State Technical Committee Meeting – 03/03/2022

ALL POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS ARE ON THE WEBSITE & the video can be found on our YouTube page.


WELCOME AND THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE! INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW STATE CONSERVATIONIST – Brad Soncksen, ASTC-P & Robert Lawson, State Conservationist

- Went over the Agenda
- Brad introduced Rob.
- Robert Lawson introduced himself.
  - Week 3 on the job but physically still in WI.
  - Should be in NE in the next couple of weeks.
  - Grew up in SE Iowa.
  - Went to Iowa State University
  - Worked Soil Conservation Technician in Central Iowa
  - Moved to NE Iowa as a Soil Conservationist there - 10yrs
  - Became District Conservationist (DC) in Harlan, IA for 4yrs.
  - Then went to IL to be a DC to cover 2 counties in Central, IL.
  - Joined the Leadership team as an Assistant State Conservationist in Indiana.
  - Last position was Assistant State Conservationist for Management & Strategy in Madison, WI.

UPDATES WITH USDA-NRCS

- Still following our COVID safety protocols
  - All Service Centers are @ 75% capacity & allowing visitors by APPOINTMENT ONLY.
- Phased return to the workplace plan
  - Implemented by the end of May.
- LWG have started in Nebraska
  - Excited to see all the input
- We will be working on an Urban Ag Sub-Committee through the State Technical Committee.
- Can’t wait to get out & meet all of partners in Nebraska.
Climate Change Affects U.S. Agriculture and Rural Communities
  o Shifting weather patterns & increasing frequent severe storms, floods, drought & wildfire are the major climate impacts.
  o These threats have significant implications
  o USDA is developing a comprehensive strategy to address the impacts of climate change centered on voluntary incentives, that is inclusive for all agricultural producers, landowners, and communities.

USDA Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Strategy (CSAF)
  o USDA hosted 10 stakeholder listening sessions to provide a forum for feedback & discussion around CSAF.
  o Listening sessions included farmer organizations, commodity groups, livestock producer groups, environmental organizations, forestry representatives, agriculture businesses and technology companies, environmental market organizations, renewable energy organizations, Tribal organizations, and organizations representing socially disadvantaged communities.
  o Targeted Outcomes:
    ▪ Sustainable increase agricultural productivity & incomes
    ▪ Adapt & build resilience to climate change
    ▪ Carbon sequestration
    ▪ GHG emission reductions
  o The Proposed strategy consists of the following elements:
    ▪ Develop a CSAF strategy that works for all farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, and communities.
    ▪ Develop methods to quantify, track, and report the benefits of CSAF activities.
    ▪ Leverage existing USDA programs to support CSAF strategies
    ▪ Strengthen education, training, and technical assistance for CSAF practices
    ▪ Support new and better markets for agriculture and forestry products generated through CSAF practices.
    ▪ Develop a forest and wildfire resilience strategy
    ▪ Improve research
  o Develop a CSAF strategy that works for all farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, & communities.
    ▪ Strengthen consultation & engagement with Tribes and socially disadvantaged communities and producers.
    ▪ Identify opportunities for broader inclusivity within USDA programs
    ▪ Remove barriers to participation & adoption
    ▪ Recognize & include early adopters.
  o Develop methods to quantify, track, & report the benefits of CSAF activities.
    ▪ Identify promising CSAF practices
    ▪ Develop or enhance tools to assist farmers, ranchers, and foresters in quantifying benefits of CSAF practices.
    ▪ Track implementation & quantify benefits of CSAF practices at the national scale.
    ▪ Support research and data collection for quantification, monitoring & verification of carbon benefits.
  o USDA Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities
    ▪ The opportunity is available to partners who served producers of all sizes, methods, locations, & types of production.
      ▪ Primary applicant must be an entity, not an individual.
    ▪ Applications must submit their applications via Grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. EST on:
      ▪ April 8, 2022
        ▪ First Funding Pool
          ▪ Large scale pilot projects
• May 27, 2022
  o Second Funding Pool
    ▪ Smaller scale innovative projects

  o Leverage existing USDA programs to support CSAF strategies.
    ▪ Identify & prioritize
      • Climate risks
      • Adaptation opportunities
      • Carbon benefits
    ▪ Support & help finance renewable energy & energy efficiency activities.
    ▪ Keep forests as forests while building climate resilience through forest conservation programs.
    ▪ Help build community resilience to climate change.

