NRCS-Wyoming State Technical Advisory Committee
Minutes of February 18, 2020 Meeting

1. Roll Call

- The NRCS-WY State Technical Advisory Committee meeting met by telecon at 10:00 am, Tuesday, February 18, 2020. It lasted approximately one hour.
- **NRCS Attendees:** Astrid Martinez, Kresta Faaborg, John Hartung, Jamison Jewkes, Fred Harrell, Chuck Schmitt, Katelyn Vaporis, Rusty Schwartz, Andi Neugebauer, Tiffany Hayes, Ben Bonella, Tim Kellogg
- **Partner Attendees:** Jennifer Zygmunt (DEQ), Tate Smith (WSGLT), Cathy Rosenthal (WACD), Jennifer Hart (Campbell County CD), Carmen McIntyre (CCNRD), Ian Tator (WG&F), Erica Hansen (JHLT), Travis Osmond (Weed & Pest), Dennis Sun (WYLR), Bobbie Frank (WACD), Bud Spillman (City of Cheyenne, retired), Mark Hogan (USFWS), Michelle Huntington (Converse County CD)

2. State Conservationist Update, Astrid Martinez, astrid.martinez@usda.gov, State Conservationist

- Rusty Schwartz will be acting State Conservationist while Astrid is on detail for her executive service development program with Foreign Ag Service for 4-4 ½ months, March-July 2020.
- Hiring updates: Andi Neugebauer is the new State Resource Conservationist (previously on the programs staff). Andi will still be in charge of the NWQI and Source Water protection program. Sage Sheldon is the new GIS Specialist. Jeff Goats is the new State Soil Scientist. Jake Hogan is the new Tribal Liaison at Fort Washakie. Adam Clark is the new DC in Afton.
- Many other openings throughout the state
- We received our final appropriations; similar to last year’s.
- We are conducting weekly Farm Bill training conference with employees.

3. Resources Update, Andi Neugebauer, andi.neugebauer@usda.gov, State Resource Conservationist

- Starting CART training on Feb 25; delivering to field offices via Adobe Connect. Training will be provided 4 times.
- Soil Health card being updated to align with new resource concerns and planning criteria.
- Reviewing conservation standards and making updates as we receive them from HQ.
- Will put out state guidance on new resource concerns and assessment tools in the next few weeks.
- Working on Wyoming planner certification supplement to be submitted to HQ in the next month or so; will take around 6 months for review and posting.
- Training committee meeting last week. Ongoing efforts to get employees trained up to become certified conservation planners.
- New GIS specialist, Sage Sheldon, begins March 2.
- CRP: new changes include management activities will no longer be paid for like previous CRPs, but they are still required. Looking for feedback on two items: 1. What are opinions about how often grazing or haying activity would happen for life of CRP contract. 2. Opinions on memo with FSA recognizing intermediate and pubescent wheatgrass as one species since they are similar genetically.
4. Programs Update, Kresta Faaborg, Kresta.faaborg@usda.gov, ASTC-Programs

- Busy getting new Farm Bill items rolled out.
- Every Wednesday, HQ has telecon with States; Thursdays, NRCS Wyoming has call with employees to relay new HQ info. In recent weeks, information is starting to get finalized and approved.
- The 530 Manual, the new programming and contracting manual, is mostly published minus EQIP portion, but later this week it should get posted.
- Working on draft bulletin for CSP cutoffs and timelines; expect timelines to be condensed.
- RCPP is now a standalone program with separate funding. Rules are out for public comment. Another RCPP sign up expected this summer. The sign-up process has changed with the new Farm Bill, requiring more detailed information.
- Ranking templates being developed.
- Planning to conduct a Partners training in the future, including training on easements. Pending further info before scheduling.
- RCPP evaluation process is a little different than the past: If a partner puts in an RCPP, the state would evaluate; if multi-state, there will be a lead state and neighboring states would evaluate and make recommendations before sending to HQ. HQ will review and give final approval.

5. Engineering Update, Chuck Schmitt, chuck.schmitt@usda.gov, State Conservation Engineer

- A big workload with EWP coming up. Funding approval for Johnson and Sheridan counties; winter conditions prevent survey in other areas.
- Watershed program; 2 applications were approved-West Fork Irrigation Reservoir and Bear River/Yellow Creek watershed projects.
- Several other large projects going on, including stream projects and ag waste systems.
- The WFPO (Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations), PL566 program, applications will be due April 4.

Subcommittee Updates

6. EQIP: Increased Payments for High Priority Practices, Lee Erickson (briefed by Kresta Faaborg), lee.erickson@usda.gov

- An email was sent out to the subcommittee on priority practices.
- Once Lee returns from paternity leave, he will set up a teleconference some time in March to go over priority resource concerns as discussed in his email to the subcommittee.

7. EQIP: Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, Brian Jensen (briefed by Andi Neugebauer), brian.m.jensen@usda.gov

- No guidance has been received; once received, Brian will set up a call with the subcommittee.
8. EQIP: Priority Resource Concerns (Watersheds, Andi Neugebauer, andi.neugebauer@usda.gov)

- No guidance from HQ.
- Last year, Sep 2019, we requested from HQ to withdraw Lower Nowater Creek from the program based on waning participation and determined we have done what we could to address water quality concerns.
- Requested to add the Alamo Creek/Bighorn Watershed into the readiness phase of the program.
- Need to determine process to get info on adding additional watersheds in the state, but waiting on HQ guidance.

