

KANSAS TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

May 20, 2025 - In person and via Microsoft Teams

Jack Fitzgerald - Welcome & Introductions

Dean Krehbiel - Assistant State Conservationist for Water Resources

- **Kansas Conservation Priorities**
- **Grasslands**
 - Represent 40% of the Agricultural Lands in Kansas.
 - Grasslands are Ecologically Significant Provisioning Healthy and Abundant Food, Clean Water, Community Vitality, Food Security, Abundant and Diverse Wildlife
 - Threatened by Woody Encroachment and Conversion
- **Water**
 - Water is Essential to Life.
 - Agriculture Thrives when Water it is Abundant and Clean.
 - The High Plains Aquifer is at Risk to Depletion.
 - Nutrients and Sediments Impair Drinking Water.
- **Healthy Soil**
 - Capacity of Soil to Function as a Vital Living Ecosystem that Sustains Plants, Animals, and Humans.
 - Healthy Soil gives us Clean Air and Water, Bountiful Crops, Productive Grazing Lands, Diverse Wildlife, and Beautiful Landscapes.
 - Healthy Soil is the Foundation of Productive, Sustainable Agriculture.
- **Questions to Ask**
 - Does it Meet A Kansas Priority?
 - Is it Strategic and Purposeful to meet a Priority?
 - Is it Applicable Across Kansas?
 - Does it Provide Meaningful Outcomes?
- **Summary**
 - Motivations for Conservation are high
 - Finite Resources
 - Capacity to Deliver
 - Partnerships

Matt Sprick- KACD Contractor

- **2025 Local Work Group (LWG) Resource Concern Summary**
- **Local Work Group Meetings**
 - Convened annually by local Conservation Districts
 - Support the locally led conservation process to address natural resource concerns
 - Identify priority resource concerns
 - Identify information and outreach needs
 - Identify educational and training needs
 - Provide recommendations on USDA conservation activities & programs
- **Local Work Group Meetings**
 - Convened annually by local Conservation Districts
 - Support the locally led conservation process to address natural resource concerns
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 - Provide recommendations on USDA conservation activities & programs
- **2025 LWG Participation**
 - KACD LWG Cooperative Agreement completed in 2024

- 37 LWG meetings held
 - 28 MU LWG meetings
 - 9 individual county LWG meetings
- 531 participants (509 in-person, 22 virtual)
- LWG meetings were held in January, February, March
- 2025 LWG Summary Report available on KACD website – www.kacd.net
- Agronomy/ Soil Health
 - Concern for a need to expand soil health practices (no-till/cover crops).
 - Concern with the lack of diversified crop rotations.
 - Perceived need for additional education/training on cover crops/soil health and the long-term benefits of soil health practices (for both staff & producers).
 - Concern cover crop implementation is difficult to justify (economically) unless cover crops are able to be grazed.
 - Concern that benefits from soil health practices take years to realize.
 - Concern with nutrient management and implementation of nutrient management practices. Includes concerns with proper soil testing, soil test interpretation, and the associated proper/efficient application of fertilizers.
 - Concern with the 590 (Nutrient Management) practice implementation and the documentation/records/requirements needed to meet practice standards and specifications.
 - Concern with active gully erosion (specifically ephemeral erosion) in cropland
 - Concern with structural conservation practices that have outlived their span and are failing.
 - Concern with grasslands being converted to marginal cropland (sodbusting) and not being adequately treated.
 - Concern adapting to challenging environmental conditions...drought, heat, increased rainfall intensities, etc.
- Grazing Lands Conservation
 - Tree/brush (primarily cedar trees) invasion associated with grazing lands.
 - Concern with performing prescribed burns and the overall risks associated with prescribed burning.
 - Concern for the lack of available resources to assist/support producers in applying prescribed burning (burn associations & districts/groups, rural/municipal fire departments).
 - Concern with overgrazing of grasslands and perceived lack of adoption of prescribed grazing practices/systems.
 - Concern with lack of water availability on grasslands...lack of reliable watering points for proper grazing distribution.
 - Concern with ponds that have outlived their lifespan and can no longer provide adequate water storage...loss of capacity due to sedimentation.
 - Concern there is a need to provide program financial assistance (FA) to address ponds that have outlived their lifespan and need to be rehabilitated...similar to past DOC sediment removal programs.
 - Concern for the growing number of absentee landowners and their perceived lack of concern for, or understanding of, grassland management needs.
 - Concern associated with the challenges managing grazing lands that are adjacent to tracts of land that are primarily managed for deer hunting
 - Concern for the acreage of grasslands that are being purchased for hunting with grazing management becoming an afterthought.
 - Concern with grazing lands being converted to cropland...primarily economically driven.
- Water Conservation/ Water Quality
 - Concern with the amount of nutrient delivery to surface waters.

