Colorado State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) Meeting
Minutes
September 14, 2016

Meeting Location: San Juan and Arkansas Conference Rooms
Colorado Department of Agriculture Offices
305 Interlocken Parkway, Broomfield, CO 80021

Members Present: See attached list of attendees (attachment 1)

Welcome – Randy Randall, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Welcomed everyone and thanked everyone for attending.
- Around the room partner introductions.
- During introductions, Trent Verquer, CPW, announced that the first year of avian research on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) midcontract management lands was completed and offered to share the initial results at a STAC meeting if desired.

USDA Agency Reports

- Farm Service Agency (FSA)-Cindy Vukasin (Gene Backhaus provided report in Cindy’s absence)
  - CRP Contract Management Activities: Gene shared a matrix that identified the contract management activities that could be selected for each of the CRP enrollment types. The STAC was asked for recommendations or concurrence with the activities.
    - Question: What is the desired outcome of the management activities in SAFE?
    - Answer (Gene): The outcome of SAFE is to provide wildlife habitat for the targeted species or habitat type, to have good plant diversity, and to control soil erosion. This is mandatory for all CRP acres, including tree practices.
    - Question: What does that wildlife habitat look like?
    - Answer (Gene): The desired habitat has a mix of bunch grasses, forbs (annual sunflower, clover, etc) and legumes.
  - Comments on Management Activities:
    - Willing to exclude grazing on Lesser Prairie Chicken SAFE
    - Encourage communication within the wildlife community to ensure that everyone is aware so that we do the right things
  - CRP SAFE Acreage Caps: Learned that the National FSA Office may cut off signups if they exceed the 24 million acre limit; states are not “guaranteed” the acres identified with a SAFE area.
  - Additional Questions and Concerns:
    - Question: There is confusion on criteria for a successful pollinator planting. What is the criteria?
    - Answer (Gene): Technical note criteria indicates 3-4 plants per square foot comprised of flowering plants (3 early flowering, 3 mid season flowering, and 3 late flowering) and at least 2 grasses.
    - Question: Do we need 9 species of flowering plants for success?
Answer (Gene): Need at least one flowering species from each category, but it is a professional judgement call on whether 1 to 3 may be needed from each category.

Question: How are pollinator stands doing in Colorado? We’ve heard that nationally, the success rate is not good.

Answer (Gene): They have not been very successful in Colorado to date, but we’ve gained experience in what plants are performing well in areas which is leading to improved stands.

Question: Was FSA successful in moving SAFE acres between projects?

Answer (Gene): They have submitted the request to the national office.

State Technical Advisory Committee Overview-Dawn Jackson, ASTC-Programs (NRCS)

In response to a request at the last STAC meeting, Dawn Jackson presented slides and a chart demonstrating the interaction of the Lower Work Groups and subcommittees with the STAC and the expected items or actions that each group would be asked to advise or provide recommendations toward.

NRCS Conservation Program Items – Dawn Jackson, ASTC-Programs

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Allocation Formula: Dawn presented a slide indicating the factors that would be used to develop the allocations on a watershed level basis and asked for any last recommendations before it is implemented for FY2017 program delivery.

- Recommendation – Possibly increase the credit for irrigation land from 10% to 15%, and reduce number of farms factor from 15% to 10%.
- Recommendation was received to offer points in all EQIP rankings if the participants are willing to incorporate wildlife habitat projects.
- Another member commented and cautioned against adding layers in a ranking that might affect the implementation and focus of funding with limited technical assistance.

Local Work Group Recommendation Summaries: Dawn provided a spreadsheet that summarized the information provided by Conservation District Local Work Group meetings. The information identified the two top priority resource concerns, practices or actions that were necessary to address the concerns, recommended percentage of funding for each resource concern, and any identified limitations. Dawn asked if there were any concerns or other recommendations from the STAC.

- No concerns or recommendations given.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) FY2017 Ranking Tools: A national effort is underway to revise ranking tools for the FY2017 CSP General Signup. Dawn summarized the changes and the anticipated advantages to moving away from the traditional CMT Tool for ranking program applications. The STAC was asked to break into groups and provide NRCS with recommendations on state priority resource concerns and local ranking questions.

- Results of State Priority Resource Concern exercise:
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- Water Quality Degradation
  - Nutrients in Surface Water
  - Nutrients in Groundwater
  - Salts in Groundwater

- Soil Erosion
  - Wind Erosion
  - Ephemeral Gully Erosion

- Insufficient Water
  - Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water

- Degraded Plant Condition
  - Inadequate Structure and Composition
  - Wildfire Hazard, Excessive Biomass Accumulation
  - Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health
  - Excessive Plant Pest Pressure

- Fish & Wildlife
  - Inadequate Habitat – Cover/Shelter
  - Inadequate Habitat – Habitat Continuity (Space)

- Breakout sessions provided recommendations for 5 local ranking questions for CSP.

**Defining Invasive Plant Species—Chanda Garcia, State Biologist, NRCS**
- Chanda explained to the STAC how identification of plants as ‘invasive’ affects the use of them in recommended seed mixes and other planning efforts. Colorado needed to update the list of invasive plant species. Chanda proposed identifying all the species shown on the Colorado Noxious Weed List A, B and C as ‘invasive’ species for NRCS purposes and asked for recommendations or concurrence with that proposal.
  - STAC members recommended including the Watch List Species from the Colorado Noxious Weed List and concurred.

**Committee Recommendations and Discussion**
- Steve Miller, CWCB, asked for an update on NRCS staffing. Randy indicated that Colorado has set a staff ceiling of 240 employees, and we hope to fill our 23 vacancies by January. NRCS is also looking at strategies with partners and administrative opportunities, potentially contracting for services, to address deficiencies.
- Cindy Lair, CSCB, stated her appreciation of efforts to address the backlog on clearing cultural resources for projects and asked if a partnership agreement may be an option. Gene indicated that Colorado has hired a State Archaeologist and has made an employment offer to another individual for the planned archaeologist for the eastern plains. We’ve also streamlined some clearance processes and trained field offices to help control the backlogging of work. Further, Colorado NRCS has used and can continue to use archaeological companies or organizations for heavy periods or for large, complex projects.
Next Meeting Date
Following discussion of potential dates, STAC members indicated the desire for the next meeting to be in March 2017.

Adjournment

Attachments
Attachment 1 – Attendee List
Attachment 2 – CRP Matrix of Contract Management Activities
Attachment 3 – Local Work Group Summaries
Attachment 4 – STAC Overview and Conservation Program Power Point Presentation