Agenda

Teams Recordings – For those of you with access to the recordings, locate specific topics using timestamps as indicated in parenthesis (0:00:00) throughout the content.

Part 2 - https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/9687974a-2ae6-47af-9633-eaae877da1fa

This meeting was recorded for future use. All participants were notified prior to recording via the Microsoft Teams notification and a presentation slide.

(0:00:03) Brief Introduction to Teams’ Tools and Meeting Etiquette (Sean Forehand, NRCS, Management Analyst)

We were unable to fully capture all participants in attendance. A listing of the STAC thread is available upon request.

(0:02:47) Welcome & Update (Clint Evans, NRCS, State Conservationist)

(0:03:48) Staffing Forecast and Challenges
(0:07:24) Pandemic Response
(0:09:19) Resource Based Planning and Landscape Planning
(0:12:00) Planning First Campaign (Long-term Planning and Local Working Groups)
(0:14:14) Snowpack and Run-off Forecast
(0:15:32) Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI)
(0:16:14) Central Grasslands Roadmap
(0:16:52) Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program
(0:18:53) Meeting Expectations and Welcome Participation

Q: (0:19:38) Will NRCS Colorado likely still support the partnerships with partner positions on the ground with the increase in workforce directly through the NRCS? You guys have been great supporters of our partnership positions, but will that affect any of the agreements and future support of our partner positions?

A: Yes, that’s a priority for us, to continue to support those partner agreements, especially that lead to boots on the ground. However you identify it, as we continue to staff up, that does close that margin in the budget and so a lot of that’s going to be budget driven and we’ll be engaging with the partners where we have agreements in order to let folks know if we can continue to support those positions or if, in some cases, we may need to reduce, you know if we’ve got larger agreements to add six to eight or ten positions. We may have to over time, through attrition, reduce those down in order to keep within our available budget. But that is a priority for me, to try to continue to support those. The partners have been an important part of our workforce and you all have stepped up and brought matching funds to the table to help us address staffing needs when we couldn’t hire. That’s a part that for me is extremely valuable to our processes and getting conservation on the ground in Colorado. So, as long as the budget allows and we can, we’ll make adjustments where we need to; but, yes, we’re going to try to support those.
Western Governors’ Association (WGA) (Heidi Ramsey, NRCS, WGA Liaison)

WGA Presentation

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Q: (0:31:37) Has WGA heard from or do they anticipate being able to go through and connect some with Secretary Vilsack?

A: I did have a conversation with Troy Timmons at WGA, the other day, and he did share with me that they are likely going to ask Secretary Vilsack to speak at the summer meeting this year.

Programs Update (Liz With, NRCS, Assistant State Conservationist - Programs)

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Conservation Incentive Contracts (CIC) (Kindra Brandner, NRCS, Program Manager - EQIP)

EQIP CIC Presentation

(0:36:33) Purpose
(0:38:08) Major Features
(0:41:00) Allocation
(0:41:40) High Priority Areas (HPAs)
(0:42:19) High Priority Area (HPA) Example
(0:43:42) Priority Resource Concerns (RCs)
(0:45:18) Benefits of EQIP CIC
(0:46:27) Key Points
(0:48:23) Crosswalk Matrix
(0:51:03) Resource Concern (RC) Category Level
(0:51:30) Common National-level Q & A
(0:53:03) Recommended HPA
(0:54:48) Ranking
(0:55:30) Contract Scheduling
(0:56:31) Discussion

Deb Daniel’s Comments: (0:57:18) Kindra, thank you so much for your presentation. You had a ton of information in there; but I just want to introduce myself. First, my name is Deb Daniel. I’m the General Manager of the Republican River Water Conservation District (RRWCD). I don’t have so much of a
question as much as an expression of sincere appreciation for the NRCS, especially Clint Evans and the rest of all your staff at the state and local level county offices. We appreciate working with each and every one of you and I also wanted to thank you for offering a program that can compensate producers who are willing to retire their irrigation well while allowing dry land farming and grazing on these formerly irrigated acres. You know, this year I have spoken with numerous producers who are interested in entering into an EQIP contract; but, usually, the limiting factor for them is the amount the producers will receive in compensation for the retirement of their irrigation well. The Republican River District has carried the majority of this financial load and we’re asking for more assistance from NRCS by increasing the number of payment years that are currently being offered through the CIC. It would be greatly enhanced, our efforts to assist the state of Colorado in compact compliance, if NRCS would offer not only a five-year payout, but that you would offer a ten-year payout for the retirement of wells in this program. This would be extremely beneficial to producers over in Ogallala who are interested in retiring their irrigation wells to conserve water, to receive compensation for canceling their water right, and to have the ability to dry land farm and graze their land, which supports our local communities. And, as was listed, the Ogallala Aquifer is extremely important and listed as a high priority in northeast Colorado. A ten-year payout for the CICs would help to alleviate the financial load that the RRWCD has carried in the past. We strongly encourage you to provide this ten-year payout so that more acres in the RRWCD can be retired for water conservation through this program, which allows producers to continue doing what they love to do… farm and raise livestock and continue to support our rural economy. I’m going to close with that because I know that we have several others who would also like to make comments. Thank you so much for your time.

**Drew Peternell’s Q:** (1:00:06) I am Drew Peternell. I am the Director of the Colorado Water Program Trout Unlimited and I’ve got a question about the HPAs. I’m wondering if you all, at NRCS, considered the Colorado River Basin as a potential HPA with the RCs that would sort of mirror the RCs that you’ve recognized for the Colorado River Basin under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)? Those are, I think, soil quality, water quality, habitat availability, and water availability.

