

LONG RANGE PLAN-  
FOR THE FOCUSED  
CONSERVATION  
APPROACH (FCA) TO  
THE ENVIRONMENTAL  
QUALITY INCENTIVE  
PROGRAM (EQIP)

Prepared by: USDA-NRCS-April 2016

Elk Conservation  
District (ECD)-  
Nicholas, Braxton,  
Clay, and Webster Co.

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## **Introduction**

### **General Information**

The Elk Conservation District (ECD) is comprised of Braxton, Clay, Nicholas, and Webster Counties. It is located in the central part of WV, with the geographic center of the state located in Braxton Co. The total acreage of the ECD is approximately 1,323,000 acres (2,067 sq. miles). The counties of this District fall primarily within the Eastern Allegheny Plateau region land resource area with a lesser portion (in Nicholas and Webster Co.) falling in the Cumberland Plateau and Mountains region. The area of the District ranges in elevation from 641' near Queen Shoals (Clay Co.) to 4,200' (Webster Co.) above sea level. With the lower elevations being in the western part and the higher elevations being in the eastern part of the District. The topography of the ECD is a highly dissected landscape, with steep side slopes, with fairly narrow ridge tops, and fairly narrow flood plains overall.

The ECD is drained entirely by the Elk, Gauley, and Little Kanawha Rivers, with their larger tributaries of the Meadow, Birch, Cherry, Williams, Cranberry, and Holly Rivers and their lesser tributaries. All of which (excluding the northern part of Braxton County which is drained by the Little Kanawha) are part of the Kanawha River System. The Elk, Gauley, and Little Kanawha Rivers are all dammed by the Army Corp of Engineers primarily for flood control and water augmentation on the Kanawha and Ohio Rivers. These form Sutton, Burnsville, and Summersville (the largest lake in WV) lakes.

### **General Soils Information**

In the Elk Conservation District, with there being four counties and a varied landscape, the region does have some similarities and generalities when it comes to soils. The landscape is overall deeply dissected with small and large streams, with steeper upland slopes and narrow ridgetops. The soils that are present on the uplands tend to be higher in clay content, with Gilpin, Upshur, Pineville, Buchanan, being some of the more common. On the lower lying areas along the more narrow floodplains the soils tend to be more loamy and richer, with higher organic matter, with Lilly, Cateache, Pope, and Monongahela being some of the more common map units. See the Web Soil Survey for Nicholas, Webster, Braxton, and Clay counties for more detailed soils information.

### **Demographics and Socio-Economics**

The population of the Elk Conservation District is approximately 58,065 (2014) which is about 3 % of the states total. Since 2010 the ECD has lost 2.5% of its population. As far as race demographics are concerned, the ECD is very homogenous. It is comprised of 98% white, 1% Hispanic, and less than 1% black. The average household income in the ECD is \$33,145.00, with the poverty rate being approximately 23%. Current unemployment levels in 2016 are at 12%, which is nearly 5% higher than the national

average. This is due to the current economic downturn in the coal, oil, and natural gas industries. The number one employer in all four counties is the Board of Education, with other major employers being the Summersville Regional Med. Center, Wal-Mart Stores Inc., Weyerhaeuser, Columbia, Superior Coal, and Alex Energy. With the largest industries being coal mining, oil/natural gas production, and timber.

### **Common/Important Agricultural Enterprises**

The Elk Conservation District has approximately 1,434 farmers operating 963 farms (Nicholas=393, Braxton= 386, Clay=114, Webster=70) located within its boundaries, comprised of 175,005 acres. This is about 5% of WV total farm acreage (the District is comprised of 85% forest overall). Total commodity sales are just over \$10 million, of which \$8.1 million is from livestock sales. The most common agricultural enterprises consist of grass based agriculture (pasture and hay), primarily for beef cattle, with some small ruminants such as sheep and goats. There is very little traditional row crop agriculture now, and there are no significant dairy farms located within the District. The District has seen an increase in recent years of “truck crops” (fruit and vegetable) being grown, both conventionally and in seasonal high tunnels, for local sales to schools etc. and farmers markets.