  o EQIP CONSERVATION INCENTIVE CONTRACTS (EQIP-CIC)
    ▪ CICs address priority resource concerns, including sequestering carbon & improving soil health in high-priority areas.
    ▪ Focus on management practices:
      • Irrigation water management
      • Drainage water management
      • Feed management
      • Residue & tillage management
      • Cover crops that target resource concerns
        o Degraded soil water quality
        o Available water
        o Soil erosion

  o NRCS Partnership with Farmers for Soil Health Initiative
    ▪ United Soybean Board
    ▪ National Corn Growers Association
    ▪ National Pork Board
    ▪ Works to advance use of soil health practices
      • Especially cover crops on corn & soybean farms
    ▪ Has a goal of doubling the numbers of corn & soybean acres using cover crops to 30 million acres by 2030.
    ▪ Cover crops have great potential to improve:
      • Soil Health
      • Water quality
      • Sequester carbon
      • Make our farms more resilient to severe climate events.

  o Strengthen education, training & technical assistance for CSAF practices
    ▪ Strengthen & increase technical assistance
    ▪ Build on & expand existing education & outreach efforts
    ▪ Invest in & strengthen the role of the Climate Hubs

  o Support new & better markets for agriculture & forestry products generated through CSAF practices.
    ▪ Support:
      • producer participation in involuntary carbon markets
      • The role of agriculture in decarbonizing the transportation sector
      • Renewable energy development in rural America
      • Deployment & development of methane digesters, biogas, & biobased products
      • New markets for wood products

  o USDA’s Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities
    ▪ Announced on February 7, 2022
    ▪ USDA will support the production & marketing of climate-smart commodities through a set of pilot projects that provide voluntary incentives through partners to producers & landowners to:
• Implement climate-smart production practices, activities, & systems on their working lands.
• Measure/quantity, monitor & verify the carbon & greenhouse gas (GHG) benefits associated with those practices, and
• Develop markets & promote the resulting climate-smart commodities.

- Develop a forest & wildfire resilience strategy.
  • Increase the rate of:
    o fuels reduction to decrease the risk of severe wildfire
    o reforestation, especially disturbances
  • Support applied forest research to inform climate mitigation & adaptation
  • Ensure equitable distribution of services regarding wildfire mitigation & response

- Improve Research:
  • Support landscape-scale conservation & management
  • Evaluate potential climate benefits of new technologies
  • Increase our understand of climate change & variability, it’s effects on agriculture & forests, & ways to build adaption & resilience.
  • Support research into human dimensions & economic effects of climate change for agricultural & forest-dependent communities.
  • Target research on technologies with potential for mitigating U.S. agricultural GHG emissions.

Q: Adam Smith with NE Forest Service – Wildfire Mitigation Resiliency, is there a plan to engage some of the subcommittees in the state to help out with those activities? The development of that plan the Forestry sub-committee would be good perspective that comes from that group.

A: Other than knowing that it’s one of the elements of the Climate SmartAct Strategy, I am not real clear on the specifics of it, but I can certainly ask that question up the line & get back with you.

CONSERVATION PROGRAMS UPDATES - Brad Soncksen, NRCS

- **EQIP – Climate Smart Ag & Forestry (EQIP-CSAF)**
  - FY 2022 Practice List
    - **Soil Health**
      - 327 - Conservation Cover (Acres)
      - 328 - Conservation Crop Rotation (Acres)
      - 329 - Residue and Tillage Management, No Till (Acres)
      - 332 - Contour Buffer Strips (Acres)
      - 340 - Cover Crop (Acres)
      - 345 - Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till (Acres)
      - 386 - Field Border (Acres)
      - 393 - Filter Strips (Acres)
      - 412 - Grassed Waterways (Acres)
      - 484 - Mulching (Acres)
      - 585 - Strip cropping (Acres)
      - 601 - Vegetative Barriers (Feet)
      - 603 - Herbaceous Wind Barriers (Feet)
    - **Nitrogen Management**
      - 590 - Nutrient Management (Acres)
    - **Livestock Partnership**
      - 366 - Anaerobic Digester (Number)
      - 632 - Waste Separation Facility (Number)
- Grazing & Pasture
  - 512 - Pasture and Hay Planting (Acres)
  - 528 - Prescribed Grazing (Acres)
  - 550 - Range Planting (Acres)
  - 311 - Alley Cropping (Acres)
  - 379 - Multi-Story Cropping (Acres)

- Agroforestry, Forestry and Upland Wildlife Habitat
  - 380 - Windbreaks/Shelterbelt Establishment and Renovation (Feet)
  - 381 - Silvopasture (Acres)
  - 390 - Riparian Herbaceous Cover (Acres)
  - 391 - Riparian Forest Buffer (Acres)
  - 422 - Hedgerow Planting (Feet)
  - 612 - Tree/Shrub Establishment (Acres)
  - 645 - Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (Acres)
  - 650 - Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation (Feet)

