Kasey Taylor, NRCS State Conservationist
Kasey opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the virtual meeting.

**FY21 NRCS Accomplishments - Kasey Taylor**

- The investments have focused our efforts on our two most critical resource concerns, the people and the land that have been outlined within our Delaware Strategic Plan.
- **PEOPLE** - driving in on the support of our valued external and internal stakeholders, looking at how we’re working in partnership and in service of Delaware’s natural resources.
  - We have been able to harness opportunities to achieve our vision for delivery of conservation solutions by partnering with the Delaware Association of Conservation Districts (DACD) in developing resource management systems or whole farm plans in the state. We have also identified strategies to improve efficiency within the workplace.
  - We are able to provide employees with tools and resources to drive scientific technical and operational innovation.
  - We are continuously improving how we serve our customers and work with our partners.
  - We focused on employee competencies to continuously increase their knowledge, skills, and abilities to increase employee certification and job approval authorities for expanded adoption of conservation practices.
  - We focused on harnessing the power of our partnerships/shareholders by meeting monthly to discuss our efficiencies for the working lands and restoration programs resulting in additional boots on the ground improvements for our technology exchange and transfer occurring on federal and local lands and increasing training collaborations to focus on technical certification, leveraging of funds, and implementation of prescribed practices throughout the state.
- **LAND** - supporting the resilience of our agricultural landscapes and our shared goal to increase the sustainability of agricultural lands and forest lands.
  - We have developed a strategy to identify and reduce impacts from agriculture to surface and groundwater sources.
  - We are looking at prioritizing funding for the projects and groundwater basins identified within our source water protection program where 10% of the funds have been allocated to move this effort forward.
  - We have integrated our soil health into our conservation planning process specifically, program delivery partnering with DACD to increase the promotion of soil health benefits and methods to customers and partners through field days focusing on new scientific innovations during our forthcoming Delaware Soil Summit, February 7th, and 8th.
  - We have also partnered with the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service for the return of the Bobwhite Quail through the National Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative.
- Delaware farmers and landowners are using our conservation systems to promote, protect, and improve water quality.
  - **Animal Waste Management Systems** - include heavy use area protection at animal mortality facilities and storage structures to ensure effective storage and management of animal manure until the nutrients for the manure can be properly applied to a growing crop.
  - **Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP-ALE)** - We continue to partner with our DDA for agland acquisition preservation efforts for the state. In FY21, we had 1420 acres preserved totaling investments of $3M of which NRCS invested $1.5M.
o **Wetlands Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE)** - 83 acres were enrolled and 1 application funded totaling $199,293 for 71 acres.

o **Agriculture Management Assistant (AMA)** - received 98 applications with 433 acres enrolled for a total of $224,403.

o **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** - renewed seven CSP totaling $970,465 covering 8,685 acres.

o **Wildlife** - continues in partnership with Ducks Unlimited to lead NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative to enhance and restore habitat for the American Black Duck. In FY21, there was a continued increase in interest and participation that included 10 signups to install conservation practices beneficial to wildlife or waterfall habitat.
  - With assistance from our partners, we are working to reverse the Northern Bobwhite Quail decline. Over the next five years, NRCS will be setting aside funds for wildlife practices to benefit nesting cover of broad rearing habitat, looking at forage habitat, and escape cover for bobwhites within the priority areas. Landowners can now receive technical and financial assistance to implement a variety of those conservation activities for restoration.

o **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** - approved 87 contracts covering 13,424 acres totaling $5.8M.

o **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)** - We funded cost share opportunities for beginning farmers, two contracts totaling $112,411.
  - Chesapeake Bay Farm Stewardship and Preservation, 21 contracts for $312,945 covering 6,042 acres.
  - Protecting Delaware Bay and Inland Bays with Cover Crops, 10 contracts for $253,510 covering 4,042 acres.

**Agency priorities**
- We have gone in and realigned the Chief’s priorities into our FY22 Strategic Plan and have crafted out our vision.
  - Ensure equity in the delivery and implementation of all NRCS programs and services to meet the needs for our evolving agricultural landscape in the state.
  - Increasing assistance for climate-smart agriculture and forestry.
  - Expanding conservation tools and support to address the unique needs of urban farmers and communities nationwide.
  - Cultivating a complete and diverse workforce that has the right tools, technologies, and training to uphold the scientific integrity of NRCS.
  - Continued leveraging for innovative partnerships to expand NRCS’s ability to get conservation on the ground effectively and efficiently to ensure a viable resource base within the state.