### **Conservation Work- Past and Present**

Traditionally and currently, the most common conservation work in the Elk Conservation District deals with grass based livestock agriculture. Typical farms in these counties tend to consist of steeper hillside pasture, with hay meadows on the ridge tops or in the bottoms. Most farms are dissected by one or more perennial or intermittent streams. Most farms also contain small to large woodlots within the farm boundaries. Therefore, most conservation work and practices have dealt with pasture management, livestock water and winter feeding concerns, as well as water quality issues related to livestock in and around streams and woodland. In more recent years there has been some focus on practices to improve forest land, wildlife habitat, and increase the production of locally grown fruits and vegetables.

The most common conservation practices that have been installed in recent years to address resource concerns caused by livestock are livestock water developments (springs, ponds, wells, pipelines, troughs), pasture management practices to improve pasture conditions and reduce erosion (prescribed grazing, nutrient management, brush management, division fence, forage and biomass planting, heavy use area protection, and waste storage facilities), and practices to improve the impact of livestock on sensitive areas (fence, use exclusion).

The ECD is comprised of over 85% forest (WV is approximately 77%), with Webster Co. being the most forested county in the state, and for years it was thought that we should be doing more conservation work in this area. One of the handicaps to this is that a

good percentage of this land is industrial private forest land (larger timber companies) and a significant acreage is located within the boundaries of the Monongahela National Forest.

In recent years more work has been done on forestland than ever before as far as conservation and management is concerned. Common practices for improvement on forest land include: use exclusion, fence, timber stand improvements (thinning, grapevine removal), brush management, tree and shrub site preparation, and tree planting. There has also been interest in wildlife habitat practices, especially for game species that may be in decline, and to a lesser degree species that may be threatened. These practices include many of those listed above for manipulation of woodland habitat to suit the specific species the landowner is interested in.

In recent years (last four or five) there has been a great interest within the ECD (statewide and nationally) in locally grown produce. This has been especially true in the last two years, with many more people growing fruits and vegetables to sell locally within the District. The common practices that have been used on these small cropped areas include, seasonal high tunnels, mulching, irrigation water management, and micro-irrigation. These small local producers are really quite important due to the lack of grocery stores throughout the District and thus the access to fresh produce (“food desert”).

Most of these practices have been successful and have benefitted the resource concern that they were intended to. Especially the pasture management practices and the forest stand improvement practices. It would be easier to list the ones that have not. The practices that have not had as much benefit are those related to winter feeding of livestock, and of those primarily “feed pads” and waste storage facilities. That is not to say that these practices are not needed or beneficial, it’s just that overall people have tended to be poor managers of these facilities and for the cost of installation it is believed that the benefit is not as great.

It should also be mentioned that within the District there are several watershed projects that were installed 50+ years ago in order to protect areas of the ECD from flooding, or at least reduce its impact. These have been very successful, and so far are still functioning well, and are being maintained.

## **Partnerships**

There are many well established partnerships within the Elk Conservation District. These partnerships include first and foremost, the Elk Conservation District Board. NRCS works with them on a routine basis with watershed projects, local work group meetings, conservation programs (both agency's), and field days.

Other partnerships include the Farm Service Agency (FSA) whom we work with to establish farm record and producer eligibility requirements for programs. We also have quarterly FAC committee meeting with them to discuss various issues within the District.

NRCS has a very good partnership with the WV Division of Forestry (WVDof) in the ECD. We currently have a shared forester position with a forester in place to assist the District specifically with forest management plans and practices. This has been an extremely beneficial position to NRCS.

WVU Extension Service has been a beneficial partner for local work group activities, outreach, and field days. They assist NRCS with various activities throughout the year.

The WV Division of Natural Resources (DNR), with whom we are going to be gaining a "shared" employee to be located within the District to help with our wildlife conservation programs. DNR also has an office located in the same building as NRCS in Gassaway which makes it handy to ask questions or get information.

