

# **State Technical Committee Meeting – 9/13/2018**

**ALL POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS ARE ON THE WEBSITE.**

**You can listen to the recording of the meeting by dialing:  
877.471.6587 or 402.970.2667**

**Enter replay ID: 33950394014 to hear the first Agenda Item &  
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(There is a 5m blank time from the start of the recording to the beginning of the meeting, also unfortunately we lost service for a small period & there are 2 recordings. You can fast forward by pressing 9 & rewind by pressing 7.)

**Attendees:** Brad Soncksen, Tami Nordman, Sam Kazda, Britt Wieser, Erica Gnuse, Rick Rasby, Ed Hubbs, Mark Brohman, Elbert Traylor, Eric Zach, John Erixon, Steven Roth, Jeff Blaser, Jeremy Warner, Jerad Reimers, Wally Valasek, Marcia Trompke, Greg Whitmore, Kent Zimmerman, Sarah Heidzig-Kraeger, Lavaine Moore, Andy Baker; **via phone:** Dan Ruterbories, Andy Houser, Neil Mouseman, Mike Murphey, Dennis Schueth.

**Welcome and thank you for being here! – BRAD SONCKSEN, NRCS NE**

**RANGELAND HEALTH DEMONSTRATION RANCH INITIATIVE (Using Adaptive Management to Improve Rangeland Health) – BRITT WEISER, NRCS NE**

## **❖ NRCS PLANNING PROCESS**

- **PHASE 1: Collection & Analysis**
  - Determine Objectives
  - Identify Problems
  - Analyze Resource Data
  - Involuntary Resources
  
- **PHASE 2: Decision Support**
  - Formulate Alternatives
  - Evaluate Alternatives
  - Make Decisions
  
- **PHASE 3: Application and Evaluation**
  - Implement the Plan
  - Evaluate the Plan
  
- **All livestock producers utilize adaptive management to some extent.**
  - Example: Implementing a drought contingency plan
  - Observations of pastures to time moves
  
- **Initial adaptive management is represented by the NRCS planning process.**

- ❖ **Goal 1: Increase the Level of Adaptive Management**
  - Pro-active management
  - Utilize additional monitoring, precipitation forecasts, and other available information to change grazing plans
  - Make grazing strategy changes during the grazing season
  - Flexibility is the key
  
- ❖ **Goal 2: Evaluate the Impact of Management on Rangeland Health**
  - Soils and Site Stability
  - Hydrologic Function
  - Biotic Integrity
  
- ❖ **Goal 3: Field Trials: Compare at Two or More Management Strategies**
  - Current management compared to a new management strategy.
  - Compare two new management strategies.
  - Compare current management to several new management strategies.
  
- ❖ **Goal 4: Information Sharing / Technology Transfer**
  - Demonstrations are an integral part of the project
  
- ❖ **Project Details**
  - Funded through EQIP program.
  - Two options for management intensity
  - 5-year contracts
  - Rangeland health assessments completed at beginning and end of project.
  - Accelerated monitoring to facilitate adaptation to changing conditions and progress toward goals.
  - Monitoring techniques are determined by rancher's goals and results of the rangeland health assessment.
  - Two options for level of management:
    - Adaptive Management – Most Popular
    - Collaborative Adaptive Management
  
- ❖ **PROJECT FOCUS BY COUNTY**
  - Scottsbluff County
  - Lincoln County
  - Boyd County
  - Thayer County
  - Nuckolls County
  - Pierce County
  - Stanton County
  - Otoe County

- **Summary of Project goals**
  - REDUCE INVASION OF INTRODUCED COOL-SEASON GRASSES
  - REDUCE AMOUNT OF OTHER INVASIVE/ENCROACHING PLANTS (EASTERN RED CEDAR and LEAFY SPURGE)
  - INCREASE AMOUNT OF TALL WARM SEASON GRASSES
  - IMPROVE FORAGE PRODUCTION
  - IMPROVE STRUCTURE FOR WILDLIFE
  - IMPROVE POLLINATOR HABITAT
  - IMPROVE SPECIES DIVERSITY
  - REDUCE LIVESTOCK OPERATION INPUTS