- Restoration of Disturbed Lands
  - 453 - Land Reclamation, Landslide Treatment (Acres)
  - 543 - Land Reclamation, Abandoned Mined Land (Acres)
  - 544 - Land Reclamation, Currently Mined Land (Acres)

- Rice
  - 449 - Irrigation Water Management (Acres)

- Ranking Tools
  - FY22 Beginning Farmer Rancher & Socially Disadvantaged producers receive additional ranking points when the application includes at least one of the CSAF practices.
    - The application contains
      - one or less core practices
      - two core practices
      - three or more core practices

❖ EQIP-CONSERVATION INCENTIVE CONTRACTS (CIC)

- PURPOSE:
  - To incentivize additional conservation around locally established resource priorities:
    - States identify High Priority Area(s) (HPA)
    - States identify Priority Resource Concern(s) (PRC) associated with HPA
    - States identify relevant land uses and the set of incentive practices that will address the PRC(s) in the HPA(s).
  - Steppingstone for producers from EQIP to CSP:
    - Allows producers to implement elements of CSP on a smaller scale

- Incorporation of CSP-like program policy
  - Producers must address at least 1 priority resource concern
  - Provides annual payments for certain incentive practices and enhancements to attain increased levels of conservation
  - Provides practice payments to implement an incentive practice
  - Contract length:
    - All CIC contracts will be 5 years

- Payments are made of two components:
  1. Incentive practice payments for adopting and installing practices
  2. Annual payments for managing, maintaining, and improving incentive practices during the contract period.
o Aggregate payment limitation:
  ▪ May not exceed $200k total payments to person or legal entity
  ▪ Joint Operations (bus type 2 or 3) have a contract limit not to exceed $400K
  ▪ Payment Limitation may not be waived

o High Priority Areas:
  ▪ Represent areas of significant concern
  ▪ Must encompass every region within the State
  ▪ May encompass an entire State or overlap with other high priority areas
    ▪ Set of High Priority Areas must cover the whole state

  ▪ Goal: Help producers address priority resource concerns on part of their operation as a “steppingstone” to achieving sustainable stewardship on their entire operation

  ▪ Outcomes:
    ▪ Reduce greenhouse gas emissions
    ▪ Enhance carbon sequestration
    ▪ Due to positive experiences under EQIP CIC, some participants go on to pursue further conservation benefits on their entire operation through applying for CSP

  ▪ Land Use:
    ▪ Crop
    ▪ Pasture
    ▪ Range
    ▪ Forest

  ▪ Priority Resource Concern:
    ▪ “Soil Quality Limitations”,
    ▪ “Degraded Plant condition”,
    ▪ “Water Quality and Quantity”

o EQIP CIC – Incentive Practices
  ▪ Focus is on Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry and Drought Mitigation Practices
  ▪ 32 eligible management practices (1 year lifespan)
  ▪ 5 CEMAs
    ▪ CEMAs are not required to be scheduled
    ▪ Encouraged if applicable to the operation
  ▪ Management practices can be scheduled 5 years if practical for the operation

  ▪ Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (CEMA): These activities include assessment, monitoring, recordkeeping for a special purpose, requirements, or assessing the effectiveness of conservation practices and activities.

  ▪ Example CEMA’s:
    ▪ 216-Soil Health Testing
    ▪ 217-Soil health and Source Testing For Nutrient Management

  ▪ Goal: Select practices/enhancements that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and/or enhance carbon sequestration
    ▪ Example Management Practices:
      ▪ 340-Cover Crop
      ▪ 328-Conservation Crop Rotation
      ▪ 329-Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till

    ▪ Example CEMA’s:
      ▪ 216-Soil Health Testing
      ▪ 217-Soil health and Source Testing For Nutrient Management
- FY22 Incentive Practices
  - 328 –Conservation Crop Rotation
  - 329 –Residue and Tillage Management, No Till
  - 338 -Prescribed Burning
  - 340 –Cover Crop
  - 449 -Irrigation Water Management
  - 511 –Forage Harvest Management
  - 528 –Prescribed Grazing
  - 590 –Nutrient Management
  - 595 –Pest Management Conservation System
  - 645 –Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
  - 647 –Early Successional Habitat Development and Management
  - 808 –Soil Carbon Amendment
  - 216-Soil Health Testing

  - Year 1-328, 329, 216, 340
  - Year 2-328, 329
  - Year 3-328, 329, 340
  - Year 4-328, 329
  - Year 5-328, 329, 216, 340

- EQIP-CIC Allocation
  - States will reserve 5% of the general EQIP allocation or $200,000.00 whichever is greater for FY2022
    - States have the option to set aside more than the minimum amount, up to 20%, if they choose.
    - State will have the flexibility to roll unused funds back to the EQIP general fund.