**Elizabeth With’s A:** We’re certainly willing to talk about other additional areas and hash out other potential HPAs. Maybe after this meeting you and I can get together and talk about some of these details with Kindra?

**Drew Peternell’s A:** Sure.

**Darlene Carpio’s Comments:** (1:01:32) Kindra, thank you for your presentation and Clint, good to have this opportunity to touch base. I serve as the Regional Director for Congressman Ken Buck’s office and we serve in District 4, which is out here on the Eastern Plains. So, I’d like to share an approved statement from the Congressman’s office this morning: “As the RRWCD strives to meet their mission to keep Colorado in compact compliances, I wanted to share our thanks to the NRCS for their support and efforts of using federal programs to meet the ongoing challenges of the Ogallala Aquifer. By utilizing these programs, they’ve been successful in retiring thousands of irrigated acres for conservation through incentivizing local producers to do their part in protecting the Ogallala Aquifer. But, to meet the goal of retiring 25,000 acres on the South Fork by 2029, they’ll need every tool available to them. Thank you for your continued support. Thank you to NRCS. Clint, you, and your agency has always been incredibly great to work with. I just want to thank you for your continuing service.”

**Q:** (1:02:58) Are water management entities (WMEs) eligible for CICs?
Clint Evans’ A: No, the WME EQIP sign-up opportunity is intended to address infrastructure needs. The CICs are for enhancement activities and practices that would go on farms. So, the WMEs will not have control of land for the on-farm practices and activities that are going to be available through the CICs.

Tim Pautler’s Comments: (1:04:12) Yes, thank you very much. I’m Tim Pautler from Stratton, Colorado. I just want to say thank you for opportunity to speak to this issue. Kindra that was a great presentation. It’s a little bit much for this farmer-guy to absorb all at one time, so I would have to need a rehearsal for that several times over; but we’re very excited to support this program because we think, long term, it’s going to be, perhaps, the answer to some of our questions, or problems, out here in the Republican Basin. You know we’ve partnered with NRCS since 2005 in transitioning producers from an irrigated personal economy back to a dry land economy. As, Clint, you know, we’ve had those conversations two years ago about trying to reverse this role of what the RRWCD does and what NRCS has the capability of doing and we’re really looking forward to that as we continue to try to meet the demands on the basin in regard to the compact. Since 2004, the district has retired 35,000 acres in the basin. We’ve invested $90,000,000 of our own money in water projects in the basin to keep ourselves in compliance with the other two states and in an effort to try to keep the economic engines plugging along. Now that we’re in compliance, how do we ensure the longevity of the aquifer into the future? How do we manage the water we have left? We think this CIC thing could very well have a huge impact on the success moving forward of doing just that. One of the tools that we already have in our toolbox is the Colorado Master Irrigator Program, which teaches producers how to manage and be profitable by using less water. There’s a big effort by the groundwater management districts in the Republican River Conservation District Basin boundary. We’re trying to implement conservation plans moving forward because everybody is starting to understand the dire need for such programs by each individual groundwater management district. That is just in its infancy and we’re probably two years away from that becoming a reality, but efforts are moving in a positive direction and how, perhaps, NRCS can help the individual groundwater management districts in that endeavor, remains to be seen; but, we’re certainly looking forward to that discussion. The two that we’re looking at today is the resource through well conversions, leaving water in the hole for domestic and livestock use. In some areas of the basin, this is really the only option that’s left. The ability to farm these acres is a key component of this program. Not only for the producer but it continues to keep the economic engine running to the extent that dry land farming allows. The potential for the CIC in this basin is very important to the resource but also to the basin. We have discussed in the past, Clint, our budget is limited when it comes to the number of acres that we can feasibly retire annually with the NRCS programs. In the past, we have funded approximately two thirds of the costs of those retirements. As a result, we are in jeopardy of not meeting our goals on the South Fork, which, for those who don’t know, we’re being asked to retire 25,000 acres on the South Fork of the Republican and we’re, kind of, under the gun. We’ve got 10,000 to get by 2024. We’ve got about 2,500 of that 10,000 and a balance of 15,000 due by 2029. We really need these financial roles to be reversed in order to accomplish this goal. So, in closing, Clint and everybody from NRCS, we’re excited to support NRCS efforts in the implementation of this new CIC provision of the 2018 Farm Bill. We’re looking forward to having further discussion and we think working collaboratively using all the tools in the toolbox, we think we can make a difference in prolonging the life of the Aquifer. Thank you very much. I will answer any questions if anybody has any.

Mark Hillman’s Comments: (1:09:00) Good morning, I appreciate that. I just wanted to speak in support of the comments with RRWCD. I’m Mark Hillman. I farm near Burlington and in 2003, I sponsored, along with, then, Representative Greg Brophy the enabling legislation that created Republican River Water Conservation District. Two years ago, I enrolled three wells in the retirement program.
Under that arrangement, RRWCP will pay, roughly, 80 percent of the retirement and NRCS will pay about 20 percent. I know that the district appreciates the help from NRCS, but the hard fact is that if RRWCD must pay 80 percent of the cost of the program, then it’s ability to enroll new acres will be severely limited. The year that my application was accepted, I believe the district was able to accept applications for less than ten wells. So, I would echo the comments that Tim Pautler just made and, otherwise, that sums up what I have to say, and I appreciate your time.

