Resource Conservationist. She provided some Ecological Sciences (ECS) updates:

- NRCS has hired a State Forester, Angela George, who was previously a resource forester with MDC.

- Hosting a national Conservation Planning Part 2 course for Technical Service Providers (TSP) and partners.

- Will be updating several conservation practice standards in FY25 to reflect national updates.

-Grassland and Row Crop Subcommittee met on June 17. Reviewed most used practices in EQIP and CSP, and the High Priority Practices for Missouri, including a discussion on the removal of Field Borders from the list. Also reviewed priority resource concerns. Discipline leads provided summaries on the Native Forage Initiative, EQIP IRA Nutrient Management Initiative, and overview of wildlife practice trends and obligations.

- MO Prescribed Burn Policy was updated May 17, 2024, GM 190-413 Prescribed Burn Transmittal

- incorporates changes brought about in the 2019 NRCS National Prescribed Burning Policy

- MO policy renames Job Approval Authority (JAA) to Levels 1, 2, and 3

- JAA level is progressive in complexity and size.

- Level 1 (Awareness) now requires 16 hours of classroom training

- Previous burn trainings specific to the MDC are no longer required for NRCS Levels 2 & 3. Instead, training for each level has a list of specific subjects to be covered.

- Levels 2 & 3 now require writing three (3) prescribed burn plans and participating on three (3) burns.

- More flexibility and options have been given in maintaining each JAA level.

- Prescribed Grazing Code 528 has been revised, public comment for the national standard ended in March.

Highlights of what has been added, reducing pest pressure to the purpose and building resilience and resistance to climate related disturbances. Added text to clarify the standard is intended to be used for managing vegetation using herbivores. State IR will reflect any changes.

- In the process of adopting interim standard Amending Soil Properties with Lime (Code 805).

- Action Items: Consider adding field borders back on the High Priority Conservation Practice List

-Forestland and Wildlife Subcommittee met on June 20, 2024. Hank Steltzer, Ryan Toot, Jim Ball, George Kipp, and ECS staff in attendance. Reviewed forestland trends and most used practices in EQIP and CSP, along with the High Priority Practices and resource concerns for Missouri. Discussed why Riparian Forest Buffers are not often implemented through EQIP and CSP.

- Brian Kruse, acting state forester reviewed CPAs, DIAs, and CEMA and how the documents now follow the NRCS conservation planning steps when TSPs are planning.

- NRCS has partnered with MU to hire a forester in Warren County, covering the area from Pike to Callaway.

- Jason Sykes reviewed wildlife practices planned and applied in FY23/24, along with changes made to current payment scenarios and new ones added.

- Discussion items included:

- Challenges in managing invasive species, especially sericea lespedeza

- Challenges with converting land to Monarch plantings and maintaining CRP eligibility. Jim suggested a policy changed allowing land transitioning to pollinator habitats to retain crop history. In return would maintain financial/program eligibility after the transition. Freezing the crop years at the point of enrolling in monarch habitats could help preserve the eligibility for future CRP enrollment, avoiding complications from changes in agricultural activity requirements. Jason Sykes, NRCS State Biologist, stated he has been looking for additional funding or programs to encourage producers to continue maintaining monarch habitats after the initial five-year CSP contract but has not found any options yet.

- The new MO Farm Bill brochures for EQIP and CSP were commended.

- Future use of electronically delivered newsletters (like FSA) are helpful in getting information to producers in a timely manner.

-Next up, CRP with Drew Walters, FSA Chief Conservation Program Specialist Appeals Coordinator. See slides below for more information.

-FSA is interested in getting feedback from our members, and is also hiring program specialists, look to USA Jobs (<https://www.usajobs.gov/search/results/?jt=Agricultural%20Program%20Specialist&l=Columbia%2C%20Missouri&a=AGFA&p=1>) as the positions close the 9th.

-CRP subcommittee has met June 20th and August 22nd. Talked about CRP Annual Rental Rates, Invasive Species on CRP acres, and Reviewing/Updating CRP Seeding Specifications. CRP acreage across multiple states, Missouri has been declining (not the only state doing so), while some others have been greatly increasing over the past 12 years. Continuous CRP is up, while General CRP is down.

10:41 am:

-Q&A with the STC members.