- EQIP CIC –Next Steps
  - DONE:
    - Develop ranking tools
    - Train staff
    - Advertise and announce signup
  - Rank and approve applications
    - March/April
  - Obligate contracts
    - Target date July 1, 2022
  - Full completely obligated
    - August

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- EQIP
  - Nebraska
    - Active Contracts as of March 2022
      - 2,508
      - Acres
        - 1.1 Million
    - Obligated funds
      - 80 million
  - EQIP Fund Pools FY 2022
    - Source Water Protection – 10%
    - Wildlife Initiative – 10%
    - Historically Underserved – 10%
    - EQIP-CIC = 5%
    - Livestock – 50%
- **FY2022 STATEWIDE FUND POOLS**
  - Advanced Cover Crop Initiative
  - NE Great Plains Grassland Initiative
  - Working Lands for Wildlife – Sandhills
  - Seasonal High Tunnel
  - Organic
  - Energy
  - Conservation Activity Plans
  - Animal Feeding Operations
  - Tribal
  - Disaster

- **FY 2022 General EQIP Allocation = $25.5 Million**
  - Wildlife (**10% combined with NE-GPGI**) = $1.35 million
  - Historically Underserved (10%) = $2.55 million
  - Source Water Protection (10%) = $2.55 million
  - NE Great Plains Grassland Initiative = $1.2 Million
  - EQIP-CIC (5%) = $1.3 million
  - Advanced Cover Crop Initiative = $300,000.00
  - Animal Feeding Operations = $1.0 Million
  - Disaster = $1.0 Million
  - Conservation Activity Plans = $200,000.00
  - Sandhills Working Lands for Wildlife = $100,000.00
  - High Tunnels = $100,000.00
  - Organic = $100,000.00
  - Tribal = $100,000.00
  - Energy = $25,000.00

- **FY2022 PARTNERSHIP FUND POOLS**
  - National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)
    - 3 Projects
      - Bazile, Big Sandy, Turkey
    - Allocation
      - $1.7 million
  - Water Smart (Bureau of Reclamation)
    - 2 Projects
      - URNRD
        - $250,000.00
      - MRNRD
        - $524,000.00
  - Forest Service (Joint Chiefs)
    - 1 Project
      - UNWNRD, MNNRD, ULNRD
    - Allocation
      - $500,000.00

- **CSP**
  - CSP – Nebraska
    - Total Active CSP Contracts as of February 2022
      - Contracts = 1,809
      - Contract Acres = 2,856,086
      - Obligated funds = $121,873,424.00
    - FY 2022 Allocations
      - CSP Classic
        - $8.6 Million
• CSP Renewal  
  o $6.6 Million  
• CSP-Grassland Conservation Initiative  
  o $50,000.00

• FY 2022 Applications  
  • Classic  
    o 1137

• FY 2022 Contracts  
  • Renewal  
    o 66  
  • GCI  
    o 14

• FY 2022 CSP Classic Signup  
  • Unfunded FY22 Renewals eligible to compete in Classic  
  • Applicants are being contracted to provide information about their operation.  
    • Information used to prioritize applications  
  • Ranking Deadline MAY 6, 2022  
  • Application Deadline was November 19, 2021  
    • FY022 CSP Classic Fund Pools  
      o 23 fund pools to align with DC administrative boundaries

❖ ACEP

• FY2022 ACEP – Nebraska  
  • ACEP-WRE Eligible Applications  
    • 18 Eligible Applications  
    • 2,872 Acres

  • ACEP-WREP  
    • 2 Eligible Applications  
    • 138 Acres

  • ACEP-ALE  
    • 1  
    • 2,350 Acres

• FY Initial Allocation of funds  
  • ACEP-WRE -$2.1 Million  
  • ACEP-WRE-WREP -$1.14 Million  
  • ACEP-ALE -$451,308  
  • ACEP-WRE/WRP Stewardship Funds -$860,000  
    • These funds are for maintenance and repairs of existing WRE and WRP easements.

• Moving Forward on:  
  • WRE  
    o 3 applications for 836 acres  
      • $1.6 million estimated acquisition costs  
      • $380,000.00 estimated restoration costs.

  • WRE-WREP  
    o 2 applications for 138 acres  
      • $320,000.00 estimated acquisition costs  
      • $98,000.00 estimated restoration costs.
• ALE
  • 1 Application on 3350 Acres
    • Making field visit in March
    • Estimated $564,000.00 federal share
    • Will have to request more funds after field visit & if site is found to be eligible.

