Idaho State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Agenda
Friday July 8, 2016
9:00 am – 3:30 pm
USDA Conference Room

- Welcome & Update – NRCS State Conservationist
  - Introductions
  - BLM, Idaho Soil & Water Conservation District, IDFG, FWS, FSA-3, State Dept. of Ag.,
  - Ducks Unlimited, Soil and Water Conservation Commission-3, Idaho Dairymen’s
  - SWCD, Governor’s Office, Idaho Dept. of Environmental Quality

Priorities for NRCS
- Soil Health – Compliance included
- Water Management – recharge
- Strengthening Our Technical Skills
- Improving efficiencies and follow-up
- Expand and Strengthen Our Partnerships
- Improving Management of the Farm Bill Programs
- Building Capacity for the Future

Conservation Innovation Grants – 15 applications were received. 11 for state, 4 for national

Working with Governor’s Office, Simplot, FWS, BLM and Idaho Dept. Lands on 150,000 acre
- parcel outside of Mountain Home (the Big Springs and Battle Creek allotments)

Special Projects – 6 projects were funded. Appeal to partners to get involved and help us with
- special projects, from proposing to implementing.

Budget looks good. Fiscal Year 2017 will likely begin with a Continuing Resolution.

Partnership agreements – currently have 90. They are helping with new projects and existing
- workloads. National office is recognizing our collaborative work. Lots of visitation by
- Washington folks.

ACEP training for entire West region coming up. Including tours of easements.

Conservation in Action Tour in August. Sec. Vilsack, Chief Weller and Regional Conservationist
- invited.

- NRCS Financial Assistance Programs – Jeanne Jasper
  - Easements – Wade Brown
    2008 Farm Bill – Good for easements in 2013 were working on a backlog of
    - 120 “Closed” easements
    40 Grasslands reserve program
    - Idaho has the greatest # of acres enrolled in the nation
    30 Wetland easements
20 Farm/Ranch Protection easements
2 Emergency Watershed Easement

2014 Farm Bill
Partners now hold the easements rather than NRCS
Several easements are close to closing
Approximately 10 easements under 2014 Farm Bill
Looking for greater consistency across how we manage those easements
Improvement of monitoring of easements
Wetland Reserve Plan of Operations

EQIP – Allocation of Funds
   Number of contracts is up this year.
   Still have to obligate some initiatives (eg SGI)
   Questions regarding clarification of different funding codes
Subaccounts for Ranking/Funding (see handout)
   Request for new/additional fund codes from Curtis
   IFG – we would like to see what fund codes planned projects we would be applicable for rather than new fund codes – work with FOs
Bruce noted the Aspen Restoration project could be a special project

Multiple Batching Periods
   Divisions – No reason for them as Idaho has plenty of high quality applications to obligate the money
   IFG – once a year is working fine
   Clarification questions
   Governor’s Office – Multiple Batching Periods prove complicated
   Consensus to leave things as is

Locally Led Workgroup
   Each Division holds these meetings to get information on what the focus/priorities should be – their input is then included in the EQIP ranking procedure
   Question to the District: How are the Locally Led Workgroups working?
   Response: was that it works to a greater or lesser extent based on the Division
   Response from IFG: Priorities can be swayed by who show up to the meetings
   Curtis: It is a work in progress. We’re trying to sell various groups on the importance of participating.

Special Projects
   Piloted in Fiscal Year 2016 -- $1 million
      13 proposals
      6 funded
   Will be continued in FY 2017 -- $1 million
      Changes:
      FOs sked for Pre-Proposal process
   Guidance for FY 2016 is expected to be released at the end of July
   Request for the guidance be sent to all members of the STAC
Question regarding whether the Conservation Districts can propose projects and partner with other organizations to leverage more money.
Question from DEQ regarding whether the monies can go to the partner to manage the project
Response: No.
Question: Can the special project be a multi-year proposal
Response: Yes, but we like to keep them to 3 years or less.
Lynn – There may be $3 million for a partnership if flow meters could be included, BUT he has to check with his board.

Future Directions
Each state can submit proposals that they would like additional program funding for. $10 million is available nationwide.