Probably one of the best and most overlooked partnerships that NRCS has in all conservation districts is the local landowners and producers. Without their participation and willingness to make improvements on private land NRCS would not exist.

## **Evaluation of Resource Concerns and Program Suitability**

### **Resource Concerns**

The Elk Conservation District Local Work Group (LWG) met on Feb. 1, 2016 for the purposes of discussing and prioritizing resource concerns within the District that they would like to see addressed in the next five years. Eight different organizations/partners were represented at the LWG meeting and nearly all gave input as to what they would like to see addressed. Please see the minutes of the LWG meeting attached for a complete list of resource concerns discussed. In summary it was agreed to by the group that the major resource concerns in order of importance/priority are as follows:

- 1.) Invasive Species
- 2.) Issues related to winter feeding of livestock
- 3.) Better Pasture management/Extended Grazing/Nutrient Management
- 4.) Erosions from farm and woodland roads

- 5.) Forest Stewardship...both for timber production and wildlife
- 6.) Wildlife Fencing and Micro Irrigation for fruits and vegetables
- 7.) Use Exclusion from streams/wetland and Streambank Restoration
- 8.) Replacing/Redoing Practices already installed that are past lifespan

Other ideas were brought up and discussed but these were the ones that the group thought were of most importance. These resource concerns, the group agreed, are scattered throughout the ECD, with the higher concentration of grazing issues being in Nicholas and Braxton Counties. The local workgroup said however that they would like to focus on specific resource concerns rather than specific geographic or watershed areas, in order that people throughout the District might benefit, but also because there is not one specific location within the ECD that has a higher concentration of these concerns. Rather they are scattered throughout the ECD.

### **Addressing Individual Resource Concerns**

-Invasive species control, was the number one resource concern listed by nearly everyone in the LWG, and it is expected this is one of the major concerns statewide and even nationwide. Invasive species have cost millions of dollars in damages to both farms and woodlands in the state through loss of productivity on both land uses. They have also displaced many native and more desirable species of plants and animals. This is overall the biggest problem mentioned when talking with landowners.

NRCS has practices, primarily brush management and herbaceous weed control that can address this problem on both agricultural land and forest land. It is something that is needed and wanted by nearly every landowner, and natural resource organization. The problem is, as discussed by the LWG, that even though individual landowners can address invasive species control, it has, in the past, been deemed effective only with people who are willing to treat the concern on a routine basis, and that the concern never totally goes away, because it is so widespread. It is also thought by the group that there would never be enough funding available to get enough people to control invasive species significantly to reduce them on anything other than small acreages. The cat is out of the bag so to speak and it is unclear if there are any better control measures on the horizon. Until there are, it may be that this problem continues to get worse as there seems to be no end. It can be addressed through EQIP, but to more or lesser degrees of effectiveness.

The greatest degree of effectiveness has seemed to have been on woody invasive species in forest settings. The LWG decided that if this resource concern is to be addressed it should be on forest land use. Primarily the focus is to be on tree-of-heaven, autumn olive, Japanese barbary, and multiflora rose, on forested landuse.

Livestock winter feeding issues were the next biggest resource concern as determined by the LWG. This is a problem that causes soil erosion and animal waste issues, which in turn cause water quality problems. This is large problem due to our growing season which is approximately 180 days, our humid climate, and the fact that more mechanization is used in the processing and feeding of hay (ie. round bales). We have many practices that can and do address this, and they are too numerous to list. Many if not most of them have been, or can be very effective. The group agreed, that while many like the winter feeding areas/waste storage facilities (WSF) that we have constructed, they have been misused and mismanaged, and would like to see agronomic practices used to address this concern rather than the more expensive winter feeding/wsf. This can and has been done, and has been very effective, and can be addressed effectively through EQIP. Therefore, for this resource concern priority will only be given to those who want to address this resource concern by way of management and agronomic practices.