9. EQIP: Source Water Protection, Andi Neugebauer, andi.neugebauer@usda.gov

- Working to identify local community waters systems that have existing source water protection plans that have issues with the drinking water.
- Submitted the following areas to HQ last September: Torrington Wellhead Protection Area, Source Water Protection area for Upper North Platte, SWP area for Dubois, SWP area for Boysen. Haven’t heard back if these have been accepted, but assuming they were.
- Recently given guidance on identifying practices that would target those areas; this guidance was sent out to the subcommittee for further discussion.
- This subcommittee can also identify other areas that are local priority areas for SWP.

10. Delivery of Technical Assistance, John Hartung, john.hartung2@usda.gov

The following is a copy of John’s notes he read during the meeting

Role of the Subcommittee:
Participate in the review process of conservation practice standards or interim practice standards for the state.

Background:
Nationally there are currently 171 Conservation Practice Standards.
- 69 Practice Standards are under the Ecological Sciences division (Range, Agronomy, Forestry, Wildlife)
- 102 Practice Standards are under the Engineering division
- April of 2019 there were Nationally 170 Practice Standards
- 1 new Conservation Practice standard was added in May 2019
  - Ecological Science practice Standard 420 Wildlife Habitat Planting added in May 2019 under the Biologist - Wildlife discipline lead

Wyoming –
- Of the 69 Ecological Science practice Standards Wyoming NRCS has adopted 66 of the Standards
  - 2 Standards that were not adopted historically by Wyoming
    - 334 – Controlled Traffic Farming – Agronomy Discipline Lead
    - 379 – Multi Story Cropping – Forestry Discipline Lead
  - 1 new Standard not yet adopted by NRCS Wyoming
    - 420 Wildlife Habitat Planting which was added in May of 2019 as mentioned earlier
• Of the 102 Engineering practice Standards Wyoming NRCS has adopted all 102 practice Standards

Where are we now and tying in the role of the subcommittee:
With the signing of the 2018 Farm Bill one of the tasks assigned was to complete a review of all the Conservation Practice Standards allowing for public comment through the Federal Register process. After the National Practice Standard has gone through the Federal Register process and has been excepted or approved the States have one (1) year to adopt as the State practice Standard. This is where this subcommittee comes in to play – The subcommittee is asked to review the use of the Standard for Wyoming. With four recommendation options coming from that review to be presented for consideration to the State Conservationist.
   1. Accept the Standard as is and adopt as the Wyoming Practice Standard.
   2. If a major error is found – can be submitted to the National Discipline Lead for possible immediate change or update
   3. Adopt as is for now with notes for possible change(s) during the next review of that Standard
   4. If National Standard just will not work for Wyoming can submit request for a variance

As of May 2019 – Eight (8) Conservation Practice Standards have been excepted Nationally.
• Four (4) Ecological Science Standards and Four (4) Engineering Standards
  o Ecological Science Standards
    ▪ 590 – Nutrient Management
    ▪ 595 – Pest Management Conservation Systems (Renamed)
    ▪ 395 – Stream Habitat Improvement and Management
    ▪ 420 – Wildlife Habitat Planting
  o Engineering Standards
    ▪ 372 - Combustion System Improvement
    ▪ 373 – Dust Control on Unpaved Roads and Surfaces
    ▪ 606 – Subsurface Drain
    ▪ 360 – Waste Facility Closure

• 62 Standards are scheduled to come out in 2020
• We can review these standards as a sub-committee but probably best would be to try to divide and concur these standards – using member specialties, expertise, preferences and interests of the individuals and divide the standards that best fit the members. We will start with the practices standards we use the most.
  Top 10 last 5 years (2015-2019)
  10) Forest Stand Improvement
  9) Woody Residue Treatment
  8) Irrigation Water Management
  7) Fence
  6) Sprinkler System
  5) Livestock Pipeline
  4) Pumping Plant
  3) Irrigation Pipeline
  2) Watering Facility
  1) Structure for Water Control

Future:
All Standards are reviewed every 5 years and will continue this process.
Subcommittee:
We will be meeting in the next couple of months to start working through the Standard review process. Information and Standards to be reviewed will be provided at that time.

11. Payment schedule and Payment Rates, Aaron Waller (briefed by Kresta Faaborg),
aaron.waller@usda.gov
- Aaron has reached out to the subcommittee
- 2020 funding is already set, so starting to look at 2021.
- Expecting to reach out again in April/May to work with the subcommittee on 2021 payments

12. Regional Conservation Partnership Program-RCPP, Jamison Jewkes,
Jamison.jewkes@usda.gov
- Role of the subcommittee is to provide input and guidance on the competitive ranking process.
- Sent out to the subcommittee an RCPP guide on the ranking process
- Overview of that process:
  o Initially, interested partners would submit proposal to RCPP portal by the deadline
  o RCPP portal requires an e-authentication and RCPP portal account
  o The proposal is vetted in the state by the RCPP manager
  o A team in the state from various disciplines review the proposal and rank the proposals
  o The review team sends comments to the State Conservationist.
  o The SC reviews and then submits to HQ for review and recommendation to the NRCS chief.
  o NRCS chief makes final decision on what projects are accepted.
- The last proposal period, Wyoming submitted two for the state and multi-state pool. We submitted our review and recommendation to HQ at the end of last month. Expect the chief to announce by the end of March which proposals were funded.
- Interim RCPP rules published last week and comments are due by April 13. Submit comments through Federal Register.

13. Final Comments
- Rusty: districts are in the process of planning the FY2020 local workgroup meetings. If you’d like to know when those meetings are held, please contact Rusty, Tiffany or Fred.
- Next STAC Meeting will be held at the NRCS-Wyoming State Office conference room on May 19. More info will be provided as we get closer.
- Notify Fred Harrell, fred.harrell@gmail.com of any edits needed to names/emails included in these minutes.