

Kentucky USDA State Technical Committee Meeting

August 21, 2019 – 9:30 a.m.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Office, 771 Corporate Drive, Lexington, Kentucky

The agenda and list of attendees are found at the end of these meeting notes.

State Conservationist Welcome and Opening Comments

State Conservationist Greg Stone welcomed everyone to the State Technical Committee meeting. He said that the 2018 Farm Bill offered some new opportunities including giving NRCS conservation program priority to source water protection areas, and that today's meeting was to listen to those in attendance provide input and help identify where NRCS should provide those priorities.

He reminded the group that at the last meeting he discussed the "Focused Conservation Projects" for which Kentucky will give Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) priority in fiscal year 2020. He said 13 projects were received and will be approved, several of which include areas that are drinking water protection areas. The projects are a result of local workgroup meetings.

He then asked the group to introduce themselves. A list of attendees may be found at the end of these notes. Following introductions, he called on Assistant State Conservationist for Programs Deena Wheby to talk more about today's topic.

Preparing for NRCS Fiscal Year 2020 Source Water Protection Activities

Deena discussed the 2018 Farm Bill provision regarding source water protection. She said that NRCS is to encourage practices that relate to water quality and quantity which protect source waters for drinking water while also benefitting agricultural producers. She said that each state is to identify local priority areas for the protection of source waters for drinking water and offer to producers increased incentives and higher payment rates for some practices. She said that 10 percent of program funds would be used for this purpose, and mentioned that it was for all programs, not just EQIP, but also Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). She added that the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), was not included.

She explained that conservation program applications received from landusers (farmers, woodland owners) in the selected priority areas may receive higher consideration for funding to treat natural resource concerns, and if funded, may receive a higher level of financial assistance for some conservation practices and activities. She noted these priority areas would not be "named projects" or separate pools of funding – rather priority would be in the way of additional ranking points and higher funding levels (cost share rate) for certain practices.

She went on to say that identified priority areas could be entire or portions of already identified source water protection areas, and that they should have a protection plan, in addition to an assessment that characterizes the source water, identifies areas of concern, potential threats, and describes source

water protection goals and an action plan for implementation. She added that more guidance was to come on identifying priority practices for the increased payment rates.

She said that she hoped at today's meeting, attendees would tell NRCS why certain drinking water sources needed NRCS to provide natural resource assistance to landusers in the protection area. She reminded the group that NRCS can only assist with agriculture related resource concerns, but would also like to know if there are other concerns such as failing septic systems or urban runoff issues in the areas that were being put forth for priority area consideration.

She had earlier emailed an information-gathering sheet for interested parties to complete to help identify potential source water protection priority areas for NRCS program priority. She also had hard copies available at the meeting, as well as a handout summarizing the effort and a copy of the statutory (Farm Bill) language. All three handouts may be found at the end of these notes.

Deena then introduced Rob Blair from Kentucky Division of Water.

Source Water Protection in Kentucky

Rob discussed the Kentucky Division of Water efforts regarding source water protection planning. He explained the importance for source water protection including health-based impacts to drinking water from elevated nutrients, increased turbidity, and pathogens. He said these things lead to immediate and significant impacts such as harmful algal blooms, disinfection by-products, and increased drinking water costs. He mentioned that source water protection fits with the state's nutrient reduction strategy. Rob displayed slides showing Kentucky maps with the public water supplies from groundwater and from surface water. He identified source water protection and agricultural connections including monitoring; analysis of water use and information needs; water resource development and technical assistance; drought mitigation and response; communications and outreach; and the Ag Water Quality Authority and nutrient reduction strategy. His final map provided showed the Division of Water source water protection area priority areas, locations of source water protection areas, and drinking water source lakes with harmful algal blooms. A copy of these maps and other information may be found in Rob's PowerPoint presentation.

Input from Group to Help Identify Priority Areas for NRCS Program Priority and Increased Incentives to Agricultural Producers

Greg thanked Deena and Rob for their presentations and said it was now time to listen to thoughts and recommendations to help NRCS identify source water protection priority areas.

Jack Stickney (retired, Kentucky Rural Water Association) said that the agricultural community and water utilities need to work together. NRCS had funding to help ag producers and this could help with source water quality.

Danna Baxley of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) said that TNC has developed a tool to determine where resources should be placed. That tool may be found at <https://maps.freshwaternet.org/dev/missriverbasin/#> Danna said that TNC recommends the Lower Green River/Ohio River, specifically 12 digit HUC south of Evansville, Indiana, and west of Owensboro, Kentucky. TNC provided NRCS with a completed information sheet for the recommendation.

