

NEBRASKA STAC MEETING MINUTES

June 5, 2025

1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

ATTENDEES - Rob Lawson, Conor Ward, Fred Stevens, Amy Miller, Lindsay Hovey, Jeremiah Schutz, Jana Ingwerson-Laws, Pat Lechner, James Huntwork, Crystal Powers, Carlos Villarreal, Allen Gering, Corey King, Jamie Thoene, Mike Murphy, Jenny Prenosil, Elbert Traylor, Larkin Powell, Andrew Tonnies, Mallory Jaymes, Bruce McIntosh; **VIA TEAMS & PHONE:** Sherry Asche, Andy Bishop, Heidi Borg, Chandler Schmidt, Curt Becker, Dan Ruterbories, Dave Potter, Alexa Davis, Debbie/Sen Rickets, Dustin Wilcox, Ele Nugent, Steve Fairbairn, Katie Hickie, Andrew Houser, Jennifer Swanson, John Hansen, Mark Brohman, Misha Mazurkewycz, Mary Reece, Craig Romary, Roric Paulman, Shelly Kelly, Steven Jara, Doug Wagner, Megan McGuffey, Jenny Mason

FUTURE Meetings: 1121 Lincoln Mall – Rm 352

❖ SEPTEMBER 4, 2025

❖ DECEMBER 5, 2025



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

- **Workload Activities Across the State**
 - Obligating Farm Bill contracts
 - Food Securities Act Compliance Reviews
 - Preplanning on CRP
 - **Administrative**
 - Sending out email to our distribution list for interest on remaining on the committee
 - Then soliciting for subcommittees
 - **June 18: Meetings for Wildlife & Forestry Subcommittees**
 - Reports at next State Tech Advisory Committee
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FSA UPDATES: *Jana Ingwerson-Laws – Programs Specialist – FSA*

HIGHLIGHTED Points:

- **CRP Updates**
 - National acreage statutory cap = 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
- **Continuous CRP Signup 63**
 - Signup started May 12, 2025
 - Offers will go through batch processing
 - June 6 = deadline to submit for 1st batch processing
 - Additional batching periods announced dependent on acreage availability
 - Enrollment types: Continuous, CLEAR30, FWP, HELI, SAFE, Platte-Republican CREP
 - Interim Conservation Plans are authorized
 - All contracts will have a 10/1/2025 start date
- **General CRP Signup 64**
 - Signup: May 12 – June 6, 2025
 - Competitive process using ranking (EBI)
 - Interim Conservation Plans are authorized
 - All contracts will have a 10/1/2025 start date
 - Land Eligibility Requirements for General CRP:
 - Planted to an ag commodity 4 of the 6 crop years 2012-2017
 - Meet one of the following:
 - Weighted average erodibility index of the 3 predominant soils is 8 or greater
 - Expiring CRP – 9/30/2025 expiration
 - Located in a Conservation Priority Area
 - Same priority areas
- **Payment Rates for FY25**
 - 3 Groupings
 - No Inflationary for Climate Smart adjustment
 - CLEAR30 reduced
- **Other CRP Updates**
 - No authority date for TIPS or Migratory Bird SAFE
- **Approved Counties for ECP FY2025**
 - Keya Paha (June 2024 flooding)
 - Custer (Dec 2024 fires & February 2025 fires)
 - Lincoln County (October 2024 & March 2025 fires)

Q: Grassland CRP?

A: A release came out May 12. There will be a signup, but future details to be announced.



NRCS PROGRAMS UPDATE: *Conor Ward – NRCS Acting ASTC-Programs*

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
 - No new IRA Obligations in FY25
- **General EQIP Farm Bill Fund Obligations**
 - 98% funds preapproved
 - 78% of funds obligated
- **General CSP Farm Bill Fund Obligations**
 - 98% funds preapproved
 - 48% of funds obligated
 - General allocation breakout
- **IRA Obligations**
 - No new contracts executed using FY25 IRA funds
- **State Wildfire Initiative**
 - Managed using ACT NOW guidance.
 - Application Deadline is June 6, 2025
 - \$1.73M funds available
 - Approved applications = almost \$1.62M
 - Funded Practices: cover crops, prescribed grazing, mulching
- **FY25 CSP Classic and Prior Year Funds**
 - \$13.4M currently being obligated (120 contracts)
 - Also received \$9.9M prior year funds (70 additional CSP contracts)
- **CSP Renewals**
 - Taking applications through June 20, 2025

- **NWQI (National Water Quality Initiative):**
 - Annual partner meetings Feb – May
 - Partners include: NRD, NDEE, Local, Area and State NRCS
- **Local Work Group Meetings**
 - Wrapped up in March
 - Resource concerns at local level
 - Soil erosion
 - Soil quality degradation
 - Excess water
 - Practice recommendation - Virtual Fencing will be offered in FY26
- **RCPP**

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 1/17/25
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	FBIB	\$15,000,000	Obligated 3/28/25
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)	Inter Tribal Buffalo Council	AFA	IRA	\$16,000,000	In Negotiation

- **AFA -Growing & Expanding Nebraska's Grassland Cores – NFC**
 - Alternative Funding Agreement with lead partner takes on the bulk of the administration
 - NRCS responsible for the environmental evaluation

Q: NONE



FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT & MITIGATION TOOL: *Lindsay Hovey – State Wetland Technical Specialist, NRCS*