- Concern with nitrate impairment of groundwater.
- Concern with phosphate impairment of surface waters.
- Concern with blue green algae impairment of surface waters.
- Perception that more expansive use of soil health practices would improve water infiltration and subsequently assist in reducing excessive surface water runoff.
- Concern with declining groundwater levels.
- Concern with increasing irrigation efficiencies and the economic challenges associated with transitioning from irrigated to dryland cropland.
- Concern there is a need to provide funding for irrigated cropland to dryland cropland conversions...need to look at other financial alternatives to encourage landowners to retire water rights and permanently transition to dryland (easements, tax codes, etc.).
- Concern State water right rules provide no incentive for conservation of water outside of GMDs. If you don't use it, you lose it...no incentives for conserving water.
- Concern with losing farm income when reducing irrigation acres.
- Wildlife and Forestry
 - Concern with habitat degradation and lack of diversity across the landscape.
 - Concern with brush/tree/invasive species...cedar, hedge, locust, honeysuckle, phragmites, teasel, winter creeper, sericea lespedeza, etc...and the detrimental effect on wildlife habitat.
 - Concern with the declining populations of ground nesting game birds (quail, pheasant, turkey) and non-game birds
 - Concern with lack of proper habitat management on lands owned/controlled by "out of area" individuals whose primary interest is "deer hunting".
 - Concern there is a need to educate landowners whose main objective is deer hunting that a grass biome-based habitat is better than a woody (cedar) based habitat.
- Forestry
 - Concern with loss of windbreaks/shelterbelts, and windbreaks/shelterbelts not being properly managed/maintained.
 - Concern with lack of proper management and maintenance of forestland. Concerns include plant vigor, density thinning, removal of undesirable trees, and control of invasive species (honeysuckle, Callery pear).
 - Concern with loss of native hardwoods in forested areas. Desirable native species being replaced with less desirable species.
 - Concern with the Emerald Ash Borer.
 - Concern with lack of riparian area management...degraded riparian area conditions, livestock winter feeding areas, woody/herbaceous invasive species encroachment.
- Small Scale Farming
 - Perception the conservation partnership is not properly prepared to assist urban/small farm landowners and producers...technically and pragmatically.
 - The following concerns were noted at 100% of the 2025 LWG meetings that encompassed the major urban areas within Kansas (Kansas City, Lawrence, Topeka, Wichita).
 - Concern educational needs exist for urban/small farms and conservation partners...need to have a better understanding of urban/small farm perspectives and needs
 - Concern with the perceived urban population lack of understanding of "traditional agriculture"
 - Concern with increased fracturing of rural lands
 - Concern with the frequency and magnitude of ownership changes in a fragmented urban landscape
 - Concern with people moving into rural areas and having unrealistic expectations dealing with traditional agriculture interactions...dust, odors, smoke, noise, etc.