**Mike Sullivan’s Comments:** (1:10:15) Thank you. This is Mike Sullivan. I’m with the Division of Water Resources and I’m going to pile it on a little bit. We appreciate you putting a high priority designation on the Ogallala Aquifer. It’s a stressed resource. We know it’s declining in areas. We do have some goals within the state, but we also recognize that we’re using a lot of water out of that and if we want to maintain a long-term economy in those areas, we need to have ways in which people can gracefully bow out of irrigated farming and move themselves into dry land farming and I think this program is a great incentive to doing that. It keeps them on the land and producing, but it reduces that demand on the aquifer and lengthens the life of the aquifer, so the new farmers have a chance to take some advantage of that resource. So, I appreciate you are making that a HPA and encourage extending this program out to ten years if you can possibly do it and I’d like to thank the NRCS for all the stuff it does. I rely heavily on your forecasts that you produce. It’s good data. We’re seeing less water coming out of the mountains in some areas. In some areas, we’ve seen 15 percent less water flow and I think it’s important that we try and encourage everyone to conserve and optimize the use of water so that we maintain that vibrant agricultural economy the state has supported for so many years. Thank you.

**Steve Kramer’s Comments:** (1:12:06) I live and farm out here near Burlington, Colorado and I serve on the RRWCD, also, and all my colleges have pretty much stated the importance of this program; so, we are really looking forward to seeing what we can do to work together and make this program useful out here in my area to retire more of these irrigation wells. With that, I'll just thank you and that’s about it.

**Rod Lenz’s Comments:** (1:12:47) Yes, my name is Rod Lenz. I’m with the RRWCD, as well. I just want to reiterate what Deb, Darlene, Tim, Mark, Mike, and Steve all said that we appreciate the NRCS and all the things you have done for us. We appreciate the prioritization of the Ogallala. We realize that that resource is dwindling across many states and we’re just one of those eight states that is having the same issue. I promise you; we are on a path to long term water use reduction. Whether we be successful as far as sustainability, that has yet to be determined. But programs like your EQIP program or programs that help us, give us an opportunity to achieve that and, right now, I think Mark referenced that as far as our limitations from our budget, we have a priority of only 500-750 acres a year is all our budget can sustain it the way the breakout of the reimbursements is. So, we were so limited, we need to be able to change that so we can extend more acres every year to get to that 25,000 by 2029. I just echo what everybody else has said and I, once again, just want to thank all of you guys for the work you’ve done.

(1:14:34) Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) (Russ Knight, NRCS, Program Manager - CSP)

**CSP Presentation**

(1:15:22) Proposed Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) CSP Fund Pools
(1:16:03) CSP FY21 Priority RCs
(1:18:20) Other Program and Resource Priorities
(1:18:54) Questions? There were none.
WMEs Presentation

(1:20:03) What is a WME?
(1:21:24) WME and Eligibility
(1:21:51) WME Eligibility
(1:23:24) Land Eligibility
(1:24:49) Why are WMEs a big deal?
(1:28:18) Questions?

Q: (1:28:39) We experienced technical difficulties. In summary, we believe the question was would there be special considerations made for group projects like WMEs?

Liz With’s A: We also have the ability and special considerations for these larger group watershed-type projects and that’s what Alex is referring to, here, and these group projects are larger, multiparticipant project, multiple EQIP contracts… big projects where we can link things together to get kind of synergistic benefits with a great degree of resource conservation should the entire package be installed versus bits and pieces here and there. So, we are always willing to talk to partners about potential group projects coming through. They do have to meet the regular eligibility requirements that we see in the general EQIP sign-ups and go through those same individual hoops. It really comes down to targeting those projects, looking for those funding opportunities, and working with you guys, as our partners, to know where those opportunities are. So, if you’ve got a bigger project like that, a group project that is full of our typical EQIP eligible participants like ag producers that qualify and are interested, that’s where we can start talking about these group projects. If you know those, I strongly request that you let us know and we can start working on considering those.

Tim Pautler’s Q: (1:30:55) Thank you. I just have a question about, part of the question that Alex was leading to and for my comments earlier about these groundwater management issues in the Republican Basin, trying to put forth conservation plans, which are going to take a lot of dollars to implement. Are we going to be eligible…? I sit on the Plains Groundwater Management District out here in Kit Carson County and I guess the question isn’t for all the groundwater management districts in our basin, there’s eight of them. Are we going to be eligible for such a program like this? We were by statute created in the ’65 Groundwater Management Act. Can somebody address that situation, please?

Liz With’s A: What we’re finding, and so you’ve got to please be patient with us, I hate using it’s on a case-by-case basis because I know that’s frustrating to all of us. We’re learning that a lot of things about designations, business rules, business charters, and all that stuff. Right now, we’re kind of in the middle of hashing it out for this first WME sign-up that we’re going through. What I might recommend is if you contact your Farm Service Agency (FSA) and let’s, first, see if we can get you an answer. So, let’s go back to the WME Eligibility slide. I would take your business type documents in and work with your FSA and find out which one of these entities you fall within. Then, I think, once we can establish that you firmly fall within one of those, eligible business types, and you meet that definition of serving a public purpose, which I think is pretty easy to justify, go ahead… when we can get those records established, that’ll give us the answer that we need.
Clint Evans’ Comments: (1:33:01) Tim, what I was going to add to this conversation is that if you all want to work with Liz With, Kindra Brandner, or myself, we’d be happy visit with you a little bit more to see what kind of project and, where I’m struggling a bit thinking about it from a groundwater perspective is, I believe that Congress’ intent on these WME sign-ups was to help modernize and improve surface water irrigation delivery infrastructure. So, it was, from what I understand from some friends on The Hill, when this was being added that lead to the EQIP authorities, it was really intended for surface water delivery and modernizing these surface water delivery systems. However, that said, as a groundwater management district, let’s have a conversation and see what type of projects you all might be wanting to implement and then we can dig into the policy and consult with our National office to get some guidance on how we might be able to make that work if we can make it work.