Better Pasture Management as a resource concern has been a large focus of NRCS's work for a long time. Again, we have many practices that can deal with this concern effectively, and many of these have been implemented, in the past, and led to much better pasture management. One of the practices that is somewhat controversial, that nearly everyone mentioned they would like to see more of is nutrient management. Controversial because this alone often times does not fully address the resource concern. With most in the LWG only referring to the application of lime and fertilizer. This in only one of many, maybe even more effective, practices that can be implemented for better pasture management. Some include, water developments, division fencing, and prescribed grazing to name a few. The LWG feels though that this is a concern that should continue to be addressed, in the ECD, and that it can be addressed effectively, both through EQIP and also the Elk Conservation District's AgEP program. The nutrient management portion of this concern will continue to be addressed by way of the AgEP program. The LWG has decided that with this resource concern(s), priority will be given to individuals who have already addressed their nutrient management needs through AgEP or on their own. Priority will also be given to landowners who will be addressing resource concerns through EQIP and AgEP that will get the farm to RMS level of conservation on the farm. We would like to see contracts for this concern implemented on a per farm basis, of approximately 50 farms over a five year period. This would be approximately 25% of those who have participated in the AgEP program since its inception (3 years ago). It is believed that this is a manageable amount based on annual funding levels and program participation as well as staffing needs.

Erosion Specifically from Farm and Woodland Roads is a problem that has long needed to be addressed more significantly. It has been addressed in a very limited fashion to this point. It has been and continues to be a big resource concern in the ECD (and most

places). This concern causes not only gullies and rill erosion but also water quality issues with sediment and turbidity. Not to mention that the roads often become impassable and not useable. We have practices such as heavy use area protection, drainage practices, and critical area seeding that can all address this concern under the EQIP program. One of the things that was brought up in this discussion is the fact that many of these farm roads are being eroded because of oil and gas drilling operations. Priority is to be given to roads that are primarily used for agriculture or farm operation needs. It is thought by the group, that most (maybe 75%) of the farms in the District have some resource concern, primarily erosion, related to their farm roads.

Forest Management (stewardship) is a concern that is important to the entire ECD, as the District (and state) are so heavily forested. While there are people that have stewardship plans, many more are needed and desired, and many more timber stand improvement practices are needed to address better timber production, control of invasive and less desirable species, and wildlife habitat (primarily early successional habitat). We have numerous practices that can and do address this resource concern, and this can be addressed through EQIP, and in fact already is, but to a lesser degree, because this part of EQIP never gets funded to the degree that agriculture concerns do, even though there is much more forest land than agricultural land. Also, there is a problem getting forest stewardship plans written, as WVDOP is understaffed to meet the demand. So there is a need here certainly. Even though we have practices to address this, and EQIP addresses this concern, it was mentioned that perhaps we assist landowners financially in hiring a consulting forester to come in and write a management plan, since that seems to be a large hang up, as there are too few DOF foresters to do all that work, and in visiting with them, they have a backlog of these that in some cases goes back many years.

Wildlife Damage/Micro-irrigation for small fruit and vegetable producers was a concern that was brought up by one individual, but agreed on by the entire LWG. All agreed that more needs to be done to assist and encourage production of local fruit and vegetable producers. While high tunnels have become popular, with many more being installed in recent years, there is still more production “outside”. The major limiting factor to producing fruits and vegetables in the ECD is wildlife damage, and the major damage comes from deer. In the past, under EQIP, “deer fence” was a practice that could be assisted with. That was only for a very short time, and it is no longer an option with EQIP. The LWG would like to see this come back. It is needed and desired throughout the ECD. Also, with the increase in vegetable crops in the area, irrigation, especially more efficient forms of irrigation, are needed and desired. This is something that we can currently help with under AMA and EQIP programs, but only to a small degree. Since we no longer have “deer fence” as an option under EQIP this will have to be addressed by NRCS programs and resource staff. This resource concern will be addressed again at that time, with details to follow, if this can be addressed by those people.