**Chesapeake Bay Investments**
- We want to make sure that we are not only focusing on what’s happening across the state, but also within our Chesapeake Bay, the ongoing work and investments that are being done. The job of Conservation Stewardship that our growers are leading and being able to demonstrate when we have those right tools, resources, and funding available.
- Across six states within the Chesapeake Bay, the accomplishments, and findings from 2018 until 2020 show that NRCS milestones and accomplishments align within the bay program goal metrics.
- Milestones include acres of conservation practices applied that improved water quality, soil health, and fish and wildlife habitat.
Outreach and engagement priorities include training, public engagement, and outreach to individuals.

These items align with the BMP implementation, funding for implementation, communication, and coordination in the Bay Program Watershed Implementation Plan goals.

Our next steps will be working towards establishing our new plan for FY21 through FY25. We are working in partnership with our regional conservationist, Terrell Ericsson as well as, our Chesapeake Bay Coordinator Leon Tillman who in turn is working with Chris Brosch, DDA to have more internal focused conversations and mitigate those impacts and what that would mean for Delaware.

We want to make sure that we are able to demonstrate that the Bay model program is showing that the model sediment loads in the watersheds are below the 18,587 million pounds goal going into 2025.

- Chesapeake Bay Watershed priorities as reported within the Bay model.
  - Water Quality goals - 94,412 acres applied
  - Soil Health - 90,328 acres applied and treated
  - Fish and Wildlife Habitat - 794 acres

- Financial Assistance investments in the Bay watershed
  - $2.69M through our conservation technical assistance (CTA) program
  - $3.21M within the Bay for practices and enhancements.
  - $885,879 easement and restoration programs (FY20)

Subcommittees - Karri Honaker, Assistant State Conservationist, Programs and Field Operations

- The Urban Ag Subcommittee was stood up last year to reinvigorate our commitment to urban agriculture and making sure that we can address the needs that we have here.
- Our first meeting was held on November 10, 2021. We focused in on continuing our efforts to address the barriers, look at our resources, and tailor our efforts to those needs. We have several programs that are available, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA). We also have other programs that are that are upcoming (such as EQIP-CIC).
- We have created a ranking pool specifically for urban agriculture. In FY21 we funded seven urban projects totaling around $31,000.00.
- In addition, we have an agreement with the New Castle Conservation District to develop the urban agriculture program focusing on urban farmer training, urban agriculture assets, and inventory as well as, developing an urban AG website.
- This subcommittee was tasked with working on an action plan to help drive us forward within these endeavors for targeting and prioritizing urban agriculture.

Delaware Poultry Pilot Environmental Assessment, New and Expected Resource Concerns - Jayme Arthurs, State Resource Conservationist

- The 2018 farm bill introduced the idea of new and expected resource concerns and how to address them through our programs.
- In Delaware, our first thought was focusing on livestock operations, particularly poultry operations that would be established here in the state and the resource concerns that would be associated with those new poultry operations.
- As part of our planning process, we go through an environmental evaluation process looking at resource concerns already out on the landscape, not necessarily new work suspected and we were guided towards developing an environmental assessment (EA) for our Delaware Poultry Pilot and continue moving forward.
The pilot project establishes criteria for folks that can apply for our financial assistance programs primarily through EQIP. We set criteria for new poultry operations and to make them eligible for the program. Before implementing the poultry pilot, we have to have an environmental assessment done for that operation.

We have submitted a Request for Proposals (RFP) for an environmental assessment for the poultry pilots out there focusing on the Northeast Region but unfortunately, we did not have any responses. We did have folks respond letting us know that either they didn't have the capacity or some of the expertise to do an EA. We decided to expand the reach for the EA out to the remaining regions in the country resulting in one contractor that submitted a proposal and we are currently going through the process of looking at the components and the prices associated with it and start negotiating prices with them.

