



Natural Resources Conservation Service
359 East Park Drive, Suite 2
Harrisburg, PA 17111



State Technical Committee

AGENDA

Tuesday, April 21, 2020

*This meeting will be conducted via WebEx internet conferencing.
A meeting link and a call-in telephone number is provided below.*

- 1:00 pm Welcome – Denise Coleman, State Conservationist
- 1:05 pm Technical Guide Report
- Engineering – Peter Vanderstappen, State Engineer
 - Ecological Sciences – Mark Goodson, Acting State Resource Conservationist
 - Soils – Yuri Plowden, State Soil Scientist
- 1:30 pm Draft Pennsylvania Minimal Effect and Functional Assessment Worksheet for Food Security Act Wetland Compliance Determinations – James Gillis, State Biologist
- 1:45 pm FY 2020 Programs – Barry Frantz, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, Zenik Crespo, Program Analyst, and Ashley Lenig, Resource Conservationist
- Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)
 - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
 - Source Water Protection
 - High Priority practices
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - Conservation Innovative Grants (CIG)
- 2:30 pm FY2020 Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) – Hathaway Jones
Easement Programs Manager
- Agricultural Land Easement (ALE)
- New Option for Entities for Cooperative Agreements or Program Agreements
 - FY 2020 Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC)
 - FY 2020 ALE Rankings
 - FY 2020 ALE Deadlines
- Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE)
- Wetland Restoration Criteria and Guidelines
 - FY 2020 WRE Rankings
 - FY 2020 WRE Deadlines

- 3:15 pm Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) – Susan Marquart, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships
- FY 2020 RCP Applications for Alternative Funding Arrangements
- 3:45 pm Committee Input: Do the State Technical Committee members have any suggestions for topics or agenda items for future meetings?

The next State Technical Committee Meeting will be held on Wednesday July 22, 2020.

Dates for the Remaining FY 2020 State Technical Committee Meetings:

Wednesday, July 22, 2020

Thursday, October 22, 2020

State Technical Committee

April 21, 2020

Meeting Notes

Denise Coleman, PA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist, opened the meeting promptly at 1pm. She announced that in the past we have been using the Toll-Free Number for use by those members who could not attend the meeting in person, but could still participate by hearing the meeting. Today we are going to use a Webinar Approach so that members will be able to see the actual presentations as well as hear them. She welcomed all participants on the WebEx and asked that they introduce themselves. There were 50 persons participating from remote locations. She thanked Tim Peters (NRCS) and Tim Kinney for setting who set up this WebEx and managing the technical side of this meeting. She went on to say that Secretary Purdue had asked us to continue to keep our offices open. So due to the fact that we are in a heavy construction season going on this time of year, we are required to have a lot of our Field Office folks going out to the field to work with landowners (keeping the same required social distancing), doing inspections, planning and any kind of design work, such as surveying and layout. She wanted to update all from a perspective of where things are with NRCS. We are continuing normal operation procedures with Programs sign-up, and indicated there have been a couple that have been extended which would be covered at this meeting as we proceed through the agenda.

Pete Vanderstappen, PA NRCS State Engineer, was introduced and presented an Engineering Update. (See the attached hand-out) He started off discussing the Dam Rehabilitation Program. He indicated one big program we have had going on over the last several years is in Chester County called the Hibernia Dam Project. We bid it out last year but didn't have enough funding to award it. This year's bid came in at \$946,430 and was awarded. There were three bidders for this project and the bid price went down from last year's bid, saving about \$150,000. Being as the economy's a little different now, the project bidders may be a little more interested in bidding on the dam rehab projects. He discussed details of a part of the Chester County project concerning a spillway which will cost approximately \$900,000. He then discussed the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) status. Presently 93 sites have been awarded cost-share starting in 2018 and 2019. There were 28 sponsors and at this time there is only 1 site left to be done costing \$99,999 which will be starting in late May and be completed by June 2020. The NRCS cost share for this project is 75% and we have spent \$3.9 million dollars, plus \$1 million federal dollars involved and DEP came through with the remaining 25% or about \$1.32 million dollars. He also discussed the Emergency Milk Disposal Fact Sheet. There has been some surplus milk because of supply chain issues and some dairy farmers have been asked to either reduce production by 15% or dump their milk for a day or two until we get things resupplied. NRCS developed a Fact Sheet for their staff that answers the question of what to do with the waste milk. In some cases, dairy producers are storing the waste milk in their manure storage which will be landified sometime this spring. He shared the interesting fact that milk is actually a really good fertilizer. It has an "N" value that is three times higher than manure. However, because of that, direct application of waste milk probably shouldn't exceed 4,500 gallons per acre because that would yield about 200 pounds of nitrogen. So, you wouldn't cover many acres, but certainly it's of a high nutrient value. He noted that staff should be alerted that putting milk waste in a vegetative treatment area or waste storage under animal housing is not recommended. The waste treatment area overloads with

nitrogen. In addition, there could be dangerous gas generation along with a lot of bad odors. The PA Dept of Agriculture and the State Conservation Commission has put out a lot of good guidelines on how to handle the milk waste and application rates, and that information is getting out to all the producers across the state. The last topic he covered was the Boot Camps Phase 1 and 2 updates. He noted that after 20 years the first ever Phase 1 of Boot Camp was held as WebEx based training. It consisted of 3 hours of training over a 4 day period. The second Phase (Field Portion) will be held in September with the dates and location to be announced.



PA NRCS ENGINEERING UPDATE

PETE VANDERSTAPPEN, PE

STATE CONSERVATION ENGINEER

APRIL 21, 2020



Dam Rehabilitation Program

Hibernia Dam Project was recently re-bid

Last years bid exceeded available funding

This years bid came in at \$946,430 and was awarded

Had three bidders.

This bid was about \$150,000 less then last year

- Time of year
- Longer work schedule
- Current economy

Work Includes:

- Concrete cutoff wall in emergency spillway channel
- Remove berm to reduce infiltration on slope
- Improving out conditions



Emergency Watershed Protection

2018 EWP Status

- 93 sites awarded cost-share
- 28 sponsors
- Only 1 site left to be done for \$99,999
 - Starting in late May and done in June, 2020
- NRCS 75% cost-share spent \$3.9 million dollars
 - DEP covered the remaining 25% or \$1.3 million dollars



EMERGENCY MILK DISPOSAL FACT SHEET

Developed fact sheet for NRCS staff to answer any questions about disposing of surplus milk.

10-15% surplus due to disruption in supply chain.

Most surplus milk being temporarily stored in waste storage facilities for land application at a later time.

Milk can be used as a fertilizer. Its N value is three times that of normal manure.

Direct application should not exceed 4,500 gallons per acre.

Putting waste milk into a vegetated treatment area or waste storages under animal housing is not recommended.

Dairy operations are to follow PDA and SCC rules on application and documentation.

Boot Camps I and II Update



After 20 years held
BC I as the first
WebEx based training

4 days @ 3 hours
per day

Field portion
scheduled in
September



Boot Camp II has been rescheduled
for this fall.



Several other trainings are being
done via WebEx and reduced field
time at a later date

Mark Goodson, NRCS Acting State Resource Conservationist, was introduced and presented a Field Office Technical Guide (FTOG) Eco-Sciences Update. (See attached hand-out) He reviewed topics that were covered during a Federal Register comment period. One of those topics was the announcement of new and revised assessment tools in our Technical Guide. He also noted that we have some new job approval Authority Phase-in policies that we are doing. Public Inspection Notification was made on the Federal Register for 49 Conservation Practice Standards which will be officially available for public comments that began on March 24th and will be open for 30 days. The public inspection is available on the website:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/03/24/2020-06-88/proposed-revisions-to-the-national-handbook-of-conservation-practices>.

Early in 2020, our National Office released an updated Natural Resource Concern List and Planning Criteria. This document is the official list of NRCS resource concerns and planning criteria to determine resource treatment levels using conservation planning practices and planning process. This is the first update of this document in the last seven or 8 years and it is in our Technical Guide. Also in our Technical Guide is a number of new and revised assessment tools that our planners use when assessing resources. The pasture condition scoring guide and has since been revised and we will be training on that this summer. That note is for people working with pasture conditions and are not familiar with the changes. He noted that there a new cropland "In-Field" Soil Health Assessment Guidance Worksheet to be used to assess soil health resource concerns by working through a series of in-field soil health indicators. The Pennsylvania Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guidance has been revised as well as additional Pennsylvania Cultural Resources. He went on to note that we are in the midst of rolling out a new National Policy to require job approval authority for those Planners, Apprentice Planners and Technicians who are planning, designing and certifying ecological job science, practices in the field during the planning process. There are instructions posted in the Technical Guide and initial job approval authorities have been assigned who are currently certified and current Apprentice Planners. This

affects all the NRCS planning staff as well as partners and Affiliates. TSP's fall under a different set of rules and so they are not affected by this. However, it is something that affiliates, the partners, and our NRCS staff are going to be working through over the next nine months to fully implement.

Field Office Technical Guide update

State Technical Committee Meeting April 21, 2020

Pennsylvania Tech Guide updates – Eco-Sciences

- **Federal Register comment period**
- **New and revised assessment tools**
- **Ecological Sciences Policy phase-in**



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Federal Register Review

A public Inspection notification was made on the federal register for 49 Conservation Practice Standards were officially available for public comments beginning March 24, 2020 and lasting for 30 days. The public inspection notification is available here:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/03/24/2020-06088/proposed-revisions-to-the-national-handbook-of-conservation-practices>



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PA FOTG updates past 90 days



 United States Department of Agriculture

National Resource Concern List and Planning Criteria

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)



Natural Resources Conservation Service



PA FOTG updates past 90 days



Assessment Tools

- Pasture Conditioning Scoring Guidance
- Cropland In-field Soil Health Assessment Guidance
- PA Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guidance
- PA Cultural Resources Review Guidance

Ecological Sciences Job Approval Authority

- Instructions for policy phase-in
- Initial JAA assigned to certified and apprentice planners
- NRCS staff and partners working under NRCS
 - Does not apply to Technical Service Providers



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Yuri Plowden, NRCS State Soil Scientist, was introduced and presented an update on Soils data. (See attached hand-out) She announced that a new Web Soil Survey Report was recently made available titled "Poultry Mortality Disposal by Composting". She indicated that this report is one of several interpretations available to serve as a starting point for finding suitable sites for large-scale animal disposal. She also said that onsite investigations may still be recommended. She went on to explain how to find the website and gave details on how to find specific data. She also noted where to find the latest Web Soil Survey updates intitled "See what's new" where you can see the newest information available, including new and known problems that have been encountered. Also the site makes note of tabs that have been removed because they were obsolete as well as "Bug Fixes" on the site. She remarked that the Web Soil Survey is the "Official" NRCS Soil Data that is updated constantly and refreshed on an annual basis. The next annual refresh date for the Soil Survey Data has been established as being July 1st, 2020.



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PA Soils Update

April 21, 2020

PA State Technical Committee



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New Web Soil Survey Report

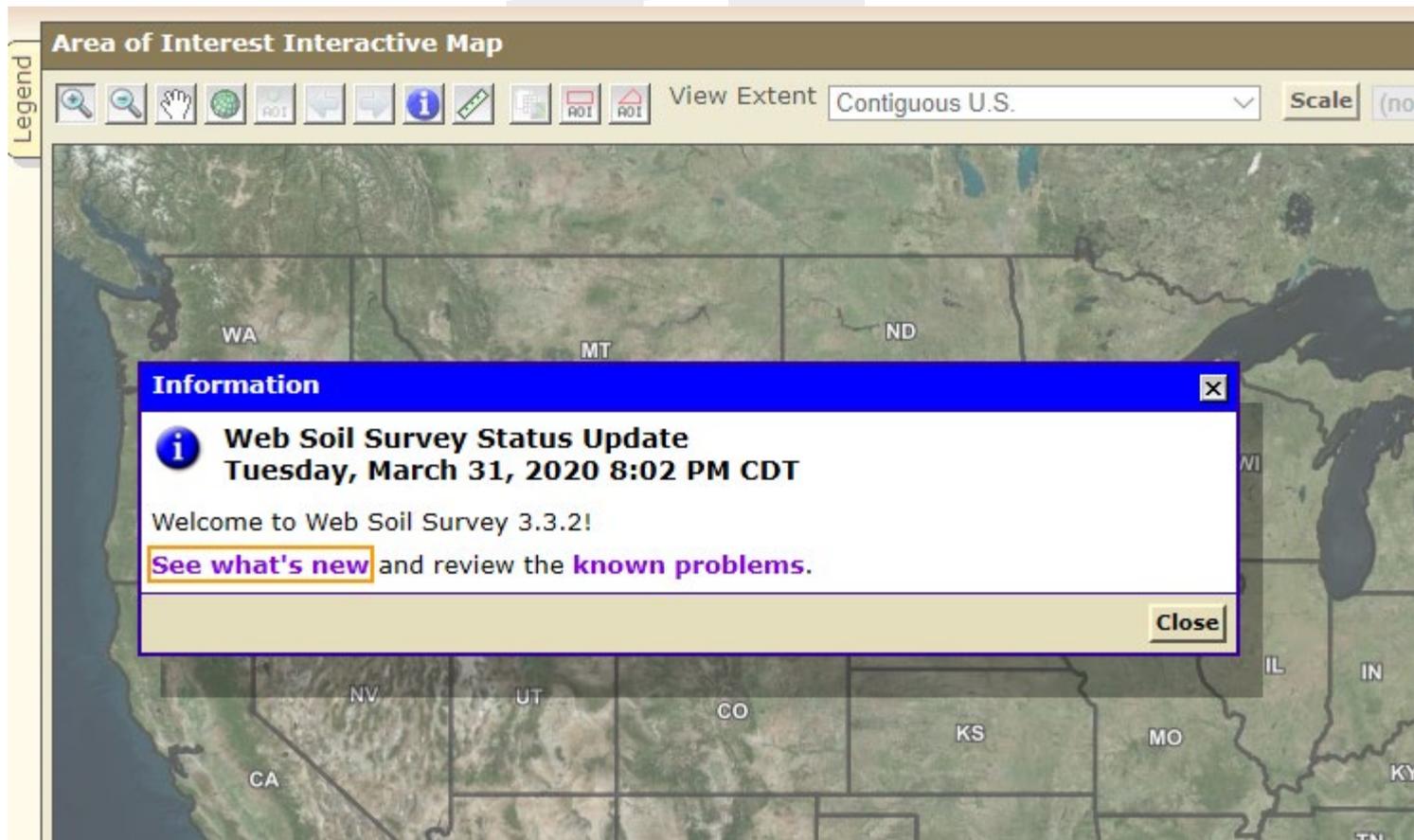
Poultry Mortality Disposal by Composting