CSP – CSP Reinvention for Fiscal year 2017
Will be available online
2nd Farm Bill with CSP
Feedback:
  Hard to see where payments are coming from in the contract
  Hard to see where the points are coming from in terms of ranking
Going forward – National is working toward more transparency
  Change in screening tools -- simplified
  Once screening tools are in then the application will be ranked in a fashion similar to EQIP
70 Million acres enrolled nationwide since 2010
We doubled the acreage in Idaho FY 2015 and FY 2016
  290,000 acres in our allocation for FY2016
  Split into North and South areas for funding competition
  There are some special allocations within CSP – socially disadvantaged, beginning farmer/rancher, etc.
Question: Can NRCS host a class on this?
Response: NRCS can send out the current power point to STAC members

• Idaho Department of Agriculture Report
  Brian Oakey
  Couple of projects that are mid-to long-range programs that are important to the agency.
  Rangeland Health Monitoring – MOU with BLM to do RHM with permitees
  Noted there were a distinct lack of data collection, so decision making process was not entirely data driven. As a result: Idaho Dept. of Ag developed:
    Site selection protocols
    Data collection protocols
    Reporting on those protocols
Have more people wanting to participate than they have staff to do the monitoring. As a result, the Idaho Dept. of Ag has reached out to the Districts to help with the monitoring. Piloting the “train the trainer” system in Owyhee.

Question from Curtis on merging the state’s monitoring process with NRCS’s monitoring system.

Response: It’s possible if it meets the state’s protocols.

Idaho Dept. of Ag reports back to the State’s legislature.

Idaho One Plan – great white whale of an IT project

Chose to focus on nutrient management plan. Dept. of Ag brought that within house and they have discovered how challenging this is. Hard to keep the talented programmers. But they are making progress.

Web-based

Producers can log on and use the planner and/or store the data related to nutrient manager

Hope to have it up and running this calendar year

Database is long overdue from a regulatory standpoint, but once up and running it will hopefully improve efficiencies at all levels.

Terry – the Commission has the responsibility to promote the One Plan

Once a year there was a board meeting to update stakeholders

But there are no funds to support the recommendations of the executive committee meeting

U of I is interested in the pesticide application record keeping aspect of the old Idaho One Plan

MOU with DEQ with regards to the diary regulations

2 regulatory channels for the community. One for those with permits and one for those who do not apply for a permit.

Primarily used two standards

- Soil and Water Conservation Commission Report
  Anyone who has any concerns about where the Idaho One Plan is not going, should talk to Terry M.

Governors Trail Ride

USFS & BLM implementation of SGI

Efforts to coordinate grazing management across and USFS & BLM managed lands

IFS spoke to State Sovereignty over wolves

SWCC TA allocated to Districts for FY2017 –Breakdown of staff hours to provide assistance

SWCC FA available to Districts -- $1,353,200 appropriated to Districts

Snapshot of unmet needs for water quality projects across 8 districts: $6,570,710.

Look to SWCC, Federal, Conservation Districts, and Other funding sources

SWCC loan officer – low interest loans (state funds)

We work closely with various EQIP projects

Starting to see 319 projects

Loan Fact Sheet passed out

To illustrate things that have happened in the past 8 months

Beginning farmer program

Was up and running almost immediately
Plenty of money to loan out at present ($6 million liquid out of $10 million)
Drop in commodities prices – it will be interesting to see how conservation
lending will pan out
  Many projects are irrigation projects
  Trying to integrate more categories of conservation projects
Watching for special project opportunities with NRCS
Curtis – would it be worth approaching Ag lenders to see if they would be willing to
offer a reduced interest rate for those who have a conservation plan in place.
Response – it would be interesting to see how that would go. SWCC offered to get in
touch with Farm Credit Services