**Farmed Wetland Hydrology Indicators - Jayme Arthurs**

- In February of last year, we introduced the idea of the new hydrology indicators that would be used for determining farms wetlands as a national effort using specific indicators to determine if a wetland met the farm wetland criteria.
- In September, we presented what our farm wetland indicators were going to be for Delaware and partnering with Maryland. We submitted those to the national office for consideration for the Federal Register for an open comment period.
  - Jayme, followed up with our national lead for wetlands and he indicated that there were three comments received during the open comments period but none of them were specific to Delaware and they will respond to those comments.
  - We may be able to start using our new farm wetland indicators as early as this year and there should be no significant changes to the indicators that we originally proposed.
- The processes are, we look at the landscape, at a particular area to determine if its wetlands or not and then decide if we are going to use these farm wetland indicators to determine whether it meets the hydrology requirements for a farm wetland. We will be using these specific indicators to make that determination. We are not going back to look at areas that were previously determined farmed wetlands. These indicators would be used moving forward on any new determinations that we make in the state.

**Working Lands for Wildlife - Bobwhite Quail**

- NRCS had an effort with several other conservation organizations in the country to focus their efforts on Bobwhite Quail and restoring their habitat. We wanted to make it an effort to focus on areas in our state where there was the potential for increasing habitat for bobwhite and then focus on practices that would benefit them in our state.
- We worked with our wildlife subcommittee last year to dig in and come up with a plan and goals for bobwhite in the state. We looked at the practices that we can primarily offer through EQIP but, other eligible programs as well. Some practices are newer to Delaware or are long term.
- So, this year we started off with developing a fact sheet that we've provided to our conservation planners in the field offices as well as, landowners to highlight what we're trying to do and why and practices to help benefit Bobwhite Quail.
- One of the things that that we've been working on, spearheaded by Heather Beaven our resource conservationist, and working with Craig and Eric from Fish and Wildlife Service at the Cedar Swamp Wildlife Area to develop a video highlighting the work that has been done to date. We hope to be able to put the video out for our planners as well as landowners in the near future.
**Watershed Program Funding Opportunities - Ann Baldwin**

- We wanted to make sure everybody is aware of funding opportunities that we currently have through our watershed program.
- Through the Infrastructure and Investments Job Act, money has come to our agency through the watershed programs.
  - Watershed Operations (watershed planning and construction design), $500 million
  - Watershed Rehabilitation (rehabilitate aging dams, does not apply to Delaware), $118 million
  - Emergency Watershed Protection (result from natural disasters such as a hurricane), $300 million. If there was a backlog in the state for funding for that, we could benefit from it, but the good news is we don't need to right now.
- If you have some thoughts about any potential projects that we might be able to request, contact us and we can discuss it.
- In terms of this additional funding, there are some priorities that have been set for new projects. It doesn't mean that you have to be in one of these categories to get a project, this would just raise that request to a higher level in terms of the priorities. They would like to focus on,
  - Historically Underserved and Limited Resource Communities
  - Severe need for watershed infrastructure – such as water supply
  - Tribal projects
  - Backlog projects
  - Ag water management in Western States
- If we had any project requests that could meet some of these priorities that would help but not required.
- If anyone is interested in learning more about this opportunity and the project potential in general and what the process would be to apply, training was provided for potential sponsors in December and the link to that video and additional information is on the NRCS web page under Programs/Landscape Planning/NRCS Watershed Programs Resources. Link posted below as well as in the Chat.
- There is not just one set deadline for applying, they'll be taking rolling applications with first projects announced early February.
- To be a local sponsor you must be a state agency, a subdivision of the state (which could be a non-profit if it’s a part of the state government), a local municipal agency for county/city, or a tribal organization.
  - Sponsors must have some interest and control in the projects they would be administering and ability to implement operation and maintenance.

**Upper Nanticoke Project**

- We are currently still waiting for a report and the next steps from the contractor that will result from the field work they completed. They've been spending a lot of time doing hydrologic and hydraulic computations and, modeling of the various watersheds within the upper Nanticoke. Ann will keep everybody posted as we get that information in.