- The report is one of several interps that serve as a starting point for finding suitable sites for large-scale animal disposal
- An onsite investigation may still be recommended



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Updated version of WSS Version 3.3.2



Soil Survey

[Soil Survey - Home](#)

[Soil Surveys by State](#)

 [Partnerships](#)

[Publications](#)

 [Soil Classification](#)

[Soil Geography](#)

[Tools](#)

 [Soil Survey Regional Offices](#)

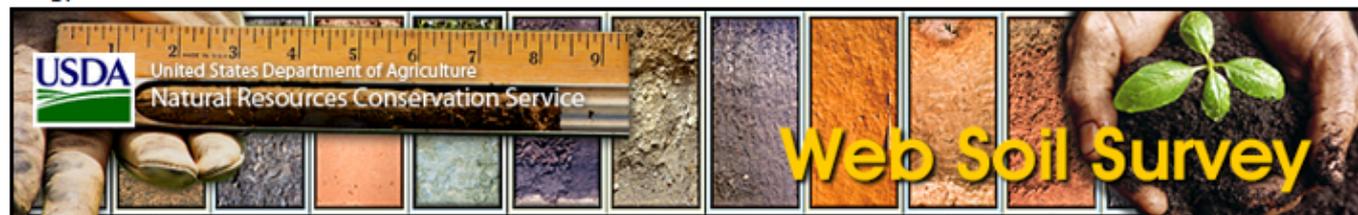
[Soil Climate Research Stations](#)

Web Soil Survey Information

- [Version 3.3.2 New Features](#)
- [Tips and Shortcuts](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Status Map of Available Soil Surveys](#)
- [Metrics](#)

Web Soil Survey 3.3.2 — New Features and Fixes

1.



[Removal of "Ecological Site Assessment" Tab from Soil Data Explorer Page](#)

2. [Bug Fixes](#)

Removal of "Ecological Site Assessment" Tab from Soil Data Explorer Page

The "Ecological Site Assessment" inner tab has been removed from Soil Data Explorer page to prevent display of obsolete ecological site information. In its place a new "Vegetative Productivity" report has been defined, "Link to Ecological Site Descriptions in EDIT". See the [WSS Frequently Asked Questions](#) for instructions.

Bug Fixes

Incorrect links for the "Frequently Asked Questions", "Known Problems", and "Tips and Shortcuts" pages have been fixed.



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Home

About Soils

Help

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You are here: Web Soil Survey Home

Search

Go

All NRCS Sites

Browse by Subject

- Soils Home
- National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCCS)
- Archived Surveys
- Status M
- Official S Description
- Series Explorer
- Geospatial Data Gateway
- eFOTG
- National Soil Characterization

The simple yet powerful way to access and use soil data.



Welcome to Web Soil Survey (WSS)



Web Soil Survey (WSS) provides soil data and information produced by the National

I Want To...

- Start Web Soil Survey (WSS)
- Know Web Soil Survey Requirements
- Know Web Soil Survey operation hours
- Find what areas of
- Know the SSURGO data structure
- Use Web Soil Survey on a mobile device

Remember that WSS is the official NRCS soils data. As yet, no annually refreshed 'live layer' on ArcGIS online.

The site is updated and maintained online as the single authoritative source of soil survey information.

Soil surveys can be used for general farm, local, and wider area planning. Onsite investigation is needed in some cases, such as soil quality assessments and certain conservation and



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Soil Survey Annual Data Refresh

July 1st, 2020

Contact Yuri Plowden if you need
more information
yuri.plowden@usda.gov

Jim Gillis, NRCS State Biologist, was introduced and did a presentation concerning Food Security Act (FSAct) Wetland Functional Assessments that NRCS has to develop for the purpose of implementing the Food Security Act. (See attached hand-out) He emphasized that the FSAct applies to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) participants, NOT USDA Agencies. He explained that NRCS must continue to follow our own internal regulations and policies for wetland. And that means that our first rule is that we have to avoid negative wetland impacts whenever possible period. If there is a wetland run landscape even if the USDA participant can do something with that wetland, that doesn't necessarily mean that NRCS can. So it's nothing really changes by this functional assessment or very little changes for us. That our rule of thumb is always going to be to avoid wetlands whenever possible. The 2018 Farm Bill actually had written in to it that became law, that requires that NRCS has to conduct a functional assessment on any wetland acres affected by manipulation or conversion to verify that those acres were providing the functions and values of a wetland before USDA, as a whole, ending the operation and ineligible for benefits. So what that legalese translates into in plain English is just a very simple question wasn't going to be later converted area truly a functional wetland before it was manipulated or converted. He indicated that there has been a lot of pressure nationally for justification of what we are calling converted wetlands. He went on to describe examples. He discussed Functional Assessment Screening questions as outlined on the attached hand-out of his presentation. Indicating that the FSAct Functional Assessment draft is not cut in stone and that anyone or any agency interested in participating in a review of the draft should contact him with any input they might have. We desperately would like to have input from others so we can get a well-rounded approach. He stated that there are other rapid assessments and things like that that are available and they would be included if provided. However, very few of these are specifically designed for farmland and they have rapid in the title, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are rapid in the real world. We must come up with something a little bit different but that he would welcome any

interest or participation from everyone. If anyone who is interested would like a copy of the draft assessment to review, please contact him and he will share it with you. He again stated that the deadline for completion is July and hopefully it will be completed and available for presentation to the State Technical Committee at the July meeting.



United States Department of Agriculture

Food Security Act



Wetland Functional Assessments

Jim Gillis,
NRCS State Biologist



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FSAct – Functional Assessments

APPLIES TO *USDA PARTICIPANTS*, **NOT** USDA AGENCIES!

NRCS will continue to follow our own internal regulations and policies regarding wetland impacts:

1. *Avoid negative wetland impacts whenever possible.*
2. When avoidance is not possible, minimize negative impacts & get appropriate permits.
3. Mitigate negative wetland impacts.



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FSAct – Functional Assessments

The 2018 Farm Bill requires that

1. ***NRCS must conduct a Functional Assessment on wetland acres affected by manipulation or conversion,***
2. ***to verify that those acres were providing the functions and values of a wetland,***
3. ***before USDA deems the operation ineligible for benefits.***

“Was the manipulated/converted area truly a functional wetland before it was manipulated/converted?”



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FSAct – Functional Assessments



Wetland functions are relative, based on a variety of features.

Some functions are important enough to warrant wetland protection in ALL cases.

Addressed through Screening Questions...



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FSAct – Functional Assessments

Functional Assessment Screening Questions (Must be answered sequentially from S1 to S6.)	
<p>S1. Wetland conversion is <i>planned or completed</i>, with the intent of <i>making production of an agricultural commodity possible</i> in an area that is currently not croppable?</p> <p><i>Select appropriate answer in box to right.</i></p>	<input type="button" value="Yes"/> <input checked="" type="button" value="No"/>
<p>STOP. Project is ineligible for Functional Assessment; consider the Manipulated Wetland (WX) label</p>	
<p>S2. Do threatened or endangered species <i>exist in (or are they suspected to exist in)</i> or <i>depend on</i> the affected wetland complex? Include PNDI or documentation from regulatory agencies in the case file.</p> <p><i>Select appropriate answer in box to right.</i></p>	<input type="button" value="Yes"/> <input checked="" type="button" value="No"/>
<p>STOP. Project is not eligible for Functional Assessment, due to negative impacts on T & E species.</p>	
<p>S3. Are the affected wetland acres part of a mitigation project, long-term easement, or restrictive covenant with any other group or agency?</p> <p><i>Select appropriate answer in box to right.</i></p>	<input type="button" value="Yes"/> <input checked="" type="button" value="No"/>
<p>STOP. Wetland acres are protected and not eligible for Functional Assessment.</p>	
<p>S4. Are the affected wetland acres directly linked to a <i>High Quality (HQ) or Extreme Value (EV) stream</i>? As indicated on the Priority Resource Inventory map for the site.</p> <p><i>Select appropriate answer in box to right.</i></p>	<input type="button" value="Yes"/> <input checked="" type="button" value="No"/>
<p>STOP. Project is not eligible for Functional Assessment, due to presence of HQ / EV stream.</p>	
<p>S5. When fully installed, will the planned project(s) disturb <i>more than one acre of wetland</i>?</p> <p><i>Select appropriate answer in box to right.</i></p>	<input type="button" value="Yes"/> <input checked="" type="button" value="No"/>
<p>STOP. Project is not eligible for Functional Assessment, due to large amount of wetland disturbance.</p>	
<p>S6. When fully installed, will the planned project(s) disturb <i>less than 0.05 acre of wetland</i>?</p> <p><i>Select appropriate answer in box to right.</i></p>	<input type="button" value="Yes"/> <input checked="" type="button" value="No"/>
<p>Automatically eligible for Minimal Effect exemption, due to minimal amount of wetland disturbance.</p>	



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FSAct – Functional Assessments



Other characteristics have relative levels of importance, and need to be assessed objectively across all land uses:

- size
- hydrologic connectivity
- use / management
- frequency of saturation
- duration of saturation



These are topics that may or may not, in combination or alone, affect the functional value of wetlands.



FSAct – Functional Assessments



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Functional Assessment of EXISTING Wetland Functions (E1 - E4)		existing acres	existing values
E1. How many acres of wetland(s) currently exist in each land use in the project area: <i>Enter acreage for each land use, including 0 where applicable. Round acreage to the nearest hundredth.</i>	Cropland, Hay in rotation, or Pasture:	0.99	3.3858
	Low-intensity Pasture or Permanent Hay:	0.18	3.6396
	Erosion control practice (gww, div., etc.):	0.18	3.6396
	Conservation cover, Fallow, or Forest ≤5 yrs:	0.13	3.7206
	Forest > 5 years:	0.1	3.7
	Existing wetland acres in project area:	1.58	18.09
E2. How far is the existing wetland complex from other surface waters, either permanent or seasonal: <i>Select most appropriate answer in box to right.</i>		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> > 300' from other surface waters <input type="checkbox"/> 200 - 300' from other surface waters <input type="checkbox"/> 100 - 200' from other surface waters <input type="checkbox"/> within 100' of other surface waters </div>	
E3. Affected wetland acres are currently saturated for how long, typically: <i>Select most appropriate answer in box to right.</i>		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> < 15 days per year <input type="checkbox"/> 15 - 30 days per year <input type="checkbox"/> > 30 days per year </div>	
E4. Affected wetland acres are currently saturated how often, on average: <i>Select most appropriate answer in box to right.</i>		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> less than one in four years <input type="checkbox"/> one in four years <input type="checkbox"/> every other year <input type="checkbox"/> every year </div>	
EXISTING WETLAND CONDITION SCORE: 18.09			
Current wetlands provide environmental functions and benefits.			
The Functional Assessment shows that current wetlands have environmental value, and additional consideration of project effects is needed. Complete the 'Assessment of Wetland Functions AFTER Project Installation' (below); a minimal effect finding may still be possible if project impacts are minor enough.			



FSAct – Functional Assessments

Functional Assessment of Wetland Functions AFTER project installation (A1 - A4)		"after" acres	"after" values
A1. How many acres of wetland(s) are expected to remain in each land use after the planned project is fully installed: <i>Enter acreage for each land use, including 0 where applicable. Round acreage to the nearest hundredth.</i>	Cropland, Hay in rotation, or Pasture	0	0
	Low-intensity Pasture or Permanent Hay	0	0
	Erosion control practice (gww, div., etc.)	0	0
	Conservation cover, Fallow, or Forest ≤5 yrs	0	0
	Forest > 5 years	0.09	0.7875
Expected wetland acres in project area after project installation:		0.09	
A2. How will the planned disturbance change the interaction between the affected wetland complex and associated water bodies, either permanent or seasonal: <i>Enter one 'x' beside the most appropriate answer.</i>		<input type="checkbox"/> interactions entirely removed <input type="checkbox"/> interactions greatly reduced <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> interactions moderately reduced <input type="checkbox"/> interactions slightly reduced	
A3. After disturbance, affected wetland acres are expected to be saturated for how long, typically: <i>Enter one 'x' beside the most appropriate answer.</i>		<input type="checkbox"/> < 15 days per year <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 15 - 30 days per year <input type="checkbox"/> > 30 days per year	
4b. After disturbance, affected wetland acres are expected to be saturated how often, on average: <i>Enter one 'x' beside the most appropriate answer.</i>		<input type="checkbox"/> less than one in four years <input type="checkbox"/> one in four years <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> every other year <input type="checkbox"/> every year	
RESULTING WETLAND CONDITION SCORE:		3.54	
Resulting wetlands will no longer provide acceptable levels of environmental functions or benefit.			

INELIGIBLE FOR MINIMAL EFFECT FINDING and FSAct MINIMAL EFFECT (MW) LABEL.
 Because the planned project will degrade the existing/functional wetlands to a point where they provide less-than-acceptable environmental benefits, it is ineligible for a Minimal Effect finding. Print and sign this document, then put in case file. Re-design or re-plan the project to reduce wetland impacts, if possible. For FSAct wetland determinations, DO NOT assign the MW label to the wetlands in question; assign other FSAct label(s) as appropriate according to NFSAM 5th edition, Part 514.



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FSAct – Functional Assessments



INPUT REQUESTED!