Use Exclusion protection of streams, wetlands, and other sensitive areas is a very hot topic in the ECD, and with the LWG. The reason being is that there is an active Farm Bureau throughout the ECD and they have received information about proposed, and passed, rules and regulations the Army Corp of Engineers, EPA, and USF&W would like to see implemented regarding waters of the US and what can be done in and around these. Some of their concepts are believed to be a misunderstanding or a misinterpretation, but some of the concerns are legitimate. However, this has been, and continues to be a resource concern within the districts, with few people wanting to address it, without a larger incentive to do so. It may be that these regulations force this to happen, and if that is the case, there will be a great financial and technical assistance need within the District. There already is, however it has been difficult for NRCS to get folks interested in practicing use exclusion to a larger degree as folks hate to take any land out of production. Perhaps if there was a larger incentive they would be more willing. Regardless this is a major concern, and it can be addressed through the EQIP program. It is believed that between 75%-90% of all farms in the District have some form of water body/stream/wetland on them. This resource concern is one that could be addressed on nearly every farm. It is believed that while this is major concern in the District, participation is likely to be low unless landowners are forced by regulations to do this. The LWG deemed that this resource concern be revisited at a later time, possibly in a year to determined need, and learn more about regulation.

Miscellaneous Concerns were brought up by the LWG, such as Replacing Existing Practices that have reached or exceeded their lifespan and are no longer functioning has long been something that landowners have wanted, and continue to, and this was discussed at length with the LWG. However, it has been NRCS policy through EQIP that we cannot pay for the installation of the same practice on the land unit for the same purpose once we have already done so. Currently, we cannot address this though EQIP, as it would take a policy change. However, all are in agreement that this might be a good idea that would help for continued conservation where it was already established, but has fallen into a state of disrepair. Relaxed standards and specifications was another item recommended by several in the LWG. This was discussed and NRCS explained why the standards were the way they were, and that in some cases they were changed or modified periodically. Predator control for livestock was mentioned as a special concern. This issue was discussed only briefly as this is something that NRCS does not assist with, but rather APHIS does.

The discussion of resource concerns was concluded by one individual remarking that we would like to see it be a goal of EQIP to address multiple land uses (pasture, hay, forest, wildlife) by focusing on a resource concern that would benefit all. The whole group agreed that this was a great idea if it could be done. An example that was given was that of invasive species, and how they often, if not nearly always, effect multiple land uses. It

was agreed that this would be taken into consideration when writing a proposals for funding.

## **Conclusion**

Of the resource concerns listed above, no less than the top seven can be addressed through EQIP. How effectively they can be addressed is a matter of debate. The number one listed concern is that of invasive species. While this is something that can be, and has been addressed through EQIP, the measures to address it have had limited impact overall. Whereas, with many of the other resource concerns listed NRCS has had a much greater impact, and it is believed if efforts are concentrated on these, can have an even bigger impact.

As to the cost of addressing the priority resource concerns listed above, that will depend on the specific aspect of the resource concern selected. It is believed that the cost will be no more and possibly even less than it has been in some cases when addressing these resource concern without the Focused Conservation Approach (FCA). With FCA, it is hoped, but remains to be seen, that conservation dollars will be directed where they are needed most, and be more effective than they have been in the past. Again, it remains to be seen, but it is hoped that this FCA will be more cost effective than EQIP in the past.

Staff resources in the Elk Conservation District, it is believed are adequate at this time. We currently have, or will soon have, individuals that specialize in nearly all disciplines that may be addressed under this FCA long range plan. We have employees with backgrounds in agronomy, agriculture, forestry, and will soon have a wildlife biologist on staff. The amount of staff is believed to be about right, except that there is always need for more program assistant type help. The type and amount of staff is also dependent on specific project proposals, approval of these, and public interest. Currently it is believed that the staff is adequate to handle the workload. NRCS will also be careful when writing proposals for funding in that they try and not over-extend themselves so that customers get adequate service.