John Webb, Kentucky Division of Water, said that the Division was doing a nutrient load study, and that data is undergoing review and will be available soon.

Angella Watson, Farm Service Agency, mentioned that USGS presented interesting water quality information at a recent Farm Bureau meeting that may be of use for this effort.

The question was asked if there was a limit to how many priority areas/how much area could be identified – what is “focused”? adding that GIS tools could be very helpful. Greg responded that Kentucky NRCS has limited capability for GIS right now. In response to how does NRCS focus, Greg talked about the focused conservation projects that will be rolled out next year. Deena reminded the group that the source water protection area priorities will be different than the focused conservation projects. She said that while the focused conservation projects will be named fund accounts with separate dedicated funding, that the source water protection priorities will be in the way of additional ranking points and higher funding levels (cost-share rate) for certain practices. It will be something that runs in the background giving more consideration for applications in the identified priority areas.

Pam Snyder, Kentucky Division of Forestry, asked if there would be watershed credits and if woodland would also be included. Greg responded that NRCS does not provide watershed credits, and yes, NRCS considers woodland as agricultural land.

A question was asked if water companies could help promote NRCS programs. The answer was yes. A brand-new handout entitled, “Farmers’ Guide to Conservation Programs” was handed out (and later emailed to the State Technical Committee email list.) It may be found online at the following Farm Bill websites: farmers.gov, NRCS, FSA, and RMA.

Greg recommended to the group that they attend local workgroup meetings and encouraged input for source water protection efforts in the future focused conservation projects.

Mary Carol Wagner, Northern Kentucky Water District, asked if NRCS funding can be used for educational purposes. Deena responded that NRCS program funding is to provide technical and financial assistance to landusers to implement voluntary conservation practices. She said although NRCS technical assistance did provide farmer “education”, that there could be other partners, such as Cooperative Extension, who could also provide education and outreach. NRCS program funding cannot be provided to another party to provide education. She said it would be helpful for the water providers to know what to monitor for and when.

Henry Duncan, Kentucky Woodland Owners Association, said it is a positive thing for farmers to do conservation practices for water quality. He said that NRCS and UK did good work with farmers and clean water is important to farmers as it results in more dollars to them. He appreciates NRCS efforts.

Rob Blair asked the utilities in the room if they had ideas for their locations or other locations across the state to be considered as priority areas.

Andy Tompkins, City of Danville, said that they have had issues with nutrient loading and harmful algal blooms. He said Herrington Lake was one day away from issuing a health advisory and then it was gone (point being that it can change depending on weather, etc.)

Dorothy Rader, Kentucky American Water (Lexington), said they have taste and odor issues as a result of nutrient loading in their impounded reservoirs.

John Webb, Kentucky Division of Water, pointed out on the state's "Source Water Protection Priority Areas and Harmful Algal Blooms" map (available in Rob Blair's PowerPoint presentation), that the areas in pink were where a high occurrence of harmful algal blooms had been documented over the last five years. He said that there is a voluntary network who looks at local water bodies bi-weekly. He added that this effort was recently highlighted in "Naturally Connected", a blog of the Kentucky Energy and Environmental Cabinet. The article may be viewed by clicking [here](#).

Angella Watson said from a personal viewpoint, she thought water sources in Green County were important to be considered a priority.

A question was asked if taste and odor data was captured in any databases. Kentucky Division of Water said not currently. Kentucky American Water said that they did maintain that information for their water sources.

John Webb said that they are looking at satellite imagery on a biweekly basis for algal blooms.

Brent Harrell, US Fish and Wildlife Service, asked if there was climate data, and did it tie hotter weather to increased activity. Someone responded that Lynn Jarrett (retired, US Army Corp of Engineers) had recently presented at the 2019 Kentucky Water Resources Annual Symposium on this subject.

Danna Baxley, TNC, said that this is a tough topic for prioritization, but she thinks priority areas should be proactive areas where there is nutrient loading with agricultural ties. She recommended using the best available data to prioritize, but perhaps other tiers of prioritization could include where NRCS has unfunded applications, or where NRCS programs have not been popular. She said looking at distressed counties, where utilities don't have funding, could also be a consideration.

Joni Nelson, Kentucky State University, mentioned that USGS has a number of "super gages" installed to measure nutrient loads.

Greg Stone mentioned that precision agriculture can help with nutrient reduction and it will require farmers to make changes, and that it will be worth it to their bottom line.

Jack Stickney said that long-term actions such as environmental easements and land procurement could be beneficial in addition to the short-term practices. He said he thinks the best land use is a well-managed forest. Greg responded that NRCS in Kentucky spends \$10 – 15 million annually and works with partners such as TNC and others on easement efforts. For the short-term practices, although they are often annual practices, he hopes landusers will adopt the practices as part of an ongoing system.