Anyone or any agency interested in participating in a review of the draft FSAct Wetland Functional Assessment should contact:

Jim Gillis, NRCS State Biologist
james.gillis@usda.gov



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Before introducing the next presenter, Denise Coleman made comments regarding the new automation system. She announced that we are moving to the Conservation Assessment Rating Tool (CART) and so every field and every resource concern on every field is being assessed by our field employees at this time, before it gets put into our ranking so that we can show true outcomes on the site-specific basis. This information system that we are using will actually show the site-specific outcomes related to those practices implemented. So while our field people are doing that it takes an extreme amount of time and effort to revamp. It works through our Conservation Desktop platform, which is also new this year to our field folks. It is an extremely new setup for everyone in the field who is doing work with NRCS as it moves through the ranking cycle. We have yet to rank any of our applications that have come in for FY 2020 sign-up but that is the intent and then, of course by the end of the year we will be awarding those contracts. Each program manager is going to go over their deadlines, keeping in mind that some of these are critical deadlines that we are going to talk about as it relates to CSP, as it relates to State CIG, as it relates to our RCPP classic and their Alternate Funding Arrangement (AFA). She asked that the presenters at this meeting just repeat the deadlines for folks being as they have changed and/or been extended. These changes perhaps have not been passed on as yet by public affairs. She announced that Audrey Mays has been appointed as the new CREP Coordinator for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Denise asked if she was online for the meeting, and if so to introduce herself, which she did.

Barry Frantz, PA NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs was introduced and provided an update of 2020 Programs. (See attached hand-out) He announced that Ed Sanders, PA NRCS EQIP Coordinator has retired and is being replaced temporarily by Zenik Crespo. Zenik has been detailed to the State Office and will be the acting "go to" person for EQIP. He commented on the new Conservation Assessment Rating Tool (CART) that Denise had previously discussed. He noted that it is bringing out some new Farm Bill regulations, and for that reason we're trying to minimize other changes that we are making in our system because of these two big changes that we are dealing with which is the new Farm Bill Regulations and the new computer tool to help us plan with landowners and farmers. Under Agriculture Management Assistance (AMA), he indicated that we typically get a small amount of funding because the national allocation for AMA nationwide is not very large. That typically for 16, 17 states it's a subset of risk management funding, so we don't have enough funding to make it worthwhile to have a statewide signup. In previous years we have rotated the money across the state, so this year we are targeting the Southeast Pennsylvania counties of Cumberland, Bucks, Montgomery, Lehigh and Northampton. Funding categories will be directed toward High Tunnels and Irrigation projects. The funding allocation this year for AMA is about \$350,000. He indicated that there are 3 general options for CSP this year: the Classic CSP Option for new enrollments; CSP Renewal Option for the one time renewal contract option; the Farm Bill 2018 has added a Grassland Conservation Initiative for producers with eligible base acres maintained by FSA. He discussed the National Listed Activities and indicated that not all activities are applicable to Pennsylvania. He covered the CSP Enhancement Options to be improved upon. He went on to cover the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to address natural resource concerns and delivers environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, and improved or created wildlife habitat. He stated that we have similar funding categories as in prior years, and the program offers

largely the same as what we have had in previous use. One of the changes to EQIP raises the payment limit cap for organic producers to \$140,000 and this is part of the \$450,000 limit they have in the Farm Bill for EQIP, so if someone signs up for the EQIP Organic Option, they will compete only against other people in the Organic which raises their chance of getting funding of up to the \$140,000 for this and in their remaining regular EQIP option and they still have \$310,000 remaining to get up to the \$450,000, but it helps make it a little more possible for the folks in Organic Option to get funding. It also got rid of the \$20,000 annual payment limit for Organic. He then discussed the EQIP National Initiatives that included: Conservation Activity Plans; the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, for which we have a lot of funding available; the High Tunnel Initiative; Historically Underserved Groups such as beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers; the National Water Quality Initiative; the On-farm Energy Initiative; the Organic Initiative; and the Working Lands for Wildlife to include the Golden Winged Warbler. He then covered our state priorities for EQIP that included: Cropland; Forestry, to include Forest Management Plans; Grazing; Livestock; Poultry; and Stream Corridor Management. He stated that there are about 15 different kinds of Conservation Activity Plans available and that the ones that we get most interest in are the Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan; the Nutrient Management Plan; and the Forest Management Plan. Additional plans that are lower on use scale are: Agriculture Energy Management Plan; the Organic Transition; and the Pollinator Habitat Plan. He indicated that a new Activity Plan for 2021 may be a Soil Health Management Plan. He outlined the active contract workload that we have by program, active contracts (1,752), planned practices (14,335) and with remaining payments amounting to \$51,522,139. A question was asked concerning updating the practices that came through the Federal Register, that NRCS would keep the same ones from last year, also that NRCS seems to be behind in notifying folks whether potentially they might have funding under the various EQIP programs. Barry responded that we have put out news releases through the usual media and our public affairs person. The people who have existing contracts will get a reminder letter

from their local Field Office saying that they have a contract and that these are the things that you are scheduled to do this year.

Denise Coleman interjected comments concerning NRCS status. With the new Farm Bill and the new regulations that had to be written and the new automation system, She indicated that we are six months into the new Fiscal Year and currently we usually like to be in this place around the December-January timeframe. The situation that was asked about the processes, those practices that are published for the Federal Register comments are National Practice Standards now. They are revisions to the National Practice Standards. We will take a look at the National Practice Standard and see how applicable those practice standards are to Pennsylvania. And they may come up for review in Pennsylvania as practices are updated. Usually we get teams together to take a look at those practices, and may go out with Pennsylvania State Standards. It needs to be compatible with national standards but can be more restrictive. Barry reminded everyone that the application due date for EQIP, AMA and RCPP to be considered for the first evaluation cycle is March 20. He stated that there is a National date we have for the CSP application, no earlier than June first. We have a national obligation date for the regular CSP by the end of July. EQIP, we are still in process of doing the rankings, and so there's some national obligation data released in September and we have our in mid-August.

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2020 Financial Assistance Programs



NRCS Programs and Tools

Conservation Technical Assistance

- **Conservation planning assistance**

Conservation Programs

Agricultural Management Assistance AMA
Conservation Stewardship Program CSP
Environmental Quality Incentives Program
EQIP

Easement Programs

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
ACEP
Agricultural Lands Easements
Wetland Restoration Easements
Healthy Forest Reserve Program

Regional Conservation Partnership Program RCPP

- **Conservation Easements**
- **Conservation Practices**
- **Conservation Practice Enhancements**

2018
FARM
BILL

Agricultural Management Assistance

**Rotate Limited Funding to the 3 PA NRCS
Administrative Areas**

Targeted to SE PA in 2020

Cumberland

Bucks –Montgomery

Lehigh-Northampton

Funding Categories

High Tunnels

Irrigation

Specialty Crops

**2018
FARM
BILL**

Conservation Stewardship Program - CSP

A photograph showing two men in a field. The man on the left is older, wearing glasses and a dark jacket over a blue shirt. The man on the right is younger, wearing a red polo shirt. They are both looking at a large green plant that the older man is holding. The background is a vast green field under a clear sky.

Helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority natural resource concerns. Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

Conservation Stewardship Program

“Classic” CSP Option

New enrollments

CSP Renewal Option

One time renewal option

CSP-Grassland Conservation Initiative

**For producers with eligible base acres
maintained by FSA**

2018
**FARM
BILL**

Conservation Stewardship Program

Nationally Listed Activities

156 Enhancements

84 Practices

28 Bundles

**Not all Activities are Applicable to
Pennsylvania**

2018
**FARM
BILL**

PA CSP Enhancement Options include improving:

Crop Rotations

Nutrient Management

Pest Management

Cover Crop & Soil Health

Pollinator habitat

Wildlife Habitat

Pastures & Grazing Management

Forest Management

Riparian Buffers

2018
**FARM
BILL**

Environmental Quality Incentives Program - EQIP



Provides financial and technical assistance to address natural resource concerns and delivers environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, and improved or created wildlife habitat.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Similar Funding Categories as Prior Years

National Initiatives

State Priorities

Conservation Activity Plans

Conservation Innovation Grants

Eligible Practices

2018
**FARM
BILL**

Changes to EQIP

- **Raises cap for organic producers to \$140,000**
- **Advance payments for historically underserved producers including Beginning Farmers**

EQIP National Initiatives

Conservation Activity Plans

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

High Tunnel Initiative

Historically Underserved Groups

Beginning Farmers

Socially Disadvantaged Farmers

National Water Quality Initiative

On-Farm Energy Initiative

Organic Initiative

Working Lands for Wildlife

Golden winged warbler

2018
**FARM
BILL**

EQIP State Priorities

Cropland

Forestry, including Forest Mgt Plans

Grazing

Livestock

Poultry

Stream Corridor Management

2018
**FARM
BILL**

Conservation Activity Plans

Most Popular

Comprehensive Nutrient Mgt Plan

Nutrient Mgt Plan

Forest Mgt Plan

Additional

Agriculture Energy Mgt Plan

Organic Transition

Pollinator Habitat Plan

New – 2021?

Soil Health Mgt Plan

2018
**FARM
BILL**

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Conservation Innovation Grants

National CIIG Option

National On-Farm Trials

State CIIG Options

2018
**FARM
BILL**

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

State Listed Activities

106 Practices

15 Conservation Activity Plans

2018
**FARM
BILL**

Active Contract Workload

Program	Active Contracts	Planned Practices	Remaining Payments
AMA 2014	17	64	\$ 568,138
AMA 2018	11	28	\$ 256,041
CSP 2014	496	2,669	\$ 6,404,816
CSP 2018	116	1,426	\$ 3,207,585
CSP-GCI	65	283	\$ 122,703
EQIP 2008	3	16	\$ 44,375
EQIP 2014	542	4,326	\$ 16,465,726
EQIP 2018	363	4,166	\$ 18,893,732
RCPP-CSP	12	136	\$ 392,593
RCPP-EQIP	116	1,189	\$ 5,035,829
WHIP 2008	11	32	\$ 130,601
	1,752	14,335	\$ 51,522,139

Applications and Funding

Program	Applications	Available Funds (rounded)
AMA	30	\$360,000
CSP	391	\$4,255,000
EQIP	2,184	\$22,609,000
RCPP-EQIP	63	\$3,136,000

2018
**FARM
BILL**

Note: RCPP-EQIP fr remaining FY2018 funds

For Help go to www.farmers.gov



Conserve

USDA recognizes that conservation by farmers, ranchers, and forest owners today means thriving and sustainable agriculture for our future.

Seventy percent of the nation's land is privately owned. Conservation of our nation's private lands not only results in healthy soil, water, air, plants, animals, and ecosystems but also provides productive and sustainable working lands.

Whether you are small-scale vegetable grower, a cattle rancher on 10,000 acres of range, a multi-tract timber manager, or someone who owns agricultural land, USDA has tools and resources to help you learn about conservation and what you can do, voluntarily, to improve the natural resource conditions on your land.

Visit our [Soil Health](#) page to learn about best practices to improve the health of your land.

Manage Your Natural Resources



Get Technical Assistance



Explore Financial Assistance Options



Using the ACT Conservation System On Cropland

*For Healthy Soils, Clean Water,
and Profitable Farms*



**2018
FARM
BILL**

Sign up for NRCS news and information

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/pa/newsroom/>

Browse By Audience

Using the ACT Conservation System On Cropland
For Healthy Soils, Clean Water, and Profitable Farms



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A man with a beard and a baseball cap is smiling and holding a small green plant in his hands. He is standing in front of a wooden building with an American flag hanging on the wall behind him. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

The Farm Bill is an important tool. But it doesn't work without the dedication of the folks in the field, most importantly, the farmers and ranchers that use it to make the best decisions for their land and operations.

Ashley Lenig, PA NRCS Conservation Program Manager, was introduced and presented updates on Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), and High Priority & Source Water Protection Practices. Under CSP: she commented that CSP Contracts are being extended for an additional year; renewing existing contracts for another 5 years; folks applying for CSP Classic (Regular, beginning farmer/rancher, socially disadvantaged farmer/rancher and Organic) must do so by June 1st. On CSP renewals, she reminded everyone that the renewals are competitive this year and indicated that CSP is the first to go through the CART program this year. Going through this process of working with the new conservation desktop which replaced the mapping and planning software that was previously used, we have had to develop ranking questions and put them into the system. So for any of our CSP's whether it's renewal or classic, we do have categories underneath CSP Ag Lands and pasture. She discussed the new ranking questions and how they work with the information provided. She continued to explain program and resource priorities as they pertain to the stewardship threshold, water quality, systems approach and pollinator habitat. She covered CSP NIPF (Non-industrial Private Forestland) program priorities, including state priority resource concerns and current the current Forest Management Plan. Under Resource Priorities, she discussed: the Stewardship Threshold; plant structure and composition; threatened, endangered, or species of greatest conservation need; Brook Trout greatly reduced targeted Priority Watershed; and Systems Approach. Ashley went on to discuss Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) by announcing that the CIG proposals are due May 11th for the National CIG on farm conservation innovation trials. Denise Coleman interjected that a change had been announced moving the CIG proposal due date to May 29th. Ashley announced that the Pennsylvania CIG proposals are due by June 15th, and referred all to the announcement made on the Grants website, <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/pa/newsroom/releases>. Also that the National CIG for 2020 is expected to be announced sometime in

April or May. Ashley then provided an update on the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI). She shared a Pennsylvania map and provided an update concerning the status of the 5 watersheds that are approved for the Readiness Phase. She went on to discuss application processing. In addition, she shared the NWQI Outreach activities in those 5 watersheds that are: Warrior Run, Upper Yellow and Beaver Creeks, Upper Kishacoquillas, Swatara Creek and Maiden Creek. She provided information relative to the current NWQI Applications, those being: 7 new applications in Warrior Run; 16 existing applications in Upper Yellow and Beaver Creeks; 3 existing applications in Upper Kishacoquillas, 21 new Source Water Protection (SWP) in Swatara Creek; and 19 existing SWP in Maiden Creek. She indicated that as a result of studies, Designation of Practices as high priority, SWP had been updated. Some practices were selected to receive a higher payment rate. The goal was to introduce practices that may be overlooked for whatever reason. NRCS National asked states to solicit input and select up to 10 practices for EQIP General and up to 10 practices for EQIP-NWQI source water protection. The practices selected as "High Priority" are: Prescribed Burning; Riparian Herbaceous Cover; Stream Habitat Improvement and Management; Aquatic Organism Passage; Tree/shrub Site Protection; Streambank and Shoreline protection; Denitrifying Bioreactor; Tree/shrub establishment; Wetland Restoration; and Phosphorous Removal System. Under Source Water Protection: Well decommissioning; Karst Sinkhole Treatment; Streambank and Shoreline Protection; Denitrifying Bioreactor; and Phosphorous Removal System.

