

NEBRASKA STAC MEETING MINUTES

March 13, 2025

1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

ATTENDEES - Rob Lawson, Conor Ward, Fred Stevens, Amy Miller, Eric Smith, Julie Breuer, Emily Webster, Carlos Villarreal, Jeremiah Schutz, Allen Gering, Ritch Nelson, , Jana Ingwerson-Laws, Burdette Piening, Mike Murphy, Lyndon Vogt, Russel Callas, Anni Poetzl, Katie Hickle, Shelly Kelly, Crystal Powers, Alexa Davis, Kent Zimmerman, Pat Lechner, Dustin Wilcox, Ted LaGrange, Elbert Traylor, Andrew Tonnies; **VIA TEAMS & PHONE:** Brad Lubben, Chandler Schmidt, Debbie/Senator Ricketts, Deborah Solie, Gabriel DuPree, Dustin Weinandt, Edgar (City Sprouts), Ele Nugent, Andrew Houser, Ed Hubbs, Scott Ingalsbe, Jenifer Swanson, John Hansen, Kalee Olson, Sean Kruse, Ryan Lodge, Mike Crosley, Cathy Mills, Neil Moseman, Nav Ghimire, Rachael Herpel, Rachael Whitehair, Ben Rhodes, Craig Romary, Steven Jara, Jami Thoene, Wade Ellwanger, 402-640-4827

FUTURE Meetings: 1121 Lincoln Mall – Rm 352

- ❖ JUNE 5, 2025
 - ❖ SEPTEMBER 4, 2025
 - ❖ DECEMBER 5, 2025
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WELCOME & OPENING COMMENTS: *Robert Lawson - NRCS State Conservationist*

- **Local Work Groups**
 - NRDs are wrapping up this week
 - April 4 – Deadline to turn in minutes to the state office
 - Thank you for your participation in the local work group process
- **Staffing Updates:**
 - John Mayberger ASTC Programs, retired with 42 years of service
 - Conor Ward is Acting ASTC-Program
- **IRA Program Payments pause lifted**
- **All new IRA activity is paused**

Q: Status of written agreement with Colorado & Kansas

A: All IRA related agreements are being reviewed at the Department.

Q: Any additional dollars available through IRA are paused?

A: Yes. New obligations with IRA have been paused.

Q: Are obligated funds honored?

A: Yes. Active, existing contracts under EQIP, CSP, RCPP & ACEP can have IRA payments made.

FSA UPDATES: Jana Ingwerson-Laws – Programs Specialist – FSA

HIGHLIGHTED Points:

- **Staffing Updates** – FSA has not lost staff

- **CRP Updates**
 - Can act only on current contracts since Oct 1, 2024
 - 27 M cap
 - 25.9 M acres in CRP nationally
 - Total national acres expiring = 956,313 on 9/30/2025
 - NE was one of the three highest states in enrollment acres

- **CRP Cost Docket Review**
 - NE rates established at the State level with NRCS cooperation
 - Seed cost share not to exceed 50% of actual seed cost
 - Policy allows County Committees to increase/decrease on a case-by-case basis if not in line with current county average rates
 - All components are consistent with NRCS EQIP rates whenever possible

- **CLEAR30 Maintenance Payment Rates**
 - Water quality practices paid at a 75% rate
 - Consistent with EQIP rates
 - Minimum list of maintenance activities that have to be included on the docket
 - FY25 changes on CRP & CLEAR30 docket

- **ECP in Nebraska**
 - Runs by fiscal year & since Oct 1, 2024
 - Counties: Keya Paha (June 2024 flooding) & Custer (Dec 2024 fires)
 - On radar – COC Reviewing
 - Feb 2025 Wildfires in Custer & Hooker
 - Common practices

- Documentation & written approval before starting
 - Payment scenarios to streamline program implementation
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Q: What is the turnaround time for ECP?

A: We do what we can within policy. Typically, 60 days, NEPA process and staffing. When national grants special memos to streamline we can approve people quicker. It also depends on the practice.

Q: Did FSA lose any people?