HIGHLIGHTED Points:

- **What is FAM?**
 - Developed to assist in planning onsite and offsite wetland mitigation
 - For when a person wishes to restore a wetland or convert a wetland and move it somewhere else

- **Benefits**
 - Nationally consistent and defensible method to determine mitigation requirements
 - Provides greater customer service with consistent and timely responses
 - Considers multiple variables to quantify the quality of the wetlands
- **What do we do?**
 - Assess & score project site
 - Hydrology - Connectivity
 - Micro-topography - Proximity
 - Land use - Hydrogeomorphic (HGM)
 - Vegetation
 - Functional Capacity Index – deemed important by Congress
 - Wildlife habitat
 - Sequestration
 - Flood water storage
 - Compare index scores to get a ratio for each of the wetland functions
 - Tool calculates how many acres need to be mitigated to assure those functions are recovered

Q: What is the next step?

A: It will be posted on the eFOTG, and we will start to fully utilize the FAM tool.

Q: Do you pull the necessary information from map layers or do you go to individual sites.

A: We go onsite to measure and score these as well as GIS to understand the connectivity of wetlands in the area.



MASTER IRRIGATOR: *Crystal Powers – Nebraska Extension*

- **Master Irrigator vs. TAPS**
 - TAPS already existed in Nebraska
 - Developing how we want this to look across a 5state region
- **Master Irrigator Themes**
 - Irrigation
 - Soils & Fertility
 - Protecting Nebraska's soil & water
 - Transforming farm data into decisions

- **Discussions with Growers – to guide curriculum**
 - What do growers want to learn?
 - How do growers want to learn?
 - Proposed Master Irrigator Structure – 3-year certification
 - 30 hours - How will this look?
 - **Next Steps**
 - Farmer advisory board meeting – June 20
 - Planning committee ongoing
 - Open registration October
 - In-person cohort – Winter 2025
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Q: What does the peer-to-peer cohort look like?

A: It's up to our curriculum committee. It's intended to be very interactive.

Q: How do the hours compare to a master beekeeper, master gardener certification?

A: I have looked, and the hours are less, but require service hours so in total the obligated hours are very similar.

Q: Would this be a draw for those hosting people from other countries that come to learn about irrigation?

A: We have been talking about that from the beginning and on the international student side of it.

PARTNER UPDATES:

- **Andrew Tonnies – Center for Rural Affairs**
 - First conservation mentorship field days schedule -July 31, Ogallala
 - Flyer to be posted on website: <https://www.cfra.org/>
- **Craig Romary - NDA**
 - With FSA reductions in CRP – possible incentive for an application in the *Nebraska Buffer Strip Program*
 - Request assistance from FSA & NRCS to promote NE Buffer Strip Program, there is funding available, potential in partnering.
 - Field day coming on Prairie Strips, June 17 in Craig, through Extension faculty
 - See Pheasants Forever website for list of field day series
- **Jenny Prenosil - NE Game & Parks**
 - Wildlife Subcommittee at NRCS on June 18, 9 am

- **Roric Paulman**
 - Proceeding with partnerships across multiple NRDs
 - Nitrogen has gone up as an input by 50% in some areas
 - Continuing to bring advancements with new ideas & software
- **Shelly Kelly – Sandhills Task Force**
 - NE Range Youth Camp scheduled next week – 4 days in Chadron
 - 16 interns in the Sandhills Ranch Internship Program
- **Andy Bishop - Rainwater Basin Joint Venture**
 - Thank you for allowing us to extend the (WREP) Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership application period.
 - 17 Applications, 5 eligible playas, 9 eligible in the WREP
 - National Fish & Wildlife Foundation grants have been instrumental in us purchasing 3 prescribed mobile burn units. Also, preliminary approval for another grant to purchase 2 more burn units.
 - USGS & NRDs are making great strides in ground water quality improvements.
 - All of these could not be accomplished without NRCS staff support.
- **Mark Brohman - Wachiska Audubon Society**
 - Grassland Restoration Field Trip: June 18, 9 am – 12 pm at Klapka Prairie, Table Rock
- **Jennifer Swanson – NARD**
 - *Producer Connect*: A new online platform that the NRDs have developed to help submit crop report forms in the phase two and higher areas. Also provides a nitrogen recommendation to producers based on the data that they submit.
 - NRD staff are trained and signing up producers for the 2025 crop reporting season.
- **Larkin Powell - UNL – School of Natural Resources**
 - Workforce development: Thank you for the feedback that has helped us better align requirements for Fisheries & Wildlife & Environmental majors for those applying for federal jobs.
 - Continuing education: conservation, agriculture, non-thesis master's program classes are available online for those that can't get to classes on campus.
- **Elbert Traylor – NDEE**
 - Governor signed off on merging DNR & DEE. Beginning July 1, we will be the Dept of Water, Energy & Environment.
- **Craig Romary - NDA**
 - Registration is open for Nebraska Chapter SWCS annual meeting in Lincoln – June 24-26.

- **Andrew Tonnies**
 - Nebraska Grassland Conference is coming up in a few weeks.
 - **John Hansen – Nebraska Farmers Union**
 - Summer board meeting coming
 - Looking at how the budget reconciliation impacts our farm bill marks. Make sure our interests are represented and hopefully get a permanent farm bill solution.
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WRAP UP

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