An Update on Program Opportunities



State Technical Committee Meeting 4/20/2020

Ashley Lenig, Conservation Program Manager
ashley.lenig@usda.gov 717-237-2204

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What will we cover?

- Conservation Innovation Grant opportunities
- Conservation Stewardship Program
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program –
National Water Quality Initiative
- High Priority & Source Water Protection Practices



Conservation Stewardship Program

- **CSP Extensions**
 - Extend CSP contract an additional year
- **CSP Renewals**
 - Renewing an existing contract for another 5 years
- **CSP Classic (apply by June 1)**
 - Regular
 - Beginning Farmer/Rancher
 - Socially Disadvantaged Farmer/Rancher
 - Organic



Conservation Stewardship Program

- **CSP Renewals**

- Ranking Questions
- First program planning to go through Conservation Desktop (CD)
- First to go through the new Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART)

- **CSP Ag Lands**

- Agricultural Land includes Cropland, Pasture
 - Also can include Farmstead and Associated Ag Land

- **CSP NIPF**

- Non-industrial Private Forest land includes Forestland
 - Also can include Farmstead and Associated Ag Land



CSP Ag Lands ranking questions

- **Program Priorities**
 - State Priority Resource Concerns
 - Soil Health
- **Resource Priorities**
 - Stewardship Threshold
 - Water Quality
 - Systems Approach
 - Pollinator Habitat



CSP NIPF ranking questions

- Program Priorities

- State Priority Resource Concerns
- Current Forest Management Plan

- Resource Priorities

- Stewardship Threshold
- Plant Structure and Composition
- Threatened, Endangered, or Species of Greatest Conservation Need
- Brook Trout Greatly Reduced Targeted Priority Watershed
- Systems Approach



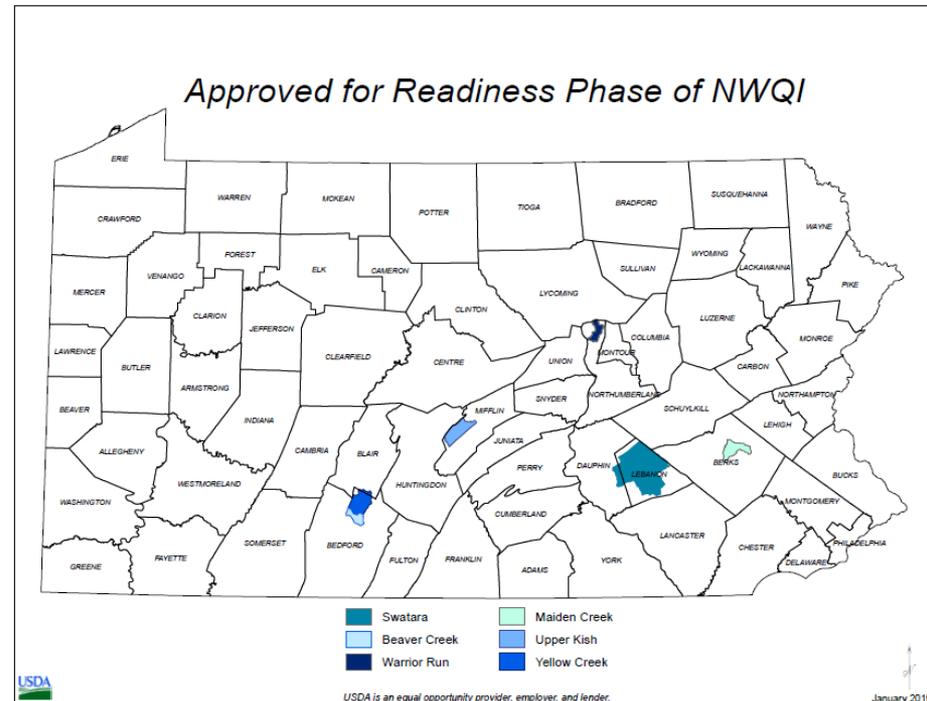
Conservation Innovation Grants

- National CIG On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials
 - Proposals due May 11th
- PA CIG 2020
 - Proposals due June 15th
 - Announcement on www.grants.gov
 - USDA-NRCS-PA-CIG-GEN0010781
 - Information on PA NRCS website
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/pa/newsroom/releases>
- National CIG 2020
 - Expected to be announced soon



Environmental Quality Incentives Program- National Water Quality Initiative

- **Watersheds**
 - 2019 Planning/Readiness Phase
 - 2020 Implementation/Contracts
- **Outreach**
 - 3 NWQI
 - 2 NWQI Source Water Protection
- **Applications**
 - Assessing/Planning now
 - Ranking → Contracting next



NWQI Outreach Activities

- **Warrior Run**
 - Ice Cream and Electrofishing (photo →)
 - Pancake Breakfast with information and speakers
 - Video (<https://www.nccdpa.org/warrior-run-watershed-national-water-quality-initiative/>)
- **Upper Yellow and Beaver Creeks**
 - 4 events – presentations/materials
 - Flyers at Feed Stores & Door-to-Door outreach
 - Partners (CD/FSA)
- **Upper Kishacoquillas**
- **Swatara Creek**
 - Fulton Bank Ag Lender Meeting
 - PSU Crops Day
- **Maiden Creek**
 - Young Farmers Meeting (photo →)



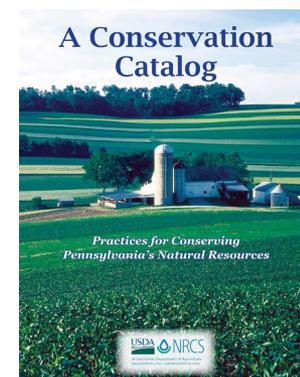


NWQI Applications

- Warrior Run (new)
 - 7
- Upper Yellow and Beaver Creeks (existing)
 - 16
- Upper Kishacoquillas (existing)
 - 3
- Swatara Creek (new SWP)
 - 21
- Maiden Creek (existing, SWP)
 - 19

Designation of Practices as High Priority , Source Water Protection

- Practices selected to receive a higher payment rate
 - (90% instead of 75% of expected cost)
- **GOAL:** introduce practices that may be overlooked
 - high cost of installation with high environmental benefit
 - need for increased exposure
- **NRCS national asked states to solicit input and select**
 - Up to 10 practices for EQIP general
 - Up to 10 practices for EQIP-NWQI source water protection



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Practices Designated

High Priority (10 practices)

- Prescribed Burning (338)
- Riparian Herbaceous Cover (390)
- Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (395)
- Aquatic Organism Passage (396)
- Tree/Shrub Site Preparation (on abandoned mine lands only) (490)
- Streambank and Shoreline Protection (580)
- Denitrifying Bioreactor (605)
- Tree/Shrub Establishment (on abandoned mine lands only) (612)
- Wetland Restoration (657)
- Phosphorous Removal System (782)

Source Water Protection (5 practices)

- Well Decommissioning (351)
- Karst Sinkhole Treatment (527)
- Streambank and Shoreline Protection (580)
- Denitrifying Bioreactor (605)
- Phosphorous Removal System (782)



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Questions?



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Susan Marquart, PA NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships, was introduced and discussed The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Susan announced that we are currently soliciting applications for our Alternate Funding Arrangements (AFA) portion of RCPP. The AFA was first included in the 2014 Farm Bill and has been expanded into the 2018 Farm Bill now. She indicated that there is up to \$50 million dollars available nationwide for the AFA. There is a statutory restriction of a maximum of 15 projects. Many of the requirements to the AFA are similar to the Classic RCPP and the funding must be split 50/50 between the critical conservation areas and the state and multi-state pool. The conservation benefits must be shown in the application and the resource concerns that are designated in that multi-state pool must be addressed in your proposal. We are also looking for a partner contribution and there are still critical and our goal is at least one-to-one contribution from the partners and NRCS. Our minimum funding amount is \$250,000 and the maximum is \$10 million and that is the same as in the RCPP Classic, as well the 70/30 financial assistance technical assistance, and the eligibility criteria for the lead partners. The RCPP principles are the same as our RCPP and the AFA. We are looking for an impact statement from each project. We are expecting partners to identify exactly what the impact of their project is going to be especially in this case for the state of Pennsylvania. We are also looking at partner contributions. We would like to see at least an equal partner contribution with the NRCS contribution. Also we are looking for innovation in your project, something that you're not something that would ordinarily be done through the RCPP Classic program...something new and different. The Partnership and Project Management has to be demonstrated in the applications to show that the partners are able to manage the project and provide the technical assistance that is needed. The AFA is designated for: projects that are innovative and do not rely on existing NRCS program operations; that cannot be effectively carried out using RCPP Classic approach; that can be entirely managed and implemented by the lead partner, with the exception of inherently governmental activities, in a more grant-like fashion. She went on to discuss

the AFA Authorized activities concerning land management, Land rental, entity-held easements and watershed/public works. Concerning Partners: she stated that lead partners must be able to carry out all FA and TA activities; that partners must have access to producer networks and have the capability to provide funding to producers/landowners. Proposals are due by May 29th, 2020. She announced the following RCPP Classic Announcements made on April 16th, 2020. They were: Kittatinny Ridge Conservation Landscape Project; AG CMP Implementation in the Chesapeake Bay; and the Buffalo Creek Watershed Conservation Alliance. These projects account for almost \$14 Million dollars that were brought into the state. A question concerning the definition of "Lead Partner". She stated that the Lead Partner would be the partner entity or group that would be putting in the application for the RCPP project and would be working with all the other partners in the project as well as with us at NRCS. She was also asked if there was more detailed information available on the first two RCPP projects. In addressing the question, she indicated that there was nothing very specific at this point. She said that she was about to attend a training where they were going to put the available information together so that it could be properly announced to the State Technical Committee with more detailed information on what these projects would entail.

Denise Coleman interjected comments concerning the Kittatinny Ridge project. She said that the innovation that is involved in this project really came forward through the Department of Defense Funds to match with the State PDA funds as well as the ACEP-ALE. There will be a large conservation easement component up and down the Kittatinny at Ridge. There is also a partnership with the PA Game Commission and others as well as local districts to go out and to do Forest Management Plans on the Ridge as well as Ag Conservation Practices and Forest Management Practices. We can see that there was a sizable match to the Kittatinny Ridge with over \$38 Million dollars' worth to match with NRCS money that was given for land acquisition. She indicated that there is going to be a large land acquisition component and specifically protecting a lot of Source stream sources and the lower valley. Concerning the project in Berks County, that work will be just in the Berks County portion of the watershed and we will be doing traditional conservation practice work there. The innovation involved in that project is that we are looking at potentially trying out those very similar practices that were just discussed with the 90% cost share such as Nitrogen Bioreactors and Phosphorus removal structures in those areas. Susan offered further clarification on the role of Lead Partners. The Lead Partner cannot be equal to the Landowner, the Lead Partner needs to be one of the entities that are applicable that is listed in the RCPP funding announcement. They are looking for entities such as Conservation Districts, institutions of higher learning, State Departments of Agriculture or Environmental Protection. They are looking for those big overarching partners to be the lead partner on a project. One that will be able to run the project, the practices and everything, to keep tract of managing the project over the whole scope of the project. A landowner that would want to apply would go in to NRCS like they do with other programs and put in an application for an RCPP project.



United States Department of Agriculture

Regional Conservation Partnership Program



**PA State Technical
Committee Meeting
April 21, 2020**



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Alternative Funding Arrangements

- **First included in the 2014 Farm Bill, expanded in the 2018 Farm Bill**
- **Up to \$50 million available nationwide**
- **Statutory restriction of a maximum 15 projects through this announcement**



Many requirements similar to Classic

- Funding must be split 50/50 between CCA and State/Multistate pools
- Conservation benefits/resource concerns
- Partner contributions are still critical and goal is at least 1:1
- Funding min (\$250k) and max (\$10M) are the same
- 70/30 FA/TA split is the same
- Eligibility for lead partners is the same



RCPP Principles



- **Impact**
- **Partner Contributions**
- **Innovation**
- **Partnership and Project Management**



AFA is designed for projects...