- Training/Education
 - Perceived need for additional prescribed burning training for staff and producers.
 - Perceived need for additional soil health training for both staff and producers.
 - Concern with training of new employees (NRCS and Partners). Providing timely training, appropriate training, field training/field experiences.
 - Concern with the overall nutrient management and implementation of nutrient management practices. It was felt that additional education and training was needed to address this concern.
 - Perceived need for additional training/education/resources to promote grazing lands health (proper grazing mgmt., pest ID, brush control, etc.).
- Outreach
 - Concern there could be an improved collaborative effort between local/private/state/federal entities to promote, advertise, and implement resource protection programs.
 - Perceived need for “conservation partnership” to become more familiar with “all” available programs
 - Concern with lack of outreach promoting available conservation programs.
 - Concern reaching and providing outreach/education to absentee landowners.
 - Concern with the lack of landowner/producer participation in meetings, workshops, trainings, and field days.
 - Concern reaching an audience with a diverse “age demographics”.
 - Concern NRCS is not utilizing all forms of social media outreach...i.e. mass emails and text messaging.
 - Concern there is a lack of outreach to local schools/school organizations, and local civic groups.
- Programs (NRCS)
 - Concern inadequate livestock water...“water availability”...should be considered a stand-alone resource concern for EQIP.
 - Concern with lack of outreach promoting available conservation programs.
 - Need to provide program FA to address ponds that have outlived their lifespan and need to be rehabilitated...similar to past DOC sediment removal programs.
 - Concern available financial assistance funds are insufficient to address existing resource concerns.
 - Concern additional FA is needed for new structural practices (i.e. terraces, waterways, etc.).
 - Concern additional FA is needed for rebuilding/replacing structural conservation practices that have outlived their lifespan and are considered failing (i.e., terraces, waterways, etc.).
 - Additional “act now” funding opportunities are desired.
 - Concern grazing plans for EQIP applications/contracts are too restrictive and are not economically feasible for producers to implement.
 - Concern with time from EQIP application to potential funding...too much time in between...producers waiting to hear and not addressing resource concern in a timely manner...hinders decision-making process...especially with deferred applications.
 - Concern with the 590 (Nutrient Management) practice implementation and the documentation/records/requirements needed to meet practice standards and specifications. Also, a related concern with the inconsistency of implementation of this practice across the state.
 - Concern with the amount of “paperwork and administration” that exists with implementing federal FA
 - Concern payments rates are too low for many practices...magnified by current inflation rates and supply issues.

- Concern EQIP payment rates should be developed on a more "localized" state basis, rather than on a multi-state basis.
- Concern that "funding pools" should be refocused back to the MU level.
- Programs (CRP)
 - Concern with the lack of appropriate vegetative management, maintenance, and oversight of CRP acres
 - Concern CRP payments rates are too low hindering interest in new contracts and renewal of expiring contracts.
 - Concern with the conversion of expired CRP to cropland. Perception exists that better incentives are needed to improve CRP re-enrolled.
 - Concern financial assistance is needed to improve infrastructure on CRP Ac while the land is still under contract to support future grazing, fencing, water development, etc.
- Technical Assistance/Staffing/General
 - Concern with lack of adequate staff, number of vacant positions, training/knowledge of existing staff (particularly new staff), and retention of staff.
 - Concern with contractor availability (contractors servicing soil conservation, spraying and brush/tree removal, well drilling, prescribed burning, tree planting, grass drilling, etc.).
 - Concern with the lack of time NRCS is spending on the land with landowners...not enough staff to spend adequate time in the field with producers.
 - Concern with cultural resource review process. Perception this has resulted in significant delays in practice start/implementation and become a road block for producers and contractors to start/complete a project within a reasonable time frame.
 - Concern NRCS needs to place more emphasis on CTA planning vs programs. Spending more time with landowners providing a comprehensive evaluation of the landowner's resource concerns with treatment alternatives, along with follow-up after practice implementation.

Casey Guetter - Wetlands Specialist

- Kansas Interim Minimal Effects Procedure
 - Based on national template
 - 2 year interim period
 - Collect further data
 - Make any necessary adjustments if needed
 - Simplicity
 - Rapid assessment
 - Conforms to Rule, Regulation, and Policy
- Regulations
- NRCS Policy
- Functional Capability
- Wetland Value
 - Value we place on a wetland
 - Weighted average calculation
 - $3(\text{Wildlife FCU Loss}) + 2(\text{Water Quality FCU Loss}) + \text{Floodwater Storage FCU Loss}/6$
- Rare and Unique Wetlands
 - Get a higher wetland value consideration
 - Unlikely to ever be granted minimal effect exemption
 - Removed this language from the national template
- Previous Minimal Effects Authorizations
 - Must track previous exemptions to account for current and future authorizations
 - Prevent a piece of land from receiving multiple exemptions which therefore exceed minimal effect
 - Will be tracked by Farm Service Agency tract

