

STAC Meeting Minutes

November 7, 2024

Virtual Meeting

Meeting Opened at: 9:30 AM

Introduction: Nick Vira, NRCS State Partnership Liaison

- **Attendance:** 39 Attendees: Mike Baden, Jennifer Boie, Elsa Bowen, Dan Calvert, Randall Chipman, Roylene Comes At Night, Robert Compton, Larry Cochrane, Andrea Cox, Stuart Crane, Michael Crowder, Merissa Dominguez, Erin Eaton, Robert Evans, Kyrre Fledge, Nathan Gallahan, Keith Griswold, Dean Hellie, Lee Hemmer, Aubrie Hoxie, Michael Isensee, Shana Joy, Lynelle Knehans, Anna Lael, Dan Larsen, Eun Lee, Linda Lyshall, Peter McBride, Aaron Miles Sr., Nick Peak, Angie Reseland, Jackie Richter, Cameron Stoflet, Nick Vira, Allan Warren, Heather Wendt, Andrew Wolfe, Jon Wyss, Fenner Yarborough.

Opening Remarks: Roylene Comes At Night, NRCS State Conservationist

- FY25 Overview: 300,641 acres soil health, 275,984 water quality & quantity, total 1.2 million acres treated.
- FY24 NRCS WA had an additional \$21 million for EQIP IRA and over \$8 million in CSP IRA
- FY25, we already have the IRA funds in our accounts. \$29 million in EQIP IRA and over \$15 million in CSP IRA. This will be the first time we have received funding for IRA easements.
- FY24 RCPP – total obligation of over \$7.7 million
- Future of RCPP – we are in the top 5 in the nation for RCPP participation
- 10 RCPP proposals with only 1 funded at the present time in Whatcom. Because we have 12 active projects, we may not receive additional funding until we make headway on completing our existing projects. RCPP team, full time 9-member team. RCPP ranking is conducted at the national level.
- FY25 – 31% increase in TA & FA, 21% decrease in EQIP and 14% decrease in CSP but overall, an increase.
- LWG's make spending IRA funds possible. We are one of the few states in the nation that are using IRA funds this way. Initial IRA allocation of \$3 million with final allocation of \$7 million.
- NRCS WA has 24 agreements for \$17 million and 3 contracts for \$1.9 million to assist in getting conservation on the ground.
- Staff: We have over 200 staff for the first time in a long time including 22 partner staff. Goal for FY26 is 227 people and 245 in FY27.
- Training: 26 training events, created 15 new AG learn training courses, enrolled 117 WA NRCS employees and hired a new training officer.
- Outreach: 181 events attended, 3 outreach coordinators with commodity groups, and a content creator. Work with CDs and partners on social media and outreach.

- We need to connect with new legislators at the state and national level to educate them about what we do.

Program Updates: Keith Griswold, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist

- Act Now is an Expedited Program
 - Pre-approvals will be first come from application submittal date for applications meeting or exceeding threshold.
 - Obligated contracts must occur within the published timeline (45 days from preapproval).
 - ACT NOW is not a different program, just a condensed process within existing Farm Bill programs (EQIP, CSP).
 - Limited number of Resource Concerns
 - Limited number of conservation practices
 - Date of application is more important than ranking score
 - There are new fund pools available this fiscal year. Additional funds can be requested if they are fully allocated and there are additional applications.
 - CSP Renewals are also available for Act Now.
- Growing CSP in Washington
 - We obligated more CSP funds than in California.
 - CSP has a different payment limitation than EQIP.
 - 399 applications in the system as of this morning.
 - FY25 CSP allocation---\$27,484,000 available this year
 - Trends – 72% of contracts are in the east area. We need to shift that to the west so that we can spread the workload and the program benefit.
 - How do we increase CSP Application – providing a CSP 101 Training to NRCS and CD employees. Increase communications and outreach and target certain land uses and participants. CSP has a minimum \$4,000 per year annual payment. Goal for each team to have 15 CSP eligible and ranked CSP applications. **January 17th CSP Application Deadline.**

Ecological Science – Practice Updates, Bobbie Evans, NRCS State Resource Conservationist

- New Interim Practice Standard ICPS 809 – Harvest Management
 - Optimize the amount of residue height for snow capture
- New Interim Practice Standard ICPS 828 - Wildlife Site Preparation
 - Allows for multiple treatments
 - Enables treatment of sites where weeds and invasive plant pressure is medium to high
- New Interim Practice Standard ICPS 825 - Cultural Plantings for Soil Health
 - Growing two or more culturally significant plants together and you can plant into existing stands with 6 available scenarios.
- New Interim Practice Standard ICPS 822 - Non ruminant Livestock Outdoor Management of Vegetative Cover
 - Managing soil and vegetation by managing livestock numbers and periods of use