### **QUESTIONS & Comments**

ERIC ZACH – In regard to Collaborative Adaptive Management Ranchers – do the ranchers enter into a contract and collaborate with other agencies? Answer: Ranchers have a choice whether to use just Adaptive management, with goals selected by the rancher and NRCS; or whether to use Collaborative adaptive management where additional entities would collaborate with the rancher with additional goals. Ranchers using the Collaborative adaptive management are paid a higher incentive payment to offset additional monitoring time and expense for addressing additional goals.

Do you offer field days? - Yes, field days & educational experiences are an important part of this initiative. The purpose of this initiative is to learn more effective grazing management strategies. We then want to use field days and other means to transfer this information to other ranchers.

Will the Rangeland Initiatives results be available online? - YES – as we receive results, we will try to provide this information online.

### **EASTERN RED CEDAR COST-SHARE CONSIDERATIONS – BRITT WEISER, NRCS NE**

- ❖ **Since 1997, use of EQIP cost-share for planting and removing eastern red cedars**
  - Planting Eastern Red Cedars - \$2 million provided to 1900 producers to install 6 million feet of windbreaks
  - Brush Management - \$15 million provided to 4000 producers to remove cedar trees from 225,000 acres
  - Prescribed Burning - \$1.5 million provided to 600 producers to burn 170,000 acres
    - 95% + of brush management is to remove Eastern Red Cedars.
- ❖ **Resource considerations**
  - Negative Impacts of ERC Invasion
    - Habitat Degradation
    - Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health
    - Wildfire Hazard and
    - Excessive Biomass Accumulation

- Positive Impacts for Use of ERC
  - Wind Erosion (Are ERC needed to adequately address wind erosion?)
  - Air Quality (How does ERC impact ability to address odor management?)
  - Energy (Farmstead and Feedlot Windbreaks for energy conservation and snow management)

❖ **NRCS is evaluating our EQIP cost-share priorities for planting eastern red cedar.**

- Considering a 2-Step Process
  - Is the proposed cedar planting project located in a vulnerable area, prone to the spread of cedar trees?
  - If yes, are there viable alternatives to planting eastern red cedar trees?

If both criteria are yes, then the EQIP application would score lower, or perhaps be classified as a low priority and not funded.

❖ **Determining Vulnerability Areas**

- Eastern Red Cedar plantings would be considered a risk for spreading to nearby grassland. Grassland areas within a certain distance from the cedar planting would be **vulnerable** to this risk.
- Eastern Red Cedar plantings that are surrounded by cropland would **not** be at risk of spreading, and therefore would not be in a **vulnerable** area.

(see PowerPoint with Restricted Areas for ERC Planting map)

❖ **Scenario #1 (see PowerPoint with Restricted Areas for ERC Planting map)**

- East Major Land Resource Area's (MLRA) – 40 Acre Blocks of grassland with ½ Mile Buffer
- Central MLRA's – 80 Acre Blocks of grassland with ½ Mile Buffer
- Panhandle (plus Southwest) MLRA's – 160 Acre Blocks of grassland with No Buffer
- Sandhills MLRA – Grassland

❖ **Scenario #2**

- East MLRA's – 80 Acre Blocks with ½ Mile Buffer
- Central MLRA's – 160 Acre Blocks with ½ Mile Buffer
- Panhandle (Only) MLRA's – 320 Acre Blocks with ½ Mile Buffer
- Sandhills MLRA – Grassland

❖ **Conservation Tree & Shrub Groups (see PowerPoint with Map & Group 3 Loamy Soils)**

❖ **We want your feedback**

**1. Should NRCS adjust its EQIP policy for planting Eastern Red Cedars?**

- a. Yes, but look at other approved plants also.
- b. The term “adjust” is broad. May need to eliminate it all together, narrow it down or define more specific species.
- c. Suggest changing policy so if they get funding to plant Cedars, they can't also receive funding to remove.
- d. Have you considered doing any research concerning ERC in your Rangeland Initiative?
  - **Britt will check with Nadine Bishop on this.**
- e. Suggest looking into planting Male Cedar or hybrid cedar, so they don't reproduce

