

NEBRASKA STAC MEETING MINUTES

December 19, 2024

1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

ATTENDEES - Rob Lawson, Fred Stevens, John Mayberger, Amy Miller, Lisa Berkeypile, Evan Liable, Julie Breuer, Emily Webster, Corey King, Anne Pollock, Carlos Villarreal, Conor Ward, Shelly Kelly, Dean Edson, Kent Zimmerman, Jacob Fritton, Kristine Dvoracek, David Schroeter, Julie Patzel; **VIA TEAMS & PHONE:** Al Junke, Alexa Davis, Amanda Gangwish, Melissa Baier, Brad Lubben, Buffalo Bruce, Chandler Schmidt, Cole Fiedler, Crystal Powers, Dan Ruterbories, Dustin Wilcox, Ele Nugent, Allen Gehring, Katie Hickle, Andrew Houser, Ed Hubbs, James Huntwork, Jaymes Mallory, John Hansen, Laura Johnson, Kalee Olson, Katie Hickle, Kayla Vondracek, Sean Kruse, Lon Sonya Luther, Mark Brohman, Jason McCauley, Connor McFayden, Catherine Mills, Nav Ghimire, Jennifer Prenosil, Mary Reece, Cory Schmidt, Steven Jara, Terri James, Jami Thoene, Doug Wagner, 202-913-2730, 402-310-6628

FUTURE Meetings: 1121 Lincoln Mall – Rm 352

- ❖ MARCH 13, 2025
- ❖ JUNE 5, 2025
- ❖ SEPTEMBER 4, 2025
- ❖ DECEMBER 5, 2025

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

- Local Work Group process in January – mid March in all NRDs
 - Listing of local work groups can be found on the NRCS website
 - Dates, times and locations can be found at:
www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-state/nebraska/technical-committee


FSA UPDATES: Julee Pazel – Programs Specialist – FSA

- **SEE SLIDES – HIGHLIGHTED Points below**

- **Operating without a farm bill**
 - Effective October 1, 2024 FSA **will not** process offers for CRP enrollment for any signup type.
 - County offices **will not** do any activities related to CRP.
 - NRCS **will not** do site visits or development conservation plans.
 - On contracts approved prior to Sept 30, FSA can pay those agreements as they come in but **cannot** approve any cost share that is over the original agreement.
- **CRP Active Contracts**
 - 2.4M acres in CRP
 - 21,010 contracts (includes grasslands)
 - Average rental rate \$40
 - NE was one of the three highest states in enrollment acres
- **Contracts broken down further with acres (see slides)**
 - Clear 30, continuous, farmable wetlands, general, signup 62, grassland, HEL
 - FY25 expiring contracts

Q: When this cycle hits and you get held up with CRP, how does that affect like enrollment or opportunities for landowners?

A: It's a barrier for continuous sign up because normally when we have a farm bill, they can start enrolling October 1 again and enroll those that are continuous. It impacts it until given a farm bill or extension.

 **NRCS CONSERVATION PROGRAMS UPDATE:** John Mayberger - NRCS ASTC-Programs, Emily Webster – Programs & Initiatives Coordinator, Fred Stevens - NRCS Programs Specialist

- **SEE SLIDES. HIGHLIGHTED Points below.**
- Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)
 - A climate smart ag or forestry practice must be in IRA contracts.
 - Cannot include IRA funds in a non-IRA contract.
 - All practices and activities must be paid before September 30, 2031
 - Overview of changes to core and facilitating practices
- EQIP Ranking Deadlines
 - EQIP IRA: January 31, 2025
 - EQIP General: February 28, 2025
 - EQIP IRA ACT NOW: January 13 through May 16, 2025
- FY25 EQIP IRA
 - Nov 15, 2024 General Application cutoff

- Nov 16 – May 15 applications received will be ranked in EQIP IRA ACT NOW by order of application received
- FY25 EQIP General Allocations
 - FY25 EQIP IRA Allocations
- FY25 CSP Renewals & Allocations
 - Renewal Classic \$8.7M, 72 contracts
 - Renewal IRA \$1.9M, 16 contracts
- FY25 CSP Allocations
 - General \$21.8M
 - IRA \$25.6M
- FY25 CSP Classic/IRA Signup
 - Nov 15, 2024 application deadline
 - \$100,000 contract average
 - 370 applications received & projected approvals
 - Applications must meet minimum ranking threshold
- FY25 CSP Ranking Deadlines
 - CSP IRA – April 4, 2025
 - CSP General – April 18, 2025

Q & A: Reference recording for EQIP practice specific questions and answers:

(20:26) Practice 372 -Combustion system improvement

(27:40) Where does a producer make an application to receive funds? – NRCS field offices.