-Jim Ball (MO Walnut Council) on CRP, he really enjoys the subcommittee under Drew, good discussion in the last meeting. The comment Jim has on the last slide of that report, House Committee's drafts, House is looking to expand CRP Grasslands even more in the new Farm Bill at the expense of all the other types of CRP funding. Missouri is losing out to the Western states on grasslands. What can we do, either to expand Missouri's CRP Grasslands usage, or is there a way to convince Congress to reprioritize back towards what Missouri has traditionally utilized? It was pointed out that Federal agencies cannot lobby, but that doesn't mean other STC members can't lobby their own representatives.

-Jim pointed out that Missouri carrying capacity is around 2 acres/cow and a CRP Grasslands rate of \$26 per acre looks different here when compared to 10 acres/cow in western states at the same \$26 per acre.

-Frank Oberle says Missouri is losing more grasslands back to row crops. Focus on CRP rental rates to get landowners back to enrolling/maintaining grasslands and not going for row cropping.

-Jim Ball asks about managing invasive species, is there a better way, or timing, or herbicides Missouri's producers should be hearing about? Nate replies, encouraging all of the STC members to communicate with each other. Any information could be potentially helpful to anyone else.

-Hannah Hemmelgarn comments in chat "Unfortunately, Bayer (or other chemical companies) won't be the best option for recommendations other than chemicals - the profit motive is a huge red flag bias. Prescribed burning, multi-species grazing, and other management options need to be part of the mix for research too (and likely have been, I just want to raise this concern)."

-Jef Hodges (Total Resource Management) suggests that MO Department of Agriculture to put sericea lespedeza on the noxious weed list.

-Jim Ball replies that won't be enough, we need better answers to the problem.

-Frank Oberle asks what programs NRCS has to support weed management? Nate replies EQIP and CSP have practices that can help with herbaceous weed control (315) and invasive brush management (314). How about CRP? NRCS cannot spend EQIP/CSP dollars on land enrolled in CRP.

-Jim Ball says there are moneys available from MDC for this as well.

-Adrian Hendricks (USDA Liaison to Lincoln University) asked in chat "Maybe the National Farmers and Ranchers Advisory committee?"

-MDC has a page about controlling sericea lespedeza - <https://mdc.mo.gov/trees-plants/invasive-plants/sericea-lespedeza-control>

-Although not discussed during the meeting, the Missouri Invasive Plant Council (MoIP) would be a good resource for committee members to consult. MoIP is a multi-agency/industry networking and advocacy group to address concerns related to invasive plant species. See - <https://moinvasives.org/>

-Scott Edwards will elevate these issues to the NRCS National Office to discuss possible financial assistance programs and policy changes to current programs.

11:05 am:

-Looking for a different meeting location for our next in-person meeting in November. Any suggestions, please send them Nate Goodrich at nate.goodrich@usda.gov.

-Adrian Hendricks said in chat "Lincoln University may be another site location to consider."

-Zack Miller said in chat "TNC MO would be happy to host one at the Missouri River Center in Huntsdale."

- Next meeting will be November 5th, 2024 with location TBD.