- f. Male oriented are costly or cost restrictive for possible cost-share rate.
    - Britt noted that NRCS can develop a cost-share scenario to offset higher costs for male only cedar trees.
  - g. Look into if a Farmer gets cost-share to plant them & then the neighbor farmer gets cost-share to remove them?
  - h. Eastern Red Cedar is not invasive - it is a native. Pheasants Forever and Nebraska Game & Parks still use them.
  - i. Love Cedars & Junipers because if you plant them they will grow, but we do promote other species.
  - j. Vast invasion of the Cedar trees they started in ravines, so it all comes down to management. Lack of Management by the Landowner.
  - k. Mike Murphy – Wanted to make aware that the species & wildlife – mule deer, monarch butterflies, robins, & pheasants benefit from the cedar trees in the winter months & we would have to start worrying about those species if we start to remove the ERC. It is mainly more about Forest Management.
  - l. Forestry Management is labor intensive & Expensive, but Landowners need to be held responsible.
2. Is the concept of using vulnerable areas and viable alternatives a good approach to this?
- a. Whatever is chosen it will not be perfect when implemented, as not everyone will be happy & appreciate taking this on as it is a big challenge.
  - b. Need to use local resources.
3. Do you have any other ideas to defining vulnerable areas?
- a. Male vs Female Trees. – Males only in KS.
  - b. Allow cost-share this year for standard designs for a non-tree windbreak.
  - c. Cedars are a fire hazard for a farmstead.
  - d. Restricted one on the map like Dawson Co., really should be looked at hard.
    - Some Farmers have had to go away from no-till due to the Red Cedars in Dawson Co.
    - NRCS should look at programming & EQIP dollars for Russian Olive too.
    - Are we looking into mechanical windbreaks vs tree shelterbelts?
  - o. Britt noted that Nebraska NRCS has approved the use of fabricated windbreaks.
  - e. Costs more to remove the cedars than to upkeep them, again falls back on LO taking care of their land/tree management.
  - f. Takes longer to grow the Ponderosa pine for a shelterbelt.
  - g. Gotten a comparison from other states like OK or TX & have you consulted the University?
    - NRCS response: Nebraska NRCS is working with Dr. Twidwell at UNL on this issue.
  - h. Local Work Groups should be asked to help with feedback as well on this issue. Absentee landownership is part of the problem.

- i. Mace Hack, The Nature Conservancy: **ERC** -TNC is very behind your efforts to reduce cost share for planting in areas where they can become invasive, and to find alternatives in those locations. I thought the Upper Elkhorn speaker had a good point – landowners should take responsibility for reducing ERC on their lands. Obviously in some cases the problem grows beyond what they can afford to address, and then NRCS cost share can really help. Have you considered providing cost share for removal but obligating the recipient to continue managing the spread of seedlings from then on, by promising to use fire or mechanical control at regular intervals?
- j. Feeling for when you will be choosing a scenario? Timeline?
  - NRCS response – we will evaluate feedback for the next few months and could make a decision for this fiscal year.

All of this was gone over with at the NARD conference on September 24, 2018 for feedback as well.

**In Brad’s handouts in the EQIP portion there is a new idea called Advanced Cover Crop Fund Pool that this could be a special pool for certain Landowners. – Should we have a STATE POOL where these types of applications are funded?**