- New Payment Scenarios for Aquaculture PS 398 – Fish Raceway or tank and PS 400 – Bivalve Aquaculture Gear and Biofouling Control
- CSP Enhancement E327C – Wildlife Habitat for nesting and brooding on non-cropped areas.
- Bio TN 29 – New Version Addressing Monarch Butterflies in eastern WA and OR
- New Cover Crop Tool for multi-species cover crops – for use in all counties to be release in winter 2025.
- New Virtual Fence Scenarios – webinar at the end of the month.
 - Scaled based on herd size
 - 528 scenarios for prescribed grazing in years 2 - 5.
- Several new range documents are pending in FOTG.
- New Range Riding Scenario – as part of CPS 645. Can support it through rotational grazing, to avoid predators as part of a contingency plan.
- 645 – Turbo Fladry
 - 374 Turbo Fladry Carnivore Deterrent Fence – Year 1
 - 375 Turbo Fladry Carnivore Deterrent Fence – years two – five
- New 643 02N – restoration of oyster reef, additional option in practice narrative.
- New Forest In-field Soil Health Assessment and Guide Released
- Updated Fuel Break Guidance and Implementation Guidance
- Enhancement E666J – Facilitating oak forest regeneration will include rangeland as an eligible land use.

Wildlife Subcommittee Update: Peter McBride, NRCS State Wildlife Biologist

- Angie Reseland and I convened the subcommittee after a hiatus. Members from 7 organizations attended, 2 are new. The Committee met Eric Lewis who is the new lead for Pheasants Forever in Washington State. The group is working on documenting how the group works in relation to the STAC. The Committee also discussed a periodic update to the Sage Grouse Initiative Priority Areas. The group is proposing to use the WSRRI Sage Grouse mapping tool for the update.
- Richard Fleanor, NRCS Rangeland Specialist, talked to the group about the virtual fencing standard and payment scenario. There will be a waiver for the standard 20-year lifespan, this scenario will be 7 years. NRCS will look to provide training on the standard and the equipment.

State Conservation Engineer Update, Lynelle Knehans, NRCS State Conservation Engineer

- Anaerobic Digesters
 - Currently \$22 million of state funds are available for Anaerobic Digesters. NRCS participates in Dairy Anaerobic Digester Subcommittee
 - NRCS has created a fact sheet for Practice 366 – Anaerobic Digester
 - Actively pursuing RCPP funds, because the cost of the equipment is so onerous
 - Two new Payment Scenarios for FY25: 366 Anaerobic Digester for more than 2,000 Animal Units and a another one for systems under 2,000 Animal Units.

- Another challenge is the requirement for a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP). NRCS has 2 new CNMP teams in the state that we hope will help with the backlog.
- EWP – Emergency Watershed Protection
 - NRCS provides services post event for reducing continue threats.
 - Must be done through a sponsor, after a disaster has been declared by either the State Conservationist for small local disasters or a federal or state disaster declaration.
 - Recovery must be completed within 220 days of the disaster, EWP provides partial payment and is on a reimbursement basis.
 - Potential and Active EWP Projects: Gorge Dam Boom, Retreat Fire and Pioneer Fire.

FSA Update, Jon Wyss, FSA State Executive Director

- FSA is at a standstill on new sign-ups until the Farm Bill is extended. They can make payments on existing contracts. They can take the 2025 adjusted gross income from producers. Crop Insurance was not impacted by the expiration. Working on the never ending CREP audit.

Local Working Group IRA Project Proposals, Nick Vira, NRCS State Partnership Liaison

- Nick reported that there were very few changes with the process this year.
- Project proposal development and submittal (Michael Crowder)
 - Their area had \$3 million in unfunded EQIP applications, so they developed a SC Soil Health Pool. Created a ranking tool that met the program requirements. They requested \$5 million and were provided with \$1 million to start. Rangeland Pool was also developed. Applicants received extra points for buffers and wildlife plantings.
 - Good program because it reduced the back log of projects while retaining original EQIP funds.
- Project proposal development and submittal (Andrew Wolfe)
 - Palouse LWG developed a proposal for \$4 million for EQIP eligible practices targeting soil health.
 - Reviewed challenges with EQIP that included low application rates and hold downs.
 - LWG reviewed previous successful applications.
 - Developed a submission with review by the local NRCS office.

Closing Remarks: Roylene Comes At Night, NRCS WA. State Conservationist

- Thank you all for your time. Please ask for clarification if needed.
- ACT Now advertisement went out today.
- LWGs will be meeting in January and that information will be posted on the NRCS website.
- NRCS and the Partnership will be going to DC in March.
- We have two more years with current funding levels unless there is action by the new administration to rescind the funding.
- **The next STAC Meeting will be on February 6th.**

Meeting Closed at: 12:28 PM