- Adjournment

Farm Bill Programs FY24

EQIP	CSP	ACEP	Total
\$24,445,000	\$22,445,000	\$6,348,000	\$53,238,000

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

EQIP	CSP	ACEP	Total
\$38,684,000	\$14,787,000	\$121,533	\$53,592,533

\$106,830,533

76.38%
09/03

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



Impacts to Staffing – 2022 to 2024



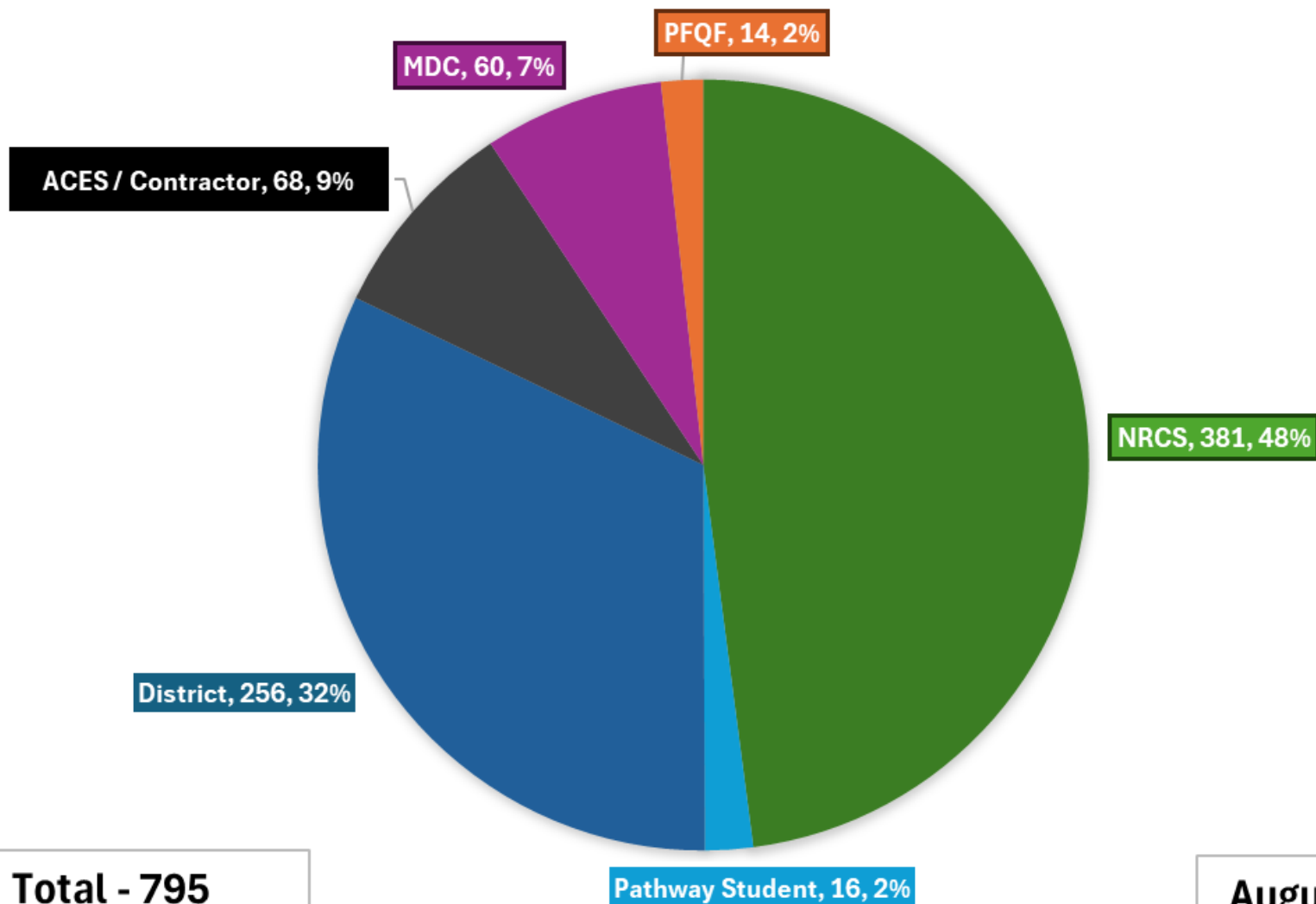
Missouri NRCS Staffing

- 2019 – 289 NRCS Employees in MO hit all time low
- 2020 and 2021 – Capped at 330
- 2022 – Staffing caps no longer exist but we have a planning Number of 359 if budget can support it.
- 2023-2024 – 300 hiring actions





MO CONSERVATION FAMILY



Total - 795

August 2024

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/





**Soil Conservation
Service
Excelsior Springs, MO
June 1952**

70 Years Later...

**Natural Resources Conservation
Service
Columbia, MO
May 2022**



Locally Led Conservation

Local Working Group Resource
Concern Questionnaire "Draft"



[Local Working Group Questionnaire](#)