(29:14) Sandhills working lands distribution for FY25 with practices 314 & 338.

(34:45) Practice 449 now requiring a flow meter? What is 587?

(39:19) Are there concerns with the amount of funding about not getting it utilized?

- **RCPP FY24 Awarded Proposals**
 - \$1.5B national budget
 - National demand of \$5.4B in proposals submitted
 - NE submitted 3 Classic & 5 AFA proposals = \$138M
 - NE **awarded** 2 Classic & 2 AFA proposals = \$85M
 - Selection made at the national level
 - NE was second highest in funding \$ awarded

- NE Proposals

FY24 Awarded Proposals

Title	Lead Partner	Project Type	Funding Source	Funding Amount (FA)
Growing and Expanding Nebraska's Grassland Cores	Nebraska Community Foundation	AFA	IRA	\$18,750,000
Pasture Progress: Advancing Regenerative Beef in Nebraska	Prime Pursuits	AFA	IRA	\$15,750,000
Irrigation and Nutrient Management in lower Loup River Basin	Lower Loup Natural Resources District	Classic	FB18	\$15,000,000
Protecting Nebraska's Groundwater and Grasslands	Nebraska Community Foundation	Classic	IRA	\$15,600,000
Tribal Buffalo Restoration in the Southeast Region (OK, FL, KS, NE)	InterTribal Buffalo Council	AFA	IRA	\$16,000,000

- Specifics of new NE Proposals (See Slides)
- Current RCPP Project Roster

CLASSIC	Alternative Funding Arrangement
2020 - Ogallala Aquifer & Platte River Recovery	2020 - NE Forest Restoration Program
2020 - Resilient Futures for Nebraska Soils	2023 - Kansas Nebraska Wetland Initiative
2020 - Cropland Cover for Soil Health and Wildlife	2023 - Expanding Soil Health through Carbon Markets
2021 - Platte & Playa Wetland Protection	2024 - Growing and Expanding Nebraska's Grassland Cores
2023 - Improving Grassland Health and Connecting Resilient Lands	2024 - Pasture Progress: Advancing Regenerative Beef in NE
2024 - Irrigation and Nutrient Management in LL River Basin	2024 - Tribal Buffalo Restoration in the Southeast Region
2024 - Protecting Nebraska's Groundwater and Grasslands	

Q: When would the projects that didn't get awarded be able to reapply?

A: We have not heard the specifics on the application process, but I imagine it would be similar to this past year.

Q: Is a public institution allowed to apply for those grants?

A: Yes, public entities are eligible to apply.

Q: What are the expectations as a deliverable for Project 3535 (Soil Health Through Carbon Markets)?

A: Each product is required to identify specific environmental outcomes and how they're going to measure and report them.

Q: Then how does the public producer access the results/successes? Share the wins throughout the state?

A: In general partners have field days and share their outcomes. This is a good flag to give feedback and have general outreach.

○ **NWQI (National Water Quality Initiative: (See Slides)**

- Thank you to all our partner
 - NDEE, NRDs, sub water quality committee
- States are required to address 3 of 12 NWQI impairments
 - NE goes beyond this mark and Bazile alone would meet the requirement.
 - NE spent over \$3M for NWQI in FY24
- FY24 & FY25 funding given for:
 - Bazile Creek
 - Bow Creek
 - Wahoo Creek
 - Big Sandy Creek
 - Turkey Creek


Q: Are any of these project sampling in season?

A: We have not heard the specifics on the application process, but I imagine it would be similar to this past year.

 **INNOVATION GRANTS & COLLABORATION AGREEMENTS: Conor Ward – ASTC-Partnerships (Recording)**

- Nebraska Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) Competition
 - \$1.9M of EQIP IRA funds toward this grant opportunity
 - CIGs support:
 - The development and demonstration of innovative conservation approaches and technologies that are not yet widely adopted.
 - The development of a new technology or tool for use by ag producers or conservation professionals.
 - Software tools, smart phone apps, yield guides, handbooks
 - Testing of new or modified approaches to inform a modification or update of an existing NRCS conservation practice standard.
 - Development of environmental markets and conservation finance approaches to increase the total amount of funding available, private and working lands conservation.
 - Funds early-stage pilot projects, field demonstrations and farm research for approaches and technologies that have been studied.
 - Projects can be carried out on private, university or extension lands.
 - Does not provide funding directly to ag producers.
 - Eligibility
 - State or local governments
 - American Indian tribes
 - Non-governmental organizations
 - Matching funds requirement 1:1
 - Signup Announcement coming: Feb 16 through mid-March