- That are innovative and do not rely on existing NRCS program operations
- That cannot be effectively carried out using RCPP Classic approach
- That can be entirely managed and implemented by the lead partner (in collaboration with other partners), with the exception of inherently governmental activities, in a more grant-like fashion



AFA Authorized Activities



- **Land management**
- **Land rental**
- **Entity-held easements**
- **Watershed/public works**

***note—no U.S.-held easements in AFA projects**



Partners



- **Lead partners must be able to carry out all FA and TA activities (minus inherently governmental items)**
- **Partners must have access to producer networks and have the capability to provide funding to producers/ landowners**
- **Proposals due ~~May 18, 2020~~ May 29, 2020**

RCPP Classic Announcement 4/16/20

Project Title: Kittatinny Ridge Conservation Landscape

Lead Partner: Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Lead State: PA

Funding Amount: \$ 9,928,571

Funding Pool: Chesapeake Bay Watershed
Critical Conservation Area

Project Title: Ag BMP Implementation in the Chesapeake Bay

Lead Partner: Berks County Conservation District

Lead State: PA

Funding Amount: \$ 2,232,143

Funding Pool: Chesapeake Bay Watershed
Critical Conservation Area



RCPP Classic Announcement

Project Title: Buffalo Creek Watershed Conservation Alliance

Lead Partner: Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania

Lead State: PA

Funding Amount: \$ 1,169,618

Funding Pool: State/Multi State





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Hathaway Jones, PA NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) was introduced and presented updates on Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) and Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) activities. (See attached hand-outs that include the Pennsylvania NRCS ACEP-ALE Ranking Form for FY 2020; ACEP-WRE Ranking Scoring Worksheet; and the ACEP-WRE Ranking Scoring Worksheet for Bog Turtle/Massasauga Ranking) Hathaway briefly discussed the ACEP-ALE Ranking Questions, indicating the National questions must be verbatim according to ALE policy, however the State Ranking Questions have a bit of flexibility, and she welcomed any comments/feedback on the ranking for this FY. She announced a new option for ALE funding. This program agreement option allows us more flexibility because it separates the agreement into a Statement of Work (SOW), which is not tied to any funding is signed by both parties and then attached to that Statement of Work are individual contracts related to each parcel that we would find through ALE, and the money is tied to those individual contracts that are part reference to the SOW. This means that we have a really smaller dollar value contracts for one of each parcel instead of one large agreement and that allows us to have more flexibility in how we fund these projects, and less time is needed. But approvals are needed for paperwork to get to the end of the road, which is enrolling farms and preserving them. She went on to discuss the Program Agreement compared to the Cooperative Agreement for ALE. She noted that Cooperative Agreements are still available and that the Program Agreements are the new method that is also available for ALE funding and in is in the application process. Entities can choose which type of agreement they prefer to use. She went on to review the ACEP-ALE FY2020 deadlines, which she noted were tentative: May 1st - is the ALE Application Deadline; June 26th for tentative ALE agreements to be submitted for Internal Controls and Grants and Agreements Review; July 31st - NRCS and ALE entities execute agreements; August 21st - Complete required steps to finalize agreement; and September 9th - Final ALE Funding/Obligation Deadline. Hathaway then provided an update on FY 2020 WRE Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC). She indicated that the GARC rates that had previously calculated had been

rejected. Some of the values were calculated uncorrected using ratios. The revised SOW, released in FY2020 requires all GARC values to be based on sales, not ratios. To meet this requirement, PA NRCS is obtaining a new revised Area Wide Market Analysis that will meet the new requirements. She indicated that the updated GARC values will be presented at the next STC meeting. She discussed the Wetland Restoration Criteria and Guidelines (WRCG) that provides documentation of technical criteria specific to Pennsylvania's Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE). It also explains Pennsylvania methodology for evaluating alternative wetland communities, determining eligibility, developing ranking questions, and managing violations, compatible uses and restoration activities. That once completed, the WRCG will be released to the STC for review and comment. She indicated that the WRE Program Ranking has no significant changes from last year except a change to reduce points. Per National guidance, the maximum allowable points is 400. She reviewed the ACEP-WRE tentative deadlines for FY 2020 as being: May 1st -WRE application deadline; June 26th - Tentative WRE applications are selected; July 17th - Finalization of WRE agreements, and upload to National Easements Staging Tool (NEST) and obtain Internal Controls reviews; August 14th - Issue offers of enrolment to landowners; August 28th - Complete required steps to finalize enrolment; and September 9th - Final ALE Funding/Obligation Deadline.



United States Department of Agriculture



Easement Programs
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Easements Update State Technical Committee Meeting

April 2020

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center



ACEP – ALE Program Updates



ACEP – ALE Program Ranking

- **National Ranking Questions**
 - **Required verbatim according to ALE policy (528.41 (C))**
- **State Ranking Questions**
 - **Selected by PA NRCS**
 - **Follow recommendations set forth in ALE policy 528.41 (C)**

The FY 2020 ALE National and State Ranking questions are provided in an attached PDF for your review

ACEP – ALE Program Agreement

- **New option for ALE funding**
- **A Statement of Work (SOW) outlines the contract between NRCS and Entity**
- **Funding is tied to each parcel through an individual “parcel agreement” attached to the SOW**

- **Provides faster obligation of funding**
 - **Requires less documentation**
 - **Requires less 3rd party reviews**
 - **Parcel agreements to add funding for new parcels can be added at any time to the SOW**

Program Agreement vs. Cooperative Agreement for ALE

Process Comparison at Time of Agreement Execution

ALE Cooperative/Grant Agreement

- Eligible Entity Documentation
- Designation of Program Technical Contact
- Entity application and all individual parcel applications
- Attachment to identify all parcels selected for funding and proposed for substitution
- SF-424
- SF-424A
- SF-424B
- General Terms & Conditions
- Lobbying Certification
- AD-3030
- AD-3031
- Subject to Grants and Agreements regulations (2 CFR Parts 25, 170, 200, 400)

ALE Program Agreement

- Eligible Entity Documentation
- Designation of Program Technical Contact
- Entity Application only
- Attachment to list eligible entities, and potential co-holders, and third-party right holders
- Optional provisions negotiated between NRCS and entity
- Statement for certified entities
- Parcel Contract to provide cost-share, executed any time
- ProTracts as system

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ACEP-ALE – FY 2020 Deadlines (tentative)

- **May 1st - ALE Application Deadline**
- **May – June PA NRCS Completes Due Diligence and Ranking of Applications)**
- **June 26th – Tentative ALE agreements submitted for Internal Controls and Grants and Agreements Review**
- **July 31st – NRCS and ALE entities execute agreements**
- **August 21 – Complete required steps to finalize agreement**
- **September 9th – Final ALE Funding/Obligation Deadline**



ACEP – WRE Program Updates



Update on FY 2020 WRE Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC)

- **The GARC rates previously calculated were rejected**
- **Some values were calculated incorrectly using ratios**
- **The revised SOW, released in FY 2020 requires all GARC values to be based on sales, NOT ratios**
- **To meet this requirement, PA NRCS is obtaining a revised Area Wide Market Analysis that will meet the new requirements**
- **The updated GARC values will be shared at the next STC meeting**

Wetland Restoration Criteria and Guidelines (WRCG)

- **Provides documentation of technical criteria specific to Pennsylvania's Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE)**
- **Explains Pennsylvania methodology for evaluating alternative wetland communities, determining eligibility, developing ranking questions, and managing violations, compatible uses, and restoration activities.**
- **Once completed, the WRCG will be released to the State Technical Committee for review and comment.**

ACEP – WRE Program Ranking

- **Follows National Ranking Guidelines in WRE policy (528.111)**
- **No significant changes from last year**
- **Only change was to reduce points.**
 - **Per National guidance, the maximum allowable points is 400.**

The FY 2020 WRE Ranking questions are provided in an attached PDF for your review

ACEP-WRE – FY 2020 Deadlines (tentative)

- **May 1st – WRE Application Deadline**
- **(May – June PA NRCS Completes Due Diligence and Ranking of Applications)**
- **June 26th – Tentative WRE applications selected**
- **July 17th – Finalize WRE agreements, upload to NEST and obtain Internal Controls reviews**
- **August 14th – Issue offers of enrollment to landowners**
- **August 28th – Complete required steps to finalize enrollment**
- **September 9th – Final ALE Funding/Obligation Deadline**



Questions?

Pennsylvania NRCS ACEP-ALE Ranking Form FY 2020

National Ranking Factors	Maximum Points	Points
<p>Percent of prime, unique, and important farmland in the parcel to be protected</p> <p><i>(0 points for 50% or less, 4 points for greater than 50% and less than or equal to 60%, 8 points for greater than 60% and less than or equal to 70%, 12 points for greater than 70% and less than or equal to 80%, 17 points for greater than 80%)</i></p>	17	
<p>Percent of cropland, rangeland, grassland, historic grassland, pastureland, or nonindustrial private forest land in parcel to be protected</p> <p><i>(0 points for 33 percent or less, 4 points for greater than 33 percent and less than or equal to 40 percent, 8 points for greater than 40 percent and less than or equal to 50 percent, 17 points for greater than 50 percent)</i></p>	17	
<p>Ratio of the total acres of land in the parcel to be protected to the average farm size in the county according to the most recent USDA Census of Agriculture (www.agcensus.usda.gov) Avg. Farm Size County _____ Acres of Parcel _____</p> <p><i>(0 points for a ratio of 1.0 or less, 7 points for ratios of greater than 1.0 and less than or equal to 2.0, 15 points for ratios of greater than 2.0)</i></p>	15	
<p>Decrease in the percentage of acreage of farm and ranch land in the county in which the parcel is located between the last two USDA Censuses of Agriculture (www.agcensus.usda.gov) Decrease in Percentage _____</p> <p><i>(0 points for decrease of 0 percent or less, 1 point for a decrease of greater than 0 and less than or equal to 5 percent, 5 points for a decrease of greater than 5 and less than or equal to 10 percent, 9 points for a decrease of greater than 10 and less than or equal to 15 percent, 16 points for a decrease of more than 15 percent)</i></p>	16	
<p>Decrease in the percentage of acreage of permanent grassland, pasture, and rangeland, other than cropland and woodland pasture, in the county in which the parcel is located between the last two USDA Censuses of Agriculture (www.agcensus.usda.gov) Decrease in Percentage _____</p> <p><i>(0 points for a decrease of 0 percent or less, 3 points for a decrease of greater than 0 and less than or equal to 5 percent, 5 points for a decrease of greater than 5 and less than or equal to 10 percent, 8 points for a decrease of greater than 10 and less than or equal to 15 percent, 15 points for a decrease of more than 15 percent)</i></p>	15	
<p>Percent population growth in the county as documented by the United States Census (www.census.gov) State growth rate _____ County growth rate _____</p> <p><i>(0 points for a growth rate of less than one times the State growth rate, 4 points for a growth rate of greater than one and less than two times the State growth rate, 7 points for a growth rate of two and less than three times the State growth rate, 15 points for a growth rate of more than three times the State growth rate)</i></p>	15	

<p>Population density (county population per square mile) as documented by the most recent United States Census (www.census.gov) <i>State Density _____ County Density _____</i></p> <p><i>0 points for population density less than one times the State population density, 4 points for population density of greater than one and less than two times the State population density, 7 points for population density of greater than two and less than three times the State population density, 15 points for population density of greater than three times the State population density</i></p>	15	
<p>Proximity of the parcel to other protected land, such as compatible military installations; land owned in fee title by the United States or an Indian Tribe, State or Local Government, or by a non-governmental organization whose purpose is to protect agricultural use and related conservation values; or land that is already subject to an easement or deed restriction that limits the conversion of the land to nonagricultural use or protects grazing uses and related conservation values</p> <p><i>0 points easement offer area (EOA) greater than 3 miles from a protected land boundary, 4 points for an EOA greater than 1 mile but less than 3 miles from a protected land boundary, 7 points for an EOA within 1 mile of a protected land boundary, 15 points for an EOA that adjoins a protected land boundary</i></p>	15	
<p>Proximity of the parcel to other agricultural operations and agricultural infrastructure</p> <p><i>0 points if EOA is greater than 3 miles in proximity, 4 points if EOA is greater than or equal to 1 mile but less than 3 miles in proximity, 7 points EOA is within 1 mile in proximity, 15 points EOA boundary adjoins</i></p>	15	
<p>Existence of a farm succession plan or similar plan established to address agricultural viability for future generations</p> <p><i>10 points for yes, 0 points for no</i></p>	10	
<p>The land is currently enrolled into CREP or CRP that will expire within 1 year AND is grassland that will benefit from the protection under the long-term easement <i>10 points for yes, 0 points for no</i></p>	10	
<p>Parcel ability to maximize the protection of contiguous or proximal acres devoted to agricultural use</p> <p><i>15 points if the parcel links two non-continuous corridors of protected agricultural use, 6 points if parcel is a contiguous or proximal expansion of agricultural use protected area, 0 points parcel does not increase a protected agricultural use area</i></p>	15	
<p>The parcel is a grassland of special environmental significance that will benefit from the protection under the long-term easement <i>10 points if Yes, 0 points if No</i></p>	10	
<p>Percent of the Fair Market Value (FMV) of the agricultural land easement that is the eligible entity's own cash resources for payment of easement compensation to the landowner and comes from sources other than the landowner</p> <p><i>15 points if the providing 50% or more of the FMV, 7 points if providing at least 33% but less than 50% of the FMV, 0 points if the eligible entity is providing less than 25% of the FMV</i></p>	15	
<p>National Ranking Factors Total Points</p>	200	

Pennsylvania NRCS ACEP-ALE Ranking Form FY 2020

State Ranking Factors	Maximum Points	Points
The Parcel is located within an area zoned for agricultural use, is located within an Agricultural Security Area or other locally identified unique agricultural area <i>50 points for yes, 0 points for no</i>	50	
The Parcel contains an archaeological or historical resource <i>10 points for yes, 0 points for no</i>	10	
Eligible entity has demonstrated performance in managing and enforcing easements by successfully completing the required monitoring (per ACEP Policy 527.170) each year in the past 5 years <i>30 points for Yes, 0 points for no</i>	30	
Protecting the parcel provides multifunctional benefits of farm or ranch land protection or improvement; the landowners a historically underserved group, small scale farmer, limited resource landowner, new or beginning farmer or rancher or veteran landowner <i>10 points for yes, 0 points for no</i>	10	
The parcel contains State-specific factors for grasslands of special environmental significance <i>20 points for yes, 0 points for no</i>	20	
Parcel is in a geographic region where enrollment achieves landscape, regional, or other agricultural or conservation goals and objectives identified in State plans <i>30 points for yes, 0 points for no</i>	30	
The eligible entity is certified or for noncertified eligible entities, the entity will append or incorporate the NRCS minimum deed terms to or into their conservation easement deed or the entity has an already approved entity-specific deed template <i>20 points for yes, 0 points for no</i>	20	
Entity is eligible but is deficient in meeting the requirements of ACEP-ALE including; 1) Annual monitoring reports are insufficient, late, or not provided to NRCS; 2) Entity has failed to complete actions toward closing on an existing FRPP or ACEP-ALE agreement by the third year; 3) Documents are not submitted in accordance with ALE-agreement timeframes or policy; 4) Entity has not abided by the terms of an existing or closed FPP, FRPP, or ACEP-ALE agreement; 5) Entity failed to enforce an existing FPP, FRPP, or ACEP-ALE funded after notification of a violation <i>-25 points for five deficiencies, -20 points for four, -15 points for three, -10 point for two, -5 points for one, -0 points if none</i>	-25	
The Parcel contains a state or federal threatened or endangered species (based on PNDI hit) <i>10 points for yes, 0 points for no</i>	10	
The landowner has a current conservation plan addressing soil, water, plant, animal and other potential resource concerns. The conservation plan accurately reflects the current ag operation/management of the parcel <i>20 points for yes, 0 points for no</i>	20	
State Ranking Factors Total Points	200	
Total Combined Ranking Score National and State Ranking Factors	400	