A: In Nebraska we did lose employees to retirement/resignation, not probationary people.

 **NRCS CONSERVATION PROGRAMS UPDATE:** Conor Ward – NRCS Acting ASTC-Programs, Emily Webster – Regional Conservation Partnership Program Coordinator

HIGHLIGHTED Points:

- **FY25 EQIP & CSP Implementation**
 - Nov 15, 2024 – application deadline for all programs.
 - Ranking deadlines: EQIP IRA was Jan 31, 2025; EQIP General was Feb 28, 2025
 - Ranking deadlines: CSP IRA was April 1, 2025; EQIP General was April 18, 2025
 - General EQIP preapprovals are currently underway
 - All new IRA Obligations are Paused
- **FY25 EQIP General Allocations**
 - EQIP General almost \$21M in funds
 - State Wildfire Initiative
 - Funds set aside if needed
 - Typical practices eligible: 340, 484, 528
- **NWQI (National Water Quality Initiative: (See Slides))**
 - Three active projects in the Implementation State
 - Bazille Creek: 54 Applications, 6 approved
 - Wahoo Creek: 2 Applications, both approved
 - Turkey Creek: 3 Applications, 2 approved
 - One project in the Planning Phase
 - Bow Creek: No FY25 funding
- **FY25 CSP Renewals & IRA**
 - Renewal Classic \$8.3M, 71 contracts
 - Renewal IRA \$1.9M, 16 contracts (on pause)
- **FY25 CSP Classic Allocations**
 - General \$21.8M

- \$13.4M after renewals: 434 applications, projected approval of 130 contracts

- **FY26 CSP Renewals**

- National bulletin released. State Bulletin is being drafted
- June 20, 2025 application deadline

- **Local Work Group Meetings**

- Being held throughout the state
 - [Local Work Group Schedule](#)

Q: If an application is ranked by a different office, is that farmer/rancher obligated to report to that office or use their home office?

A: An application can be submitted to any office. It will be ranked where most of the land is located. The producer may have to sign paperwork through that office but still work through their home office and get paperwork back and forth, so the producer doesn't have to travel as far.

Q: Given the amounts of IRA funding, has NE hasn't been able to use any of the FY25 IRA dollars?

A: Yes, that is correct as we are on a pause. We have not obligated any of our IRA funding for FY25 CSP.

- **RCPP FY24 Awarded Proposals**

- NE Proposals that were funded

FY24 Awarded Proposals

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

- Growing & Expanding NE Grasslands is active as of January 17, but new activity is on Pause
- Negotiating the other IRA proposals with end of April deadline
- Lower Loup Project funded through FB18. This one we can activate.

- **Current RCPP Project Roster**

Nebraska RCPP Projects Roster

CLASSIC	Alternative Funding Arrangement
Resilient Futures for Nebraska Soils (2021)	NE Forest Restoration Program (2022)
Cropland Cover for Soil Health and Wildlife (2021)	Kansas Nebraska Wetland Initiative (2025)
Ogallala Aquifer & Platte River Recovery (2022)	Expanding Soil Health through Carbon Markets (2025)
Platte & Playa Wetland Protection (2022)	Growing and Expanding Nebraska's Grassland Cores (2025)
Improving Grassland Health and Connecting Resilient Lands (2025)	Pasture Progress: Advancing Regenerative Beef in NE (selected proposal)
Irrigation and Nutrient Management in LL River Basin (selected proposal)	Tribal Buffalo Restoration in the Southeast Region (selected proposal)
Protecting Nebraska's Groundwater and Grasslands (selected proposal)	

- Resilient Futures for Nebraska Soils
 - FY25 is the last year, 6 applications preapproved
- Cropland Cover for Soil Health & Wildlife NGCP
 - FY25 is the last year, 12 applications preapproved
- Ogallala Aquifer & Platte River Recovery
 - 2 years remaining, 12 applications preapproved
- Improving Grassland Health (IRA funded =Paused on obligating)
 - First year of project, 6 applications preapproved

PARTNER UPDATES:

- **Craig Romary -NDA**

Nebraska Buffer Strip Program

Cropland adjacent to perennial and seasonal streams, ponds, and wetlands can be enrolled in buffer strips, which are designed to filter agrichemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides. Two kinds of buffer strips are eligible - filter strips, which are narrow strips of grass; and riparian forest buffer strips containing trees and grass. The minimum widths are 20 and 55 feet, respectively; the maximum widths are 120 and 180 feet, respectively.