It is believed that the current partnerships in the ECD are adequate to administer the FCA-EQIP. NRCS currently has a great working relationship with all the members of the local work group. NRCS in the ECD currently has a shared employee (forester) with the WV Division of Forestry (WVDOP), and will be gaining a shared employee (wildlife biologist) in the near future. Likewise NRCS partnerships/relationships with other related agencies such as WVU Extension Service (WVUES), the Farm Service Agency (FSA), and the Elk Conservation District (ECD) are all very good and strong. Other partnerships may be developed as needed depending on resource concerns to be

addressed, and project proposals that may be accepted. It is believed that our current partners are adequate to meet our needs.

It can be inferred, based on the major resource concerns selected by the LWG, and past experience with resource concerns that have been addressed with EQIP, that public interest and participation should be good. However, there is fear by the LWG that with this change from the old style of EQIP to the Focused Conservation Approach to EQIP, as with any change, the public will not be accepting. This remains to be seen. The LWG is aware that a somewhat similar approach to EQIP was tried several years ago, and that it was not very successful at all. It is hoped that with adequate outreach, this obstacle, if it is one, can be overcome. More outreach to the public than has normally been done, by all partners, may be required, and is anticipated, in order to gain additional public support.

There are other factors, in addition to people's resistance to change that could have an impact on the success of the FCA to EQIP. One, as mentioned above, is outreach. Getting the word out and explaining to folks what we have to offer and how EQIP will be administered may be an obstacle. People's mistrust and suspicion of government has been, and will always be an obstacle. In the case of NRCS in the ECD this has been an issue, but not a major one. It is hoped that these challenges can be met and overcome, and that the FCA can be a success. Again, this remains to be seen.

In summary, the LWG has agreed that the above listed resource concerns, listed in order of priority, be the basis for any proposals for funding that may be written and administered. The LWG said that they would like to see the FCA be based this way rather than focusing on a watershed or geographic area. The reason being that it would allow for landowners in all portions of the ECD to have an opportunity to participate. However the proposals will be detailed, and focus will be placed on one part or aspect of the larger resource concerns.

NRCS will write proposals, but only after consultation with the LWG. It is agreed on by all that resource concerns be selected for proposals for funding on the basis of their chances of being both well received by the public, and having the best chances of being successful in adequately addressing the resource concern in a given area.

Questions regarding this plan or any of the information contained here may be directed to the local USDA-NRCS District Conservationist at 304-872-1731 ext. 114.

(\*See minutes from Local Work Group meeting attached)

**Attachment:**

**Elk Conservation District-Local Work Group Meeting**

**2/1/2016**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Attendees:**

Melodie Baily-FSA

Brian Sparks-WVU Extension-Nicholas Co.

Debbie Friend-WVU Extension-Braxton Co.

John Wayne-Producer/Farm Bureau Member

Donald Burroughs-Producer/President Braxton Co. Farm Bureau

Wetzel McCoy-Producer

John Pittsenbarger-Elk Conservation District Board Member/Nicholas Co. Farm Bureau President

Mike Smalley- Elk Conservation District Board Member

Shirley Hyre- Elk Conservation District Board Member

Tyler Putzulu-WV Division of Forestry

Russell Young-WV Conservation Agency

Roy Brown-Producer/Farm Bureau

Mike Johnson-Producer/Farm Bureau

Brandon Duckworth-NRCS

Larry Greynolds-NRCS

Halley Dawkins-NRCS

Andy Sentz-NRCS (moderator)

\*17 Attendees from 8 different organizations/agencies were represented

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-Andy Sentz-DC-NRCS opened the meeting at 1:00 by handing out an outline (see attached) of what is to be discussed. He opened by giving a background of EQIP and Local Work Groups (LWG) as well as partnerships. He discussed how this used to work, how it's been working in recent years, and that NRCS goal was to get back to the old "ground up" approach to EQIP. He went on to explain how NRCS plans to administer EQIP in the future, by way of a Focused Conservation Approach (FCA), and why it is important to have LWG participation in this process early on. He explained the FCA approach and why NRCS is going to try and go this way to delivery of EQIP by using talking points discussed in previous meetings. Sentz and the rest of the group discussed fund codes (National and Regional fund codes will remain, but "regular" local fund codes will go the FCA). Questions were asked and answered by several members of the entire group and a better understanding was gained by all.