Alex Funk’s Comments: (1:34:14) I guess that’s where some of the confusion, I guess, we’re having comes from because, I mean, to our understanding this is a brand-new feature under the WME section. It did seem to reference, sort of, two distinct types of projects, both, infrastructure centric and then watershed-wide centric, I guess, because it lays out things like deficit irrigation and transition to water-saving crops and things I think would be more relevant to the groundwater management district; so, I’d be happy to flag that and follow-up to talk more about that if there’s an opportunity to do so.

Clint Evans’ Comment: Yes, definitely, that sounds great.

(1:35:18) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) (Liz With, NRCS, Assistant State Conservationist – Programs)

WME RCPP Presentation

(1:35:29) What is RCPP? Regional Conservation Partnership Program | NRCS (usda.gov)
(1:36:05) What’s changed in RCPP?
(1:37:15) What are the Core Principles?
(1:39:46) Interested in Applying? RCPP - How to Apply | NRCS (usda.gov)
(1:40:43) Colorado Programs Team

EQIP - Kindra Brandner, kindra.brandner@usda.gov, 970-458-3151

CSP - Liz With, elizabeth.with@usda.gov, 970-765-1485

RCPP - James Sperry, james.sperry@usda.gov, 719-695-3342; currently out of the office. In his absence, please contact Liz With, elizabeth.with@usda.gov, 970-765-1485

ALE - Heather Foley, heather.foley@usda.gov, 720-544-2805; Laura Trimboli, laura.knapp@usda.gov, 970-422-3368

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Assistant State Conservationist - Programs
Liz With, elizabeth.with@usda.gov, 970-765-1485
(1:47:59) Central Grasslands Roadmap Summit (Lauren Connell, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, Stewardship Director)

Central Grasslands Roadmap Resources
Website: https://www.grasslandsroadmap.org/
YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ8cPXwNgB7TN8qyBR24jCQ
Questions/comments: Lauren.Connell@birdconservancy.org; Tammy.VerCauteren@birdconservancy.org

Central Grasslands Roadmap Summit Presentation

(1:48:55) Central Grasslands Roadmap
(1:49:59) Decline of the North American Avifauna
(1:50:50) Losing Our Grasslands
(1:51:28) Central Grasslands Roadmap (New Vision – Canada, United States, and Mexico)
(1:51:48) Planning Committee
(1:52:23) Planning Committee’s Vision
(1:52:56) Structuring the Collaboration
(1:54:14) Framework
(1:55:15) Constellation Governance Model
(1:55:46) NRCS Participation
(1:56:34) Virtual Summit (August 2020) – See YouTube Channel link above for videos.
(1:58:17) Roadmap Priorities: Big Buckets
(1:59:21) Moving the Work Forward
(2:00:57) How will we measure success?
(2:02:10) Here’s my ask of the STAC…
(2:02:30) Monthly Newsletter (How to Subscribe) – See Website link above.
(2:03:00) Presenting Sponsors
(2:03:06) Questions? There were none.

Clint Evans’ Comments: (2:03:25) I just wanted to say thanks to Lauren and Tammy VerCauteren for the partnership between the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and NRCS. They took on a significant effort here in pulling together this Central Grasslands Roadmap and the partnership meetings that were conducted last year in 2020. It was really a heavy lift and I just wanted to compliment them on their efforts of where we are today and excited to see where we can go in the future as we get more partners and more program opportunities lined up to help address these grassland concerns, so thank you.

Lauren Connell’s Comments: (2:04:06) Thank you. I wish Tammy was here to share this with you all directly. It’s her vision in conjunction with partners and she’s a true visionary, she’s gotten us all onboard. We’ve all drank the Kool-Aid and we’re all really excited about moving us forward. Thanks, again, for the support.
(2:04:45) Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI) (Jason Lawhon, USFS, Southwest Colorado Program Manager for RMRI)

**RMRI Presentation**

(2:05:19) RMRI Background  
(2:06:12) Fire Issue in 2020  
(2:07:03) Values, Threats, Pace, & Scale  
(2:09:54) Find a Place Out West, Gather Influencers, and Identify Shared Values  
(2:11:08) Look Broadly Across Landscapes & Ownership Boundaries  
(2:11:46) 2 Conveners, 12 Influencers, 30 Stakeholders & 170 Individuals  
(2:12:07) Three Priority Landscapes  
(2:13:08) Southwest Colorado Shared Stewardship  
(2:14:43) Southwest Colorado Joint Prioritization – Project Area  
(2:15:31) Southwest Colorado Cross-Boundary Strategy – RMRI-SW Aligns Efforts  
(2:17:32) Southwest Colorado Investments & Actions – Collaborative Investment  
(2:23:06) Outcomes at Scale  
(2:25:02) Outcomes – 2020 Summary (as of September 30, 2020)  
(2:26:30) Cross-Boundary Strategy – Comments  
(2:28:18) Questions? There were none.