Signature of NRCS Employee Confirming Ranking Score

Date

Pennsylvania NRCS Wetland Reserve Easement Program (ACEP-WRE) Ranking Scoring Worksheet

March 16, 2020

Landowner Name: _____ County: _____ Application Date: _____ Fiscal Year: _____
 Interdisciplinary Team Approval Date: _____ Tract: _____ **FINAL RANKING SCORE:** _____

State Biologist Review/Concurrence: _____ **Date:** _____

PART I - Environmental Benefit Considerations		70 Max. Points
LOCATION		70 Max. Points
1. Proximity to designated local, state, or federal wildlife habitat/conservation, or forest area of significance		
a. Project is directly adjacent to a designated local, state, or federal wildlife habitat/conservation, or forest area of significance		10 _____
b. Project is within 5 miles of a designated local, state, or federal wildlife habitat/conservation, or forest area of significance		5 _____
c. Project is > 5 miles from a designated local, state, or federal wildlife habitat/conservation, or forest area of significance		0 _____
<i>List area of significance here:</i> _____	subtotal	_____
2. Proximity and connectivity to permanently protected areas (State or Federal forests/parks/easements, gamelands, other conservation easements)		
a. Project is directly adjacent to an existing permanently protected area		25 _____
b. Project is within 5 miles of an existing permanently protected area		5 _____
c. Project greater than 5 miles away from an existing permanently protected area		0 _____
<i>List permanently protected area here:</i> _____	subtotal	_____
3. Proximity to existing wetlands, streams, or surface waters		
a. Offered acres connect existing wetlands, streams, or surface waters		10 _____
b. Offered acres are adjacent to existing wetlands, streams, or surface waters		5 _____
c. Offered acres are within one mile of existing wetlands, streams, or surface waters		2 _____
<i>(zero points for projects > one mile from existing wetlands, streams, or surface waters)</i>		subtotal
4. Offered acres are located within a Pennsylvania WRE Priority Area <i>(select one)</i>		
_____ 020503050202 Lehman Run-Muddy Run	_____ 020401041004 Cherry Creek	25 _____
_____ 020503050307 Doubling Gap Creek	_____ 020401050601 Allegheny Creek-Delaware River	0 _____
_____ 020503050303 Laughlin Run-Paxton Run	_____ 050301020304 Booth Run-Pymatuning Creek	
_____ 020503050203 Trout Run-Conodoguinet Creek	_____ 020401050603 Buckhorn Creek-Delaware River	
_____ 020401040805 Lower McMichael Creek	_____ 041201010602 East Branch of West Branch Conneaut Creek	
_____ 041201010601 Headwaters Conneaut Creek	_____ 020503050306 Three Sq. Hollow Run-Conodoguinet Creek	
_____ 020401050602 Martins Creek-Delaware River	_____ 050301020401 Sugar Run-Shenango River	
_____ 050301020402 Big Run	_____ 020503050606 Lower Swatara Creek	
_____ 020503050901 Reeds Run-Swatara Creek	_____ 020503050901 Lower Little Swatara Creek	
_____ 020503050902 Bow Creek-Swatara Creek		
<i>(zero points for projects not located within a WRE priority area)</i>		subtotal
HABITAT		30 Max. Pts.
5. Threatened, Endangered, and Special Concern Species (maintain rare native species) <i>(Attach PNDI print to ranking form)</i>		
a. PNDI shows Threatened, Endangered, or Special Concern Species		15 _____
b. PNDI shows no Threatened, Endangered, or Special Concern Species		0 _____
	subtotal	_____
6. Aquatic Life Use <i>(select one - list water body or water body designation on the line below)</i>		
a. Offered acres contain a Wild and Scenic River or Exceptional Value Stream		15 _____
b. Offered acres contain a stream that outlets directly into a Wild and Scenic River or Exceptional Value Stream		7 _____
c. Offered acres contain a High Quality Stream (HQ-CWFD, TSF, or WWF)		15 _____
d. Offered acres contain a stream that outlets directly into a High Quality Stream (HQ-CWF, TSF, or WWF)		7 _____
<i>(zero points if none apply)</i>		subtotal
RESTORATION OF HYDROLOGY		100 Max. Points
7. Hydric Soils <i>(select one - use percentage of "restorable hydric soils" of restoration area from Interdisciplinary Team Report)</i>		
a. Restoration methods restore hydric soils on greater than 70% of the restoration area		50 _____
b. Restoration methods restore hydric soils on 60-69% of the restoration area		25 _____
c. Restoration methods restore hydric soils on 50-59% of the restoration area		10 _____
d. Restoration methods restore hydric soils on less than 50% of the restoration area		0 _____
	subtotal	_____
8. Dominant Land Use of the Offered Acreage within the Restoration Area <i>(select one)</i>		
a. Row crops produced within the last 3 years		50 _____
b. Hay produced within the last 3 years		25 _____
c. Acres used as pasture within the last 3 years		10 _____
d. No row crop, hay or pasture within the last 3 years		0 _____
e. Forest		0 _____
	subtotal	_____
PART I - Total Points		_____



PART II - Economic Considerations		
9. Total Easement Restoration Cost		80 Max. Points
a. Total restoration cost is < 50% of the total easement value	10	<input type="text"/>
b. Total restoration cost is between 50 - 80% of the total easement value	5	<input type="text"/>
c. Total restoration cost is ≥ 80% of the total easement value	0	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
10. Noxious or Invasive Species		
a. <20% of the vegetation in the total easement area is noxious and/or invasive	10	<input type="text"/>
b. 21-50% of the vegetation in the total easement area is noxious and/or invasive	5	<input type="text"/>
c. >50% of the vegetation in the total easement area is noxious and/or invasive	0	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
11. Operation and Maintenance costs (select one)		
a. Offered acreage/Planned restoration requires no embankments or mechanical structures (piping, water control boxes, etc.)	10	<input type="text"/>
b. Offered acreage/planned restoration requires an embankment	5	<input type="text"/>
c. Offered acreage/Planned restoration requires mechanical structures (piping, water control boxes, etc.)	0	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
12. Permitting		
a. The planned restoration does not require a permit	20	<input type="text"/>
(zero points if a permit will be required)		
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
13. Type of Proposed Easement		
a. Permanent Easement	20	<input type="text"/>
(zero points for 30-year easement)		
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
14. Total easement enrollment size		
a. Proposed enrollment is 50 acres or larger	10	<input type="text"/>
b. Proposed enrollment is 20-49 acres	5	<input type="text"/>
c. Proposed enrollment is 10-24 acres	2	<input type="text"/>
(zero points if less than 10 acres)		
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
PART II - Total Points		<input type="text"/>

PART III - Easement Offer Configuration		
15. Purpose of Enrollment Offer Adjacent Acreage (select all that apply)		45 Max. Points
a. Adjacent acres directly benefit the hydrology of the restoration area	10	<input type="text"/>
b. Adjacent acres directly benefit T&E species within the restoration area	7	<input type="text"/>
c. Adjacent acres connect offer of enrollment to a permanently protected area (such as those listed in question #2)	4	<input type="text"/>
d. Adjacent acres create a simpler, more manageable easement boundary	4	<input type="text"/>
(zero points if none apply)		
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
16. Easement Offer Boundary (select one option that best fits the easement offer)		
a. Easement offer boundary is simple with few corners, angles and turns, creating an easily managed polygon	10	<input type="text"/>
b. Easement offer boundary is moderately simple with minimal corners, angles and turns, creating a moderate to manage polygon	5	<input type="text"/>
c. Easement offer boundary is complicated with multiple corners, angles and turns creating a difficult to manage polygon	0	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
17. Easement Offer Parcel (select one option that best fits the easement offer)		
a. Easement offer parcel is one contiguous block of land with <u>no</u> right-of-ways	10	<input type="text"/>
b. Easement offer parcel is one contiguous block of land with right-of-ways	5	<input type="text"/>
c. Easement offer parcel is divided by non-eligible acreage, right-of-ways, non-eligible CRP, or other area not controlled by landowner	2	<input type="text"/>
d. Easement offer parcel is manipulated by landowner, is cut-up, divided among eligible acreage, or separated by cut-outs or in-holdings	0	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
PART III - Total Points		<input type="text"/>

PART IV - ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA SCORE		
18. Eligible Acres Contain: (select all that apply)		75 Max. Points
a. Prior Converted (PC) hydric soil acres	___ 30	<input type="text"/>
b. Farmed Wetland (FW) hydric soil acres	___ 15	<input type="text"/>
c. Farmed Wetland Pasture (FWP) hydric soil ac.	___ 10	<input type="text"/>
d. Eligible CRP/CREP	___ 5	<input type="text"/>
e. Wetland (W) farmed under natural conditions hydric soil ac.	___ 5	<input type="text"/>
f. Degraded wetlands (which will be restored)	___ 5	<input type="text"/>
g. Riparian Links (<300' with photo documentation)	___ 5	<input type="text"/>
PART IV - Total Points		<input type="text"/>

<input type="text"/>	Total Ranking Score:	<input type="text"/>
Employee Signature	Title	Date
		(Maximum Points = 1800)



Pennsylvania NRCS Wetland Reserve Easement Program (ACEP-WRE) Ranking Scoring Worksheet
Bog turtle/Massasauga Ranking

March 16, 2020

Landowner Name: _____ Application Date: _____ Fiscal Year: _____
 County: _____ Interdisciplinary Team Approval Date: _____ Tract: _____

Application Type: Bog Turtle Massasauga

Final Ranking Score: _____ State Biologist Review/Concurrence: _____ Date: _____

PART I - Environmental Benefit Considerations	
LOCATION 50 Max. Points	
1. Proximity to existing permanently protected areas of conservation value for bog turtle or massasauga	
a. Project is directly adjacent to a permanently protected area of conservation value	10 _____
b. Project is within 0.5 miles of a permanently protected area of conservation value	5 _____
c. Project is greater than 0.5 miles from permanently protected area of conservation value	0 _____
<i>List permanently protected area here:</i> _____	subtotal _____
2. Proximity to existing wetlands having shallow water (<6") and deep mucky soils <i>(select one)</i>	
a. Offered acres connect two wetlands having shallow water (<6") and deep mucky soils	10 _____
b. Offered acres are adjacent to wetlands having shallow water (<6") and deep mucky soils	5 _____
c. Offered acres are within 0.5 miles of wetlands having shallow water (<6") and deep mucky soils	2 _____
	subtotal _____
3. Offered acres are located on a USFWS or PAFBC Bog Turtle or Massasauga site	
<input type="checkbox"/> Parcel is a known or confirmed Bog Turtle or Massasauga Site	30 _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Parcel is not a known or confirmed Bog Turtle or Massasauga Site	0 _____
	subtotal _____
HABITAT 50 Max. Points	
4. Project is located within a Metapopulation Area for Bog Turtle or Massasauga (select one based on targeted site species)	
a. Yes	10 _____
b. No	0 _____
	subtotal _____
5. Known site use <i>(select one)</i>	
a. Site is a known bog turtle or massasauga site that is currently occupied	30 _____
b. Site is a known bog turtle or massasauga site that has been occupied in the last 5 years	15 _____
c. Site is a known bog turtle or massasauga site that has been occupied in the last 10 years	7 _____
d. Site is a known bog turtle or massasauga site that was occupied more than 10 years ago	0 _____
	subtotal _____
6. Current Habitat Condition <i>(select one based on Interdisciplinary Team Evaluation)</i>	
a. Excellent bog turtle or massasauga habitat	10 _____
b. Good bog turtle or massasauga habitat	5 _____
c. Marginal bog turtle or massasauga habitat	0 _____
	subtotal _____
RESTORATION OF HYDROLOGY 100 Max. Points	
7. Habitat Restoration Potential (Hydric Soils) <i>(select one using biology report from Interdisciplinary Team)</i>	
a. Restoration of hydrology will restore or maintain wetland habitat that is excellent	50 _____
b. Restoration of hydrology will restore or maintain wetland habitat that is good	25 _____
c. Restoration of hydrology will restore or maintain wetland habitat that is marginal	10 _____
<i>(zero points if none apply)</i>	subtotal _____
8. Existing Hydric Soils <i>(select one using soils report from Interdisciplinary Team)</i>	
a. Habitat area contains contiguous block of hydric soils	50 _____
b. Habitat area contains isolated areas of hydric soil habitat	25 _____
c. Habitat area contains no hydric soil	0 _____
	subtotal _____
PART I - Total Points _____	



Pennsylvania NRCS Wetland Reserve Easement Program (ACEP-WRE) Ranking Scoring Worksheet
Bog turtle/Massasauga Ranking

March 16, 2020

PART II - Economic Considerations		
9. Existing Vegetation Type in habitat area <i>(select one)</i>	100 Max. Points	
a. Open Meadow or pasture	15	<input type="text"/>
b. Brushy meadow or brushy pasture	7	<input type="text"/>
c. Forested	0	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
10. Estimated Easement Restoration Cost <i>(select one)</i>		
a. Estimated restoration cost is < 50% of the total easement acquisition value	15	<input type="text"/>
b. Estimated restoration cost is between 50 - 80% of the total easement acquisition value	7	<input type="text"/>
c. Estimated restoration cost is > 80% of the total easement acquisition value	0	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
11. Noxious or Invasive Species <i>(select one)</i>		
a. <20% of the vegetation in the total easement area is noxious and/or invasive	15	<input type="text"/>
b. 21-50% of the vegetation in the total easement area is noxious and/or invasive	7	<input type="text"/>
c. >50% of the vegetation in the total easement area is noxious and/or invasive	0	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
12. Type of proposed easement		
a. Permanent Easement	40	<input type="text"/>
	<i>(zero points for 30-year easement)</i>	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
13. Total easement enrollment size <i>(select one)</i>		
a. Proposed enrollment is 10 acres or larger	15	<input type="text"/>
b. Proposed enrollment is less than 10 acres	7	<input type="text"/>
c. Proposed enrollment is less than 5 acres	2	<input type="text"/>
	<i>(zero points if less than 10 acres)</i>	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
PART II - Total Points		<input type="text"/>