## **PROGRAM UPDATES – Brad Soncksen, NRCS NE (Highlights)**

### **❖ ACEP: Agricultural Conservation Easement Program –**

- **ACEP-ALE – Implementation**
  - FY 18 ALE Allocation = \$250,000
    - 1 Application exceeded allocation – funds returned
  - RCPP – ALE
    - Application on 2 parcels – 316.5 acres
    - Entity Holding easement – Little Blue NRD
    - Estimated cost + \$275,000.00
- **FY18 ACEP-WRE Implementation**
  - Total FY18 Allocation = \$4.4 million
  - WRE Applications = 32 on 3317 acres
  - WREP applications = 4 on 128.8 acres
  - Estimated Cost = \$10 million
  - 11 offers to purchase – Accepted
    - WRE
      - 7 approved
      - 901 acres
      - \$4,077,845.00
    - WREP
      - 4 approved
      - 121 acres
      - \$422,156

- Title reviews and Environmental Record Searches - completed
  - Obligation deadline to enroll projects = September 22, 2018
  - Surveys begin in FY2019
- **FY19 ACEP-WRE & ALE**
    - ACEP Sub-Committee Meeting – September 13, 2018
      - 2019 Market analysis and GARC Rates reviewed
      - 2019 application ranking tool revisions
      - 2019 application and ranking cutoff dates
      - Update on status of 2017 and 2018 enrollments
    - **Application cutoff date = November 1, 2018**
    - **Ranking cutoff date = February 1, 2019**
      - **NEWS RELEASE WAS SENT OUT**
    - Update on status of 2017 and 2018 enrollments
    - **FY19 ACEP-WRE Compensation**
      - The basis for the compensation offer for the easement will be the lowest of:
        - Fair market value as determined by an AWMA or appraisal
        - Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC)
        - An amount voluntarily offered by the landowner
      - The two maps in the PowerPoint are not officially approved.
        - Rates decreased from 2018-2018 in the market analysis, except for the central irrigated crop land.

❖ **CSP: Conservation Stewardship Program –**

- **Currently enrolled - Nebraska**
  - 3116 active contracts
  - 6.3M acres
  - \$58M in annual payments
- **Nationally 80M+ acres enrolled since 2010**
- **Nebraska 2018 Signup**
  - Applications = 460
  - Acres in Applications = 800,000
  - New contracts = 350
  - Acres in contracts = 705,000
- **2014 Farm Bill allows for a one-time renewal on expiring contracts (2019 Farm Bill TBD)**
  - Nebraska 2019-1 Renewals
    - 304 contract holders applied to renew
      - 77% of eligible contracts
      - Contracts would begin January 2019 (depending on outcome of Farm Bill)

- **Popular CSP Activities in 2018**
  - Prescribed Grazing
  - Cover Crops
  - Pest Management
  - Nutrient Management
  - Tree/Shrub Establishment
  - Herbaceous Weed Treatment
  - Conservation Cover – Pollinator seedings
  
- **Payment Rates**
  - Existing Activity Payment \*Number of resource concerns met at the time of application x \$350 (land use neutral). Land use rate x acres.
    - Crop and Pastured Cropland= \$7.50 per acre
    - Pasture = \$3.00 per acre
    - Range = \$1.00 per acre
    - Forest = \$0.50 per acre
    - Farmstead=\$7.50 per acre
    - Associated Agriculture Land=\$0.50 per acre
  
- **Future Enhancements**
  - States can submit requests for new enhancements
    - Accepted enhancements will be available for the 2020 signup
    - Need to have in by October 14, 2018.

❖ **EQIP –**

- **EQIP Fund Allocations in 2018**
  - **SUMMARY: Priority Resource Concerns**
    - **Soil Erosion**
    - **Water Quality degradation**
    - **Insufficient Water**
    - **Soil Quality Degradation**
    - **Livestock Production Limitation**
    - **Degraded Plants**
    - **Fish and Wildlife**
    - **Excess Water**
    - **Air Quality**
    - **Inefficient Energy**
  
  - EQIP – National Initiatives **\$4.5 million**  
Ogallala SI \$ 2.4 million + \$300,000.00 (June 2018)  
– 4 Focus Areas: UBBNRD, LBNRD, CPNRD, MRNRD
  
  - EQIP General **\$ 24.8 million**  
EQIP General Distribution + \$2.45 million (June 2018)