-Sentz went on further to say that the primary purpose of today's meeting was to receive input from the group (partners) in order to form a Long Range Plan (5 years) so that priorities might be established for the ECD in order that proposals for funding for future years might be drawn from. Sentz explained further the Long Range Plan, and how proposals for funding might be gleaned from it, and why it was important that the group establish these at this time.

-At that Sentz and other NRCS employees made it known that while they did have ideas about priorities in the district they really wanted input from the entire group. The group was then asked what they saw as the primary resources concerns within the district, and if they thought any one (or more) geographic areas of the district should be designated as a priority to receive funding. The meeting was then opened up to the group to respond with comments.

-Don Burroughs led off that **invasive species** were a primary concern of his, and many others agreed with this. Nearly a consensus of the group deemed this to be a priority resource concern throughout the district, and many examples were given.

-Burroughs, and Mike Johnsen discussed the fact that they thought **erosion from farm/woodland roads** was a priority resource concern. Again discussed among the group, and all agreed, especially with the increased pressure on these roads from oil and gas production.

-John Wayne brought about a good point that was more of a proposal but needs to be mentioned for the long range plan. **Issues related to winter feeding** of livestock are **one of our biggest resources concerns** on farms in the district. He would like to see funding be made available to construct hay storage facilities so that hay might be better distributed throughout a farm for feeding. Barns are expensive and folks are unable or unwilling to change where there hay storage is and therefore feed as near those storage barns as possible. This would promote better nutrient distribution, less erosion, and overall less pressure on small area and distribute pressure from livestock/equipment throughout the farm.

-Brian Sparks (and others) mentioned **nutrient management** as a priority resource concern. Others in the group said that while the ECD program for this had helped, it was not enough, and that many others would benefit from this as well. Most thought that this was as easy and beneficially thing as could be done to reduce soil erosion and improve water quality as there was.

-Sparks asked about DEP/EPA/Army Corp of Eng./USF&W regulations regarding livestock and farming activities in and around streams. He, and others felt that there is certainly a need for **use exclusion from**

**streams and sensitive areas**, but that if this was further regulated it would be an even greater priority. This was discussed by the group. NRCS employees all mentioned that regardless of any other agencies regulations this should be a priority. All agreed that it was a concern.

-The entire group agreed with the fact that we would like to see **better pasture management** throughout the district. This continues to be problem. Overgrazing and mismanaged pastures, weather due to poor management and infrastructure on farms (fencing and water). We all agree that this is a problem, but we have a hard time changing “hearts and minds” on management. The group agreed that this should be a priority and priority for any proposal encouraging division of pastures/pasture management/and in particular **rotational grazing** should be looked at near the top of the list.

-Mike Smalley brought about a concern that he has with **fencing for wildlife exclusion from crops etc.** We currently have many more small vegetable/fruit producers than we’ve had in many years. More markets are opening up each year and there seems to be more interest all the time with people wanting to raise fruit/berries and vegetables. One of the limiting factors with this is damage cause by wildlife (not just deer, as Debbie Friend mentioned). Mike stated that this is a major priority for the district and small vegetable producers, after all we are not just raising livestock here. All agreed that this is a real problem and should be addressed if possible. The fence is expensive to build and that is also a limiting factor.

-Mike Smalley said that he would like to see more **forest stewardship** being implemented on private lands. Sentz made the case by stating that WV is 78% forested, and we have a couple of the more forested counties in the state in our district. Smalley as well as many others in the group see this as a major concern in years to come for our area. Just like mismanaged pastures in our area, our forests are suffering from lack of management and this concerns **timber production as well as wildlife**. Melodie Bailey said that this had in the past been a priority for FSA (and is so to a bit lessor degree with NRCS now), and that she had lists of people who had signed up for FIP/SIP programs and that she would be willing to help us gather information on this.

