

# STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

## MINUTES

March 12, 2015  
10 AM to 12:00 PM

*FDACS, Division of Plant Industry, Doyle Conner Auditorium,  
1911 S.W. 34th Street, Gainesville, FL 32608*

**Present:** *Russell Morgan, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Tom Weber, NRCS; Nina Bhattcharyya, NRCS; Renee Bodine, NRCS; Rosalind Moore, NRCS; Andy Hopkin, NRCS; Jeff Woods, NRCS; Roney Gutierrez, NRCS; Darrell Leach, NRCS; Michael Bush, NRCS; Dytra Lewis, NRCS; Joseph Prenger, Fish & Wildlife Commission (FWC); Mark A. Luchte, South West Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD); James Roach, PLE/PI Chamber; Darrell Smith, Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (FDACS); Kate Brackett, DEP; Mike Thomas, DEP; Jerry Joiner, Joiner Consulting, Inc.; Janell Hendron, Florida Farm Bureau Federation (FFBF); Jason Mathis, FFBF; Frankie Hall, FFBF; Tom Hockert, Farm Service Agency (FSA); Amy Roller, FSA; Ed Aschliman, FSA; Chris Demers, UF/IFAS; Lauren Day, The Conservation Fund; Cynthia Lamb, FAMU; Ray Hodge, Southeast Milk, Inc.; Annie Dziergowski, USFWS; Betty Jo Tompkins, Hills County Soil Board; Marla Buchanan, Green Technologies; Bob Bretnall, HSW Engineering, Inc.; Thomas Obreza, UF/IFAS; Jeff Whealton, SWFWMD; Roel Herrera, Seminole Tribe of Florida; Suzanne Archer, SJRWMD; Bonnie Stine, Florida Forest Service; Tony Grossman, Florida Forest Service; Stan Simpkins, US Fish & Wildlife Service*

**Russell Morgan, State Conservationist, NRCS**, opened the meeting with a cheery welcome, allowing the guests to stand up and introduce themselves.

**Tom Hockert, Farm Service Agency (FSA) Farm Programs Chief**, gave an update of FSA Programs and Highly Erodible Land & Wetland Conservation Compliance for Crop Insurance Participants

- Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs (ARC/PLC) enrollment is going on now and ends on March 31
  - o These programs combine provisions from previous programs delivered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), which were the counter-cyclical portion of the Direct and Counter-Cyclical Program, the Supplemental Revenue Assistance payments Program and the Average Crop Revenue Program with insurance delivered by the Risk Management Agency.
- What does the Farm Bill do for Conservation Compliance?
  - o All farmers have to be comply with highly erodible
  - o Citrus Farmers are affected
  - o Avocado Farmers check Box B
  - o June 1, 2015, deadline for filling out the AD-1026 with FSA
    - If 5B is checked, it will not go to NRCS

- Affiliated Farmer defined on #7
- July 1, 2015, new crop insurance year starts

**Jeff Woods, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (ASTC), NRCS**, provided a Financial Assistance Programs update. He can be reached by phone at 352-338-9515 or by email at [Jeffrey.Woods@fl.usda.gov](mailto:Jeffrey.Woods@fl.usda.gov).

- Summary of Changes for the 2014 Farm Bill conservation programs:
  - Veteran Farmers provisions added. Producers that are veterans and meet the Beginning Farmer and/or Socially Disadvantage farmer/rancher requirement can receive a higher payment rate under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
  - The one year Operations and Maintenance (O&M) requirement for EQIP contracts has been removed
  - Adjusted Gross Income, (AGI) question from Jerry Joyner: If a producer's AGI is over \$900K, does that make you ineligible?
    - Answer: If 66% of the income comes from Agriculture, you are eligible.