• FY22 EWPP-FPE
  • Applications
    • 21
    • 10 cancelled or found ineligible
  • Acres
    • 5,590
  • Estimated Requested funding
    • $20,313,085.00
  • Offers Accepted
    • 8
    • 2 Pending Offers
      • 1,320 Acres
    • Estimated Funding needed:
      • $4,924,444.00

• ACEP
  • Applications taken year round
  • FY Cut-off October 15, 2021
  • This was for WRE, WRE-WREP, & ALE
  • Using appraisals again in FY22 to determine acquisition costs.

• Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC’s) for FY 2022
  • NOT TO EXCEED RATE = $9,535.00 for Irrigated Cropland
  • NOT TO EXCEED RATE = $5,000.00 for all other land uses
  • NEBRASKA ACEP-WRE
    • Reduction of Fair Market Value (FMV) to determine GARC’S
      • 10%
        • WEST, NORTH, SOUTHWEST
      • 15%
        • CENTRAL
      • 20%
        • NORTHWEST, SOUTHEAST, MISSOURI RIVER

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**LOCAL WORK GROUP MEETINGS**

• **FY 2022**
  • Meetings completed in February/March 2022
  • Reports are due to the State Office by April 15, 2022
  • **LOCAL WORK GROUP AGENDA ITEMS:**
    • Priority Resource Concerns
    • Fund Pools - Ranking Tools – Screening Tools
    • Practice Payment Schedule
    • Local issues
  • Your local Work Group Meeting is posted on the NE NRCS website.
REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (RCPP)

- FB 14 RCPP Projects Update
  - RCPP Project #1661 Wahoo Creek Water Quality Sites 26 & 27
    - Expires
      - 6/30/2022
    - Progress:
      - Preliminary design completed January 31st
      - Expected final design 2022 with construction following
    - One-Year No-Cost Extension to 6/30/2023
  - RCPP Project #1712 Papillion Creek Site WP-1 Dam
    - Expires
      - 12/31/2023
    - Progress:
      - Plan @ NWMC for review, expected final design completed - February 2023.
  - RCPP Project #1564 Divots in the Pivots
    - Expires
      - 9/30/2022
    - Progress:
      - ACEP-WRE
        - One Parcel Agreement Pending
        - One year no cost Extension
  - FB 18 RCPP
    - RCPP Project #1966 Resilient Futures for Nebraska Soils: Soil Carbon Project
      - RCPP FA funds
        - $3.1M
      - Progress:
        - FY21 Obligations for Producer Contracts
          - 20 Contracts
          - $545,571.00
        - FY22 Obligations for Producer Contracts
          - Budgeted @ $600K
          - 43 Applications
            - $2.16M
        - FY21 Contract Payments for:
          - Crop Rotation
          - No-Till
          - Cover Crop
        - Finalizing Project Supplemental Agreements
    - RCPP Project #2135 Cropland Cover for Soil Health & Wildlife: aka Cropland Cover Initiative
      - RCPP FA Funds
        - $700K
      - Progress:
        - FY22 Obligations for Producer Contracts
          - Budgeted @ $150K
          - 21 Applications
            - $209K
        - 15 Applications were Pre-Approved
        - Practices
          - Access Control
          - Cover Crop
RCPP Project #2271 Ogallala Aquifer & Platter River Recovery
- RCPP Project FA
  - $1.7M
- Progress:
  - Producer signups this fall
- Practices:
  - Irrigation to dryland
  - Irrigation sprinklers
  - Pipelines
  - Pumping Plant
  - Flow Meters
  - Drip Systems
  - IWM
  - Nutrient Management
  - Residue Management

RCPP Project #2434 Platte & Playa Wetland Protection #2434
- Project FA
  - $1.3M for Easement Acquisitions
- Progress:
  - Programmatic Partnership Agreement
  - Supplemental Agreement for TA-E (outreach, communication)
- Parcel Agreements on HOLD

RCPP Project #2173 Nebraska Forest Restoration Partnership
- RCPP FA Funds:
  - $3.2M
- Progress:
  - PPA signed
  - SA for FA signed
- Producer Applications this Spring for Tree Practices
- Alternative Funding Arrangement
  - NFS will administer FA contracts

RCPP & Conservation Desktop Updates:
- FY21 Conservation Desktop
  - Planning and Mapping
    - Same as other FA Programs
  - Applications
    - Manual Producer/Land Eligibility
  - Obligations
    - Manual Eligibility
    - Manual Obligations of Funds
  - Administration
    - Manual Modifications, Reviews, etc.
  - Payments
    - No Certification of Practices
    - Manual Payment Documents

FY22 Conservation Desktop – UPGRADES
- Planning and Mapping
  - Same as other FA Programs
- Applications
  - Current Update for Pulling Eligibility Documents from FSA
  - Manual Entry
- Obligations
  - Partial Completed CPA-1202 Contract Document
Double Check Eligibility prior to Obligation
o Funds Reservation – Still Manual Obligations of Funds

Administration
o Manual Modifications, Reviews, etc.