(2:28:44) Wildlife Subcommittee Update (Presented by Krystal Phillips, NRCS, State Biologist on behalf of Terry Fankhauser, Subcommittee Chair, Colorado Cattlemen’s Association)

**Wildlife Subcommittee Update Presentation**

- Western WLFW Framework online link: https://wlfw.rangelands.app/  
(2:31:54) Funding opportunities that support NRCS WLFW Frameworks – RCPP and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)  
(2:33:00) NRCS Colorado Black-footed Ferret Special Effort  
(2:33:29) Key dates for STAC Wildlife Subcommittee  
(2:34:01) Resources  
(2:34:34) Questions? There were none.
**Liz With’s Comments:** (2:34:52) Just a bit of clarification. There is an RCPP, we have already had our RCPP classic application cutoff. I do believe, I do want to say that we are potentially still waiting on our RCPP AFA sign-up to be coming up this year. There may be additional opportunities for either of those programs.

Q: (2:35:42) Do all subcommittees have websites that we can visit?

**Randy Randall’s A:** Not all subcommittees have websites yet, but we’re going to log that as an action item.

Q: (2:36:09) Can you tell us how many RCPP classic applications were received in the last round in November?

**Clint Evans’ A:** Yes, we can share the number of applications. We just can’t share any details about who applied, what entities applied. I believe we had 13 applications for RCPP last November for Colorado.

Q: (2:36:45) The website indicates the AFA is now open. Is this correct?

**Liz With’s A:** I knew it was coming, I just wasn’t 100 percent sure exactly when. So, if the website is saying that it is up and open, then it is up and open. Get your pencils ready or keyboards.

**Clint Evans’s Comments:** Yes, we received an embargoed communication on the AFA announcement, right about the start of the meeting this morning, saying that it would be released sometime today or early tomorrow; if it’s out already on the web, they must have it already out for the public, so thanks.

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(2:48:44) Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Update (Heather Foley, NRCS, Easements Program Manager - Acquisition)

**ACEP Update Presentation**
- CO FY-21 ACEP-ALE Ranking Criteria Portfolio
- CO FY-21 ACEP-WRE Ranking Criteria
- CO Wetlands Restoration Criteria & Guidance

(2:49:40) ACEP Component Programs
(2:50:19) ACE-ALE Applications – Sign-up 1 (2/12)
(2:51:47) STAC Role Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 and Beyond
(2:52:47) Geographics Area Rate Cap (GARC) – WRE
(2:53:52) FY 2021 Ranking Criteria Changes – WRE
(2:55:14) FY 2021 Ranking Criteria Changes – ALE
(2:57:41) WRCG Summary
(3:00:04) ALE Grasslands Enrollments Criteria *Proposed New Addition*
(3:03:41) Motion to Accept…
(3:04:04) Questions regarding recommended motion or proposed changes?
Ray Aberle’s Comments: (3:04:13) Heather, I just want to say thank you. I know we’ve been working a lot on trying to figure out some of the challenges within this, so I just want to acknowledge what you put out there today was starting to take a lot of it into consideration. I know it’s been a heavy lift, so thank you very much for that, much appreciated.

Sara Parmar’s Comments and Q: (3:04:42) Hi. I will echo that, thank you, and yes, we really appreciate the proposal for GSS, in particular, so that we don’t exclude important things like ranch headquarters from those conservation easements and they remain intact viable operations. Heather, I totally appreciate how tight the timeline was for you to finalize the ranking criteria for ALE in order to get those applications out this year. I’m just curious, you know, since we had the email exchanges and comments in December, you know, I know we haven’t had a chance to review the comments that we and other organizations sent in in December prior to that finalization. Will those be considered, or will we have the opportunity to review those comments prior to next year’s application before you issue ranking criteria for next year?

Heather Foley’s A: Yes, we will have another subcommittee meeting before we make any decisions on ranking criteria for next year. Whenever our next meeting is for the STAC, I’m going to try to hold a subcommittee meeting before then so we can get everything solidified.

Molly Fales’ Comments: (3:06:18) Heather, I think we’ve talked about this a little bit and I know I’ve talked to Ray about this, so we appreciate that you guys are working with the headquarters issue. I think we still need to think through a little bit more particularly with GSS as it relates to Sage grouse and how that works with irrigated hay fields. I think that at Cattlemen’s we’re a little bit nervous, you know, about whether or not irrigated hay fields counted as cropland. If there had to be Alfalfa in there and the irrigated hay fields can be fantastic habitat for grouse particularly up in Jackson County where you have irrigated meadows interspersed with the Sagebrush. The grouse really use both of those and so we have concerns that the limitation on cropland, which potentially includes those hay fields, limits our ability to utilize ESS funds for those easements and that higher level of funding. So, I think we just need to think through that a little bit more and it may come down to, and I think we make comments about this every year, I think everyone is perpetually confused by the definitions of particularly rangeland, pasture last, shrub land, into a certain extent, whether or not hay fields are in croplands. A lot of those definitions include the other words, so I think we need to continue to work on that.

Heather Foley’s Comments: I guess what I would say on that, that’s kind of why we’re offering the opportunity to request a waiver. Like I said, we’re still working on exactly what that will look like, but if you or anyone else thinks that they have a good grasslands enrollment, whether it’s general of GSS, but you have land uses that are not listed as permitted, I would just submit with your application and request for a waiver and, kind of, explain why, whatever lands are not permitted are really important for those grasslands and the grazing uses. That way we can consider what you’re putting out there before we have guidance if there’s anything else that we need before we make that determination, we can ask you. But if you don’t ask, we can’t consider it. I think perennial hay, if it can’t be classified as anything else, is a good thing to try to ask for.
Molly Fales’ Comments: Okay, that is helpful. Thanks Heather.