áticas, DACD asked about our tax ditch maintenance and community flooding issues, will they be permissible?
  - Ann responded, that certainly is an opportunity. Community flooding is very much a purpose, that we can use for watershed funds.
- Kasey added that this is very much reminiscent to the work that we’re doing in the Nanticoke and what's going through our planning process. We want to make sure that we can address what we see are critical needs and concerns that are impactful for us.

- The Nanticoke is a larger effort and intent, but there would be things that could begin the planning process. Getting that through and seeing if we can get some of those fundings pre-approved if not fully approved and making sure that we can start getting things ready for Phase 2.

- Ann reiterated, it does not have to be on a large scale like the Upper Nanticoke Project, it certainly could be on a smaller scale that might seem easier to work with.

**FY21 Programs Updates (slides 24 – 45) - Karri Honaker**

- The work that we have accomplished over the past several years, especially in light of some of the challenges that we’ve have faced with the pandemic is phenomenal. The comparison of 2020 to 2021 shows that we were able to accomplish a lot.

- As a nation, NRCS was able to accomplish an uptick in total contracts obligated as well as an uptick in treated acres. We are very interested in making sure that we can get conservation out across the landscape and help improve and treat resource concerns.

- Numbers were reviewed for National, Regional and State Level data comparing FY21 and FY22 numbers.

- Slide 39 in the presentation shows Delaware’s top 10 practices comparison for FY20 and FY21. They do change a bit from year to year depending on what practices we have that get obligated through contracts through our programs.

- The EQIP program in comparison of 2020 to 2021, in 2020 we had $6.8M and in 2021 we had $5.8M.

- The Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA) comparison show that we have less dollars in this program. Slide 41 shows how the total breaks down in comparison from year to year and the total from the State versus the totals for all counties.

- CSP, we average less dollars that are allocated and slide 42 shows our renewal applications versus classic applications. They are two different pots of money.
  - Renewals would be an already existing contract that has already been completed and then renewing that contract for additional available enhancements or practices.
  - Classic is basically starting an application not necessarily from scratch but starting a new application and not renewing an already active application.

- Our Contract Implementation Ratio (CIR), slide 43 shows the efficiency that we are able to complete our practices and get the conservation out on the landscape. The target for the Northeast Region is 87% and we are at 91% and Delaware is at 97.5%, an excellent accomplishment.

- Our Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), is the enrollment by state nationwide, Slide 45.
  - **Nationwide**, we closed 141 easements and enrolled 863,23 acres in FY21.
  - **Delaware**, we enrolled 6,050 acres.

David asked if the Delaware data can be broken out by county. Karri replied that the structure was presented differently for this meeting so that this type of reporting is presented at the local workgroup meetings so as the District Conservationists have that local level data.

Kasey also replied that, another venue would be at the partnership monthly luncheon meetings where they can provide more of a deeper dive and focused conversation.

- Kasey introduced Mr. Leon Tillman, Chesapeake Bay Coordinator and provided him an opportunity to introduce himself.
Mr. Tillman announced that, in April, he relocated here from Tennessee, where he worked as an assistant for programs as well as operations and worked with several of NRCS’ programs as a program manager.

For any ideas, plans, or ways to coordinate efforts and capitalize on efforts in the Chesapeake Bay you can contact him. Leon will add his email and phone number in the chat.

Leon is already working with Chris, DDA but if there are any kind of partnership efforts that we may be able to do to meet any technical needs there on the ground, we can always look at how we can partner our resources to help meet the needs of local farmers and producers resource improvement with priority being in the Bay, as well as across Delaware.

