

State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
March 24, 2015

Hosted by Sherre Copeland, NRCS Partnership Liaison

Attending:

- NRCS: Roylene Rides at the Door, Jeff Harlow, Alan McBee, Rick Noble, Doug Allen, Tony Sunseri, Sherre Copeland, Heidi Eisenhour, Patti Playfair, Matthew Blua, Alan Walker, Larry Cochran, Mike Baden, Ty Meyer, Bonda Habets, Kurt Merg, Doug Allen, Carri Gaines, Megan Stewart, and Kevin Sullivan. Others may have attended via webinar and this meeting is open to the public.

Roylene Rides at the Door, Opening Remarks

Sherre introduced Roylene as she was able to connect at the office in Olympia; therefore, Roylene thanked everyone for joining us to day. She noted our progress on:

- Sage Grouse
- Client Gateway
- Balanced budget first time
- Calling on partners and LWG more and more. Get out of your box and get out of general EQIP. It is not the majority of what we do. Look at easements, CSP, initiatives, special projects.
- Joint Chiefs' award, \$2 million of new money into the state.

WA State continues to use a more proactive rather than reactive approach to conservation needs and appreciates the STAC's feedback.

Bonda Habets, State Resource conservationist spoke on Bio Tech Note 14, Ag Tech Note 14, Conservation Practice Updates and Air quality Resource Concerns.

Bonda discussed the FY 17, 2.7 million available to launch Air quality dollars. Announcement coming out in mid-April. She also discussed the following points:

- Wildlife Habitat Implementation Guide
- Tech Note 14 has a lot more than the buffer and we are going to pilot it with the Voluntary Conservation Sign Up.
- Ag Tech Note 14 – Manure application, NHQ came back with BMPs for the 4 Rs. The existing one since 2005 only addressed forages in WA and so we renamed it. There was no change. We put out the guidance that NHQ put out on BMPs.
- Notices – have updated about 30 standards. They have been before the State Technical Committee and are now posted on eFOTG and these have been sent out to the STAC.
- Seasonal High Tunnel is now a perm practice and has come out of the interim
- Air Quality Initiative proposal – there is a mitigation strategy to reduce greenhouse gasses by 2025 by 26% - Ensure that it is in our SRA update
 - Optimize nutrient inputs for soil health
 - Livestock benefits – anaerobic digesters, flares for methane
 - Energy improvements in efficiency
 - Prescribed grazing – carbon sequestration
 - FY 2015 \$2.7 million available in the state
 - April 8 webinar for tool training for NRCS and CDs (not for producers)
 - April 9 webinar for NRCS tools and practices (not for producers)

- Columbia Basin and Western WA
 - Air scrubber
 - Dust abatement (polymer)
 - New energy practices
 - Not new practices for greenhouse gas mitigation
 - See table 3 in tech note
 - We have not adopted all the practices in WA
- What are the differences between energy, general EQIP, and air quality
 - Don't need an energy audit CAP for air quality
 - Air is in the non-attainment areas, and surrounding
 - Completed energy audit, but not enough money, can roll over to air
- Layers of data available for the SRA on air quality
- Consider for SRA priority resource concern
- Program for FY 2016, which counties and which practices
 - Need letters of support for conservation partners
 - 50 New CSP enhancements

Roylene noted that all partners are welcome to attend LWG meetings. All these meetings are posted on the STAC website.

Jonathan Guzzo, Department of Natural Resources spoke on Forest Action Plan Progress Update and Feedback Opportunity

Farm Bill provides direction to the DNR to develop the Forest Action Plan

Key Issues: are used as a framework to develop strategies. These were heard over and over again in conversations with stakeholders and also have been highlighted by the Director where DNR needs to take the lead:

- Mitigating Impacts of Climate Change
- Slowing the Rate of Conversion
- Protecting Communities from the Impacts of Wildfire
- Restoring the Health of Forested Landscapes

Program Connections:

- Urban and community forestry
- Forest Health Restoration
- Biodiversity and Habitat Conservation
- Working Forestlands and Conversion
- Wildfire Hazard Reduction

Programs that DNR has available to address some of the key issues

- Adapted to 35 year forest stand intensity – we have overcrowding fuel loads on our eastern forests. It is not merchantable forests. We have an obligation to the public to stay solvent. We could spend our total budget on forest health. One way we can recoup is biofuels reduction. Inhibiting production of biomass is that natural gas is now \$3, so the demand for biofuels goes down.

