

STAC Meeting Minutes

July 10, 2025

Virtual Meeting

Meeting Opened at: 9:30 AM

Introduction: Nick Vira, NRCS State Partnership Liaison

Attendance: 35 Virtual Attendees: Dave Rose, NRCS; Nick Vira, NRCS; Angie Reseland, WDFW; Heather Wendt, WACD; Larry Cochran, Palouse CD/SCC; Doug Rushton, Thurston CD/WACD/NACD; Brian Cochran, WSCC; Cameron Stoflet, Spokane Tribe; Randal Chipman, Northwest Horticultural Council; Daryl Williams, Tulalip Tribe; Elsa Bowen, Lincoln County CD; Andrea Cox WAWG; Michael Crowder, Ducks Unlimited/Benton CD; Chris Clemems, NRCS; Robert Compton, Northwest Region Bureau of Indian Affairs; Dani Gelardi, WSDA; Lynelle Knehans, NRCS; Kara Kaelber, Franklin CD; Kelsi Potterf, Franklin CD; Matt Harris, WA Potato Commission, Steven Lee, NRCS; Bella Padget, Ducks Unlimited; Stan Hoffman, DOH; Misty Seabolt, NRCS; Todd Baldwin, Kalispel Tribe; Nick Peak, EPA Region 10; Jennifer Boie, Palouse CD; Brandy Reed, Whatcom CD; Caleb Gwerder, Washington Farm Bureau; Jon Wyss, FSA; Michael Isensee, Dept. of Agriculture; Jonalee Squeochs, Yakama Nation; Dan Larsen, Kitsap CD; Carrie Brausieck, Agroforestry Northwest; Peter McBride, NRCS.

Opening Remarks: Dave Rose, Acting NRCS State Conservationist

- Dave has been the acting Assistant State Conservationist for Management & Strategy since April, and he is filling in for Roylene this week as Acting State Conservationist. Dave welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

Local Working Group Annual Report: Nick Vira, NRCS Partnership Liaison

- The Local Working Group (LWG) process has concluded for the year.
- LWGs are comprised of producers, agriculture or environmental groups, tribes, units of government, conservation district board members, FSA County Committee and CED, cooperative extension, local elected officials, and others with an interest in conservation.
- There are 10 LWGs in Washington State and 1 Tribal LWG.
- The Annual Report can be found on NRCS' website:
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/stateoffices/washington/washington-local-workinggroups>
- The dates for the 2026 LWG meetings will be set by January, with meetings held by mid-May.
- Changes to the LWG process included increased allocations for one fund pool per LWG.
- Next year, LWGs will also be asked to help identify state initiatives, including a new NWQI Watershed. CDs and tribes can help create the watershed plan. NWQI Watersheds receive a dedicated funding pool for implementation of the approved plan.
- LWGs will be asked where the money should be spent.
- 7 new LWG project proposals for \$27 million are waiting on funding to be allocated.

Programs Update: NRCS Misty Seabolt, Acting ASTC for Programs

FY26 EQIP

- If we don't get a new Farm Bill or a policy doesn't change, States are allowed to select up to 10 conservation practices that will receive the highest payment rate, 90%.
- NRCS proposed changes for FY26 Top Ten practices:
 - ADD 314 Brush Management
 - ADD 449 Irrigation Water Management
 - REMOVE 329 Residue & Tillage Management, No Till
 - REMOVE 391 Riparian Forest Buffer
- The reason for the proposed changes is that NRCS receives more applications than they can fund for 329, so removing it from the top ten practices will reduce the cost-share rate from 90% to 75%, allowing more producers to participate. With the Washington State Conservation Commission's new Riparian Grant Program, NRCS is not seeing significant sign-ups for practice 391.
- NRCS is also proposing to adjust the statewide questions. Adding a prioritization question that would rank producers lower if they had a contract:
 - terminated for cause within the participant's control; or
 - the applicant failed to implement by the date agreed to on the NRCS-CPA-153; or
 - the applicant failed to meet the O&M requirements for the lifespan of the conservation practice contained within active or completed contract(s).

Action Item: Send Nick Vira comments at Nick.Vira@usda.gov on the proposed changes by **July 24th**.

FY25 EQIP Contracting Status

- There is a hold on the remaining, unobligated IRA funds until further notice (no new contracts).
- NRCS can proceed with Farm Bill-funded contracts/obligations/modifications.
- Currently, there are 2,736 applications for EQIP and CSP.
- Thirty million dollars allocated to EQIP and approximately ten million dollars allocated to CSP. Numbers are changing daily.

Ecological Sciences Update: Steven Lee, NRCS

- There are proposed revisions to several practice standards:
 - Access Control (Code 472)
 - Controlled Traffic Farming (Code 334)
 - Irrigation Canal or Lateral (Code 320)
 - Irrigation Ditch Lining (Code 428)
 - Irrigation Field Ditch (Code 388)
 - Open Channel (Code 582)
 - Pest Management Conservation System (Code 595)