Payments
o Certification of Practices
o Partial Completed CPA-1245 Payment Document

- RCPP Classic & AFA National Funding Opportunity
  - Opportunity Announcement
    - $225 M total in Classic and AFA Projects
    - Deadline to Submit Proposal - April 13, 2022
    - RCPP - How to Apply | NRCS (usda.gov)
    - Prior to Submitting Proposal – contact RCPP Coordinator
      o Guidance about the Proposal with State NRCS Leadership
      o Guidance on how to use the Portal, Login Instructions
  - Submit Proposals via Programs Portal

  Classic = Standard version where NRCS and the lead partner both oversee contracts with producers and landowners engaged in RCPP Activities

  AFA = Partner-led contracts to achieve conservation benefits not possible under Classic

  Award Ceiling:
  - $10,000,000.00

  Award Floor:
  - $250,000.00

  RCPP Funding Levels
  - FA $ Financial Assistance for on-the-land conservation
    o 70%
  - TA $ - Technical Assistance
    o 30%
    o TA-E – Enhancement
      - Outreach
      - Marketing
      - Communication
      - Project Management
        - 7%
  - TA-I – Implementation
    - Practice Implementation
    - $ directly tied to the specific FA $
      - 23%
        o 5% NRCS
        o 18% Negotiable

  RCPP FARM BILL 18 Items to Note:
  - RCPP is not a Grant
    o Function more as a contract
  - Lead Partner is held accountable for:
    o Entering Proposal in the portal
    o If selected, entering Project in the Portal Administering Project in the Portal
    o Acquiring and Accounting for each $ for Reimbursements, Contributions and Match
    o Audits from FB14 resulted in more stringent accountability for FB18 RCPP
    o Other....
RCPP Classic & AFA National Funding Opportunity

- **Key Principles of RCPP**
  - Impact (25%): Does proposal include effective, compelling solutions to address one or more natural resource concerns?
  - Partner Contributions (25%): Cash or In-Kind FA and/or TA? Must be 1:1 ratio with RCPP funding. Cash is KING.
  - Innovation (20%): Integrate multiple or innovative conservation approaches or technologies? Build new partnerships?
  - Partnerships and Management (30%): Experience with Project Management

- **Administration Policies – Focus on:**
  - Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry projects
  - Urban Agriculture – Address natural resources of urban farmers in metropolitan areas, energy conservation, water conservation, soil health, long-term protection of land.
  - Racial Justice & Equity – Ensure equity across the Department, removing barriers to access, and building a workforce representative of America
  - HU Producers – Beginning, Limited Resource, Socially Disadvantaged, Veteran producers

**CRP**

- **1st CRP Practice Installation**
  - Potentially 3,000 Contracts

- **2nd CRP Practice Establishment**
  - Not later than 2 years after installation.
  - 9,062 Fields

- **3rd CRP Contract Expiration**
  - Expiring 2022/2023
  - 7,683 Fields

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**“NEBRASKA FOREST RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP” RCPP-AFA –**

*Adam Smith, Chief, Forestry & Fire Bureau, Nebraska Forest Service*

- This program came out of a few concerns that have been seen throughout the landscapes in Nebraska.

- **Keystone species being replaced by shade-tolerant species**
  - Low Oak & Cottonwood seeding presence
  - Increased hackberry prevalence
  - Showed the differences in:
    - Oak forests & Cottonwood forests species composition
      - Growing Stock
      - Sapling
      - Seedling

- **Background**
  - Windbreak removals are increasing
    - 100,000-acre decline since 2013
      - 20,000 Acres AgLand
      - Over 90,000 Acres Cropland
    - A LOT MORE LOSS THAN GAINS OF WINDBREAKS.

- Compounding this issue to do some work in our windbreaks.
  - Did a four states inventory – both Dakotas, Kansas & Nebraska
    - Called “Great Plains Initiative 2” report
      - 19% of all windbreaks are greater than 50 years old
NFRP Summary

- **Project Goals**
  - Restore oak & cottonwood forests
  - Renovate declining windbreaks
  - Recover lost tree cover

- **Technical & Financial Assistance Activities**
  - Forest Stand Improvement
  - Windbreak Renovation
  - Windbreak/Tree Establishment
  - Doing management on them while we still have the good trees

- **Lead Partner:**
  - NE Forest Service

- **Additional Partners**
  - NE Game & Parks
  - 16 NRD’s

Financial Assistance Implementation

- **Forest Stand Improvement**
  - Eligible only within the priority area
  - NFS & NGPC staff develop project plans & designs
  - Reimbursements calculated using active NRCS payment scenarios
    - 50% - Standard producers
    - 75% - HU producers

- **Windbreak Renovation/ Windbreak Establishment/ Tree Establishment**
  - Provide as supplemental funding to producers receiving NRD cost-share
  - Plans & designs for NRD cost-share will be used for these projects
  - Reimbursement rates based on local NRD reimbursement rates
    - Total reimbursement:
      - NRD + NFRP = 75% reimbursement

NFRP Enrollment Process

- **Reviewed the application**
  - Making sure all producers that are participating have their farm records established with FSA.