- Slow the rate of conversion. Work together with land trusts to develop a clearinghouse for projects that need funding.
- Protecting communities from impacts of wildfire – came out of the National Cohesive strategy for wild land fire management and prevention strategy....
- Spatial priorities – forest action plan has priority area maps
 - For example, Western WA is a priority for forest health because of the beetle.
- Livestock grazing will not be included because it does not fit in the rubric of federal forest lands management. It might fit it part of the western WA part, but only in regard to water quality
- Would DNR and NRC partner on a local level? Yes, the limiting factor in Western WA is capacity, but we want to provide more flexibility and maneuverability.
- Patty Playfair – private forest landowner in Eastern WA. What is timeframe? Mobile pyralis – what is the challenges with developing these kinds of technology especially with other agencies like Ecology who has not allowed us to use prescribed burning.
 - Document is for five years
 - Things we are doing now will have an impact for the next 20 years or so. We are trying to lay the groundwork for the kinds of adaptive management actions we need to take.
 - Challenges – a lot of the missions are sequestered as char, so we haven't had the types of concern from the perspective of DOE, but we have from the larger biomass plants, there is less opposition from DOE and more from local communities. They are concerned about increase in biomass particulates
- Forest Health Hazard Warning Area boundaries are dictated by the Commissioner and won't change for this document. However, we are open to serious areas of impact

Dave Kreft, State Easement Programs Coordinator, spoke on Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Rules and Manual

Dave shared he received an update the afternoon of March 23, just one day prior to this STAC. He noted the NRCS National Web page has a link for folks to comment on the ACEP program Interim Rule. The comment period is open through April 28. The ACEP Manual is 440-CPM, Part 528 in the NRCS online directives system. The ACEP Wetland Reserve Easement (ACEP WRE) application is the standard CPA 1200. Applications for ACEP Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP ALE) require a special package of forms and documentation from eligible cooperating entities. Those forms and procedures will be posted to the NRCS Washington web page as soon as they are finalized and available. The cutoff for FY2015 ACEP funding applications will be May 15, 2015. By June 12, all reviews have to be done. All funds to be obligated by September 24. ACEP applications can be submitted at any time, but funding cutoff dates will be announced annually. If you see "STC" on the NRCS website this is another name for STAC. The role of the STAC (not someone who is requesting the funds) helps in identifying needs careful to watch for conflicts of interest. What is the highest priority in the state, what is the environmental impact to the public and how to include that in the ranking (points)? Should we have a subcommittee for the STAC for easements?

- Heidi, AFT– yes, focus for funding, outreach
- Kurt Merg, DFW – yes, there is an interest and mission

Need feedback on the ranking criteria from full STAC by May 15

- Sage Grouse

- Sentinel Lands
- How do we incorporate these into ranking criteria for the easements for this year? There is more emphasis on the plans.
- Training will be announced

2015 – Coordinate a meeting on easements during April – Did we vet our questions with STAC?

Develop a subcommittee in May for 2016 and beyond. Jeff Harlow encourages the sub-committee to fast track this. Broad STAC membership for current year and a future committee to be developed for the coming year. The current ranking criteria will be shared, need by the end of April to compare to the new statutes and build ranking criteria to include the updates; grass lands, sage grouse input and feedback from STAC. More emphasis on the conservation plans to identify and implement what was put into the plan. Careful with restriction for land owners; more coming from headquarters on requirements and training...around mid-April.

Heidi is establishing the workshop April 13-15 in Menuca in Columbia River Gorge, east of Troutdale.

Grasslands of Special Environmental Significance. We asked STAC before. We have letters of support and great response from partners. We are going to have the flexibility we need within ALE. Can move funding between ALE to Grasslands. We used the Arid Lands Map, and also the Sentinel Lands.

Kevin Guinn, State Range Specialist, spoke on the Sage Grouse Initiative

Kevin shared that Washington State has three distinct populations of Sage Grouse. Douglas County is core for our state's progress. The 2010 money that went in CRP expired. We had two seasons of growth that should help with grazing guidelines. Currently, we have 38 active contracts, 26 in Douglas County, 7 Lincoln, 1 Yakama and one in Grant County.

Keystone species in 11 states. Candidate species under the ESA. West-wide decline of the species. In 2010 the USFWS said the listing was warranted. The listing is eminent in Oct. Yakima nation has been releasing some birds, but don't know. Lincoln Co have reintroduced some birds from ID and are moving from Lincoln to Douglas. Yakima Training Center has a viable population. Douglas Co has 80% of the sage grouse. Initiative started in 2010 to get ahead of the listing. Catch phrase is wildlife conservation through sustainable ranching. Model for future programs with NRCS for endangered species.

In 2010 we put most of our money into expiring CRP. We count on a stable base of habitat from ranching and CRP. 2011 national grazing program but very ridged and didn't get many takers. Later they added flexibility, which gained more participation.

2 grazing program guidelines (look at them in 3-year intervals, but can be 4-5 year grazing programs)

- plant health
- 2 growing seasons
 - Spring, fall, winter, rest = 4 year rotation

HCP, CCAA, Reg Predictability, we are setting up a large fuel load that we are going to have to address at some time.