(3:09:34) Heather Foley requests a MOTION to accept these items:
- FY22 GARC for WRE
- FY21 ALE & WRE Ranking Criteria
- WRCG, version January 2021
- Grasslands enrollment criteria

Sarah Parmar MOVED, and Molly Fales SECONDED the motion to accept these items in support of the recommendation.

(3:10:33) All those in favor, please raise your hand.

A total of 14 participants raised their hand, virtually, in support of the recommendation, as indicated below:

ACEP Vote, STAC, March 16, 2021

**Motion to Accept...**

1. FY22 GARC for WRE
2. FY21 ALE & WRE Ranking Criteria
3. WRCG, version January 2021
4. Grasslands enrollment criteria

There were no objections.

Clint Evans’ Comments: (3:13:06) Just for some clarity, we need to be clear that it’s not really counting as a vote, but essentially support for the recommendation. So, the committee makes recommendations to me, as the State Conservationist, and then, essentially, I approve or disapprove. Based on the fact, though, I think we had 14 hands raised in support of the recommendation and we didn’t have anyone appose. So, we will approve and implement the recommendations as supported by the committee.
(3:14:05) Hydrology Indicators for Wetlands Discussion (BJ Shoup, NRCS, State Soil Scientist)

Hydrology Indicators for Wetlands Presentation

(3:15:05) The Three Wetlands
(3:15:20) Clean Water Act (CWA)
(3:15:38) Food Security Act
(3:16:04) NRCS Wetland Protection Policy
(3:17:40) July 17, 2020 - Memorandum to the Field concerning implementation of Section 404…
(3:18:00) September 1, 2020 - CIRCULAR 180-20-1
(3:18:34) August 28, 2020- 7 CFR 12 Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC)
Federal Register: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/08/28/2020-18626/highly-erodible-
land-and-wetland-conservation
(3:18:56) Final Rule HEL and WC (7 CFR 12)
(3:19:47) Local Hydrology Indicators for the Identification of Farmed Wetlands
(3:19:57) Background
(3:21:02) Farmed Wetland (FW) Definition
(3:21:44) Option A - Local level indicators
(3:22:07) NRCS is requesting STAC input on proposed Local Hydrology Indicators for the identification
of Farmed Wetlands that are not playas, pocosins, or potholes
(3:22:20) Local Hydrology Indicators Farmed Wetlands
(3:22:36) NRCS’ Recommendation to STAC: Adopt all national FW hydrology indicators with no
additions or edits.

More Information…
National Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and WC Provisions Webpage

William Shoup
State Soil Scientist
Denver, Colorado

Sara Marshall’s Q: (3:25:13) Is there a reason that hydric soil is not included in the list of indicators?

BJ Shoup’s A: To make a wetland determination, we use three different factors. One is the soil, one is
the hydrology, and one is the plants. So, today we’re just specifically talking about hydrology indicators.
The hydric soil would be in soil portion of that.

(3:26:13) NRCS Proposes the following options to STAC:
• Adopt all national FW hydrology indicators with no additions or edits
• Provide opportunity to review in more detail and provide written commentary
• Hold dedicated meeting for those interested in discussion and feedback
All those in favor, please raise your hand.

A total of 10 participants raised their hand, virtually, in support of the recommendation, as indicated below:

(3:27:78) Are there any objections? If so, please raise your hand.

**Domonic Barrett’s Q:** (3:28:25) With regard to the last option, I didn’t know who that was intended for.

**BJ Shoup’s A:** Sorry, I apologize for that. Maybe this wasn’t clear. My recommendation is that first one, which is to adopt all national FW hydrology indicators. So, that’s my recommendation. If there were more recommendations to either provide an opportunity to look at it in more detail and provide written commentary or there was also another option to host a dedicated meeting for those interested so we could go over these. Those were my three options; my recommendation is the first one.

**Domonic Barrett’s Comments:** Okay, thanks for the explanation.

**Bobbi Ketels’ Comment:** (03:29:49) CACD, Option No. 2 – I just wanted to throw out there for my organization. Option 2 would’ve been their choice.

(3:30:50) **Source Water Protection (SWP)/National Water Quality Initiative Update (Paul Hempel, Colorado Rural Water Association (CRWA), presented on behalf of Mike Brady, NRCS, Resource Conservationist)**

(3:31:29) SWP Program’s History
(3:33:26) Nominations to NRCS must include these components
(3:34:11) SWP 2021 Priority Watersheds
(3:35:54) NRCS Colorado SWP Watersheds (HUC12) with tier ranking
(3:37:00) CRWA/Dallas Creek WC - Pleasant Valley Creek – Paul Hempel & Malory Hiss
(3:38:18) Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District - Big Thompson Watershed – Kimberly Mihelich
(3:40:39) Map of tier 3 watersheds that were expanded
(3:40:59) SWP and Wildfire Recovery Efforts
(3:41:50) Outreach Flyer Update
(3:42:33) Increasing stakeholder involvement
(3:43:13) Timeline for SWP Initiative

Paul Hempel
Colorado Rural Water Association
719-565-8007
phempel@crwa.net

Questions? There were none.

Clint Evans’ Comments: (3:45:04) Thanks Paul. I just wanted to express my appreciation to Paul for his leadership over the last couple of three years in leading our SWP Subcommittee. They’ve had a really engaged group and they’ve provided a lot of great input for us as an agency in implementing our programs. So, Paul, thank you very much for your continued engagement and leadership for SWP.