**Correction: The response provided to the question raised by Jerry Joiner in regards to “if 66% of the AGI comes from Agriculture you are eligible” was incorrect. If a producer’s AGI exceeds \$900,000 they are ineligible to participate in the 2014 Farm Bill conservation programs. The only exception to the AGI requirement is for participation under the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program, (RCPP). The AGI requirement for participation under the RCPP can be waived by the Secretary of USDA or Chief of NRCS.**

- Participant’s payment limitations for EQIP is now \$450,000
- Mandatory Requirements under EQIP
  - 5% of funds must be made available to improve wildlife habitat
  - 60% of funds must be made available to assist livestock operations
- Historically Underserved Groups: Beginning or Socially Disadvantaged Farmers/Ranchers
  - 10% of EQIP funds must be made available to assist HU groups
  - Eligible to receive advance payments up to 50% to purchase materials and obtain services needed to install practices in their EQIP contracts
  - Has a 90-day period to implement the practices associated with the advance payment
- De-authorized conservation programs
  - Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)
  - Agriculture Water Enhancement Program

**Kathryn Brackett, FL DEP**, discussed 319 Agricultural Projects. She can be reached by phone at 850-245-8682 or by email [Kathryn.Brackett@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Kathryn.Brackett@dep.state.fl.us).

- 319(h) Grant Federal Non-Point Source
  - Receives 5-6M each year; 10-15 projects are submitted for EPA approval

- Projects can be done on private land, though an eligible participant
- 50% of funds are used to contribute to watershed management plans
- 50% of funds are used for others, with not the same restrictions
- 40% match request
- Effectiveness of practices need to be monitored
- Water Management Districts, State and Local Governments, Universities and Non-Profits are all eligible participants.
- 2M is short term funds is open now
  - Due April 17
  - May, applications will be selected for approval
  - June-July, DEP will go to DEP for selection
  - July-October, DEP will enter into a contract with selected
  - August 2016, everything has to be complete
- 319/16 Grant
  - Due March 31
  - Applications will be submitted to EPA over the summer, but no final approval until Summer 2016
  - September 2019, projects have to be completed

**Tony Grossman, Conservation Program Manager, Florida Forest Service**, discussed Florida Land Steward Partnership Efforts. See [FloridaLandSteward.org](http://FloridaLandSteward.org). He can be reached by phone at 850-681-5874 or email [Anthony.Grossman@FreshFromFlorida.com](mailto:Anthony.Grossman@FreshFromFlorida.com).

- Collaborative Efforts were formed in 2009 with Forest Service, Fish & Wildlife, IFAS and NRCS
- Distributes newsletter “Florida Land Steward”, directed to producers and forest owners. It is mailed out in Black and White, but the color version is available on line. All back issues are available online, since it started in 1995
- Distributes a yearly calendar
- Facebook page, Florida Land Steward Partnership, to engage and inform.
- Florida Land Steward WeBlog
- Florida Land Steward Email List Serve informs subscribers of upcoming programs and workshop and includes a link to the website and newsletters, in a weekly email
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**Roney Gutierrez, ASTC for Easements, NRCS**, provided and Easement Assistance Program Update. Roney can be reached by phone at 352-338-9502 or email [Roney.Gutierrez@fl.usda.gov](mailto:Roney.Gutierrez@fl.usda.gov).

- There are four Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) Projects in Florida
  - A new 2015 sign-up will be available soon
- Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) is the program for land that used to be a wetland and the desire is to restore it
- Agriculture Land Easement (ALE) is the program for land that is Agriculture and the desire is to keep it Agriculture into perpetuity.
- Rarely are Easement Applications from the Panhandle area, however they are welcomed to see if they qualify.

Q. Is there a county list for the areas where easements are normally done?

A. Yes, it will be provided

Q. Are Blueberries considered Crop or Perennial?

A. Perennial

Q. How long are Easement Contracts?

A. ALE – Eternal; Wetland – 30 year or Eternal. No longer offer 10 year contracts for restoration.

Q. Will the slides that were shown be available?

A. They will be provided with the minutes and emailed out.

In closing, Russell reminded everyone that no matter where our funds come from, they provide assistance for our producers. The meeting adjourned.

**Next Meeting:** No date was set; it will be scheduled at a later time.