Kevin and Roylene went to a national sage grouse meeting – National plan has to go up to NHQ by April 17. Spatially explicit business plan quantifying financial and acreage needs for FY 16-18 (Farm Bill). Weller has made a commitment to the sage grouse initiative through the end of the farm bill. We have to spatially target at least 75% of our funding. The rest can be dispersed.

Kevin has engaged field staff, Eric Broughten from USFWS has been involved. Stable base of quality habitat. A couple of things that can be worked on:

1. Expiring CRP – we have to hold onto it
 - Convert to grazing
 - Use easements to prevent conversion to crop land
Need partners to contribute 25-50% match
 - 2016, Lincoln has 30K-40K expiring
 - 2018, Douglas has 16-17K expiring
2. Working ranchlands
 - Prescribed grazing
 - Fencing
 - Seeding and plantings

Need from STAC – target our easement funds to sage grouse efforts. Maybe we can earmark a chunk of our funding for this.

Michael Brown is working with partners. Douglas Co. have some interested landowners.

2012 – Meeting at landowners – 11 contracts within 7 mile radius. This is the kind of footprint we would like to duplicate with this. Also, about 80% of the sage grouse habitat occurs on private lands.

Gary Farrell, Soil Health Committee

Gary introduced that he has 29 years of experience and glad to be on the Soil Health Committee. Gary is part of Ag Enterprise Supply; on the board of Ag retailers; and chairman of national Cover Crop Committee, organization; his Co-Chair is Lynn Barick.

Committee – have about 10-12 including the NRCS. We first started with a definition of what we are going to do. Check out the growing website: SoilHealthWA.org. The committee plans to set up a twitter account. They are also building relationships with Resource partners; Farm Smart, WA NRCS, Soil Renaissance Program, Noble Foundation, Farm Foundation, Howard Buffet Foundation working with 50 million for soil health research. Very impressed with Chief Weller and his leadership and Dr. Bianca Clumb, Director of Soil Health Division. Soil testing and different types of soil health can make a difference and correlation for maintain health of the soil. Very positive results. Kevin Sullivan can contact the committee if input anyone needs assistance. Chris Walkum county cover crop seed help; looking at the i8dea similar to Pennsylvania...how do you motivate people to try this long-term investment? What is the reward for taking the time to make it work and working also with Oregon on a tool. Bonda Habets mentioned the PMC will work with Okanogan to get cover crops started and shall start checking areas and what crop species will grow for that particular area. Noting the species list doesn't work everywhere. Future direction funds to find the right cover crops if available.

Ty Myer, brief on Farmed SMART Certification

Ty gave an informative brief on Farmed SMART (please see presentation slides). The goal of this

program is to be good stewards of the land, linked to conservation and aligning with achievable goals. The main goal is to help the producers use this program. Test cases will start with RCPP – thanks to Direct Seed. Ron from Ecology, is excited about this program; focus on water quality and the like to ensure multiple aspects are covered. Also, excited about the environmental lift. Major streams have a 50 foot buffer; working on the cut off points for practical criteria, see www.directseed.org. Matthew from Potato Commission ask if any conflicts in the gap standards. Not sure how they compare and if animals have access to the field. Gowers still have to meet gap standards and wildlife is not seen as a negative. Many people were part of the process and Farmed SMART is working on where they can work together with NRCS. A tool is in the work for FY16 regarding Water Quality as well as Resource Tool.

Jeff Harlow, Assistant STC For Programs brief on 2015 EQIP State Level Ranking Questions and State Initiatives

Jeff gave copies of the ranking questions to review. Question 1a appears to be a duplicate question asked by National. Why all CAPs must be funded? Need a high point limited to 400 points and questions are geared toward workload. We use SRA for resource concerns...is workload ok? STAC input on ranking questions needed by April 30.

State level ranking questions – EQIP (May timeframe. Due by April 30).

1. CAP – duplicative
 - a. All CAPs must be funded, the only way is that they receive enough points in our system.
2. Engineering – points to workload
3. Contract length – budget, we only get TA for 3 years (keep contracts short to help the budget)
4. AFO-CAFO – concern about new regulation, but now not as much of concern with workload
5. TRA – added to tie in the Tribes
6. TRA – added to tie in the Tribes
7. RMS Plan--selected area versus full farm land helps target priorities for WA State (is the integrated forest management plan the same? Yes) Bonda mentioned we have an MOU with Forest Plans.

Easement ranking criteria. Jeff asked about keying up questions for Easements and Dave Kreft is working to have them completed by May 1.

We focus resources to get the most efficient use of the tax payer's dollars. Some LWGs are using the state questions so we don't have to duplicate efforts. State and LWG compare due to lack of funds. Fund pool may have been an issue...cannot change 30 acres to 20 acres to "meet funds" for example.

Questions and Discussion:

Sherre thanked everyone for coming and she will send out an email with the due dates for the various items discussed for feedback from the STAC. Meeting adjourned at 3:05pm

Linda Willand
Recorder