**FY22 Program Information/Input - Karri Honaker**

- Our FY22 spending plans are drafted but, we are under an advisory allocation because of the continuing resolution (CR) through February 18th.
- We have certain items for our funding that are nationally mandated.
  - 5% for our historically underserved. We are meeting and exceeding that.
  - 50% for livestock practices
  - 10% of our funds on wildlife practices
- Slide 51, shows our preliminary EQIP ranking pools (aka...spending plans, ranking pools, or fund pools). Fund pools have been adjusted and updated as needed for FY22. We took input and feedback into consideration as we work through allocating money into our fund pools for FY22.
  - EQIP - we were allocated $6.5M; up from FY21 ($5.8M).
- Fund pools that changed were increased based off last year.
- Drainage Water Management ranking pool, to allocate funds to that priority resource concern, is new this year.
- EQIP-CIC, we are allocating a little over $325000.00 this year.
- AMA ranking pools, we were given $92,000.
- We have not received an allocation for RMA-AMA funds yet
- EQIP High Priority Practices were touched on in previous meetings, have a list of practices set and available for FY21. We can set up to 10 practices that can receive a higher payment rate and these practices must fall within the following parameters:
  - Addresses specific causes of impairment relating to excessive nutrients in ground or surface water.
  - Addresses the conservation of water, to advance drought mitigation and declining aquifers.
  - Meets other environmental priorities and other priority resource concerns identified in habitat or other area restoration plans; or
  - Is geographically targeted to address a natural resource concern in a specific watershed.
- Slide 55 shows our list of FY22 High Priority Practices (HPPs). As a result of feedback we received from the local work groups, we have added two new HPPs this year; Drainage Water Management, Code 554 and Structure for Water Control, Code 587.

Chris Brosch (DDA) asked Karri if there is a sense of what the interest is in these practices? Karri replied that she does not have any hard numbers at this moment, but they did explore what interest was out there for drainage water management. They had a couple folks that were applying for some drainage water management type practices and we were able to cover them. We wanted like applications to compete with like applications so that we could give an opportunity to be funded and implement those practices. The couple of projects that we knew after talking with our field offices, engineering team, and our resources team that are out there on the landscape have heard that producers have interests and have come in to talk about these
practices and projects that could come to fruition if they go through the process and rank high enough for funding.

Ann reported that they did get interest expressed through the Sussex Local Workgroup when they were discussing drainage water management so that’s another reason to highlight those practices as high priority practices that would result from water quality benefits for installing the conservation drainage practices.

- **Source Water Practices**, we do have source water protection priority areas and for FY22 they remain the same in FY21.
  - Slide 56 shows where our source water protection priority areas are for FY22. We have source water protection practices available if an application falls within one of these areas. They will be prioritized for being within that priority area.

- **Agency priority and goals for our commitment to Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) mitigation through the rest of the farm bill will continue to see what is forthcoming for opportunities to increase our participation and be able to engage in that commitment having those climate smart practices.**
  - The agency has renewed its efforts to prioritize CSAF practices. For FY22 many practices that we offer will address resource concerns and target climate smart and Forestry Practices.
  - Resource concerns that contribute to CSAF include Soil health, Nitrogen Management, Agroforestry, Forestry and Upland Wildlife Habitat. Practices include:
    - 327- Conservation Cover
    - 340- Cover Crops
    - 345- Residue and Tillage Management
    - 612- Tree/Shrub Establishment
    - 528- Prescribed Grazing

- The FY22 Payment schedule, inclusive list of practices that are available here in the state to provide financial assistance has been completed. All costs are set for the year. In the upcoming months the process will begin for the FY23 Payment Schedule Process.

- The LWG and STAC input was considered in finalizing FY22 cost lists.

- There is a need across the country for having practices that make sense at the local level for local agriculture and we are taking this into consideration when developing our payment schedules.
  - This will become a topic for our Urban Ag Subcommittee meeting.

- For small farm scenarios or urban farm practices we have listed on our payment schedules:
  - 342 - critical area planting
  - 340 – cover crop
  - 317 – composting facility (other than animals)
  - We also have small farm scenarios for 590 – nutrient management

**EQIP-Conservation Incentive Contracts (EQIP-CIC)**

- EQIP-CIC was introduced as a pilot last year in AZ, CA, CO and OR. For FY22, we will move forward with implementation of EQIP-CIC.

- This will provide stewardship opportunities for producers through EQIP funding based on land use and must address at least one priority resource concern and be within priority areas.

- This is an opportunity to provide our producers a steppingstone from EQIP to CSP:
  - Allows producers to implement elements of CSP on a smaller scale

- The goal is to improve water quality by reducing sediment, pathogen and pesticide loss, and source water depletion in high priority areas targeting cropland throughout Delaware.

