

State Technical Committee Meeting

NRCS/FSA State Office, Tolland, CT

August 31, 2016

NOTES

Participants: Tom Morgart, Joyce Purcell, Arde Ramthun, Nancy Ferlow, Javier Cruz, Amy Fisher, Garrett Timmons, Mark Edmonds, Carol Grasis, Carol Donzella, Abbie Cadman, Todd Bobowick, NRCS; Denise Savageau, CACD; Eric Thomas, Doug Emmerthal, Judy Wilson, Joe Wetteman, Rick Jacobson, DEEP; Mike O'Neill, Rich Meinert, Tom Worthley, UConn; Lois Bruinooge, TLGV; Peter Beringer, FS; Steve Weber, Lisa Wahle, WMI; Wayne Woodward, Shelley Green, TNC; Kip Kolesinskas, DOAG; Jeannie Davies, Amanda Fargo Johnson, CTRC&D; Dan Mullins, ECCD; Brian Hurlburt, FSA; Kira Jacobs, EPA

Welcome/ Introductions: Tom Morgart

Tom noted that several USDA offices had received threats which led to office closings. He reiterated that the health and safety of its employees, partners and customers was utmost important. Most offices have re-opened; the rest will open soon once security personnel arrive on-site. Five states/6 locations were affected by this threat.

Review Agenda/Review minutes (April 27, 2016)

The minutes were reviewed and accepted; no corrections noted.

Subcommittee Reports

National Water Quality Initiative Subcommittee – Eric Thomas

Eric reported that the Little River watershed continues to be a priority watershed and more work needs to be done; there are 5 contracts with Eastern CT SWCD to do projects with dairy farms; the other priority watershed is Broad Brook; the DEEP non-point sources plan shows there are six other watersheds considered priority areas. Nancy Ferlow noted that projects are being sought for the Broad Brook watershed and future priority areas are open for discussion for FY-18. DEEPs list should be out in late October.

Forest Practices Subcommittee - Mark Edmonds

Mark reported that they are looking into where to put conservation program funds, and developing a list of forest practices. Judy Wilson mentioned wildlife habitat boxes and the best places for installation as a possibility.

Easement Subcommittee – Joyce Purcell

Joyce noted the need to replace one person on the subcommittee; the group needs to review easement ranking questions; last year the committee recommended more emphasis on soils; there is a need to evaluate and plug in parcels from past years to see how they fit into the ranking tool; if large gaps are found there may be a need to set thresholds so that lower ones are first-round funded. Tom noted that NHQ is looking to do things earlier each year and gave everyone a heads up to submit best projects early.

Proposed Wildlife Subcommittee – Tom noted it is still under review.

FY 2016 Program Accomplishments – Joyce Purcell

Joyce provided an overview of FY-16 program accomplishments noting the different programs, number of applications and contracts, and their funding. An overview of the sub-accounts was also given.

FY 2017 Program Rollout – Joyce Purcell

Based upon prior year funding levels, Joyce provided a proposed allocation for FY-17. Two new initiatives are discussed: the Urban Initiative that focuses on food deserts, and the Monarch Butterfly Initiative.

CSP-2017 – Carol Grasis

Carol reviewed the new and improved CSP that will build better outcomes; based on the EQIP, and resource concern focused. A short-term sub-committee is being created and will meet soon to discuss the new program and ranking tool.

Screening Checklists – Carol Grasis

Carol noted that a new screening tool (workload management tool) is being developed to assist the field offices with their heavy workloads. A hand out on this tool was reviewed with the committee. She also noted a rollout review session will be held on September 12, 2016 at 1:00 PM.

Practice Standards – Abbie Cadman

Abbie noted that every 5 years the standards are updated, and a few committee members are needed to review them. Anyone with suggestions for new or improved standards should contact Nancy Ferlow or Abbie.

Farm Bill Program Updates

Conservation Innovation Grants – Nancy Ferlow

Nancy reported that the national grant recipients have not been announced yet; the state recipients will be notified following that announcement.

Emergency Watershed Protection – Floodplain Easement Program – Arde Ramthun

Arde reviewed the list of towns that have applied for easements and the status of each application. He also noted that it's been four years since Hurricane Sandy hit CT.

RCPP Updates – Tom Morgart

Tom gave a brief update on the Last Green Valley project; noted that the 2017 application submission closed on August 19, 2016 and those projects are currently being evaluated and ranked. The next batch is due on October 1, 2016. He also reviewed the LIS project which has multiple pieces, with the Districts and Cooperative Extension providing technical services, and the HFRP being launched by the partners.

2016 RCPP – Wildlife Multi State Project – Steve Weber

Steve reported that this multi-state project was awarded \$5.3m to enhance wildlife habitat for selected species. Their funding source is EQIP and they will be developing a ranking tool, and looking at who, what and when with DEEP. Their goal is to spend their FA quickly so that they can re-apply for additional RCPP funds with a long list of accomplishments.

Soils Update – Debbie Surabian

No report was available.

Open Discussion

Tom reviewed the program rollout process inefficiencies and how it has created a divided workforce. In an effort to improve efficiency, tools are being developed to help focus on one job at a time. He also noted the need for additional staff and the four positions that are available. It was noted that most applicants are lacking the required soils courses needed for these positions – and many universities do not offer these classes on a regular basis.

Denise noted that CACD is working on the next Farm Bill and if anyone has comments/suggestions to let her know. Issues currently being discussed are: the SAM/DUNS requirement for small farmers; the lack of requirements for solar farms and their affect on farmland preservation, and the lack of producer representation in the state water planning initiative.

Mike noted the lack of TSPs for grazing and water and nutrient management, and how confusing the TSP certification process can be.

Amanda mentioned the high attendance at the Farm Energy Tour – with over 50% being producers; the availability of \$1.4m for projects next year, and that she is working with Ray Covino on the next Soil Health workshop with the focus on organics. It will be held in early November at Massaro Farm in Woodbridge.

Kip mentioned elevating comments to the national level – consider climate change vs. resource concerns.

Tom noted that there were a few spots left for the upcoming wildlife habitat management training which will be held from September 15-18, 2016 at the Great Mountain Forest in Norfolk.

Kyra noted that the Healthy Watershed grants are now available. If anyone is interested they should contact her directly.

Nancy noted there is an opportunity for states to help develop the prototype for future conservation planning – a blend of Partner and NRCS ideas. No funding is available for this.

Joyce discussed the WRE GARC process on how the rates for easement payments are developed. CT utilizes appraisals and offers 90% of the fair market value not to exceed \$5000/acre; and bog turtle areas not to exceed \$7090/acre. NASS cropland values are utilized. This coincides with neighboring states.

Arde gave a shout out to Amanda for a great Farm Energy Tour, and mentioned the Unsung Hero award was presented to Mike Rosado in Washington, D.C.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, December 7, 2016

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:27 PM.