The program is designed to be used in conjunction with the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), or other programs, however it can be used by itself, as well. In addition to offering rental rates for both irrigated and non-irrigated cropland, and incentives for partnering with other government programs, there are incidental haying and grazing allowances in the Nebraska Buffer Strip Program.

More information, including rental rates, handouts and related material, can be found at https://nda.nebraska.gov/pesticide/buffer_strip.html.

- **Alexis Davis - NDNR**
 - Program series videos with NRCS and FSA are published online at Nebraska Strategic Ag Coalition: <https://nebraskastrategicagcoalition.org/nebraska-program-summary-series-videos/>

- **Crystal Powers - Nebraska Extension, Nebraska Water Center**
 - Master Irrigator Design Summit
 - Three are done, O'Neil remaining next week
 - Description of what the Summit offers
 - TAPS – Testing Ag Performance Solutions
 - An Ag competition – one corn & one soybean slots are still open in the East

- **Katie Hickel – NDEE**
 - Staff update: Anni Poetzl – new liaison between NDE & UNL

- **John Hansen – Nebraska Farmers Union**
 - At national convention, it was my honor as the meritorious service chair to give former Senator Tom Harkin from Iowa our Meritorious Service Award to American Agriculture for his big picture thinking of ag and taking care of soil & water.

- **Roric Paulman**
 - 188 sites (Twin Platte NRD) with Google
 - Working with NASA Ag
 - Field to Market - field print calculator

- **Shelly Kelly – Sandhills Task Force**
 - Ranch Internship Program
 - 117 applications, 11 interns selected to work on ranches in the Sandhills
 - June 9-12: Nebraska Youth Ranch Camp in Chadron
 - Developing a Leasing Webinar -grassland
 - Working with Environmental Trust on grazing projects
 - Funding still available for eastern red cedar removal, prescribed burning, stream & wetland work.
 - Working on a Carbon Credits Project

- **Rob Lawson – NRCS State Conservationist**
 - Staff update: Jeremiah Schutz – State Resource Conservationist

- **Andrew Tonnies – Center for Rural Affairs**
 - Conservation Mentorship Network
 - All types of conservation for a diverse group of farmers

- **Carols Villareal – NRCS State Soil Scientist**
 - Pause efforts for a Soil Subcommittee to settle staffing shuffle
 - Get established with new leadership team and engaged with the subcommittees

- **Sean Kruse – NDEE**
 - Drinking & Groundwater
 - 2 new lead & cooper rules
 - Jan 16: Statewide nitrate study released. Final report and outreach tools are on the website.
 - Water well and construction standards update

- **Deborah Solie – Center for Rural Affairs**
 - Organic Certification
 - March 31 – 1st session for online & in person session
 - Wrapping up Conservation Fellows – new farmers
 - Veteran Farmers – You Pick Program
 - Latino Focus Farmers – small scale workshops

- **Jennifer Swanson – NE Assn of Resources Districts**
 - Producer Connect App – nitrogen dashboard tool
 - Wrapping up 1st phase of development
 - Appreciates feedback received
 - Goal to have rolled out by end of 2025

- **Dustin Wilcox – NE Assn of Resources Districts**
 - WFPO & Damn Rehab Program
 - Washington DC Conference
 - June 9 & 10: NRD basin tour
 - Legislative Session – tracking 50 bills that impact NRDs and conservation
 - Weekly updates on Friday afternoon can be found on NRD websites

 **WRAP UP**

- Next week – National Ag Week
- April 27 – NRCS celebrating 90th birthday
- June 10 – next State Tech Committee meeting
- NRCS message to employees is to continue to stay focused with putting conservation on the ground.