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

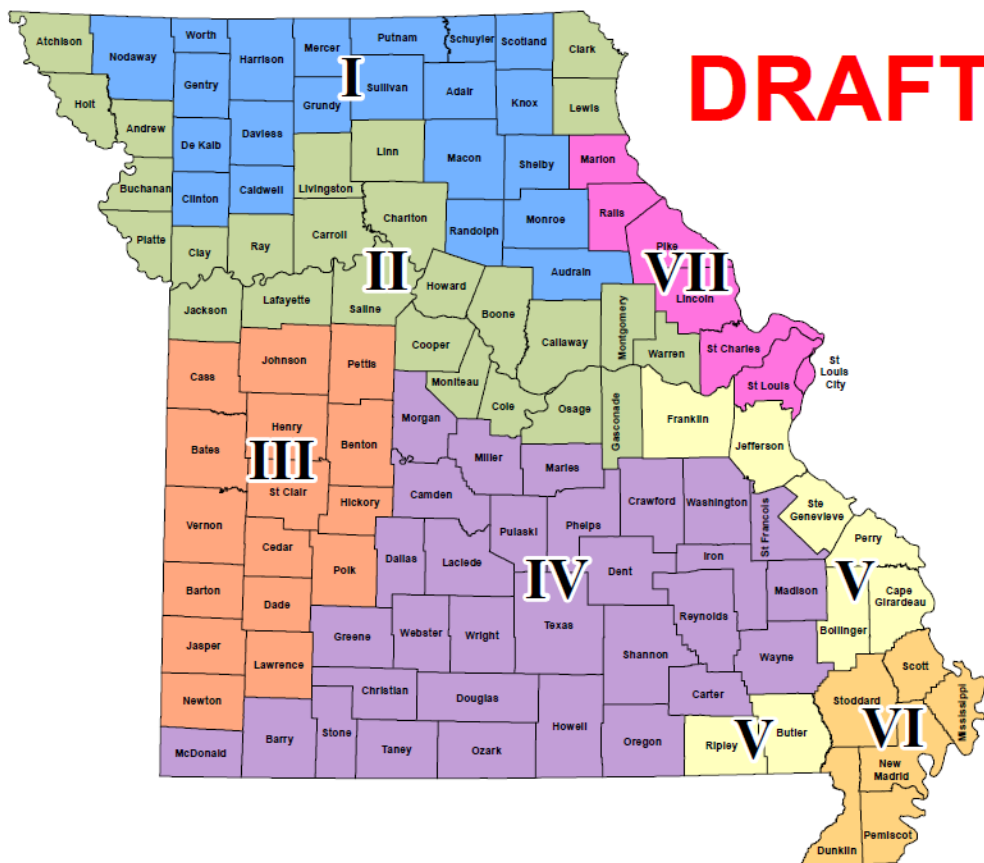
nrcs.usda.gov/

ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easements

- Area Wide Market Analysis – Completed August 2024
- Not-to-Exceed of \$5,000 has not been increased



ACEP-WRE Compensation



2025 ACEP-WRE Missouri Geographic Area Rate Cap

		2025 Maximum Payment Rate for each Region ***			
		Protected Cropland*	Unprotected Cropland*	CRP*	Other**
I		\$5000	\$5000	\$4242	\$3905
I	30-985ac	30-985 ac	30-985 ac	35-290 ac	30-2200 ac
II		\$5000	\$5000	Appraisal*	\$4569
II	30-985 ac	30-985 ac	30-985 ac	any ac	30-2,200 ac
III		\$5000	\$5000	Appraisal*	\$4,342
III	25-560 ac	25-680 ac	25-680 ac	any ac	20-680 ac
IV		Appraisal*	Appraisal*	Appraisal*	\$2922
IV	any ac	any ac	any ac	any ac	35-680 ac
V		Appraisal*	Appraisal*	Appraisal*	\$3,980
V	any ac	any ac	any ac	any ac	20-1,000 ac
VI		\$5000	Appraisal*	Appraisal*	Appraisal*
VI	20-590 ac	any ac	any ac	any ac	any ac
VII		Appraisal*	Appraisal*	Appraisal*	\$5000
VII	any ac	any ac	any ac	any ac	40-595 ac

