

Session Notes

State Technical Advisory Committee

January 21, 2021, 9:30a-12:30p - Teleconference

Attendees:

Addie Candid	Jennifer Boie	Tye Meyer
Roylene Comes at Night	Mike Kuttel Jr.	Michelle Wilcox
Carlee Elliott	Michael Crowder	Wendy Diamond
Sherre Copeland	Mike Baden	Meghan Stuart
Cara McNabb	Nicole Berg	Mike Baden
Erin Eaton	Anna Lael	Gary Bahr
Nicole Rasmussen	Dan Dormaier	Mase Vaughn
Robin Slate	Fred Morschek	
Joe Williams	Keith Griswold	
Bonda Habets	Kim Bretson	
Jacob Turner	Austin Shero	

Introduction and Housekeeping – Nick Vira, NRCS State Partnership Liaison

- Welcomes everyone.

Opening Remarks – Roylene Comes at Night, NRCS WA State Conservationist

- Will roll out for FY22; A lot of actions today is to really start preparing for FY22
- We had a tremendous year last year, obligating 42 million for WA State and excited for this FY. A lot of new tools and systems, hoping we are figuring it out and hope this year will go smoother. Hoping for field offices to have better direction and sift through new changes.
- Looking at creating a soil health sub-committee
- Currently in transition – Terry Cosby is currently our acting chief in place of Kevin Norton
- You will be seeing a lot of new opportunities, NRCS is looking at forming an urban conservation committee, looking for nominations for that.
- Help us to make sure we can stay grounded and focused at the local level and locally led.
- We were approved to do 16 direct hires off the streets and job announcements are out there now. All are field positions, and most are new positions in the field.
- Budget is looking good, working hard dealing working with COVID.

Easement Ranking (ACEP) – Keith Griswold

- **ACTION NEEDED:** To discuss and provide recommendations on ACEP ranking criteria*
- ACEP – Deals with Working lands
- Need three ranking sheets - when specific to GSS or sage grouse ranking only.

- We are now allowed to use screening worksheets for all of our programs.
- We don't screen until the application period is closed which is February 26th.
- Michael Kuttel – would like to get subcommittee stood up again. Keith said it will have to wait until next year.
- ACEP-ALE program webpage:
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/wa/programs/easements/acep/?cid=nrcseprd339613>

EQIP Statewide Fund Pools – Keith Griswold

- **ACTION NEEDED:** To discuss and provide recommendations on EQIP fund pools*
- Keith would like to request fund pools for FY22 statewide soil health fund pools –
- Keith Griswold – possibly add clearer maps – request from Sherre Copeland
- Nicole Rasmussen – Have you finalized aquatic fund pool ranking EQIP for FY21? Alan Fulk is currently working on ranking tools.
- Keith needs to get the FY21 ranking tool questions out the door before addressing the FY22 ranking tool questions.
- Is the STAC interested in adding soil health fund pool for local work group.

CRP Update – Bonda Habets

- Information and discussion: To provide practice standard updates
- Contract Reserve Program (CRP)
 - Amendments made to FSA/NRCS Memo of Understanding
 - NRCS will make 4 visits on CRP offer and more if requested by FSA
 - CRP completion date was moved from Sept 10 to July 16 (700 expired)
 - CRO contract status reviews by Sept 13 on contracts expiring 2 yrs instead of 12 months (around 1000 contracts for each FY 2022, 2023)

Practice Standards – Bonda Habets

- Information and discussion: To provide practice standard updates
- March WA Conservation Practice Standards Update
 - Practice Standards are being posted on the Federal Register for comments. Comments are reviewed and the National Standard is finalized. State then adopts them within one year. Three are being posted in March, 23 on the following Federal Register and 70 to get done by 2022.
 - Many conservation practices standards were updated and adopted and are in WA FOTG. We are currently getting them into CART assessment for obligation for EQIP. About a dozen of them and as they come off the Federal Register and hope to have all posted March 1st by FY22.
- WA Wetland Action Plan
 - Recently updated 2015 wetland action plan and will be posted to the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) section III under legislative programs.
- CARBON Farming
 - NRCS Comet-Farm online tool, enables agricultural producers to calculate how much carbon their conservation actions can remove from the atmosphere (www.comet-farm.com)

Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Program (JCLRP) – Sherre Copeland/Nick Vira

- Information and discussion: To provide overview of JCLRP enrollment process for projects
- This program's objective which includes FS & NRCS to work together to improve the health of forests where public forests and grasslands connect to privately owned lands. The three objectives are:
 - Reduce wildlife threats to community and landowners
 - Protecting water quality
 - Enhancing wildlife habitat
- This is a great partnership opportunity
- Timeline is different this year than previous years
- Clarity around the state where the greatest risks for wildfire and wildlife and has plans to address and treat the issues.
- WA has not had a project in a few years and wanted to bring to everyone's attention.
- Projects are funded for a three-year period.
- Program funding with NRCS is funded out of EQIP and funding is above the annual financial allocations of EQIP.
- Solicitation for new proposals are expected this week or next week, and proposals will be due summertime. Selections will be made sometime in October.
- Will need to have all the NEPA requirements in place.
- Approximately 16 awarded annually at the national level, but currently has no limit.
- We have recently issued a NRCS bulletin asking for areas of interests
- Points of contacts: NRCS – Nick Vira; FS – Sherrie Copeland; local level – District conservationist and forest supervisors; – State agencies DNR and WDFW and forest health collaboratives.

Easement Resources from American Farmland Trust – Addie Candib

- Information and discussion: To provide overview of services provided by AFT.
- AFT has been partnering with NRCS at the national level to improve and standardize the outreach materials that are available to support both landowners and entities to understand the process related to ACEP ALE.
- The goal is to help navigate the process and for entities to learn how to successfully participate in the program. The website will include checklists, fact sheets, videos, and other tools to help entities walk through the process. And for landowners who are interested in doing an easement project on their property these same resources are available to help them understand their readiness for the process. It will help with standardizing communication about this program nation-wide.
- As soon as the materials are released Addie will get information to Nick can get them out to the whole committee. These materials should be out by next week.
- Once these materials are published, they will be posted at the American Farmland Information Center website. <https://farmlandinfo.org/>

Closing Remarks – Roylene Comes at Night, NRCS WA State Conservationist

Adjourn

Power point presentations:

- Conservation practice standards update
- FY21 WA ACEP ALE GSS Program Agreements Ranking Pools
- FY21 WA ACEP ALE General Program Agreements Ranking Pools
- FY21 WA ACEP-ALE Statewide Screening Tool
- FY21 WA ACEP ALE GSS Sage Grouse Program Agreements Ranking Pools
- FY17 WA Parcel Eligibility and Ranking Form Example
- Exhibit B of National Instruction 440-310 Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Ranking Guidance
- Proposed FY22 EQIP fund pool
- CRP Cons Practice Standard Update 2021
- Statewide NAQI Forest Particulate Matter Map
- Statewide NAQI Cropland Particulate Matter (PM10) Map

Deadlines/Action items:	
Is the STAC interested in adding for FY22, a statewide soil health fund pool for local work groups.	Provide response to Nick asap.
The next STAC meetings is scheduled for March 25, 2021.	