- Pumping Plant (Code 533)
- Waste Treatment Lagoon (Code 359)
- Waste Recycling (Code 633)
- Wildlife Habitat (Code 645)
- Public Comment is being accepted on the proposed practice standard revision until 7/30/2025. Announcement: Federal Register_NRCS-2025-0004. Go to <http://www.regulations.gov> and search for Docket ID “NRCS-2025-0004”. Follow the online instructions for submitting comments.
- 6 national draft practice standards are under internal review by NRCS: 319, 381, 395, 450, 513, and 605.
- There are several updated practice standards and associated documents that have been added to the Washington State Field Office Technical Guide:
 - Conservation Cover (327)
 - Cover Crop (340)
 - Forest Farming (379)
 - Fuel Break (383)
 - Fire Break (394)
 - Range Planting (550)
 - Tree/Shrub Pruning (660)
 - Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)
- Additional Washington State Field Office Technical Guide updates include:
 - New High Tunnel (325) Guidance Document (GD) & Implementation Requirement (IR)
 - Conservation Cover (327) – Implementation Requirement release 10/1/25
 - Critical Area Planting (342) – Implementation Requirement release 10/1/25
 - Windbreak (380) IR has been revised to include a client signature box (previously not included in IR) and updated practice installation and certification language.
 - Fence (382) – IR for “Power – Permanent”
 - Riparian Forest Buffer (391) IR and GD were developed. Waiting for technical documents to be completed/revised with anticipated release of Oct 2025.
 - Pasture and Hay Planting (512) IR – scheduled release 10/1/25
 - Drafting on Interim Conservation Practice Standard (ICPS) for Range Riding

Wildlife Update: Peter McBride, NRCS & Angela Reseland, WDFW

- On June 4th, the STAC Wildlife Subcommittee met to develop a charter and procedures for how the committee will operate moving forward.
- The group verified membership, with at least five members not continuing, so there are vacancies. There is a need for conservation district and tribal representation on the committee.

Action Item: Let Nick Vira know if you are interested in serving on the STAC Wildlife Subcommittee. There is no deadline, but it is best to decide by **July 24th**.

- Sage Grouse surveys were conducted this spring. Based on the survey data, the subcommittee is not recommending changing the map that was proposed in May.

- WDFW took the lead on the surveys and mapping.
- The new map has been submitted to the Working Lands for Wildlife Program and will start being used in FY26.
- Past programmatic work has been done in the core areas shown on the new map.

Engineering Policy and Updates to National Engineering Manual: Lynelle Knehans, NRCS

- The National Engineering Manual (NEM) sets national policy on safety, review processes, etc.
- Each state can and must add supplements to the National Policy. The supplements for Washington State can be found here:
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/stateoffices/washington/washington-engineering>
- Washington currently has 21 supplements, most of which were updated in 2018.
- Lynelle came aboard in June 2024, and as the new State Engineer, she is reviewing the supplements. Today, she is bringing forth 5 updates and 1 new supplement.
 - WA 501 Subpart A –Review and Approval Compliance of Engineering Work with Laws and Regulations ~ Minimal Changes
 - WA 503 Subpart A –Engineering Activities Affecting Utilities ~ There were significant changes to this supplement to clarify when documentation is needed and to give flexibility to designers to approve other 811 wording if the design is not an internal NRCS design.
 - WA 503 Subpart B –Public Safety at Structure Sites ~ Minimal Changes
 - WA 503 Subpart C –Safety During Geologic Investigations Safety Requirements for the Drill Rig ~ New as NRCS has a drill rig for soil investigations.
 - WA 505 Subpart B –Procedures ~ Minimal Changes
 - WA 506Subpart A–Development and Distribution of Technical Materials ~ No changes, just re-releasing
- Supplements are available upon request for review. Comments on any supplements can be sent to lynelle.knehans@usda.gov.

Action Item: Let Lynelle Knehans know if you would like to review or comment on any of the proposed supplement updates. Comments are due by **January 1, 2026**.

Partner Update – USDA Farm Service Agency: Jon Wyss, State Executive Director

- FSA is in the final stages of the CREP audit. Revised contracts and plans have been sent to the local offices and will be sent to landowners by July 15th. Many of the plans have updated planting requirements, so landowners will want to review the plans to determine if and how they will implement them.
- As of yesterday, all of the SAFE, CRP, and CREP bids have been reviewed. All but 45 were accepted. 15 of those not accepted were in Douglas County because they have hit their acreage cap. Many of the bids that were rejected were in SAFE. They were rejected because they did not meet the stand species or density requirements. FSA/NRCS tried to move as many of those as they could over to regular CRP, but again, they hit the acreage cap in Douglas County.
- We are getting close to the National cap on CRP. Once that cap is hit, there will be no new enrollments in CRP.

- FSA is working with NRCS to look at the density and species requirements in the less than 10-inch precipitation zone. At the next STAC meeting, FSA will be requesting the STAC to consider moving from a density of .8 to .5 sq ft in counties that have less than 10 inches of rainfall. We do need to consider the implications of weed pressure.
- CRP plans need to be signed and submitted to FSA by September 1st.
- FSA will also be reaching out to the STAC Wildlife Subcommittee to discuss the required species mix for Sage Grouse priority areas (do we need that many species, and are they the right species). Having these conversations now will hopefully limit the number of contracts that are cancelled due to not meeting standards for species and density.
- In addition, the STAC will be asked to consider aligning FSA's policy with the State's policy on livestock killed by wolves. Currently, the state pays out if the kill is confirmed or probable. FSA only pays out on confirmed kills. The proposed change would align the policies to pay out from both sources for confirmed or probable kills.
- Lastly, we discussed CDs' signing of CRP plans. Per Jon, the producer assumes the liability when they sign the plan. As with CREP, NRCS and the CDs were not held liable when the plans were cancelled by FSA.

Closing Remarks: Dave Rose, Acting NRCS State Conservationist

Dave thanked everyone for attending and for providing input to NRCS.

Meeting Closed at: 11:36 AM