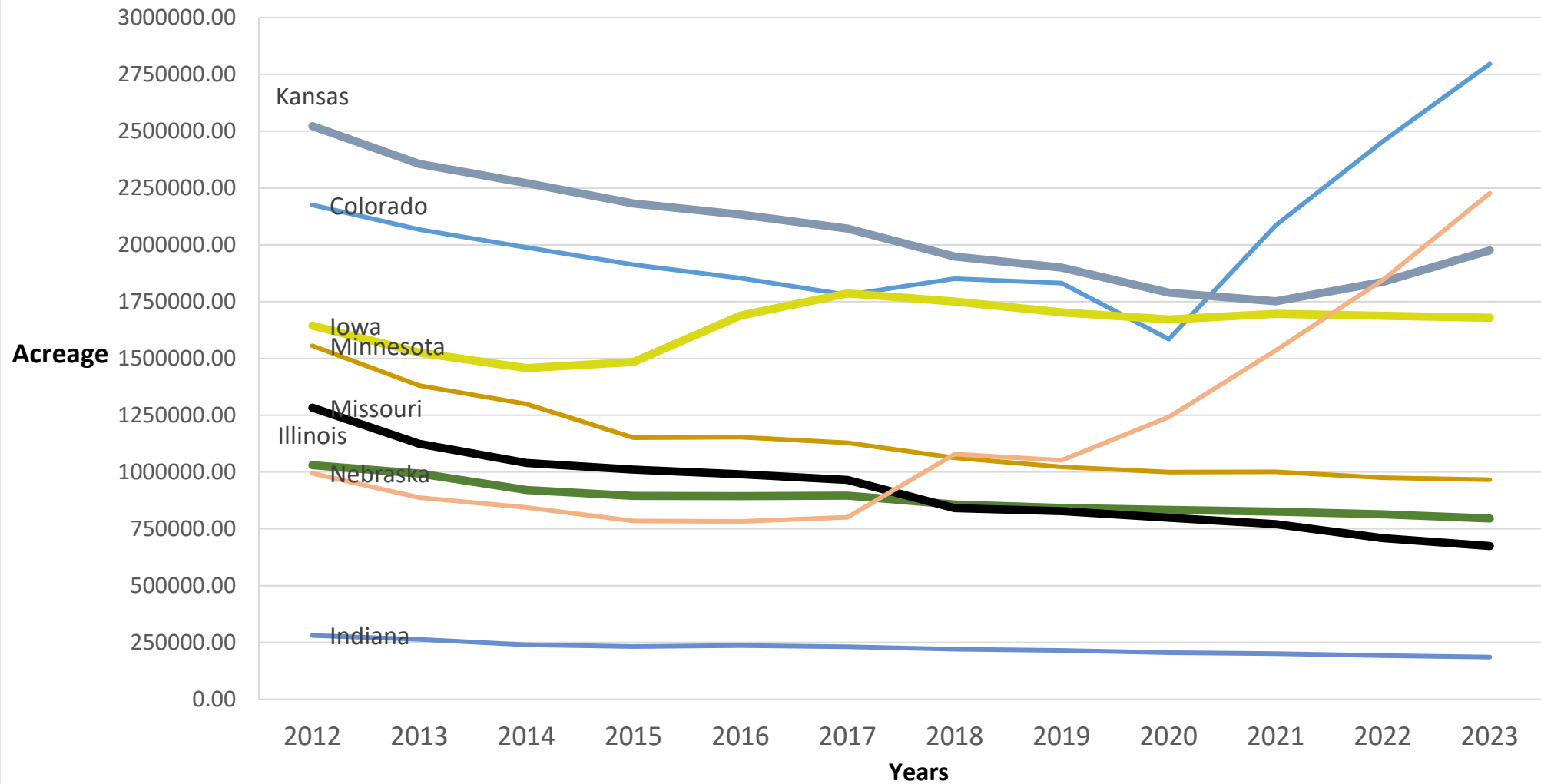
*Appraisals are required for proposed easements, larger or smaller, than the stated acres. Compensation will be 95% of the appraised Fair Market Value, not to exceed \$5,000/ac.

