

Nebraska State Technical Committee CRP Conservation Priority Areas (CPA) Minutes

Date of Review: November 24, 2020 via Teams Meeting/Teleconference
Time: 1:00pm to 1:45pm

Matter under Review: Renewing and Revising State Conservation Priority Areas (CPA's) and Zones

Background:

Notice CRP-917 was issued on November 16, 2020, requiring the State FSA Committee (STC), in consultation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Technical Committee and the State Conservationist, to develop State CPA's used for General CRP signup. CRP regulations provide that State CPA's are limited to not more than 25 percent of the available remaining cropland.

The deadline for reviewing and revising State CPA's and associated zones and reporting to CEPD is November 27, 2020.

The State CPA's **must** be based on only 1 of the following geographic aggregations:

- entire county
- entire 8-digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC)
- entire 10-digit HUC
- entire 12-digit HUC
- combination of entire county and 8-digit HUC
- combination of entire county and 10-digit HUC
- combination of entire county and 12-digit HUC.

State CPA's **must** be identified by primary purpose of the CPA (wildlife, water quality, or air quality).

Each State wildlife, water quality, or air quality zone is limited to 25 percent of cropland acres in the State. A State may not have a wildlife, water quality, or air quality zone unless such zone is located within a State or National CPA. The purpose of a wildlife, water quality, or air quality zone is to designate a geographic area that achieves the desired wildlife, water quality, or air quality objective.

States may establish water, wildlife, and air quality zones within the State CPA's. Eligible acreage offered within the applicable zone will be awarded EBI points according to 2-CRP, Exhibit 26. In the case of wildlife zones, points will be awarded if at least 51 percent of the offered acreage is within the zone **and** the weighted average N1a score is greater than or equal to 40 points. STC's shall consult with State Conservationists and State Technical Committees to develop State CPA's.

States may submit 1 or more zones. Zones with different purposes may overlap. The water quality, wildlife zones, and air quality zones may include up to 100 percent of the State CPA. STC's shall consult with State conservationists and State Technical Committees to develop zones.

Wildlife zones must be established in locations where enrollment of the cropland within the area will contribute to restoration of habitat of threatened or endangered species or contribute to the restoration of important and declining species of national, regional, State, or local significance.

STC's shall consult State Technical Committees, State fish and game biologists, USFWS officials, NRCS State biologists, State foresters, and other wildlife interests, to determine areas within the State CPA that will be designated as wildlife zones.

Water quality zones shall be established in locations where enrollment of the cropland within the area will contribute to reducing groundwater or surface water quality impairment. STC must:

- consult with EPA, The State water quality agency, and State Technical Committee in developing recommendations
- ensure that water quality zones will assist in compliance of State water quality laws
- prioritize and approve **only** the highest priority water resources of the State.

Note: Areas may include ground water or source water protection areas.

STC, in consultation with the State Technical Committee and State Water Quality Agency, may use the following as tools in developing high priority water resource designations:

- areas where CRP enrollment would assist in the compliance of total maximum daily load standards
- EPA or State-identified wellhead and groundwater recharge areas
- areas with Coastal Zone Management Act Reauthorization Amendment coastal nonpoint pollution control programs
- State 303(d) and 305(b) reports.

STC, in consultation with the State Technical Committee, EPA, and State air quality representatives, shall recommend designated agricultural zones that contribute to the nonattainment of air quality standards.

STC, in consultation with the State Technical Committee, may also recommend zones within 50 miles of a Class 1 air designated area in which agricultural crop production could impact air quality standards.

Note: The State Office shall consult with the State air quality official for the most recent Class 1 designations.

NRCS State Technical Committee Action:

The State Technical Committee met via teleconference on November 24, 2020 at 1:00 pm to develop State CPA's and associated zones. The State FSA Office developed a Nebraska map with total cropland by county. The existing State CPA's and zones were reviewed with the State Technical Committee.

Present at the meeting included:

Nancy Johner FSA
Doug Klein FSA
Jana Ingwerson-Laws FSA

Lavaine Moore	FSA
Chuck Bailey	FSA
Tim Divis	FSA
Ritch Nelson	NRCS
Craig Derickson	NRCS
Brad Soncksen	NRCS
Tami Nordman	NRCS
Britt Weiser	NRCS
Jennifer Prenosil	NRCS
Renee Hancock	NRCS
Catherine Mills	NRCS
James Huntwork	NRCS
Tammy Timms	NRCS
John Mayberger	NRCS
Thomas Schleif	NRCS
Neil Dominy	NRCS
Nathan Pflueger	NRCS
Eleanor Nugent	Rainwater Basin Joint Venture
Andy Bishop	Rainwater Basin Joint Venture
Kelsi Wehrman	Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever
Eric Zach	Nebraska Games and Parks Commission
Ginger Wilson	Senator Ben Sasses' Staff
Kenny Dinan	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Tara L Anderson	Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy
Elbert Traylor	Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy
Brandon Beethe	Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy
Pete Berthelsen	Bee and Butterfly Fund
Andrew Pierson	Audubon Nebraska
David Stock	Stock Seed Farms
George Cunningham	Nebraska Sierra Club
Kent Zimmerman	Nebraska Department of Natural Resources
Ted LaGrange	Nebraska Department of Natural Resources
Dan Ruterbories	Lower Loup Natural Resource District
David Potter	Lower Platte South Natural Resource District
Nick Streff	National Agricultural Statistic Service
Curt Becker	Lower Elkhorn Natural Resource District
Sara Brock	The Groundwater Foundation
Kris Bousquet	Nebraska State Dairy Association
Rich Walters	The Nature Conservancy
Alisha Bartling	Santee Sioux Nation
Judy Trent	Nebraska Women in Farm Economics
Bill Bevans	Nebraska Poultry Industries
Burdette Piening	Producer
Adam Smith	Rural Forestry Program Leader, Nebraska Forest Service, UNL
Georja Kriebs	Ponca Tribe of Nebraska PTN
Bryce	
Shawna	

Nebraska's CPA will be based on a combination of entire county and 12-digit HUC.

The FSA GIS Specialist was available to ascertain the proposed cropland areas within any area(s) within the State. The total Nebraska cropland was 21,715,087.27 acres. The CRP CPA's are limited to 5,428,771.82 acres.

FSA convened a meeting of conservation partners to review the current CPAs, specifically the wildlife, water quality, and air quality zones. Nebraska's landscape has been highly altered and impacted by agriculture's proliferation in the state. Though resource concerns pertaining to the different zones in many cases are dissimilar, the addition of CRP acres to these landscapes would benefit both water quality and wildlife therefore in many areas of the state they overlap.

The overall approach to identifying the Conservation Priority Areas for Nebraska to target wildlife and water quality involved collaboration with our state-level partners. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Department of Environment and Energy assisted by providing information on priority geographic areas for their respective resource concern. These target areas for wildlife and water quality were overlaid with areas of the state that either contained high enrollment for CRP or where there was considerable interest in enrollment into General CRP with a lower acceptance rate. In many cases, there was considerable overlap between the targeted wildlife zones and the targeted water quality zones with only a few areas of exception. The background information relevant to each resource concern is explained below for both wildlife and water quality.

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever (PF/QF) raised areas of interest using the Berggren Pheasant Plan (BPP). The BPP map included shows several areas of the state that conservation partners including NGPC and PF/QF have been targeting to improve upland gamebird habitat. This plan is currently being updated and many of the wildlife zone revisions suggested during this exercise mirror changes being made to the plan. The State Wildlife Action Plan (which is called the Nebraska Natural Legacy Plan (NNLP)) map included illustrates the Biologically Unique Landscapes (BULs) throughout the state where conservation partners work to improve habitat for all native wildlife, especially those identified as species in need of conservation. Many grassland dependent species identified in the NNLP benefit from the habitat provided by CRP.

Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy participated and assisted to identify areas to update in the CPA. These areas overlay waters impaired by agricultural nonpoint source pollution and encompass watersheds or groundwater management areas identified by the Department for restorative management action to abate nonpoint source pollution. Active projects are underway or planned in these CPA areas.

The partners and State Technical Committee did not propose to establish an air quality zone with Nebraska's CPA.

The proposed CPA areas and associated zones were developed according to the provided maps. CPA areas include parts of Antelope, Knox, Cedar, Dixon, Pierce, Madison, Stanton, and Thurston Counties in Northeast Nebraska; parts of Butler, Saunders, Lancaster, and Seward counties in Central Eastern Nebraska; parts of Thayer, Jefferson, Gage, Saline, Nemaha, and Richardson counties and the entire counties of Johnson and Pawnee in Southeast Nebraska; parts of Greeley and Howard County in central Nebraska; parts of Harlan, Franklin, and the entire county of Webster in South Central Nebraska; parts of Keith, Chase, Gosper, and Frontier counties and the entire counties of Perkins, Hayes, Hitchcock, Red Willow, and Furnas in Southwest Nebraska; and parts of Box Butte and Sheridan Counties in the panhandle.

State Technical Committee Discussion:

George Cunningham raised concern about the Big Blue Watershed area and the Elkhorn River area. Both areas have wildlife and water quality concerns. Ritch Nelson commented that these areas usually lack interest in CRP. Partners decided to target areas that would benefit more due to higher interest in CRP for this CPA review. Eric Zach also noted that there are still many continuous CRP signup options, such as filter strips, for those areas that would still be beneficial. Next year these areas can be reviewed and considered for the CPA.

Nebraska State Technical Committee Determination:

State Technical Committee approved the proposed CPA and wildlife and water quality zones for Nebraska. See attachment A for PowerPoint Presentation. Attachment B contains the Proposed CPA Map and Zones.