

Idaho State Technical Committee

April 4, 2019 @ 9:00am

Idaho State NRCS Office

9173 W Barnes Drive, Boise, Idaho 83709

9:00 – 9:15 - Welcome and Introductions – Curtis Elke, State Conservationist, NRCS

In attendance were Natural Resources Conservation Service staff: State Conservationist, State Resource Conservationist, State Conservation Engineer, Asst. State Conservationist for Programs, Public Affairs Specialist, State Agronomist, State Wildlife Biologist

Along with one or more representatives of the following organizations:

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS)

Idaho Fish & Game (IDFG)

US. Forest Service (USFS)

The Nature Conservancy (TNC)

Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission (ISWCC)

Forest Growers Association

Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

Latah Soil Conservation District

Idaho Dairymen's Association (IDA)

Ada Soil Conservation District

Potato Growers

Idaho Office of Species Conservation (OSC)

Association of Idaho Cities

In addition, a staffer from each of the offices of Congressman Fulcher and Sen. Crapo attended.

9:15 – 9:45 – Western Monarch Butterfly Presentation – Trisha Cracroft, NRCS Idaho State Wildlife Biologist

9:30-10:00 – Idaho NRCS Reorganization Plan - Curtis Elke, NRCS State Conservationist

Took a hand vote on the re-org

Question – How will this affect the partner positions?

- More staff to assist and go out to the producer, rather than having them coming to us.
- April 9 – Idaho Fish & Game representative requesting a sit down with Curtis and AC's to get specific question answered

Commiseration from FWS rep on the reality of the difficulties of reorgs.

Potato Growers rep said he sees value in the team concept.

Paul Calverly (Former NRCS State Conservationist)– We went through this when I was in your shoes, just be sure to make sure all your partners and customers know what you are doing and why.

It was noted that the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts in general is supportive of the re-org.

A quick straw poll indicated that there was complete understanding of the need for the re-org and that none of the organizations attending the State Technical Advisory Committee meeting indicated any opposition of the re-org.

10:15- 10:30 — State Technical Subcommittees Reports

As there were no Subcommittee Reports, Curtis turned the floor over to FSA for an update.

Charlie Newhouse from FSA noted that his agency has lost its political appointee, but they are hoping to get a new political appointee in the near future. He also said that FSA has also been through a reorganization and shrunk its footprint – so he feels for NRCS.

Mindi Rambo, public affairs specialist, announced that the results of the Ag Census will be released on Thursday, April 11 and a representative from the National Agricultural Statistics Service, Randy Welk, will do a presentation on it at 10 a.m. in the USDA Conference Room at 9173 W. Barnes Drive on that date. A question was asked about whether the data would go down to the county level. Mindi responded that she didn't know but would find out. She subsequently inquired with Randy and learned that indeed the data will go down to the county level.

10:30 – 10:40 – Conservation Practice Standards & Federal Register Announcement – Bruce Sandoval, NRCS State Engineer

Bruce asked for a show of hands for those who had seen the news release which went out in mid-March. About 6 people raised their hands.

What is the intent of the review?

- Congress wants us to look at increasing flexibility
- Seeking a balance between conservation needs and cost
- Relevance of local needs and wants

Comment was raised that the Federal Register site did NOT provide a link the list of practices up for review. Response included information that because the review includes ALL practices they didn't link to each individual one. Bruce noted the link to the national list could have been helpful, but the reality is that it is more than 150 practices. Following the meeting, he looked up the link:

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/technical/cp/ncps/?cid=nrcs143_026849

10:40 – 11:00 – Agronomy updates and WEPP. Travis Youngberg, NRCS Idaho State Agronomist

WEPP will be a web-based program. You don't have to download anything like you do with RUSL-2

- Easily accessible
- Easy to use
- Runs best on Chrome or Firefox
- Will be released to the public on or after Oct. 1, so as not to conflict with current year's contracting

Travis demonstrated the program.

