

**Fall 2024 State Technical Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**Held in Alexandria, La. State Office Large Conference Room**  
**Date and Time Held: Oct. 8 at 9:30 am**

**Agenda Items that were covered:**

**Welcome and Introductions by Dana Shuff NRCS State Resource Conservationist**

Dana Shuff, State Resource Conservationist, welcomed attendees and shared regards from Acting State Conservationist, Steven Cole, who couldn't attend. She reassured committee members that Louisiana's conservation operations are ongoing despite not yet having a permanent State Conservationist and encouraged all to continue working with their usual contacts. The meeting was attended by stakeholders representing several conservation organizations and governmental agencies with diverse interests.

**Wetland Functional Assessment and Mitigation Decision Procedures by Troy Mallach NRCS State Wildlife Biologist**

Troy Mallach, State Wildlife Biologist, presented a new model to aid compliance with the Food Security Act, which aims to prevent wetland conversion for agriculture. This model is a tool

to help landowners comply with regulations or restore converted wetlands. The discussion also touched on potential interactions with the Corps of Engineers regarding wetland jurisdiction. Troy gave a summary of the technical aspects to consider when planning practices to ensure compliance.

### **Programs Update by Kelli McClelland NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs**

Kelli McClelland, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, gave attendees an overview of FY 2024 financial data for the (EQIP) Environmental Quality Incentives Program and (CSP) Conservation Stewardship Program. Louisiana NRCS spent \$71 million on EQIP and CSP during FY 2024. Kelli also outlined the top practices in each program and highlighted some of the priorities and policies that factored into the ranking decisions for the programs.

### **Urban Ag Subcommittee Report by Committee Members**

The Urban Ag Subcommittee was well represented at the meeting and a few of the attendees contributed to a report out of the most recent meeting discussions. To summarize, the speakers pointed out the importance of engaging small-scale growers who often do not participate in USDA programs. The discussion highlighted the high-intensity production and direct-to-consumer sales typical of these growers, along with the challenges they face in accessing federal support. The group

sees this as an opportunity to expand engagement and support for urban and small-scale agriculture in Louisiana, focusing on community-based approaches and partnerships. There was also discussion about the Soil Carbon Amendment practice and how it may be able to be scaled to implementation on small-scale operations.

### **Soil Carbon Amendment by Mitch Mouton NRCS State Soil Scientist**

Mitch Mouton, State Soil Scientist, discussed the new soil carbon amendment practice being adopted for FY 25, focusing on biochar and compost applications to improve soil health. The practice aims to increase soil organic matter and sequester carbon, with specific criteria and testing requirements outlined for its implementation. Mitch highlighted the potential use of sugarcane bagasse, a byproduct in Louisiana, as a source of biochar, emphasizing its benefits for improving soil properties.

### **RCPP Open Pine Update by Bill Bartush from Lower Mississippi Joint Venture**

Bill Bartush, Lower Mississippi Joint Venture, gave a brief update on the Open Pine Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). He highlighted habitat improvements for bird species across multiple states, particularly focusing on forest land and intermediate stand treatments. He also outlined a new RCPP proposal that will build on the success so far by

expanding the program to include 47 parishes and counties, with an emphasis on prescribed fire and habitat connectivity.

### **Partner Updates of New Activities from All Partners**

Multiple conservation and agriculture organizations shared updates on their initiatives and projects.

- Sprout NOLA discussed their urban agriculture cohort and disaster preparedness training for producers in Louisiana.
- The Nature Conservancy shared updates on various conservation projects, including prairie, wetland restoration, and forest management. They also announced urban forestry initiatives and land acquisition purchase of 288 acres for conservation in Allen Parish, Louisiana.
- Quail Forever shared updates on their conservation efforts and partnerships in Louisiana, particularly in the piney woods and delta regions, and their plans to conduct outcomes assessments.
- The Louisiana Native Plant Society discussed their ongoing conservation and educational activities.
- The Louisiana Master Farmer Program shared details about upcoming field days and educational materials.

- Ducks Unlimited, shared updates on their conservation projects, emphasizing habitat restoration and wildlife protection for waterfowl.
- The Louisiana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative and the LSU AgCenter highlighted their outreach efforts, including field days and workshops to promote better grazing practices.
- The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries updated their organizational structure and strategic plan for wildlife management and ongoing commitment to conservation partnerships. They highlighted their work in different habitats across Louisiana, focusing on species like the Louisiana black bear and gopher tortoise.

### **Wrap-up Discussions and Closing Comments by Dana Shuff NRCS State Resource Conservationist**

Dana issued a call for continued collaboration and participation in subcommittees focused on different aspects of conservation, inviting members to contribute ideas and expertise to advance the state's conservation goals before adjourning the meeting.

Steven Cole  
Acting State Conservationist