

## **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 Assoc., IDA Consulting Service, Potato Growers of Idaho, The Nature Conservancy, Ada 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

2<sup>nd</sup> 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 permittees

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 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 (15<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> in nation in Irrigation withdrawals

Idaho ranks 1<sup>st</sup> 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**