- **EQIP – FY2019 Time Lines**
  - Local Work Group Meetings – Feb/March
    - [www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov)
      - AGENDA ITEMS:
        - Priority Resource Concerns
        - Fund Pool Recommendations
        - Ranking Tools – Screening Tools
        - Practice Payment Schedule
  - EQIP State Sub-Committee Meeting
    - April 2018
  - State Technical Committee Meeting
    - December 6, 2018
- **FY2019 EQIP State Policy Decisions**
  - State Subcommittee Recommendations
  - State Conservationist Decisions
    - Add Practice 576 - Livestock Shelter Structure
    - Brush Management 314 - Add new scenario “Ultra Low Density”
    - Multiple adjustments to practice scenarios and payment rates
      - Reduce PPR 327 Conservation Cover “Pollinator Habitat”
      - Reduce PPR 643 Restore Rare/Declining Habitat
      - Reduce PPR 614 Water Facilities (Tanks) – Steel, Fiberglass
    - Establish \$7,500 payment cap for cover crops (340)
    - Establish \$7,500 payment cap for conservation Cover (327)
    - Establish \$7,500 payment cap for Upland Wildlife Habitat Mgmt. (645)
    - (May be Adjusted Pending Farm Bill Implementation)
      - Ranking Tools Completed – September
      - EQIP application cutoff date - November 16, 2018
      - Applications ranked/Preapproved - February 1, 2019
- **FY2019 Local Fund Pools**
  - Same as 2018
- **FY2019 Area Fund Pools**
  - **West**
    - Same as 2018
  - **Central**
    - Same as 2018
  - **East**
    - Same as 2018

- **FY2019 STATE FUND POOLS**
  - **Special Initiatives - Nebraska**
    - Same except addition below:
      - **LENRD Water Quality Area – Pierce County**
      - Rangeland Health Demo Ranch (6 fund pools)
  - **Special Initiatives – National**
    - Same from 2018, except new below:
      - **Forestry Service Partnership**
        - UNWNRD, MNRD, ULNRD
      - **PENDING NHQ APPROVAL FOR FY2019**
        - **Ogallala Aquifer Initiative**
          - **CPNRD, MRNRD, LBNRD, UBBNRD**
      - National Water Quality Initiative
        - Same from 2018 with one addition
        - **Turkey Creek – Lower Big Blue NRD**
          - **Readiness Phase Application (Pending Approval)**

❖ **RCPP –**

- FY 2019 Statewide Fund Pools
  - Ogallala Aquifer & Platte River Recovery – CPNRD & TPNRD
  - Regional Grassland Bird & Grazing Enhancement Initiative - NGPC
  - Cropland Cover for Soil Health and Wildlife – NGPC
  - Lower Elkhorn Water and Soil Conservation Project
  - Republican Basin Conservation Partnership – LRNRD
  - Divots in the Pivots – UBBNRD/RWBJV
  - Wahoo Creek Water Quality Sites 26 & 27 – LPNRD
  - Papillion Creek Site WP-1 Dam – PMRNRD (not quite complete but will be soon)
- **FY18 RCPP Approvals – Nebraska**
  - Critical Conservation Area (CCA) Fund Pool
    - Papillion Creek Site WP-1 Dam
    - P-MRNRD Partner
    - \$4.4 million

❖ **PRACTICE PAYMENT SCHEDULE –**

- [USDA Website – State Payment Schedules](#)
  - Click on NE
- [Nebraska Payment Schedules](#)
  - [Click on EQIP](#)

- Went over a few scenarios found on the PP.
  - CLICK ON Practice Scenarios
    - Practice:
    - Scenario Description:
    - Scenario Cost Unit:

#### ❖ 2018 FARM BILL

- Possible revisions to FY19 EQIP and CSP implementation
  - House proposes to combine EQIP and CSP
  - “Streamlining” language in both House and Senate
  - New software under development to comply (New term CART)
  - Possible impacts:
    - Early FY19 EQIP Obligations limited to specific initiatives
      - We will be ready to start obligating contracts as soon as we are issued our 2019 funds. Which is usually the end of October.
    - Common application and ranking dates for CSP and EQIP
    - Rollout of “New” program combining CSP and EQIP