Questions

- **FSA**

  General Update – Mark Sanford
  30% fewer people – 30% more work
  Most of the offices in 29 Idaho counties are co-located with NRCS
  Currently in Idaho the state’s broadband capacity doesn’t support the amount
  of data FSA has to move
  Changes in the 2014 Farm Bill
  Direct, counter cyclical and Actual Crop Revenue Election payment changes
  Payment limitations reduced
  Adjusted Gross Income is reduced
  Improved “safety net” for Veterans, Beginning Farmers, Ranchers and
  Socially Disadvantage
  Expanding markets (direct marketing – farmers markets
  Food Hubs
  Increased reliance on Crop Insurance
  Reduced CRP to 24 million acres from 32 million
  Tied conservation compliance to all programs
  Increased Loan Availability
    Guaranteed (33 lending partners)
    Direct
    Micro (up to $50,000) very popular
    Farm Storage Facility (up to $500,000)
  CRP -- 562,000 currently enrolled (15th in nation for enrolled acres, Texas is #1 with
  3 million acres enrolled)
  Previous years 90% acceptance
  Current year 25% acceptance
  Question: Regarding how did that level compare nationally?
    Did well compared to other western states
  Mid Contract Management Practices – no more mowing
  Changes that need to be decided upon:
    Remove Integrated Wildlife Management (IWM) Practices
    Q: How is this different than best professional
    management practice?
    A: Requires them to implement an activity
Voted to remove
Changes to Managed Haying and Grazing Frequency
(From 1 in 5 years to 1 in 3 years)
It’s not very heavily used. 1 in 5 came out of a legal settlement. 1 in 3 allows for more dialogue with producer on how to manage the stand.
IFG – Have there been conversations with hay producers?
Yes. There is inevitably some push back.
Voted to change
CREP – Update and Proposal
State and Federal Program to restore water to Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer
Whole fields instead of little corners would be the way to go
21 Counties eligible
17,000 enrolled Acres
Proposal coming from Idaho Groundwater Users Assoc.
Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HELI)
History of FSA Investment in Idaho Ag
Questions related to Disaster spending
• NRCS/FSA
  HEL/WC Compliance – AD-1026 Forms and Certification
    FSA presentation by Jeremy Nalder
    Review of HELC Compliance under 1985 Act
    Hand out of AD-1026 Form – Form reviewed
    Questions on details of CREP participation
    Curtis: NRCS and FSA are taking this seriously
    We are asking landowners to be with us when we do determinations, so we can educate them.
    We are seeing more appeals.
    How do we get those who are outside the programs to come in and get into compliance?
    Dairy questions – looking for info on who is in the program?
    Curtis: We are having Food Security Act training later this summer. Other agencies and partners are always welcome.
    FSA: Change in Dairy coverage – FSA have moved to more of an insurance model.
    Once we get a couple of Dairies/Farms/ranches in each county to change over and pretty soon, all of them start coming around.

Wind Erosion Prediction (WEPS) Examples
    Travis Youngberg introduction as new NRCS State Agronomist
    What does it mean to follow a plan? A system?
    Explanation of what T and 2T mean.
    Development of the WEPS Development – started in 1985
    Adopted in February 2010
    Questions about how WEPS works with RUSL2
Questions about how WEPS/NRCS takes into account updates that change outcomes. – NRCS is supposed to do the run on both systems to see whether they agree and then make adjustments.

Question regarding “unsheltered distance”
Yes – unsheltered distance can include other fields.

Demo of WEPS
Question: Manure management – minimum tillage
   Look at critical wind periods
Question: Does WEPS take into account other regulatory concerns?
   The conservation planning process does.

Resource Assessment Tool – generates bar graph showing all areas where NRCS is trying to hit quality criteria.
Being piloted in the NWQI

Appeals
Determinations by County committee
1) Reconsideration to the COC
2) FSA State Committee (STC)
3) Mediation (Fulcrum Institute) – Contractor out of Cd’A
4) National Appeals Division (NAD) -- Regional Office is in Denver

NRCS Technical Determination:
1) FSA State Executive Director (SED)
2) National Appeals Division (NAD)
   Had a lot of these last year – mostly “out of compliance” appeals

• Status of Sub Committees
  Ron Abramovich – Climate report
  Drought Monitor Map
   Does the Drought Monitor take into account reservoir storage?
   Maps take into account entire water supply
  Idaho Drought Committee
   Water came off early – near record low flow for July in northern Idaho and western Wyoming
  Surface Water Supply Index (SWSI)
   There is interest from Idaho Power, State of Idaho and Drought Monitor to produce more SWSI’s in headwater streams and include potential surplus amounts
  2016 water supply best since 2012
  Predicted 2016 runoff will be about 92% of average
  2015 created Hydrologic Advisory Committee
   Idaho Water Resource Board approved $200,000 to investigate need for mid-elevation snow sites to improve streamflow data.
   Idaho ranks 2nd in nation in Irrigation withdrawals
   Idaho ranks 1st in region in farm GDP.
   IFG’s fisheries division may be interested in participating
Partnerships are extremely important for looking at increasing data acquisition and implementation as well as site maintenance.

- Partner Round Table Discussion
  Bill Moore – Southwest Idaho Resources Conservation and Development
  2 new weather stations in the Boise foothills to aid fire fighters
  Running 25 to 30 different projects
  Working with the tribes
  Area covered by SIRCD will expand up to McCall
  Average of $10 million in grants received annually
  GIS database on all the trees in their area has quantified the value of those trees
  Education, fuels reduction
  Working with Fish and Game on several projects
  Ranch on east end of Lake Lowell – easement Wade Brown talked about
  140 acres as perpetual farmland – lavender is the anchor crop

Request for speakers at next STAC
- Lynn T. suggested Water Resources Board
- Request from DEQ to hear from Idaho Power what are they doing in Hells Canyon and Little Snake
- Canyon or Ada District representatives
- Rick Whitely of Food Producers