PART III - Easement Offer Configuration		
14. Benefit of Adjacent Acreage for Bog turtle/Massasauga Habitat <i>(select <u>all</u> that apply)</i>	100 Max. Points	
a. Adjacent acres will be utilized by bog turtle/massasauga and act as an extension of the habitat area	15	<input type="text"/>
b. Adjacent acres directly benefit the hydrology of the bog turtle/massasauga habitat	15	<input type="text"/>
c. Adjacent acres connect bog turtle/massasauga habitat to another permanently protected area (such as those listed in question #2)	10	<input type="text"/>
d. Adjacent acres create a simpler, more manageable easement boundary	10	<input type="text"/>
	<i>(zero points if none apply)</i>	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
15. Easement Offer Boundary <i>(select <u>one option</u> that best fits the easement offer)</i>		
a. Easement offer boundary is simple with few corners, angles and turns, creating an easily managed polygon	25	<input type="text"/>
b. Easement offer boundary is moderately simple with minimal corners, angles and turns, creating a moderate to manage polygon	10	<input type="text"/>
c. Easement offer boundary is complicated with multiple corners, angles and turns creating a difficult to manage polygon	0	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
16. Easement Offer Parcel <i>(select <u>one option</u> that best fits the easement offer)</i>		
a. Easement offer parcel is one contiguous block of land with <u>no</u> right-of-ways	25	<input type="text"/>
b. Easement offer parcel is one contiguous block of land with right-of-ways	15	<input type="text"/>
c. Easement offer parcel is divided by non-eligible acreage, a right-of-way, non-eligible CRP, or other area not controlled by landowner	5	<input type="text"/>
d. Easement offer parcel is manipulated by landowner, is cut-up, divided among eligible acreage, or separated by cut-outs or in-holding	0	<input type="text"/>
	subtotal	<input type="text"/>
PART III - Total Points		<input type="text"/>

	Total Ranking Score: <input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>		
Employee Signature	Title	Date	(Maximum Points = 1500)

Denise Coleman, PA State Conservationist, thanked everyone for their participation in this meeting and reminded everyone that the state CIG application deadline is set for June 15th. She noted that we have a one-to-one match and that we grant up to \$75,000 for projects. Further, she stated that if any STC member would care to have anything specifically on a future meeting agenda or presentations that you would like to make, to please contact herself or Susan Marquart.

NOTE: A recording of this meeting is available upon request.

State Technical Committee

April 21, 2020

Meeting Notes

Denise Coleman, PA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist, opened the meeting promptly at 1pm. She announced that in the past we have been using the Toll-Free Number for use by those members who could not attend the meeting in person, but could still participate by hearing the meeting. Today we are going to use a Webinar Approach so that members will be able to see the actual presentations as well as hear them. She welcomed all participants on the WebEx and asked that they introduce themselves. There were 50 persons participating from remote locations. She thanked Tim Peters (NRCS) and Tim Kinney for setting who set up this WebEx and managing the technical side of this meeting. She went on to say that Secretary Purdue had asked us to continue to keep our offices open. So due to the fact that we are in a heavy construction season going on this time of year, we are required to have a lot of our Field Office folks going out to the field to work with landowners (keeping the same required social distancing), doing inspections, planning and any kind of design work, such as surveying and layout. She wanted to update all from a prospective of where things are with NRCS. We are continuing normal operation procedures with Programs sign-up, and indicated there have been a couple that have been extended which would be covered at this meeting as we proceed through the agenda.

00-05-44 - Pete Vanderstappen, PA NRCS State Engineer, was introduced and presented an Engineering Update. (See the attached hand-out) He started off discussing the Dam Rehabilitation Program. He indicated one big program we have had going on over the last several years is in Chester County called the Hibernia Dam Project. We bid it out last year but didn't have enough funding to award it. This year's bid came in at \$946,430 and was awarded. There were three bidders for this project and the bid price went

down from last year's bid, saving about \$150,000. Being as the economy's a little different now, the project bidders may be a little more interested in bidding on the dam rehab projects. He discussed details of a part of the Chester County project concerning a spillway which will cost approximately \$900,000. He then discussed the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) status. Presently 93 sites have been awarded cost-share starting in 2018 and 2019. There were 28 sponsors and at this time there is only 1 site left to be done costing \$99,999 which will be starting in late May and be completed by June 2020. The NRCS cost share for this project is 75% and we have spent \$3.9 million dollars, plus \$1 million federal dollars involved and DEP came through with the remaining 25% or about \$1.32 million dollars. He also discussed the Emergency Milk Disposal Fact Sheet. There has been some surplus milk because of supply chain issues and some dairy farmers have been asked to either reduce production by 15% or dump their milk for a day or two until we get things resupplied. NRCS developed a Fact Sheet for their staff that answers the question of what to do with the waste milk. In some cases, dairy producers are storing the waste milk in their manure storage which will be landfied sometime this spring. He shared the interesting fact that milk is actually a really good fertilizer. It has an "N" value that is three times higher than manure. However, because of that, direct application of waste milk probably shouldn't exceed 4,500 gallons per acre because that would yield about 200 pounds of nitrogen. So, you wouldn't cover many acres, but certainly it's of a high nutrient value. He noted that staff should be alerted that putting milk waste in a vegetate treatment area or waste storage under animal housing is not recommended. The waste treatment area overloads with nitrogen. In addition, there could be dangerous gas generation along with a lot of bad odors. The PA Dept of Agriculture and the State Conservation Commission has put out a lot of good guidelines on how to handle the milk waste and application rates, and that information is getting out to all the producers across the state. The last topic he covered was the Boot Camps Phase 1 and 2 updates. He noted that after 20 years the first ever Phase 1 of Boot Camp was held as WebEx based training. It consisted of 3

hours of training over a 4 day period. The second Phase (Field Portion) will be held in September with the dates and location to be announced.

00-12-44 - Mark Goodson, NRCS Acting State Resource Conservationist, was introduced and presented a Field Office Technical Guide (FTOG) Eco-Sciences Update. (See attached hand-out) He reviewed topics that were covered during a Federal Register comment period. One of those topics was the announcement of new and revised assessment tools in our Technical Guide. He also noted that we have some new job approval Authority Phase-in policies that we are doing. Public Inspection Notification was made on the Federal Register for 49 Conservation Practice Standards which will be officially available for public comments that began on March 24th and will be open for 30 days. The public inspection is available on the website:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/03/24/2020-06-88/proposed-revisions-to-the-national-handbook-of-conservation-practices>.

Early in 2020, our National Office released an updated Natural Resource Concern List and Planning Criteria. This document is the official list of NRCS resource concerns and planning criteria to determine resource treatment levels using conservation planning practices and planning process. This is the first update of this document in the last seven or 8 years and it is in our Technical Guide. Also in our Technical Guide is a number of new and revised assessment tools that our planners use when assessing resources. The pasture condition scoring guide and has since been revised and we will be training on that this summer. That note is for people working with pasture conditions and are not familiar with the changes. He noted that there a new cropland "In-Field" Soil Health Assessment Guidance Worksheet to be used to assess soil health resource concerns by working through a series of in-field soil health indicators. The Pennsylvania Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guidance has been revised as well as additional Pennsylvania Cultural Resources. He went on to note that we are in the midst of rolling out a new National Policy to require job approval authority for those Planners, Apprentice Planners and Technicians who are planning, designing and certifying ecological job science,

practices in the field during the planning process. There are instructions posted in the Technical Guide and initial job approval authorities have been assigned who are currently certified and current Apprentice Planners. This affects all the NRCS planning staff as well as partners and Affiliates. TSP's fall under a different set of rules and so they are not affected by this. However, it is something that affiliates, the partners, and our NRCS staff are going to be working through over the next nine months to fully implement.

00-17-24 - Yuri Plowden, NRCS State Soil Scientist, was introduced and presented an update on Soils data. (See attached hand-out) She announced that a new Web Soil Survey Report was recently made available titled "Poultry Mortality Disposal by Composting". She indicated that this report is one of several interpretations available to serve as a starting point for finding suitable sites for large-scale animal disposal. She also said that onsite investigations may still be recommended. She went on to explain how to find the website and gave details on how to find specific data. She also noted where to find the latest Web Soil Survey updates intitled "See what's new" where you can see the newest information available, including new and known problems that have been encountered. Also the site makes note of tabs that have been removed because they were obsolete as well as "Bug Fixes" on the site. She remarked that the Web Soil Survey is the "Official" NRCS Soil Data that is updated constantly and refreshed on an annual basis. The next annual refresh date for the Soil Survey Data has been established as being July 1st, 2020.

00-23-01 - Jim Gillis, NRCS State Biologist, was introduced and did a presentation concerning Food Security Act (FSAct) Wetland Functional Assessments that NRCS has to develop for the purpose of implementing the Food Security Act. (See attached hand-out) He emphasized that the FSAct applies to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) participants, NOT USDA Agencies. He explained that NRCS must continue to follow our own internal regulations and

policies for wetland. And that means that our first rule is that we have to avoid negative wetland impacts whenever possible period. If there is a wetland run landscape even if the USDA participant can do something with that wetland, that doesn't necessarily mean that NRCS can. So it's nothing really changes by this functional assessment or very little changes for us. That our rule of thumb is always going to be to avoid wetlands whenever possible. The 2018 Farm Bill actually had written in to it that became law, that requires that NRCS has to conduct a functional assessment on any wetland acres affected by manipulation or conversion to verify that those acres were providing the functions and values of a wetland before USDA, as a whole, ending the operation and ineligible for benefits. So what that legalese translates into in plain English is just a very simple question wasn't going to be later converted area truly a functional wetland before it was manipulated or converted. He indicated that there has been a lot of pressure nationally for justification of what we are calling converted wetlands. He went on to describe examples. He discussed Functional Assessment Screening questions as outlined on the attached hand-out of his presentation. Indicating that the FSAct Functional Assessment draft is not cut in stone and that anyone or any agency interested in participating in a review of the draft should contact him with any input they might have. We desperately would like to have input from others so we can get a well-rounded approach. He stated that there are other rapid assessments and things like that that are available and they would be included if provided. However, very few of these are specifically designed for farmland and they have rapid in the title, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are rapid in the real world. We must come up with something a little bit different but that he would welcome any interest or participation from everyone. If anyone who is interested would like a copy of the draft assessment to review, please contact him and he will share it with you. He again stated that the deadline for completion is July and hopefully it will be completed and available for presentation to the State Technical Committee at the July meeting.

00-35-15 - Before introducing the next presenter, **Denise Coleman** made comments regarding the new automation system. She announced that we are moving to the Conservation Assessment Rating Tool (CART) and so every field and every resource concern on every field is being assessed by our field employees at this time, before it gets put into our ranking so that we can show true outcomes on the site-specific basis. This information system that we are using will actually show the site-specific outcomes related to those practices implemented. So while our field people are doing that it takes an extreme amount of time and effort to revamp. It works through our Conservation Desktop platform, which is also new this year to our field folks. It is an extremely new setup for everyone in the field who is doing work with NRCS as it moves through the ranking cycle. We have yet to rank any of our applications that have come in for FY 2020 sign-up but that is the intent and then, of course by the end of the year we will be awarding those contracts. Each program manager is going to go over their deadlines, keeping in mind that some of these are critical deadlines that we are going to talk about as it relates to CSP, as it relates to State CIG, as it relates to our RCPP classic and their Alternate Funding Arrangement (AFA). She asked that the presenters at this meeting just repeat the deadlines for folks being as they have changed and/or been extended. These changes perhaps have not been passed on as yet by public affairs. She announced that Audrey Mays has been appointed as the new CREP Coordinator for the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Denise asked if she was online for the meeting, and if so to introduce herself, which she did.

00-39-15 - **Barry Frantz**, PA NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs was introduced and provided an update of 2020 Programs. (See attached hand-out) He announced that Ed Sanders, PA NRCS EQIP Coordinator has retired and is being replaced temporarily by **Zenik Crespo**. Zenik has been detailed to the State Office and will be the acting "go to" person for EQIP. He commented on the new Conservation Assessment Rating Tool (CART) that Denise had previously discussed. He noted that it is bringing

out some new Farm Bill regulations, and for that reason we're trying to minimize other changes that we are making in our system because of these two big changes that we are dealing with which is the new Farm Bill Regulations and the new computer tool to help us plan with landowners and farmers. Under Agriculture Management Assistance (AMA), he indicated that we typically get a small amount of funding because the national allocation for AMA nationwide is not very large. That typically for 16, 17 states it's a subset of risk management funding, so we don't have enough funding to make it worthwhile to have a statewide signup. In previous years we have rotated the money across the state, so this year we are targeting the Southeast Pennsylvania counties of Cumberland, Bucks, Montgomery, Lehigh and Northampton. Funding categories will be directed toward High Tunnels and Irrigation projects. The funding allocation this year for AMA is about \$350,000. He indicated that there are 3 general options for CSP this year: the Classic CSP Option for new enrollments; CSP Renewal Option for the one time renewal contract option; the Farm Bill 2018 has added a Grassland Conservation Initiative for producers with eligible base acres maintained by FSA. He discussed the National Listed Activities and indicated that not all activities are applicable to Pennsylvania. He covered the CSP Enhancement Options to be improved upon. He went on to cover the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to address natural resource concerns and delivers environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, and improved or created wildlife habitat. He stated that we have similar funding categories as in prior years, and the program offers largely the same as what we have had in previous use. One of the changes to EQIP raises the payment limit cap for organic producers to \$140,000 and this is part of the \$450,000 limit they have in the Farm Bill for EQIP, so if someone signs up for the EQIP Organic Option, they will compete only against other people in the Organic which raises their chance of getting funding of up to the \$140,000 for this and in their remaining regular EQIP option and they still have \$310,000 remaining to get

up to the \$450,000, but it helps make it a little more possible for the folks in Organic Option to get funding. It also got rid of the \$20,000 annual payment limit for Organic. He then discussed the EQIP National Initiatives that included: Conservation Activity Plans; the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, for which we have a lot of funding available; the High Tunnel Initiative; Historically Underserved Groups such as beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers; the National Water Quality Initiative; the On-farm Energy Initiative; the Organic Initiative; and the Working Lands for Wildlife to include the Golden Winged Warbler. He then covered our state priorities for EQIP that included: Cropland; Forestry, to include Forest Management Plans; Grazing; Livestock; Poultry; and Stream Corridor Management. He stated that there are about 15 different kinds of Conservation Activity Plans available and that the ones that we get most interest in are the Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan; the Nutrient Management Plan; and the Forest Management Plan. Additional plans that are lower on use scale are: Agriculture Energy Management Plan; the Organic Transition; and the Pollinator Habitat Plan. He indicated that a new Activity Plan for 2021 may be a Soil Health Management Plan. He outlined the active contract workload that we have by program, active contracts (1,752), planned practices (14,335) and with remaining payments amounting to \$51,522,139. A question was asked concerning updating the practices that came through the Federal Register, that NRCS would keep the same ones from last year, also that NRCS seems to be behind in notifying folks whether potentially they might have funding under the various EQIP programs. Barry responded that we have put out news releases through the usual media and our public affairs person. The people who have existing contracts will get a reminder letter from their local Field Office saying that they have a contract and that these are the things that you are scheduled to do this year.