**Other - includes woodland, pasture, and open water.

***The conservation easement value will be the lower of:

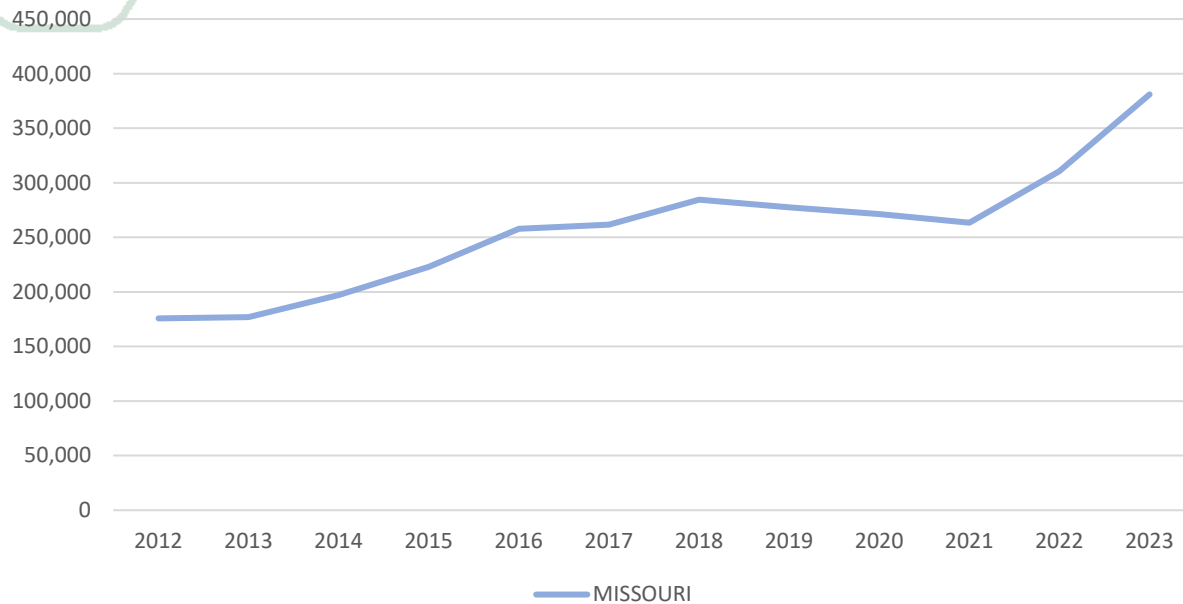
- fair market value
- geographic rate cap
- landowner offer

CRP Acreage 2012-2023

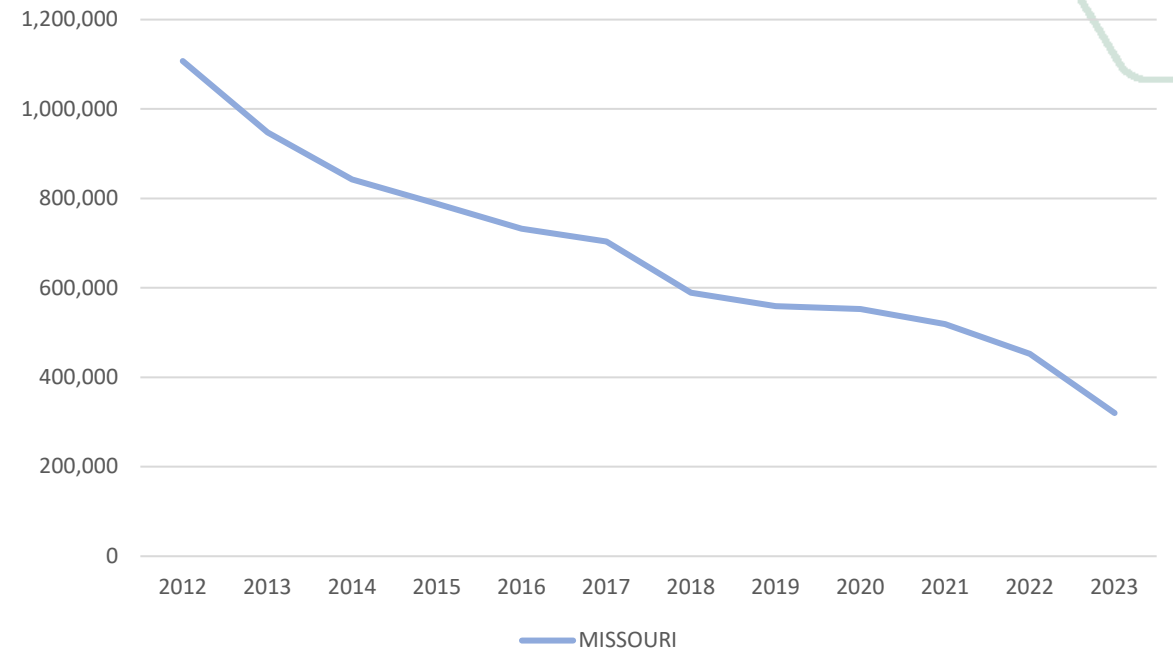


Missouri Continuous CRP vs General CRP

MISSOURI CCRP ACRES



MISSOURI GCRP ACRES



Meetings

- June 20th, August 22nd
- CRP Annual Rental Rates
- Invasive Species on CRP acres
- Reviewing/Updating CRP seeding specifications