Deena mentioned that there are on-going RCPP projects that are working in forestland, Healthy Forests Reserve Program, and pasture and cropland, including one specifically to promote the use of precision ag for nutrient management. She asked Tom Daniel of Nurtien Ag Solutions, Inc., if he would like to share about his company's RCPP project.

Tom discussed the RCPP project saying that the project was proposed by Security Seed, Inc., who was purchased by Nutrien, and although they are a for-profit business, their goal is to ensure that producers are using the right kind of nutrients, as well as the right technology and application of those nutrients so they don't end up in the rivers. He said the RCPP project will help provide the "carrot" that is needed to help some producers adopt precision ag activities. He said the practice is GIS based and information is wirelessly transmitted, so the producer knows what he is putting on the fields, when and where. He said

Nutrien has this information and although there is no link for water districts to access this information, it would be nice to share and cooperate if possible.

Angella Watson, Farm Service Agency, mentioned that Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is water quality related and that there is an increase in acres over the life of the Farm Bill. She said CRP offers longer term protection.

Mac Cherry, US Forest Service, said that they are interested in the outlying areas of the Daniel Boone National Forest and would like this to be a priority water source protection area. He said there could be a possibility of match with other producers on national forest land.

Jack Stickney asked if there could be other sources of additional funding, such as from water companies, to add onto the NRCS financial assistance. He said it could be an environmental surcharge added to bills. TNC added that maybe the incentive be something like 110 percent to encourage producers; to think beyond the 90 percent.

Greg asked if there were any other comments or recommendations. He said that this conservation programs effort is not new, but it will be an enhanced emphasis on source water protection. He expressed that it was very helpful to have the State Technical Committee to provide input and serve as advisors to NRCS. He is excited to focus funding and technical assistance.

There being no other comments or announcements, the meeting adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

Agenda and attendee list follow.

Kentucky USDA State Technical Committee

August 21, 2019

9:30 am

771 Corporate Drive, Lexington, Kentucky



9:30 a.m.	Welcome and Introductions	Greg Stone NRCS State Conservationist
9:45 a.m.	Preparing for NRCS Fiscal Year 2020 Source Water Protection Activities	Deena Wheby NRCS Assistant State Conservationist
10:00 a.m.	Source Water Protection in Kentucky	Rob Blair Kentucky Division of Water
10:30 a.m.	Input from Group to Help Identify Priority Areas for NRCS Program Priority and Increased Incentives to Agricultural Producers	Group
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who do you represent?• What is the water source?• Where is it located?• Who does it serve?• How many customers?• What/where is the protection area?• Do you have maps?• What are the identified areas of concern?• Are there other potential threats?• How does agriculture impact the source?• Current protection activities, if any?• Is there a SWP assessment?• Is there a SWP plan?• What else do you want us to know?	
12:00 p.m.	Wrap Up	Greg Stone

Attendees

Name	Representing
Greg Stone (Chair)	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Ed Thompson	USDA - Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE) Kentucky Association of Conservation Districts/Franklin Co. Conservation District
Steve Coleman	District
Meredith Scales	Kentucky Dairy Development Council
Joni Nelson	Kentucky State University
Angella Watson	USDA - Farm Service Agency (FSA)
Tom Daniel	Nurtien
Doug Wilson	TASK, Inc.
Pam Snyder	Kentucky Division of Forestry
Andy Tompkins	City of Danville
Rhonda Logan	USDA - Rural Development (RD)
Zeb Weese	Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves
Steve Evans	Kentucky Water Resources Research Institute (KWRRRI)
Jack Stickney	Kentucky Rural Water Association
Mac A Cherry	USDA - Forest Service
Danna Baxley	The Nature Conservancy
Jim Roe	Kentucky Division of Water
Matt Glass	Kentucky Rural Water Association
Rob Blair	Kentucky Division of Water
Henry Duncan	Kentucky Woodland Owners Association
John Webb	Kentucky Division of Water
Dorothy Rader	Kentucky American Water
Brent Harrell	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Owen Ronald	Bluegrass Land Conservancy
Thomas Ochuodho	UK - Forestry Department
Harold Duckworth	TASK, Inc.
Jeff Jones	USDA - Rural Development (RD)
Emmanuel Fields	Bluegrass Land Conservancy
Ashley Greathouse	Bluegrass Land Conservancy
Nicole Zub	Bluegrass Land Conservancy
Mary Carol Wagner	Northern Kentucky Water District
Deena Wheby	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)