- There are three priority resource concerns:
- Field Sediment and Pathogen Loss
- Source Water Depletion
- Field Pesticide Loss
- Slide 62 shows the list of EQIP-CIC eligible practices and activities for Delaware to address the priority resource concerns on cropland throughout the state.
  - Field office staff can work with producers on any questions they may have.
- A funding cycle was announced for EQIP-CIC and extended through February 11, 2022.

**Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) - Kaytee Todoroff, Acting Easement Program Manager**

**Agricultural Lands Easement Program (ALE)**
- We are currently working with one eligible entity, a long-standing partnership with DDA.
- For FY22, we were allocated $1,805,511 for parcel acquisition.
- We have not proposed FY22 Deadlines yet for ALE but we are in the process of changing our traditional deadlines and are making sure we are reviewing policies before we rollout the dates for FY22 and beyond.

**Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRE)**
- On January 7th an email was sent out to the STAC for comments on our new Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC) proposed for FY22. We did not receive any feedback and therefore, the GARC were uploaded for the national appraiser at EPD, national headquarters to review.
- We are proposing to keep the rates the same as last year.
  - Proposed Cropland $5,000/ac
  - Proposed Woodland $3,000/ac
  - 30-year enrollments @ 75% value
- FY22 deadlines for applications is February 11, 2022, and for the ranking packet, March 25, 2022,
- For our ranking criteria, NRCS will use ranking process to approve applications for funding based on state specific ranking templates that are reassessed every year
- Since we did not receive any comments, we are proposing to remain same as FY21.
- During a call yesterday, we received an update that we will be seeing policy changes coming soon for Compatible Uses, Haying, and Mowing requirements for nesting dates.
- CRP currently has April 15-August 15 and our ACEP manual has a different date. For consistency, they want to align with the CRP dates.
  - Delaware is already using the April 15-August 15 dates so there will be no change for our management criteria.

**Local Workgroup (LWG) Information for FY22 - Karri Honaker**
- LWG is locally led conservation. The locally led conservation effort is the foundation of the NRCS’ conservation program delivery process. Through local input, NRCS gathers recommendations on local natural resource priorities and these discussions help direct USDA conservation activities and programs that coordinate with other federal, state, tribal and local conservation programs. This will help provide a coordinated effort to address conservation concerns specific to the local area.
- Our LWGs are convened by local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) and NRCS. responsibilities include:
  - Identifying the biggest conservation needs in our counties.
  - Prioritizing those conservation needs that can be addressed by USDA programs.
o Recommending USDA conservation program application and funding criteria and focus of NRCS funding efforts.
o Assisting NRCS with public outreach and information efforts; and,
o Providing recommendations to the NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee based on resource data.

- As we transition from calendar year 2021 to 2022, we look at future programs and services we should provide to address the needs of landowners in each county. As such, the conservation districts and NRCS hold LWG meetings with their constituents annually to collect ideas and information related to local priority issues and conservation-based solutions. NRCS relies on feedback from these meetings to set local priorities and allocate local funds for conservation programs.

- Local can mean:
  o County
  o A portion of a county
  o A watershed
  o Multi-county region
  o Other identified subdivision that has interested stakeholders

- LWG membership should be diverse and focus on agricultural interests and natural resource issues existing in the local community. The LWG is made up of key people from natural resource agencies (local, state, and federal), agricultural organizations, environmental organizations, conservation groups, local agri-businesses, and impacted stakeholders as well as agricultural producers and interested individuals.

- LWG meetings are open to the public and is a great opportunity for farmers and landowners to voice their opinions of local natural resource needs for conservation activities and programs.

**State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC)**

- Our State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) is made up of partners and works hand in hand with the State Board and SWCDs on a daily basis. We also have several other partners at the state level that we coordinate with, representatives of stakeholder groups, Native American Tribes, the Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, State government entities, state agricultural organizations, agricultural non-profit organizations, and agribusinesses.

- They serve in an advisory role to the NRCS State Conservationist and offer input and insight from their members and constituents to help us determine how and where we spend our time and allocate our funding.

- The Local Work Group is like the STAC, but at the county level. The LWGs are subcommittees of the STAC and information collected at these LWG meetings will be presented to the NRCS State Conservation and STAC members for recommendations for conservation activities and financial assistance through Farm Bill conservation programs.

