

## **Spring 2024 State Technical Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Held in Alexandria, La State Office Large Conference Room**

**Date and Time Held: Apr 25 at 9:30 am**

### **Agenda Items that were covered:**

#### **Welcome and Opening Remarks from Heidi Landreneau-Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Management & Strategy**

During the NRCS State Technical Committee meeting, attendees were welcomed and thanked for their dedication to conservation efforts in Louisiana

#### **Prioritization Process and Financial Assistance Program Update from Kelli McClelland-Assistant State Conservationist for Programs**

The New Assistant State Conservationist for Programs for Louisiana introduced herself and discussed her background and the role of locally led policies in conservation. She explained how these policies allow for stakeholder involvement in evaluating resource concerns at the local level, leading to the establishment of financial assistance programs. Funding allocations for various conservation initiatives were detailed, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

#### **Locally Led-Priority Resource Concerns from Dana Shuff-Assistant State Conservationist for Ecological Sciences**

The speaker discusses the locally led process for managing resource concerns in Louisiana. This process involves individual local administrative units (LAUs), which include a couple of different parishes and field offices under the same management, to identify the top 10 resource concerns in their areas. These concerns are then submitted to a central authority by March. This purpose is to rank these concerns at the state level, using a 10-point system for prioritization, this system allows participants to allocate points to different resource concerns according to their importance. The ultimate goal is to understand the top resource concerns across Louisiana, enabling the distribution of funds and resources effectively to address these concerns

### **Easement Program Update from Tim Landreneau-Assistant State Conservationist for Easements**

The Discussion focused on easement programs in Louisiana, including wet and reserve type easements and the recent closure of the first agricultural land easement. The discussion focused on easement program updates, highlighting the steady demand and enrollment in the Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE) program, with Louisiana leading in acres enrolled. Discussed ranking criteria used for the WRE program, emphasizing environmental and economic considerations to prioritize applications offering the most benefits. The geographic area rate cap for determining compensation rates for conservation easements was discussed, along with a review of market analysis for setting these rates

### **Rice Stewardship Partnership for Climate Smart Commodities was discussed from Kyle Soileau of Ducks Unlimited**

Discussed various initiatives and partnerships aimed at agricultural and environmental conservation in Louisiana. Key points included: A partnership for climate-smart commodities, the Rice Stewardship Partnership, involving local rice growers and organizations like USA Rice that has been on dividing Louisiana into zones to ensure equitable distribution of funds and addressed concerns from different regions within the state. Also discussed preparations for the HU sign-up

## **Partnerships and Agreements Updates from Candis Voorhies-Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Initiatives**

Discussed about the state notice of funding opportunity that is supposed to be coming out. She discussed about the Office of Management and Benefits and how they are doing an additional review of the notice of funding opportunity on Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Funds and currently she does not have an expected time frame for them to finish that review. Also discussed on the two announcements that are running currently which is Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funding and Alternative funding arrangement and what projects will be done with those two fundings. She also touched on the funding priorities this year are climate smart, agriculture, urban ag, general conservation and environmental justice

## **Wildlife/Forestry Subcommittee Report from Various Members**

The meeting involved a diverse group of professionals discussing various topics related to agriculture, conservation, and environmental programs in Louisiana. The conversation touched upon the importance of sugarcane and cane sugar production, the impact of market pressures on prices, and the necessity of reaching out to other countries due to Mexico's inability to fulfill certain requirements this year. The group also discussed insurance paperwork, the formation and participation in several subcommittees including urban, wildlife forestry, and sugarcane, and the importance of being involved if one feels called to it

## **Partner Updates of New Activities from Various Members**

A partnership for climate-smart commodities received funding for a greenhouse gas reduction project

The meeting also covered the Feral Swine Pilot Program.

The 319 Program and PO 566 funding were discussed as important for water quality and watershed planning.

The Louisiana Outdoor Forever Program was mentioned as a successful initiative for leveraging state funds for conservation efforts.

Increased interest in conservation programs and cover crops, and the impact of administrative changes at the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) following a gubernatorial change. New appointments within LDWF are mentioned, along with the department's goals to modernize and rebrand to better serve hunters and anglers.

There's a focus on habitat stewardship, leveraging partnerships for funding, and engaging in climate-smart forestry practices.

The discussion also covers efforts to manage Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in deer, initiatives for coastal restoration, wind energy development considerations, carbon storage, and the importance of river water reintroduction to wetland systems

The meeting covered updates on various conservation and restoration projects across Louisiana, focusing on nutrient reduction efforts, habitat management, and species recovery programs. Additionally, there's mention of working with local universities to improve staff recruitment and retention, and updates on the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and forestry management

Other topics included partnerships for managing sugarcane waste, exploring the use of biochar from sugarcane bagasse, and efforts to expand sugarcane cultivation into new areas while incorporating sustainable practices

Overall, the meeting emphasized collaborative efforts and innovative approaches to conservation and agricultural practices in Louisiana, with various stakeholders working together on projects that address environmental concerns and promote sustainable agriculture.

### **Wrap-up Discussion and Closing Comments**

Dana Shuff Assistant State Conservationist of Ecological Sciences closed with acknowledgments of NRCS's support in climate-smart practices and urban conservation efforts, and a note on the next state technical committee meeting somewhere in September or October time frame. Dana thanked everyone for their participation and emphasized the value of in-person meetings for fostering discussions