- Conservation Collaboration Agreements
 - Building technical capacity of NRCS and partner field employees to implement farm bill programs
 - Leverage nonfederal and non-governmental resources
 - Reach historically underserved farmers and ranchers
 - State Priorities
 - Urban agriculture
 - Water quality
 - Improve wildlife habitat
 - Improve conservation of natural resources, economic performance, working Ag lands, use & effectiveness of new technologies
 - Outreach to promote conservation programs
 - No match required
 - Apply on [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)
 - Targeted to be available February 16
 - Competitive with ranking & scores

 **STATE WETLAND OFF-SITE METHOD:** Corey King – State Wetland Coordinator **(See Slides)**
HIGHLIGHTED Points below.

- Wetland Compliance
 - Swamp Buster provisions of the Security Act
 - Brief History
- Purpose: New Offsite Method updated with national policy
- Overview of Process
 - Wetland identification
 - Wetland label
 - Wetland size

Q: Are you intending to reevaluate all wetlands under this process or just what you currently have?

A: It will be the new process moving forward.

 **SOIL HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE:** Carlos Villareal – State Soil Scientist **(See Slides)**

- Background
 - A need exists to reevaluate our conservation practices
 - Recruit to re-establish the Soil Health Subcommittee
- Timeline
 - Dec 2024 – proposal presented to NE STC
 - Jan-Feb – Draft Charter & Bylaws

- Mar 2025 – Soil Health Subcommittee -1st Meeting
- Aug 2025 – 2nd Meeting

- Membership
 - State Tech Committee
 - NRD Reps
 - Fed & State Partners
 - University, Research & Extension
 - Partner NGO's
 - Producers

- Organization
 - Co-lead by Dr. Nathan Mueller – NRCS State Soil Health Specialist
 - **Jan 31** - interested participants to email Colleen.Obrien3@usda.gov
 - **Feb 21** - email will be sent with meeting information

(2:25:00) Q: Is water quality and bio sludge issues being addressed with soil health?

A: The Water Quality Subcommittee does focus on those issues. Soil health would focus more on improving the soil health, increase organic carbon, etc.

(2:28:52) Q: The legislature has already allocated some effort to this soil health piece. How do you see this playing a role?

A: Listen to recording for answer and additional expanding comments among partners attending.

(2:34:44) A: Additional state water quality testing shared by Laura Johnson – NDEE

 **PARTNER UPDATES:**

- **Dean Edson – NARD (2:40:37)**
 - Producer Connect App is launched now – To help producers manage their nitrogen sources
 - 17 NRDs involved that have mandatory metering
 - Business partners helped develop the app
 - Potential legislative issues to watch for
 - Working with Governor's Office – to set a task force to review water quality & issues
 - Legislative Conference – January 28 &29
 - Washington DC trip: March 31 – April 2

- **Crystal Powers – NE Extension, NE Water Center**
 - Hosting Design Summits for NE Master Irrigator
 - Mid Feb – March in: Scottsbluff, North Platte, Central City, O'Neill, Beatrice
 - Irrigation

- Nitro Mgt & Irrigated Systems
 - Policies & Current Events
 - Farmer Leadership
- UNL has updated nitrogen recommendations on irrigated corn – in season
- TAPS Banquet – January 25
- Soil Health Conferences in Jan & Feb
- 2-day Soils School is coming
- Water Tour in Phoenix & Yuma (first week in February)
 - **Rob Larson-NRCS on Multi-State Agreement**
 - Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas
- **Katie Hickel – NDEE**
 - Staff updates: Tara Anderson – moving to Dept of Transportation
 - Interviewing for Water Quality Coordinator
 - Section 319 Program will be gearing up in 2025 to rewrite the state management plan
 - Water Quality Subcommittee
 - 4 meetings in 2025
- **Laura Johnson – NDHHS**
 - John Cruz – new Source Water Protection Coordinator
 - Updating Water Well Construction Standards
 - Drinking Water Program
 - Two new lead rules
 - Changes to consumer confidence reporting
- **Mark Brohman – Wachiska Audubon Society**
 - Offices will be moving out to Prairie Pines
 - Anyone interested in continuing to do research out there is welcome
- **Shelly Kelly – Sandhills Task Force**
 - Taking applications for our Ranch Internship Program
 - Appy on our website: sandhillstaskforce.org
 - Ranch Profitability Workshop
 - Jan 7 – Gordon
 - Jan 8 – Burwell
 - NE Grassland Vision event - Jan 16 – Broken Bow (invite only)
- **Roric Paulman**
 - Expanding relationship with Google
 - Arable mobile app to inform and support irrigation decisions

 **WRAP UP**

- [State Technical Committee](#)
 - Bottom of STC page:
[NE Local Work Group Meetings](#)