- **STAC meeting schedule:**

  **January**
  o Will kick off the year and review previous years outcomes
  o Discuss timelines for the year, payment schedules, updated information from NHQ
  o Review the recommendations for this fiscal year and impacts/changes/improvements
  o LWGs will hold their local meetings from the January through May with recommendations submitted to NRCS prior to the next STAC meeting, May 26th.
    - Karri added that she put in a proposal to have the local workgroup committee recommendations over to us by May 16th.
May
- Review recommendations submitted by the LWGs
- Solicit other input

August
- Provide responses to the recommendations
- Review pending items and decisions needed for next FY

Committee Member Reports
- Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA), Chris Brosch
  - They are working on the grant package for food supply workers. It will take a while for the process but they plan on putting together a package for Delaware eligible participants.
  - Financial assistance budgets, they are anticipating the release of the Governor’s budget today.
  - They are expecting an increase in farmland preservation, $30M. Jimmy will be able to provide updates at the next STAC meeting.
  - Nutrient management – they are evaluating potential changes to the administration portion of their statute, issues related to governance of the commission itself and evaluating some of the appointments that are made for the chair and vice chair positions.
  - Chris noted in the chat that he forgot to mention Cover Crops! GOV budget is likely to include support at last year’s level again!

- Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), Marcia Fox
  - Tax Ditch Modernization Workgroup: Approximately 60 stakeholders attended nine workgroup sessions discussing issues facing tax ditches - officer recruitment and retention, urbanization, as well as operational issues. The workgroup’s findings were compiled into a final report that was submitted to Secretary Garvin. He has signed approved the report and the Tax Ditch Program will be emailing it to all workgroup participants.
  - Nonpoint Source Program – there are two grants open right now for request for proposals, Clean Water Act Section 319 and the Chesapeake Bay Implementation Grants.
    - If anyone is interested in implementing projects related to the above grant sources, contact Ben Coverdale or Marcia or visit Nonpoint Source Program - DNREC Alpha (delaware.gov) for more information.
  - For the Governor’s budget, DNREC has requested additional funding for conservation cost share and tax ditch maintenance.

- Delaware Association of Conservation Districts (DACD), Jen Nelson
  - Jen has been working with Kelly Shenk, EPA to put together a webinar to describe SRF funding and potential opportunities for innovative uses of that funding.
    - There has been a lot of discussion on how to tap into this funding source and leverage funding sources and coordinate with other partners to make sure that any of the proposals being put in are in alignment and coordinated across the region.
    - Please keep an eye out for the calendar invitation with information for the webinar expected to take place in March.
  - The Delmarva Land and Litter Collaborative is having a funding coordination webinar on February 28th. Jen will add the information into the chat.
    - Two events coming up with the Delmarva Land and Litter Collaborative- "Manure Shed Webinar" on 2/25 and "Ag Conservation Funding Forum" on 2/28: https://delmarvalandandlitter.net/meetings-and-events/
• Kent County Conservation District (KCD), Tim Riley  
  o Tim stated that his planners are continuing to work with the NRCS team to help build the number reported within the programs reports.  
  o They also continue to work on getting cover crop out.  
  o Tim is on the National Employee Association and they will be holding a national workgroup workshop on Wednesday morning and at the upcoming NACD meeting in Florida.