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#### QUESTIONS & Comments

- Can applications be pushed to the top for next period?
  - **A: All applications can be deferred.**
  
  - Eric – MOU’s land management can they be extended or created for partners?
  - A: This will be reviewed.**
  
  - Could there be more flexibility with a CUA in spraying noxious weed management? County gets it done faster than the CUA is being approved.
  - A: CUA’s are required when controlling noxious weeds. Faster turnaround on CUA’s is occurring now.**
  
  - Jared – Congressman Smith is confident things will get pushed forward for the new Farm Bill.
  
  - ❖ Migratory Bird Safe Ranking – NE & KS are the only 2 states.
  - ❖ Restoring Playa Wetlands 42 – 994 acres
  - ❖ 3 Factors
    - Wildlife – Bid processing up to 300 (National up 200)
    - Aquifer recharge
  
  - ❖ All must be approved 9-28-18 to do that need interim plan – Has to do Conservation plan by December. Come December can change or get out of contract w/ no penalties.
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## **MARKETING FACILITATION PROGRAM (MFP) – SARAH KRAEGER, FSA**

- ❖ This is derived from the trade situation & is one of the Tarif relief programs.
- ❖ Commodities covered under the MFP:
  - Cotton
  - Corn
  - Dairy
  - Hogs
  - Sorghum
  - Soybeans
  - Wheat
- ❖ Producers may apply for MFP beginning September 4, 2018 through January 15, 2019.
- ❖ Built off your actual 2018 yield productions.
- ❖ Payments issued on the first 50% of the producer's total production of the commodity.
- ❖ Pay = overall yield divided by 2 then multiply by the MFP Rates. – See handout for the Initial rates.
- ❖ Primary in NE right now are Dairy, Hogs & Wheat & rates will go off June 1<sup>st</sup> production.
- ❖ On or about December 3, 2018 second payment rates will be announced & applied to the remaining 50% of the producers' production.
- ❖ **WHERE TO FILE THE APPLICATION:**
  - **ONLINE:**
    - [WWW.FARMERS.GOV/MFP](http://WWW.FARMERS.GOV/MFP)
  - Local FSA Office – [www.farmers.gov](http://www.farmers.gov) (To find your local FSA office)
  - Submitted Electronically by:
    - Scanning
    - Emailing
    - Faxing

**SEE HANDOUT FOR MORE INFORMATION.**

## **CRP GRASSLANDS SU201 – 1<sup>ST</sup> PERIOD – LAVAIN MOORE, FSA**

- ❖ Ranking CRP Grasslands came out .... Signup June, end of August.
- ❖ Rankings 60 or higher were accepted
- ❖ CRP – NE Lead the nation 210,000 Acres
- ❖ Rental Rates \$7.00-\$55.00 (Grazing Program)

**SEE HANDOUT FOR MORE INFORMATION.**

## **PARTNER ISSUES/OTHER**

**Mace Hack, Cover crops:** I'm not sure but I think the program you mentioned is one that Hannah Birge on our staff has discussed with Aaron Hird. We strongly support identifying 'superstars' in the cover crop and soil health arena and having a statewide pool of funds to propel their efforts further, and to demo to other farmers. We're eager to partner and help where we can via the Soil Health Partnership.

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## **WRAP UP – BRAD SONCKSEN, NRCS NE**

**Please send any further questions or comments to Tami Nordman @ [tami.nordman@ne.usda.gov](mailto:tami.nordman@ne.usda.gov)**

**Future 2018 meetings will be the following dates:**

**DECEMBER 6, 2018 @ UNL Extension Office (444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE)**

**Future 2019 meetings will be the following dates:**

**March 7, 2019 @ UNL Extension Office (444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE)**

**June 6, 2019 @ UNL Extension Office (444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE)**

**September 12, 2019 @ UNL Extension Office (444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE)**

**December 5, 2018 @ UNL Extension Office (444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE)**