Denise Coleman interjected comments concerning NRCS status. With the new Farm Bill and the new regulations that had to be written and the new automation system, She indicated that we are six months into the new Fiscal Year and currently we usually like to be in this place around the December-

January timeframe. The situation that was asked about the processes, those practices that are published for the Federal Register comments are National Practice Standards now. They are revisions to the National Practice Standards. We will take a look at the National Practice Standard and see how applicable those practice standards are to Pennsylvania. And they may come up for review in Pennsylvania as practices are updated. Usually we get teams together to take a look at those practices, and may go out with Pennsylvania State Standards. It needs to be compatible with national standards but can be more restrictive. Barry reminded everyone that the application due date for EQIP, AMA and RCPP to be considered for the first evaluation cycle is March 20. He stated that there is a National date we have for the CSP application, no earlier than June first. We have a national obligation date for the regular CSP by the end of July. EQIP, we are still in process of doing the rankings, and so there's some national obligation data released in September and we have our in mid-August.

01-07-41 - Ashley Lenig, PA NRCS Conservation Program Manager, was introduced and presented updates on Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) - National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), and High Priority & Source Water Protection Practices. Under CSP: she commented that CSP Contracts are being extended for an additional year; renewing existing contracts for another 5 years; folks applying for CSP Classic (Regular, beginning farmer/rancher, socially disadvantaged farmer/rancher and Organic) must do so by June 1st. On CSP renewals, she reminded everyone that the renewals are competitive this year and indicated that CSP is the first to go through the CART program this year. Going through this process of working with the new conservation desktop which replaced the mapping and planning software that was previously used, we have had to develop ranking questions and put them into the system. So for any of our CSP's whether it's renewal or classic, we do have categories underneath CSP Ag Lands and pasture. She discussed the new ranking questions and how they

work with the information provided. She continued to explain program and resource priorities as they pertain to the stewardship threshold, water quality, systems approach and pollinator habitat. She covered CSP NIPF (Non-industrial Private Forestland) program priorities, including state priority resource concerns and current the current Forest Management Plan. Under Resource Priorities, she discussed: the Stewardship Threshold; plant structure and composition; threatened, endangered, or species of greatest conservation need; Brook Trout greatly reduced targeted Priority Watershed; and Systems Approach. Ashley went on to discuss Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) by announcing that the CIG proposals are due May 11th for the National CIG on farm conservation innovation trials. Denise Coleman interjected that a change had been announced moving the CIG proposal due date to May 29th. Ashley announced that the Pennsylvania CIG proposals are due by June 15th, and referred all to the announcement made on the Grants website,

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/pa/newsroom/releases>. Also that the National CIG for 2020 is expected to be announced sometime in April or May. Ashley then provided an update on the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI). She shared a Pennsylvania map and provided an update concerning the status of the 5 watersheds that are approved for the Readiness Phase. She went on to discuss application processing. In addition, she shared the NWQI Outreach activities in those 5 watersheds that are: Warrior Run, Upper Yellow and Beaver Creeks, Upper Kishacoquillas, Swatara Creek and Maiden Creek. She provided information relative to the current NWQI Applications, those being: 7 new applications in Warrior Run; 16 existing applications in Upper Yellow and Beaver Creeks; 3 existing applications in Upper Kishacoquillas, 21 new Source Water Protection (SWP) in Swatara Creek; and 19 existing SWP in Maiden Creek. She indicated that as a result of studies, Designation of Practices as high priority, SWP had been updated. Some practices were selected to receive a higher payment rate. The goal was to introduce practices that may be overlooked for whatever reason. NRCS National asked states to solicit input and select up to 10 practices for

EQIP General and up to 10 practices for EQIP-NWQI source water protection. The practices selected as "High Priority" are: Prescribed Burning; Riparian Herbaceous Cover; Stream Habitat Improvement and Management; Aquatic Organism Passage; Tree/shrub Site Protection; Streambank and Shoreline protection; Denitrifying Bioreactor; Tree/shrub establishment; Wetland Restoration; and Phosphorous Removal System. Under Source Water Protection: Well decommissioning; Karst Sinkhole Treatment; Streambank and Shoreline Protection; Denitrifying Bioreactor; and Phosphorous Removal System.

01-27-45 - Susan Marquart, PA NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships, was introduced and discussed The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Susan announced that we are currently soliciting applications for our Alternate Funding Arrangements (AFA) portion of RCPP. The AFA was first included in the 2014 Farm Bill and has been expanded into the 2018 Farm Bill now. She indicated that there is up to \$50 million dollars available nationwide for the AFA. There is a statutory restriction of a maximum of 15 projects. Many of the requirements to the AFA are similar to the Classic REPP and the funding must be split 50/50 between the critical conservation areas and the state and multi-state pool. The conservation benefits must be shown in the application and the resource concerns that are designated in that multi-state pool must be addressed in your proposal. We are also looking for a partner contribution and there are still critical and our goal is at least one-to-one contribution from the partners and NRCS. Our minimum funding amount is \$250,000 and the maximum is \$10 million and that is the same as in the RCPP Classic, as well the 70/30 financial assistance technical assistance, and the eligibility criteria for the lead partners. The RCPP principles are the same as our RCPP and the AFA. We are looking for an impact statement from each project. We are expecting partners to identify exactly what the impact of their project is going to be especially in this case for the state of Pennsylvania. We are also looking at partner contributions. We would like to see at least an equal partner contribution with the NRCS

contribution. Also we are looking for innovation in your project, something that you're not something that would ordinarily be done through the RCPP Classic program...something new and different. The Partnership and Project Management has to be demonstrated in the applications to show that the partners are able to manage the project and provide the technical assistance that is needed. The AFA is designated for: projects that are innovative and do not rely on existing NRCS program operations; that cannot be effectively carried out using RCPP Classic approach; that can be entirely managed and implemented by the lead partner, with the exception of inherently governmental activities, in a more grant-like fashion. She went on to discuss the AFA Authorized activities concerning land management, Land rental, entity-held easements and watershed/public works. Concerning Partners: she stated that lead partners must be able to carry out all FA and TA activities; that partners must have access to producer networks and have the capability to provide funding to producers/landowners. Proposals are due by May 29th, 2020. She announced the following RCPP Classic Announcements made on April 16th, 2020. They were: Kittatinny Ridge Conservation Landscape Project; AG CMP Implementation in the Chesapeake Bay; and the Buffalo Creek Watershed Conservation Alliance. These projects account for almost \$14 Million dollars that were brought into the state. A question concerning the definition of "Lead Partner". She stated that the Lead Partner would be the partner entity or group that would be putting in the application for the RCPP project and would be working with all the other partners in the project as well as with us at NRCS. She was also asked if there was more detailed information available on the first two RCPP projects. In addressing the question, she indicated that there was nothing very specific at this point. She said that she was about to attend a training where they were going to put the available information together so that it could be properly announced to the State Technical Committee with more detailed information on what these projects would entail. Denise Coleman interjected comments concerning the Kittatinny Ridge project. She said that the innovation that is involved in this project really came forward through the Department of Defense Funds

to match with the State Farms as well as the NRCS Farms and Land Protection. There will be a large conservation easement component up and down the Kittatinny at Sandy Ridge. There is also a partnership with the PA Game Commission and others as well as local districts to go out and to do Forest Management Plans on the Ridge as well as Ag Conservation Practices and Forest Management Practices. We can see that there was a sizable match to the Kittatinny Ridge with over \$38 Million dollars worth to match with NRCS money that was given for land acquisition. She indicated that there is going to be a large land acquisition component and specifically protecting a log of Source stream sources and that kind of thing along the Ridge and then as well as Ag Conservation Projects work in the lower valley. Concerning the project in Berks County, that work will be just in the Berks County portion of the watershed and we will be doing traditional conservation practice work there. The innovation involved in that project is that we are looking at potentially trying out those very similar practices that were just discussed with the 90% cost share such as Nitrogen Bioreactors and Phosphorus removal structures in those areas. Susan offered further clarification on the role of Lead Partners. The Lead Partner cannot be equal to the Landowner, the Lead Partner needs to be one of the entities that are applicable that is listed in the RCPP funding announcement. They are looking for entities such as Conservation Districts, institutions of higher learning, State Department's of Agriculture or Environmental Protection. They are looking for those big overarching partners to be the lead partner on a project. One that will be able to run the project, the practices and everything, to keep track of managing the project over the whole scope of the project. A landowner that would want to apply would go in to NRCS like they do with other programs and put in an application for an RCPP project.

01-42-40 - Hathaway Jones, PA NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) was introduced and presented updates on Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) and Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) activities. (See attached hand-outs that include the Pennsylvania NRCS ACEP-ALE Ranking

Form for FY 2020; ACEP-WRE Ranking Scoring Worksheet; and the ACEP-WRE Ranking Scoring Worksheet for Bog Turtle/Massasauga Ranking)

Hathaway briefly discussed the ACEP-ALE Ranking Questions, indicating the National questions must be verbatim according to ALE policy, however the State Ranking Questions have a bit of flexibility, and she welcomed any comments/feedback on the ranking for this FY. She announced a new option for ALE funding. This program agreement option allows us more flexibility because it separates the agreement into a Statement of Work (SOW), which is not tied to any funding is signed by both parties and then attached to that Statement of Work are individual contracts related to each parcel that we would find through ALE, and the money is tied to those individual contracts that are part reference to the SOW. This means that we have a really smaller dollar value contracts for one of each parcel instead of one large agreement and that allows us to have more flexibility in how we fund these projects, and less time is needed. But approvals are needed for paperwork to get to the end of the road, which is enrolling farms and preserving them. She went on to discuss the Program Agreement compared to the Cooperative Agreement for ALE. She noted that Cooperative Agreements are still available and that the Program Agreements are the new animal that is also available for ALE funding and is in the application process. Entities can choose which type of agreement they prefer to use. She went on to review the ACEP-ALE FY2020 deadlines, which she noted were tentative: May 1st - is the ALE Application Deadline; June 26th for tentative ALE agreements to be submitted for Internal Controls and Grants and Agreements Review; July 31st - NRCS and ALE entities execute agreements; August 21st - Complete required steps to finalize agreement; and September 9th - Final ALE Funding/Obligation Deadline. Hathaway then provided an update on FY 2020 WRE Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC). She indicated that the GARC rates that had previously calculated had been rejected. Some of the values were calculated incorreced using ratios. The revised SOW, released in FY2020 requites all GARC values to be based on sales, not ratios. To meet this requirement, PA NRCS is obtaining a new revised Area Wide Market Analysis

that will meet the new requirements. She indicated that the updated GARC values will be presented at the next STC meeting. She discussed the Wetland Restoration Criteria and Guidelines (WRCG) that provides documentation of technical criteria specific to Pennsylvania's Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE). It also explains Pennsylvania methodology for evaluating alternative wetland communities, determining eligibility, developing ranking questions, and managing violations, compatible uses and restoration activities. That once completed, the WRCG will be released to the STC for review and comment. She indicated that the WRE Program Ranking has no significant changes from last year except a change to reduce points. Per National guidance, the maximum allowable points is 400. She reviewed the ACEP-WRE tentative deadlines for FY 2020 as being: May 1st -WRE application deadline; June 26th - Tentative WRE applications are selected; July 17th - Finalization of WRE agreements, and upload to National Easements Staging Tool (NEST) and obtain Internal Controls reviews; August 14th - Issue offers of enrolment to landowners; August 28th - Complete required steps to finalize enrolment; and September 9th - Final ALE Funding/Obligation Deadline.

01-51-10 - Denise Coleman, PA State Conservationist, thanked everyone for their participation in this meeting and reminded everyone that the state CIG application deadline is set for June 15th. She noted that we have a one-to-one match and that we grant up to \$75,000 for projects. Further, she stated that if any STC member would care to have anything specifically on a future meeting agenda or presentations that you would like to make, to please contact herself or Susan Marquart.

NOTE: A recording of this meeting is available upon request.

Assan, Elsie
Bell, John
Bowling, Pat
Breshaw, Kate
Charney, Alyssa
Coleman, Denise
Crespo, Zenik
Csutoras, Becca
Dubin, Mark
Evans, Ted
Farabaugh, Jen
Frantz, Barry
Gallagher, Brian
Gillis, Jim
Gilmore, Gary
Goodson, Mark
Hanner, Melissa
Helbelka, Joe
Hoagland, Peter
Holomuzki, Nick
Hughes-Evans, Kristen
Jahrsdoerfer, Sonya
Jones, Hathaway
Kellner, Elliot
King, Marel
Kinney, Tim
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Wagner, Kurtis
Whitcombe, Jill

**Participants in the PA State Technical
Committee Meeting WebEx on April 21, 2020**