

Spring 2025 State Technical Committee Meeting Minutes

Held in Alexandria, La. State Office Large Conference Room

Date and Time Held: Apr 15 at 9:30 am

Welcome and Opening Remarks from Kelli McClelland Acting NRCS State Conservationist

As part of the meeting held on April 15, 2025, attendees were requested to sign in to ensure accurate record-keeping and participation acknowledgment

Kelli welcomed all the participants and partners who attended the meeting and discussed the importance of addressing and planning for future resource concerns for NRCS programs.

Prioritization Process and Financial Assistance Program Update from Chelsea Clark EQIP Programs Manager

Chelsea explained the locally led process, highlighting how local meetings collect data on resource concerns, which are then submitted to the state office for prioritization. How the EQIP program focuses on high-priority conservation practices, providing increased payments to incentivize practices with higher conservation benefits. Discussed Prioritization and ranking of resource concerns are based on local and statewide priorities, with 37 ranking pools established for various initiatives. Chelsea also highlighted the top five concerns for the Louisiana Area Resource Units (LARUs). She also covered financial assistance programs, including EQIP and CSP, with discussions on expected funding percentages and the impact of paused IRA funds but ongoing payments on existing contracts.

Locally Led-priority Resource Concerns from Troy Mallach Acting NRCS State Resource Conservationist

Troy discussed the voting process for locally led resource concerns for different land uses: forest lands, crop lands, and pasture lands, with electronic voting set up by Justin Hinkel Conservation Desktop Cart Manager. Participants could vote electronically via phone, also with a separate vote for each land type

Easement Program Update from Tim Landreneau ASTC for Easement Programs

Tim provided updates on the ASEF and WRE programs, highlighting challenges with IRA fund pauses and reviewing application screening and ranking criteria. He included a discussion on geographic area rate caps (GARC) for easements, detailing the process for determining per-acre values for different land zones. The session concluded with updates on a video series project related to NRCS Wetlands Easements, part of a broader conservation partnership initiative. The series includes landowner testimonies and is currently hosted on the Tri-State Partnership YouTube channel, with plans to move it to the NRCS channel. A celebration for reaching nearly one million acres of closed easements in the lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley States is being considered.

NRCS Toolkit: Resources for State Technical Committee from Mitch Mouton NRCS Soil Scientist

Mitch discussed, a new NRCS toolkit has been introduced to assist state technical committees and local planning groups with various data and dashboards for informed decision-making. The Soil Science Division and Resource Inventory and Assessment Division are key components of the toolkit, focusing on soil surveys and natural resources inventory. The toolkit aims to improve local planning efforts with data on topics like air quality, climate change, and soil health.

Water Quality Subcommittee report

Several subcommittees within the State Technical Committee are working on updating state priorities for source water protection, wildlife habitat and other conservation efforts.

Partner Update of New Activities from All

Louisiana Master Farmer program and other local agricultural programs are focusing on education, outreach, and expanding regenerative practices.

Discussion of feral swine management highlights the use of pig traps and collaboration with local districts for effective control measures.

Technical assistance and program updates from organizations like Ducks Unlimited and Quail Forever were highlighted.

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries department is active in easement monitoring, restoration, and assisting with NRCS applications. Also announced that a new wildlife management area acquisition and restoration efforts are underway

The state is seeing growth in sugarcane acreage, with efforts to develop more cold-tolerant varieties.

Discussions to focus on local partnerships and technical assistance to promote conservation and address landowner needs.

Concerns regarding budget constraints and the impact of paused funding from the Inflation Reduction Act were discussed, affecting projects and resource allocations, highlighting the importance of partnerships for continued conservation efforts.

Concerns about the impact of renewable energy on wildlife, particularly birds, were raised.

Discussions on maintaining partnerships and education efforts despite uncertainties in funding and staffing.

Various conservation and agricultural organizations provided updates on their initiatives, focusing on habitat restoration, nutrient reduction, and private land conservation projects. waterfowl habitat, and conservation education.

Wrap-Up Discussions and Closing Comments from Troy Mallach

Troy concluded with acknowledgments of partnerships and future collaborative efforts and voting on resource concerns was tested, with results indicating priorities for sediment transport, organic matter, and habitat conservation.