NRCS Eligibility Determination

- **NFS will submit the following to NRCS District Conservationist**
  - Completed NFRP Application
  - CPA-52 Cover Sheet
  - Project plan and map (for completing CPA-52)

  - NRCS will return
    - NFRP Application with eligibility determined
    - Completed CPA-52

Conservation Measures Acknowledgement

- **NFS insert CPA-52 findings into Acknowledgment form**
- Producer will sign

Reviewed Requirements before project begins

- **Project Check-out**
  - When work is completed, NFS or project partner will visit the site with the project plan
  - Conduct a site visit to ensure work was completed as designed
  - Re-submit NFRP to ensure landowner remains eligible
  - If producer remains eligible, reimbursement is provided
Q: Marcia Trompke, Central NE Public Power – As you know water is a critical issue in Western & Central NE, so wondering if cottonwood plantings maybe provide a buffer zone on strengths of tributaries? Cottonwood’s use a lot of water, so was wondering if there was lower water using species to plant near riparian areas?

A: The tree planting in the riparian areas what we are going to try & focus on is management of the cottonwood forest & remove those competing species, essentially freeing up ground water. What we are working on with our staff is to use the NFRP as a financial tool that we can provide to producers & landowners. So, whether or not it’s tree planting that is eligible through this program or riparian buffer project that might be more applicable, depends on the site. Conservation tree planting along riparian corridors is an eligible project is what is deemed best choice. I would see us managing more forest to reduce tree competition with water along the riparian forest apposed to planting new trees.

WETLAND MITIGATION BANK – Ritch Nelson, State Forester/ Wildlife Biologist, NRCS

❖ Wetland Mitigation Banking in NE with NRCS

   o Why is it needed?
      ▪ Wetland Conservation provisions of the 1985 Food Security Act require that wetlands not be converted to make crop production possible to remain eligible for USDA benefits.
      ▪ Wetlands that are converted must be mitigated (both acres and “function”) to replace those lost wetlands.
         • Options for producers include:
         • Restoring the impacted wetland
         • Replacing it on land they own/control
         • Purchasing credits from a wetland bank

      ▪ What?
         • A wetland mitigation bank is a current “non-wetland” that is restored or created and then protected and managed to be used to off-set wetlands lost elsewhere.
         • Wetland mitigation banks are owned by a private individual, corporation, non-profit organization, etc. and the bank is administered under the oversight of an agency (NRCS).
         • Credits are sold (essentially acres of wetland) to replace lost acres which are converted for crop production.

      ▪ Who operates?
         • There are several owners of wetland banks that operate under the oversight of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
         • One wetland bank with NRCS administration is operational in Nebraska at this time.
         • Westervelt Ecological Services is the entity that owns North Utica Agricultural Wetland Mitigation Bank in Seward County.
         • Recently, a new grant was awarded to Magnolia Inc. to develop a wetland bank in Eastern Nebraska on a stream floodplain.

      ▪ When will wetland credits be available?
         • The first round of credits were released to Westervelt for sale to Nebraska producers in late 2021.
         • Another credit release is expected in the coming weeks.
         • A total of 40 acres of credits is expected to be released over a five-year period.

      ▪ How are wetland Credits Sold/Purchased?
         • Producer determines the amount of wetland (acres) needed for mitigation using NRCS Certified Wetland Determination.
         • NRCS advises producer on applicability of wetland bank.
            o Wetland “TYPE” and location relative to Service Area…
         • Producer contacts Westervelt to purchase needed credits and completes the transaction.
• NRCS finalizes agreement to allow wetland bank credits to replace wetland that is converted to maintain eligibility.

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Q: Any feedback on how much interest you received? On the layout plan you had some internal buffers in there, was there some rationale for what was being planned there?

A: There has been interest generated due to the marketing & advertising. Ritch has been communicating with them on some of their sites to determine if it’s close enough proximity or type of wetland. Do have one we are going to explore further but do some more leg work to confirm. We have worked collaborative with other agencies, with the restoration plan & have made adjustments along the way on the land, especially closely with NE G&P who owns the adjacent property. What happens here is from E to W the landscape picks up a bit, those were areas that were left intact & the excavation feathered up to them, but the next cell is an additional excavation, but at a slight elevation. If we had an excessive amount of water those cells would fill with water. It was a way that they could construct this without having to excavate a significant larger portion of those sales & then have to deal with all that spoil.