CRP Rental Rates

- **Soil Rental Rates (SRR)**

- Soil-specific estimates of dryland cropland rental rates used to set maximum annual payment rates.
- Cash Rents Survey administered by NASS generates county average dryland cash rent estimates.
- Soil productivity Index (SPI) is used to adjust all county rental rates to normalize the county rental rate by soil within each county (SPI range is between 0.5 and 1.5).
- FSA will increase the county rental rate by a 1-time 10% inflationary adjustment for the life of the contract.
- SRR are based on multiplying the County Average Rental Rate by soil specific productivity factors and an SRR percentage for each signup type.
- General CRP is 85% of the posted SRR, and Continuous is 90%.

State	County	NASS Rate	Map Unit Symbol	10 Percent Inflationary Incentive	Rate With Inflationary Incentive	General CRP Signup – 85 Percent <u>1/</u>	SPI <u>2/</u>	SPI Adjusted SRR <u>1/</u>
Any State	Any County	\$100	ADC1	\$10	\$110	\$94	1.50	\$141

CRP Rental Rates

Continued

- **Weighted Average Soil Rental Rate**
 - Calculated for each offer using the acreage and SRR's of the 3 predominant soil on the land offered for enrollment
- **Establishing SRR's**
 - SRR's must reflect the cash rental rates per acre for nonirrigated cropland for annual tilled crops.
 - SRR's for marginal pastureland are set at levels that reflect the average cash rental values of nonirrigated riparian area grazing areas.
 - Grassland CRP rental rates are established based on NASS pastureland rental rates.
- **Provisional SRR's**
 - FSA State Committee's may submit alternative rental rates based on county-average dryland cash rent estimates.
 - COC must submit alternative rates for FSA State Committee Review.

CRP Invasive Management

Handbook 2-CRP Par. 491

- C/S for Post-Emergence Weed and Insect Control
 - C/S may be authorized for 1 weed and/or insect control application if:
 - NRCS or TSP determines necessary
 - It is applied with first 12 months after planting or seeding
 - It will not disturb the cover during the PNS

Status Reviews

Handbook 2-CRP Par. 427

- Cover maintenance is the participant's responsibility after NRCS or TSP completes a site visit to determine that the approved permanent cover is fully established
- Participants must maintain practices according to the conservation plan without additional c/s assistance.
- Participants must ensure:
 - Adequate vegetative cover is maintained to control erosion
 - Compliance with State noxious weed laws
 - Control of other weeds that are not considered noxious
 - Undesirable vegetation, weeds(included noxious), insects, rodents, etc., that pose a threat to existing cover or adversely impact other landowners in the area are controlled

CRP Seeding Specifications

- Missouri CP2-50 point mixes
 - Current Mix \$200/acre range
 - Mixes in surrounding states between \$100-\$120/acre
 - MO 420 specification requiring 20 different forbs is main difference.
 - 50 point - Environmental Benefit Index requires 3 native grasses, and at least 1 shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for wildlife.
 - General CRP provides 50% cost-share.
- Missouri CP1 (Establishment of Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes)
Seeding Rates
- Missouri CP43(Prairie Strips) Specifications

CRP Sub-Committee Proposals

- Review CRP rental rates, and provide Missouri FSA State Committee rental rate recommendation.
- Expand invasive species management education in CRP planning process, and in conservation plan.
- Provide additional CRP seeding options that are less expensive.
- Consider increasing CP1 seeding rates.
- Review CP43 specifications.

CRP Updates

Grassland CRP Signup 206

- 1.44 million acres accepted nationwide
 - 3 offers in Missouri, totaling 306.1 acres
 - Top States for Grassland CRP SU 206
 - Nebraska – 237,853 acres
 - Colorado – 218,145 acres
 - New Mexico – 185,145 acres

National CRP Cap

- 2.2 million acres accepted in FY 2024 for Grassland, General, and Continuous CRP
 - Almost 200,000 acres in General CRP
 - 565,000 acres in Continuous CRP
- Enrollment very near 27 million acre cap.