Rep. Fulcher's staffer – Offered his card to those in attendance

- He noted that the Congressman and his office is excited about NRCS's commitment to customer service
- Rep. Fulcher will be meeting people as often as possible when he is in Idaho

- Lots of communication between the members of the delegation

Sen. Crapo's staffer – We are in the era of a divided congress, so not a lot of big-ticket stuff is expected. He noted that they are:

- Looking toward bi-partisan agendas, along with budget and appropriations

He also communicated that Sen. Crapo is a big proponent State and Tribal Wildlife grants

11:00 – 11:15 – Break

11:15 - 11:45 – 2018 Farm Bill – Keith Griswold, Acting ASTC Programs & Curtis Elke

Briefly went over what stayed the same:

EQIP Rolled Over

Then turned to the new stuff:

One new process for the source water protection

- We are able to work with cities to identify where their source water comes from and then work with the participants in the area to implement practices that will help improve those source water points – within the bounds of our programs
 - 10% of total funds to this act -- Technical Assistance and Financial Assistance along with the NRCS portion of easement purchase prices are part of this 10 %.
- What are the priority resources? This is where the STAC can help
- Source Water Protection Areas delineated by the state's drinking water act
- When additional rules are provided to us, we will come back to the STAC, the State and our Partners for their input

With new Farm Bill irrigation districts and companies can participate as participants (contract holders).

\$16.4M allocated so far this year. This is on target for average. Curtis noted that “we can always ask for more money – if we have the manpower to do it.”

I see NRCS as being an agency for those who truly need help. Help them to get started – assist and help anyway we can, especially the new and historically underserved communities.

NWQI – still there

- We're looking to move it to other parts of the state. Interest, as determined by number of applications in the current priority areas, has dropped three years running. We have had to offer second sign-up periods in each of the past two year and we will likely have to offer a second sign-up this year.
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Cheat Grass Challenge for 2020

- We're doing a lot of planning at this time so as to make this effort a success.
- We're prioritization of focus areas to concentrate our resources to make the biggest impact on cheatgrass.
- We're coordinating with Wyoming as part of a multi-state challenge (Oregon, Colorado and Utah are interested in joining in the future.

- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is proposing to work with us and provide additional funding for the challenge or in-kind (seed, chemical. Labor, etc)

11:45 – 12:00 – Easement Priority Areas – Keith Griswold

Easement/Wildlife/everything else committee met last week

It was proposed last year that NRCS add 4 more priority areas for Ag Land Easements:

- Bear River watershed
- Big Lost River
- Kootenai Valley
- Western Camas

What as the basis for requesting priority area status?

- Potential to benefit ranchers
- Connectivity
- Partnering with USFS
- Sage Grouse
- Wildlife corridors
- Priority area for US FWS

At the end of the discussion, the State Technical Advisory Committee recommended to the State Conservationist that the subcommittee's proposal be adopted, and the four new locations added as priority areas for the state in regard to easements supporting wildlife conservation (Working Lands for Wildlife)

Following the decision to recommend adoption of the proposal to the State Conservation, conversation turned toward more general discussion of Agricultural Land Easements and the new RCPP option

Question arose about whether the easements were perpetual or term. Answer: Mostly perpetual, but there are some term easements (30 years)

Development in the Treasure Valley – it was noted that acquiring easements are very expensive in Idaho and in areas already experiencing rapid development, perhaps unrealistic.

12:00 – 1:00 – Announcements & Round Table Discussion

- Announcements:
 - Working Lands for Wildlife Meeting – June 19 & 20, Twin Falls
 - BDA training
 - Conservation Innovation Grants Request For Proposals (RFP) – The RFP is expected to be posted to Grants.Gov by the end of the week. Once it is online a news release will be issued. The Public Affairs Specialist will make sure a copy of the release is emailed to the STAC membership
 - Locally Led Workgroup Meetings (April) – Handout listing the dates, times and places for the 6 meetings was provided to everyone in attendance.
 - Three Forestry roundtable meetings were announced
 - Division 3 – USDA conference room in Boise, on April 24 from 9 to noon
 - Division 2 – Idaho Fish and Game building in Lewiston on April 22 from 9 to noon

- Division 1 – The Dept. of Environmental Quality building in Coeur d’Alene, on April 12

DEQ will have a new water quality person soon. Barry is retiring.

IDFG – Dept. of Interior migration and movement for big game initiative is continuing. Avenue where NRCS could be of assistance:

- Fencing
- Rangeland seeding

Curtis – looking to bring on a forester through an agreement with the Wild Turkey Federation. A state forester remains a priority with us.

Next State Technical Meeting – August 1, 2019