(3:46:18) FSA Conservation Update (Ivy Jean Reynolds, FSA, Conservation Specialist)

(3:46:27) Conservation Reserve Program
(3:47:04) Emergency Haying and Grazing
(3:48:25) Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) Implementation

Questions about conservation programs within FSA?

Lauren Connell’s Q: (3:49:17) I just have a quick question, I think it was, on your first slide. So, I saw the email that general sign-up is delayed until further notice, but what does it mean that counties can still accept offers? Is that just applications?

Ivy Reynolds’ A: So, CRP has several subprograms, I like to think of them. We’ve got general sign-up, which started earlier this year and that sign-up is still happening. We just don’t have an end date. So, it was supposed to, I think sign-up was supposed to close around February 12 and prior to that date, we had notification that that deadline had been extended and the new deadline has not been announced. So, we’re still accepting offers for general sign-up or Sign-up 56. Producers are more than welcome to come in the office, meet with our county office staff, and submit some of their acreage for that general sign-up, which is where we do the ranking. That’s where our safe acres are now. We had visited about the conservation priority areas and that’s where that all comes into play with that general sign-up. The email I had sent you last week was about CRP grasslands, which is a little bit different. There is still a national ranking period. However, that sign-up must happen after general sign-up has concluded. So, because we don’t have that end date, it’s delayed the grasslands sign-up until we have that final date for general sign-up.

Any other questions about CRP? There were none.

(3:51:10) Action Items: Interplanting Policy Change
Questions?

Lauren Connell’s Q: (3:52:53) Are there any typical volumes or planting? I’m just trying to imagine a footprint of disturbance. You know, is someone going out there and handplanting a few trees or are we talking about snow breaks and things like that? Are we talking heavy equipment disturbance? I’m just trying to think about the nesting implications.

Ivy Reynolds’ A & Q: Typically, with contract management, we’re not installing a new practice from scratch. So, it would be an existing stand of the living snow fence or a riparian forest buffer and we would be planting trees into that existing planting. So, I think that the heavy equipment would be fairly limited. One of the district directors who actually spoke with me about this issue is on the line. Woody, do you have a situation that you can maybe describe to provide some context?

Woody Woods’ A: (3:53:49) Yes, I can. It’s a very minimal disturbance. I mean, we may have a pickup or something hauling the trees out there, but it’s in essence removing the dead tree and putting the live tree back into the exact same hole. Very seldom is it not going back in that hole because we’ve used fabric on almost every one of our tree plantings and it’s mainly the wind bearing type, well it’s all windbreak of one kind or another, but they’re using the exact same hole, basically, and the same hole in the fabric. The only disturbance would be getting the trees to the area. We don’t anticipate needing a tractor or anything like that.

Gene Backhaus’ Comments: (3:54:52) I was just going to add to that. Basically, the trees that they’re looking at using there are usually seedling trees that are probably no more than two- to three-feet tall. So, there’s very little disturbance at all. The majority of the work, and I’m saying 95 plus percent of it, is all by hand.


Problem
Producers who are enrolled in CRP tree practices, typically, purchase the trees needed for contract management through the Conservation District. The trees from this sale are delivered to producers in April. As it’s currently written into FSA policy, contract management activities are only to take place outside of the primary nesting season (March 15 – July 15). Producers are not able to keep the trees that were delivered in April alive until mid-July to complete their contract management activity.

Proposed Action
State Technical Committee and FSA State Committee request a waiver for DAFP to allow “interplanting” on practices CP3, CP3A, CP5A, CP16A, CP17A, CP22 as a contract management activity during the primary nesting season.

(3:55:43) Justin Miller MOVED, and Ray Aberle SECONDED the motion to accept the Proposed Action, above, in support of the recommendation.

(3:56:10) All those in favor, please raise your hand.
A total of 11 participants raised their hands, virtually, in support of the recommendation, as indicated below:

There were no objections.

(3:57:36) Action Item: Haying as a Management Activity

- **MANAGED HARVESTING (Haying)**
  - When implementing haying with early successional habitat development as the focus, vegetative diversity and wildlife habitat may increase, especially if other activities also done. Managed haying may be used alone or in conjunction with other early successional plant establishment techniques.
  - Haying provides removal of dead litter and provides sun and space for re-invigorating existing species. Through dead litter removal you may be able to manipulate plant community composition by applying an additional activity to increase the quality of wildlife habitat, promote the germination of seed-bearing annuals, plant diversity, height, and density.

- Implement haying to help remove excess litter, which may be a limiting wildlife habitat component while maintaining adequate vegetative cover to minimize soil erosion and protect water quality.
  - Existing vegetation minimum height prior to haying is 8”.
  - After haying, minimum vegetation height is 6”.
  - No haying will be performed within 120 ft. a stream or permanent water body.
  - Only 50% of the contract acres may be hayed in a fiscal year during the allowable haying period, July 16 - September 30. This can then be used to manipulate species germination and establishment of reseeding or seeded annuals.

- CP1, CP2, CP4B, CP4D, CP18B, CP18C, CP38E, CP10 (meeting revision to include these CPs)

**Ray Aberle’s Comments:** (3:59:20) I just want a clarification. It doesn’t say it in here, I know you’re referencing the early successful habitats, but are we tying that to a CP? I don’t see that in here, specifically in general.
Ivy Reynolds’ A: (4:00:47) (revised the slide, adding CP1, CP2, CP4B, CP4D, CP10, CP18B, CP18C, and CP38E) Alright, so this would be our native and introduced plantings, our permanent wildlife habitat, our safe practices, and CP10, which is an existing practice and we no longer have any acres being enrolled into it. I am struggling to remember, off the top of my head, what CP18B and C are; but we don’t have a lot of it in Colorado if any. It might be a waterway. I could clarify if anyone’s interested.