- Minimal effect determination will take into account previous and future authorizations
- **Wetlands in the Area Consideration**
 - Assessed based on:
 - Wetland abundance
 - Functional level
 - Past and future losses due to other minimal effect authorizations
 - Kansas wetlands in the area = 2 mile radius (8042 ac.)
 - Utilize U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetland Inventory (NWI)
 - Record acres
 - Determine functional capacity
- **Combined Effect of Similar Actions**
 - Take into account past authorizations
 - How many tracts in the 2 mile radius are likely to request future authorization in the foreseeable future
 - Kansas = 90%
 - What is the size of future authorizations
 - Kansas = 0.2 ac.
- **Decision of Minimal Effect**
 - Smaller Functional Capacity Unit loss and the greater the wetlands in area resiliency, the more likely an exemption will be granted.
- **Expedited Minimal Effect**
 - Examples 1-11

Gaye Benfer - Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

- **Inflation Reduction Act Initial Allocations**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2025 - EQIP - \$46.6 M – obligated \$4.1M ○ 2024 - EQIP - \$34.7 M ○ 2023 - EQIP - \$3.3 M 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2025 - CSP - \$20.0 M – obligated \$485,000 ○ 2024 - CSP - \$11.1 M ○ 2023 - CSP - \$4.9 M
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- **EQIP Farm Bill Initial Allocations**
 - 2025 - \$24.9 M
 - 2024 - \$24.4 M
 - 2023 - \$28.2 M
 - 2022 - \$28.3 M
 - 2021 - \$27.3 M
 - 2020 - \$17 M
 - 2019 - \$27.2 M
- **CSP Farm Bill Initial Allocations**
 - 2025 - \$19.3 M
 - 2024 - \$17.9 M
 - 2023 - \$23.1 M
 - 2022 - \$15.5 M
 - 2021 - \$16.7 M
 - 2020 - \$22 M
 - 2019 - \$43.2 M *

Tim Weltmer – EQIP Program Manager

- **Total Funds = \$80 M**
 - EQIP General Allocation = \$34,000,000
 - EQIP IRA Allocation = \$46,000,000

- **EQIP Subaccounts**

- IRA-CROP-IRRIGATED - \$5,000,000
- IRA-XPRESS LANE - \$2,300,000
- IRA CROP SOIL HEALTH - \$19,000,000
- IRA Forestland Health - \$4,600,000
- IRA-RANGE-GRAZED - \$13,000,000
- IRA-FARMSTEAD - \$2,000,000
- EQIP-CIC-Nutrient Management - \$940,000
- Energy - \$200,000
- FARMSTEAD - \$1,800,000
- PASTURE - \$1,000,000
- URBAN - \$2,000,000
- WILDLIFE - \$2,000,000
- CROP Irrigated - \$1,000,000
- Tribal - \$380,000
- MU-CROP-WQ - \$6,000,000
- GPGI - \$4,000,000
- PRIOR YEAR Additional - \$10,000,000

NRCS National Initiatives Allocated:

- OTI - \$500,000
- MOBU - \$330,972
- NOBO - \$889,652
- WATER SMART - \$250,000
- NWQI - \$889,652

Jeff Olson – Soil Conservationist (CSP Manager)

- **CSP Applications and Contracts**
 - Total Active Contracts in Kansas
 - CSP 2018 Farm Bill- 713
 - CSP-GCI – 354
 - Total Applications for FY 2025 - CSP 2018 - 303
 - Total Contracts Obligated (May 6, 2025) - 61
 - Ranking and Funding Pools by Area in FY 2025 with the exception of NIPF (statewide) and NWQI (watershed).
- Identify emerging natural resource concerns and program needs
 - CSP addresses whole operations and incentivizes improvement through management across all land uses.
- Payment schedules
- Policy regarding payment schedules
- How does the payment schedule process work
 - Kansas Payment Schedule Team –
 - Ashley Visocsky & Tra Ketchum with programs
 - Leslie Spikes & Doug Spencer with ECS
 - Peter Clark with ENG
 - SRC, ASTC-Programs, State Engineer provide oversight.
 - “Regions” are used to establish regional payment schedules
 - Scenarios are developed either at the national or regional level – states work together on scenario development or changes.
 - State payment schedules are posted on each state’s website and are adjusted to fit the state’s needs. Not all scenarios on the regional list are available in every state.