FSA REVIEW/UPDATES –  Lavaine Moore, Conservation Program Specialist, FSA;  Jana Ingwerson-Laws, Conservation Specialist, FSA

❖ CRP TOPICS

○ CRP Signup Dates & CRP Results
  • General CRP SU58
    • January 31, 2022 to March 11, 2022
      ▪ Grass practices
  • Continuous CRP SU57
    • Ongoing
      ▪ Buffer
      ▪ Grass waterways
      ▪ Trees
      ▪ CREP
  • Grasslands CRP SU204
    • April 4, 2022 to May 13, 2022

❖ Migratory Bird SAFE
  • 1st Ranking moved from February 18 to April 1
    ▪ Changed this from 2 period ranking criteria
    ▪ Continue this through August.

○ Offers
  • General
    ▪ 828
  • Continuous
    ▪ 104
  • HELI
    ▪ 39
  • CREP
    ▪ 15
• FWP
  • 2
• Migratory Bird Safe
  • 39

CRP Cost Docket to determine what needs changed or updated. Purpose is to be consistent over the whole state.
  o Needs to be approved by the State Technical Committee
    • 2 key Areas that we focused on
      • General Adjustments made as things go up in price routinely
        o Two items increased
          ▪ Grass & Forbes seed which is a significant item in almost every contract.
          ▪ Glyphosate, that is the main chemical that is used on CRP for site prep & suppressing an existing stand to prepare for seeding it.
        o Will the dry season change the prices?
          ▪ County Committee does have flexibility to make adjustments to a contract.
    • Prescribed burning
      • Added to docket
        o Flat rate created to Hired Out - VFD, PBA "Assisted" Burn
      o Questions or concerns about this docket would be accepted now before this is sent to the state committee & approve it to be pushed out to the field.

Q: Burdette – Thanks for putting the VFD part into the docket. The irrigation & all the pipes have gone up about 25-30% in the last year, have you raised any of that?

A: We have not, but with CRP we usually don’t have a lot of irrigations pipeline but is something we can monitor & do it on a county level flexibility or make it a statewide thing.

Brad stated there has been some consideration for increased in prices for irrigation pipe in EQIP. We are making additional payments through EQIP for some of these cost increases.

PARTNER UPDATES:

• Eric Zach, NE Game & Parks Commission:
  o Commissioner just adopted the next 5-yr program Pheasant plan
    ▪ Uses CRP & other programs to enhance wildlife habitat
    ▪ Getting underway right now if anyone has any questions on focal areas
      • 6 across the state

• Craig Romary
  o NE buffer strip program still has funding available.
    ▪ Would appreciate partners promoting the program.
    ▪ State funded program through Pesticide registration fees funded by Department of Agriculture.
  o Further Information Linked HERE

• Jeff Abegglen, US Forest Service
  o Forest Service has not received their FY22 Allocation as of yet.
    ▪ Expect the full amount that was asked for.
  o Joint Chiefs update
    ▪ End of our 2nd Joint Chiefs – yr. 6
    ▪ Going for a 3rd Joint Chiefs
      • Trying to incorporate efforts involved with Great Plains Grassland Initiative
      • Solicitation comes out the end of this month with deadline the end of June.
Elbert Traylor, Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality

- We have done some revision of our non-point source program.
  - Previously did formal proposals in September
  - Have gone to notice of interest.
    - Open request like EQIP.
    - Take notice of interests January, May & September
- Worked with UNL to create a permanent position through the extension for a source water protection educator.
  - Co-funding that for 3yrs
  - Will be a permanent faculty position
    - Work with communities to develop strategies for best management practices in their wellhead protection areas.
    - Work with nonpoint source & source water protection programs
- Working with Lewis & Clark NRD to promote a practice that encourages grazing of cover crops.
  - Link with EQIP cover crop applications or be supplement.
- Working with UNL on mid-season cover crop seeding.
  - Successful in purchasing a high clearance applicator/ high bore seeder that will allow us to put cover crops in July/August time frame.
    - Initiate that as on farm demonstrations & On farm research Programs on:
      - Waverly Well protection areas
      - Wahoo Creek
      - Shell Creek
      - Few other sites
    - Target is service providers to demonstrate they can provide services in these areas.
    - Demonstrating split application of nitrogen in late May early July.
      - Idea of moving away from fertilizer in spring.

Please send any further questions or comments to Tami Nordman @ tami.nordman@usda.gov

FUTURE 2022 MEETINGS: (LOCATION TO BE DETERMINED)

- June 2
- September 8
- December 1