• Sussex County Conservation District (SCD), David Baird  
  o Cover Crop – they have established a goal of 75,000 acres and were able to get a little over 80,000 acres planted this fall. SCD is meeting the current demand and more cover crops are going into the ground. SCD believes there is further demand still to be met.  
    ▪ Any effort to support the cover crop program is appreciated.  
    ▪ Within the next few weeks, information will come out about the Cover Crop Accelerator Project through the Nutrient Management Commission, the Center for the Inland Bays, and DACD to encourage more participation in the number of growers and acreage. This effort will also evaluate current incentives in the cover crop program and evaluate the impact new incentives would have on the program.  
  o On the SCD board, Richard Carlisle has stepped down at the end of his term in December and Will Carlisle from Greenwood is a new SCD Board Supervisor whose term began in January.  
  o Vacancies within the ag program have been a challenge to fill. They are attracting a lot of folks with experience who are interested in these positions coming from related industries but the challenge created is affordability. At the same time, they are not getting as many entry level applications. So, filling these positions is taking longer than originally anticipated.  
  o There is also a big push on their tax ditch work in Sussex. They have a pilot program that was funded by the General Assembly and is being led by Wes Allen, who joined SCD in November. He is originally from Milford and has worked in the environment field in Delaware and the Mid-Atlantic region for the past 20 years. He will be working closely with our tax ditch managers on several management and financial issues as well as making sure that projects needing to be completed on tax ditches move forward to construction.  
  o As a reminder, SCD is one of the primary sponsors of the Delmarva Soul Summit on Monday, February 7th and Tuesday, February 8th being held at the Wicomico Youth and Civic Center in Salisbury.  
    ▪ Attendance will be in person or via a virtual option. More information is available on the website, www.delmarvasoilsummit.com

• Delaware Rural Water Association – David Baird  
  o David is a member of the Delaware Rural Water Association and is president of our National Rural Water Association, representing over 30,000 small water and wastewater systems around the country. The overlap within NRCS is source water protection and protecting the drinking water supply. One of the things we’ve been working on with Anita Beckel, Source Water Protection Specialist with DRWA, is making sure that cover crops and other practices are implemented within wellhead protection areas and excellent recharge areas for the aquifers.  
    ▪ Kerin Hume from KCD recently worked on a Source Water Protection Project with Anita in the Dover area.
Delaware State University (DSU) – John Clendaniel

- DSU has a plethora of programs but struggling through the pandemic has made everything virtual and some of the programs are still a hands-on situation. They are still moving forward with their mobile meat processing unit, making updates, and tweaking it as they go. It was on some producer’s properties over the pandemic.
- They have a Nanticoke connection for the small farms program, which got put on hold and is still on hold until they are released to work in-person, on-site to get their hands on participatory sites going.
- The Profiting from a Few Acres Conference is coming up on March 10th and 11th and is going to be virtual. They were planning an in-person conference, but during this current flux of this new variant, we have pushed it to virtual this year.
- They are still here, plugging along and if any other programming or other information you guys would be interested in and seeing, they will gladly work through that as well.

Farm Bureau – Richard Wilkins

- The Farm Bureau continues to be advocating for the agriculture industry in Delaware.
- Some of the members have been expressing concerns about the competing use for land with large utility scale solar farms. So, they've been advocating on their behalf trying to find other places whether they're non-prop areas on farms, rooftops on farms or, rooftops on large urban buildings as a way of being able to meet that desire for renewable energy production and at the same time, trying to remind some of these decision makers that growing crops on land or forage on land is sequestering carbon and if we're going to be taking significant portions of farmland out of production for solar arrays, that's going to have an impact upon our trend towards more climate smart agriculture not to mention, society is going to continue to need liquid fuels and the agriculture sector provides a lot of renewable liquid fuels that we can depend upon.
- Another issue they've been working and advocating on, farmers continue to be worried about whether their resource concerns are being sufficiently addressed with boots on the ground and boots on the farm rather than just pushing paper across the desk.
  - Kasey replied, that's a critical conversation and it goes into the wheelhouse of climate smart ag and forestry and what we should be looking at in preparing for those next steps. That could be something that we take into our committee workshops and discussions and seeing what those concerns are, how do we address that, and what are the impacts back for the state.

Congressional Delegation – Kate Rohrer

- Kate stated that if Senator Coons were on the call, to the federal agencies that are on, he would want to say, you come first and foremost. Thank you all for your great work.
- In addition, he has hope of the CR being resolved hopefully in the February time frame.
- He does want to warn everybody that with the politics of a Supreme Court nomination, things are going to get silly and we hope that this will not make your life more miserable.
- Chris Young, who was doggedly loyal and just loved doing ag work on the Senate side is leaving. This will be his last week in the office. He will be joining the National Association of Conservation Districts.
- Kate ended with a huge thank you. there are so many familiar faces, as well as some new faces on the call today and you all are a wonderful resource. Whether you know it or not our delegation staff so much appreciates it.

Next meeting 5/26/22