-John Pittsenbarger as well as Debbie Friend, mentioned that they would like to see some encouragement of landowners to encourage **multi-species grazing**. This would give some priority to landowners with **small ruminant animals**. They would like to see/encourage more folks to get into small ruminants rather than just cattle. In this note Pittsenbarger said that he would also like to see some more means to help landowners with **predator control**. As all agreed that this is a big factor in folks not raising sheep and goats.

-Larry Greynolds and the extension agents brought about another pasture management issue along the line of winter feeding and that is **extended grazing**. If possible this is something that we’ve tried to encourage for many years with limited success in this area. All the producers in the room agreed that we should have a mechanism for encouraging more of this.

-Burroughs brought up the idea of going back and assisting folks on **replacing or implementing conservation practices already installed. Practices that have reached beyond their lifespan and need to be replaced** or re-implemented. He stated that often times these are on properties that have practiced good conservation but need financial assistance to redo some things. As this has never been allowed in the past, it may require a policy change. But all agreed that this has merit and could be very beneficial. NRCS folks noted that this is often asked for by landowners.

-Along the lines of **use-exclusion**, especially for stream, as discussed earlier, Sentz mentioned that he felt that another priority should be **stream bank restoration**. The group agreed that this was a priority concern everywhere. Sentz then stated that even though this is a concern that we all agree on, like invasive species it's a tough one to get a handle on. But it is a priority concern none-the-less. All agreed.

-Smalley and Sentz brought up the need for more assistance with more **efficient irrigation projects** for small fruit and vegetable producers. Again, as related to what was stated above with the greater number of folks growing, they have a lack of knowledge and finances to improve irrigation systems.

-Mike Johnson stated that he would like to see some of our standards and specifications/designs relaxed. Specifically on winter feeding areas. NRCS folks explained to him that this was unlikely to happen. And that while on occasion we, ourselves agree that some things may be "over designed", none of us have had a practice that was a total failure if it was installed to our standards and specifications. Also, as stated above, the entire group agreed that we would like to see better winter feeding and grazing management, and it is hoped that this will reduce the number of folks installing winter feed pads, or even the need for them.

-As related to the topic of better timber management noted above, Brandon Duckworth said that he would like to see a mechanism to pay folks to hire a consulting forester to write **forest stewardship plans** on woodland. Just like with getting folks to take soil test, or do conservation plans, it's difficult. Even more so, because even if folks are interested in a plan the local DOF landowner assistance foresters (if you have one) are covered up and have a backlog of these to do. Therefore the other option is a consulting forester, which costs the landowner, and many are unwilling or unable to afford to pay these people to write a plan.

-Sentz asked the group if there were any other priority resource concerns or concerns in general that they would like to see addressed in the long range plan. There being none, he asked if anyone had any priority geographic areas in the district that they would like to see as a priority area. There was quite a bit of discussion on this. However, it was decided at this time that the group would like to focus on specific resource concerns in the district rather than areas, so that everyone in the district might have a chance to benefit. There being no dissenting comments on this, it was agreed that that is where the focus should be.

-Sentz asked if there was anything else that should be brought before the group...questions or comments.

-Wetzel McCoy stated that he was most concerned about invasive species and primarily stilt grass. He further stated that **addressing a resource concern like that benefits many land uses, animals, etc.** Just like many of the other things brought up in the meeting, addressing the primary concern may benefit other things as well. In using stilt grass as an example, he stated that it is a problems in his woodland and affects wildlife (worthless) and timber production (reduces), and is a fire hazard. In his hay fields it has encroached and has reduced hay production. In this way it affects, timber, wildlife, plant production, and livestock feed. Everyone thought this was a great point and should be taken into consideration when writing a proposal.

-There being no further comments or discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:00pm.

