

STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
APRIL 24, 2019
NRCS STATE OFFICE
1550 Earl Core Rd Suite 200
Morgantown, WV 10:00AM

Meeting called to order by Andy Deichert.

Minutes were reviewed by Nan Kimble and were approved as written.

Program Updates

Laura Smith

CSP did get reauthorized in the new Farm Bill. We are still taking signups.

RCPP also was reauthorized in the Farm Bill. It is now a stand-alone program.

EQIP

West Virginia received a total so far of \$9,381,284.00 in EQIP financial assistance funds for fiscal year 2019. The funds are being distributed around the state through 47 fund accounts designed to meet specific needs in several different categories of resource concerns in many varied locations. Some of the largest efforts this year are going towards establishing High Tunnel Systems, wildlife related practices, and dealing with livestock waste concerns. To date, just over one million dollars has been obligated in contracts with producers. Contracts are spread broadly across the state and address concerns adopted by local work groups.

AMA

West Virginia received a total of \$496,200.00 in AMA financial assistance funds for fiscal year 2019. The funds are being distributed around the state through 3 fund accounts: cover crops, irrigation, and high tunnel systems.

The new Farm Bill, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 contained several minor and a few major changes to Financial assistance programs management. Of note at this time: states are now required to spend 10% of their allocated funds on wildlife related practices (up from 5%) and another 10% on geographic areas with source water management plans.

Conservation Districts should now be holding local work group meetings to discuss priority resource concerns to help direct planning efforts and financial assistance funds for fiscal year 2020.

WATERSHED

Pam Yost

Cherry River is progressing. NRCS has an agreement with WVDNR to complete the planning. Trout Unlimited has been retained by WVDNR to do the field work and provide the planning expertise.

Richard Mine is moving forward. The property has been purchased and WVDEP AML&R is working on the designs for the treatment plant and the access bridge.

ACEP/ALE

Matt Oliver

NRCS WV closed two ACEP ALE easements on Monday – one in Monroe County and one in Greenbrier County. These properties totaled about 205 acres and \$300,000 dollars of which half was the federal share.

- These two easements closed in approximately 18 months and the group hopes to continue closing easements in a timely manner.

Our current enrollment to ACEP and RCPP ALE is 15 easements. We received a total of 19 ACEP ALE applications for FY19 of which 16 were above the ranking threshold. We are currently evaluating those applications for eligibility in order to make funding selections as soon as possible.

Regarding ACEP WRE/WRP, we acquired Federal contracts to complete the restoration on two previously closed easements (2004/2012) for which the original restoration failed. The restoration work on the Berkeley County WRP is scheduled to begin May 1.

NHQ has provided interim ACEP in three distinct phases:

- a. Phase 1: ACEP Implementation through the end of FY19 which will consist of a series of guidance documents from NHQ for which we have already received the first installment.
- b. Phase 2: Interim Rule to the Final Rule.
- c. Phase 3: Final Rule through the remainder of the 2018 Farm Bill.

Subcommittee Updates

Easements - Sub-committee did not meet

Forestry – No representative. Stephanie Connolly requested that NRCS-WV send a letter to Monongalia National Forest to request that they appoint a forester on the forestry sub-committee rather than a forest soil scientist.

Soil Health sub-committee did not meet; however, Jared stated they have two Soil Health and Sustainability trainings scheduled. June 3-7 & July 8-12. Both will be held in Charles Town. Jared will look into non-NRCS employees attending.

EQIP – Subcommittee did not meet. Still currently looking for members. Laura will task Jeff Griffith to take the lead and will ask conservation districts for representatives.

Members Reports

WVDEP – Theresa Koon

Chesapeake Bay – A draft was submitted of the watershed implementation plan on 4/12/19. There is a stakeholder/public comment period thru June 10, 2019 and the final plan will be done by August 9, 2019. We have approximately \$400,000 in grants for implementation projects which will expire on June 30, 2020. Nan sent a copy of the Wetland Function Assessment Tool so if there are any comments please forward any comments back to Theresa.

Jefferson County Farmland Protection Board – Liz Wheeler

Currently working on 4 conservation easements, one of which is a battlefield consisting of 300 acres. Working with landowners of the battlefield to allow some impervious areas where they were previously not allowed. Theresa Koon asked how the subdivision allowance meets the goals of the program. Elizabeth explained that the battlefield easements are to protect the viewshed.

Berkeley County Farmland Protection Board - Mark Schiavone

We are up to 54 easements, 5400 acres and we are in various stages of closing 13 easements. We will be closing our open application period.

WVU College of Law – Jason Walls

Currently assisting NRCS on three major initiatives. They will have a Mountain State Land Use Academy which will be held in Canaan Valley on May 15th which will have a lot of land use planning.

WV Conservation Agency – Brian Farkas

We received money to hire an engineer. We are at the beginning of a discussion of what conservation in WV should look like in the 21st century and will be incorporated in a strategic plan. Northeast listening session on conservation occurring in sometime in the early fall. We were able to get enacted into law the authority for the state conservation committee to create a grant program. We are working on rules to get in front of the legislature for FY2020 by May for a 30-day comment period in June and for state committee approval in July.

WV Rural Water Assoc – Lew Baker

Lew stated he would like to be on the Soil Health Committee and asked if there should be a committee on source water protection. He stated we could do better with treating water if we had more monitoring data.

WVFB – Mike Morris

This year marks our 100-year celebration with the Farm Bureau. We will have a celebration in Buchannon on June 20, 2019. One major thing we were able to get accomplished was the Senate Bill 393 – The right to farm which is one of the strongest Right to Farm bills in history. The new Mobile Ag Lab will be in Cheat Lake on May 13 & 17. New collegiate farm bureau sponsor at WVU. There will be a food link at the Ronald McDonald house this Saturday.

FSA – Roger Dahmer

Budget has passed and will be receiving money in 30-day increments. We are currently trying to hire for 10 open positions. We are working with WVCA to settle an opinion in D.C. Once it is settled we will have CREP training.

FSA – Kevin Hinkle

There are 2 facts sheets for what's new and what has changed in the new Farm Bill. First Farm Bill training will be on May 20, 2019.

WVALPA – Lavonne Paden

We unable to get the post mortem bill passed. The IRS is moving to regulate conservation easements as a result of a Georgia group coming into WV to invest in opportunities.

NRCS Soils – Jared Beard

NRCS is looking to adopt a formal compliance process. As an agency requirement we need to put this out to the State Tech Committee. If the committee has any comments, please email Jared directly. This is for NRCS and not the DEP assessment.

Andy Deichert – Acting State Conservationist

Louis continues his detail in D.C. Nicole is trying to fill ASTC-FO and West Fork DC (not announced yet). Currently awaiting final budget.

Next meeting date July 24, 2019.

Meeting adjourned