Ray Aberle’s Comment: You’re right, Ivy, those, they have to do with, some of it has to do with salt and salinity issues with 18B and 18C.

Ivy Reynolds’ A: Yes, I can’t remember what it’s called exactly, but I believe we don’t have any in Colorado.

Justin Miller’s Q: (4:02:25) Would this just be for future sign-ups or would this also apply to anything that is currently enrolled that may not have measured practices completed yet?

Ivy Reynolds’ A: This applies to anything that is currently enrolled in CRP. In order to take advantage of this practice, you need to receive a modified conservation plan from NRCS and ensure that this is the correct management activity to manage or stand adequately. So, it’ll apply to all acres in Colorado enrolled in CRP. I’m sorry, I should clarify… all acres enrolled in CRP in these practices.

(4:03:19) Questions? There were none.

(4:04:00) Justin Miller MOVED, and Les Owen SECONDED the motion to accept the Action Item, above, in support of the recommendation.

Ray Aberle’s Q: (4:04:16) I’m wondering, I don’t see any sideboards. Is this annually, can this be done annually?

Ivy Reynolds’ A: This happens once during the life of the contract. So, I believe it would need to happen before year 6 of the contract and after the stand has been established.

Questions? There were none.

(04:05:00) All those in favor, please raise your hand.

A total of 9 participants raised their hands, virtually, in support of the recommendation, as indicated below:
There were no objections.

(4:06:39) EQIP CIC HPA Vote ([Liz With](mailto:liz.with@co.nrcs.us), NRCS, Assistant State Conservationist - Programs)

(4:07:11) Recommended HPA

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Priority Area (Statewide)</th>
<th>Soil Health</th>
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<tr>
<td>Priority Resource Concerns</td>
<td>Soil Quality Limitations</td>
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<td>Degraded Plant Condition</td>
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<td>Wind and Water Erosion</td>
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<td>Land Use(s)</td>
<td>Crop, Pasture and Rangeland</td>
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<tr>
<th>High Priority Area (Statewide)</th>
<th>Grazingland Health (Drought)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Priority Resource Concerns</td>
<td>Livestock Production Limitation</td>
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<td>Degraded Plant Condition</td>
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<td>Terrestrial Habitat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land Use(s)</td>
<td>Pasture and Rangeland</td>
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(4:08:52) Cindy Lair MOVED, and Justin Miller SECONDED the motion to accept the items, above, in support of the recommendation.

A total of 7 participants voiced their support, earlier in the meeting, and 11 participants raised their hand, virtually, in support of the recommendation, as indicated below:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Priority Area (Statewide)</th>
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<td>Land Use(s)</td>
<td>Crop, Pasture and Rangeland</td>
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There were no objections.
CSP Vote (Liz With, NRCS, Assistant State Conservationist - Programs)

(04:10:50) CSP FY21 Priority RCs

<table>
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<tr>
<th>All Resource Concerns</th>
<th>Statewide Ag Land (Including Organic)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Air Quality Emissions</td>
<td>Degraded plant condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquatic Habitat</td>
<td>Field sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentrated Erosion</td>
<td>Field pesticide loss</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degraded Plant Condition</td>
<td>Livestock production limitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Sediment, Nutrient and Pathogen Loss</td>
<td>Soil quality limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Pesticide Loss</td>
<td>Source water depletion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire Management</td>
<td>Terrestrial habitat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inefficient Energy use</td>
<td>Wind and water erosion</td>
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<td>Livestock Production Limitation</td>
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<td>Pest Pressure</td>
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<td>Salt losses to Water</td>
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<td>Soil Quality Limitations</td>
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<td>Source Water Depletion</td>
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<td>Storage and Handling of Pollutants</td>
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<td>Terrestrial Habitat</td>
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<td>Weather Resistance</td>
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<td>Wind and Water Erosion</td>
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Q: (4:12:41) Just for clarification, you said that the proposed RCs to be accepted are in white, correct?

A: No, the proposed ones are in green. They’re green in the left column and pulled out to their own list in the right column, which are the ones that are being proposed.

Q: (4:13:54) What is Weather Resistance as a RC? Is that related to climate change and adaptability?

A: I do believe so, yes; but that is not my area of expertise, so Gene do you want to speak up and clarify? I do believe it is climate change type-factors, building resiliency into those systems… drought type of measures.

Christine Newton’s A: Weather Resilience is the actual name of the RC.

(4:15:14) Justin Miller MOVED, and Deb Daniel SECONDED the motion to accept the Statewide Ag Land (Including Organic) recommended priority RCs above.
A total of 10 participants raised their hand, virtually, and 1 chat vote in support of the recommendation, as indicated below:

(4:17:35) Ray Aberle MOVED, and Les Owen SECONDED the motion to accept the Non-Industrial Private Forest recommended priority RCs above.

A total of 9 participants raised their hand, virtually, in support of the recommendation, as indicated below:
There were no objections.

**Christine Newton’s Comments:** (4:19:09) Just to follow up on the question related to the RC category Weather Resilience, here are the types of individual RCs that can be addressed through implementation of conservation practices.

(4:20:19) **Closing Comments (Randy Randall, NRCS, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships)**

(4:21:22) **USACE 404 Permit and Closing Comments (Clint Evans, NRCS, State Conservationist)**

Next meeting will be held mid-July.