

**Pacific Islands Area (PIA)  
State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting**

September 17, 2014  
1:00 – 3:00 p.m. (Hawaii Time)

**MINUTES**

**Welcome, Introduction & Review of Agenda – Shirley Nakamura**

**Partner Reports:**

Connie Laumann – FSA: Finalizing CREP projects; received emergency funds for Big Island from drought, vog, hurricane; spoke about Livestock Forage Program & NAP

Tui Anderson – Hawaii Rural Water Association: Contact Tui for any projects near drinking water sources.

Hudson Slay – EPA: Working with partners to implement watershed plans, and address polluted runoff and coral reef impacts (West Maui, South Kohala – Pelekane Bay & Waiaula).

Benton Pang – USFWS: Obligated \$3.5M in 2014; ranked FY-15 projects & hope to obligate soon; Loyal Merhoff leaving; Greg Koob joining FWS

Doug Beaton – Grazing Land Coalition: Supporting cattlemen and sheep/goat associations.

Mary Robblee – Kona SWCD: Spoke about Safe Harbor Agreement

**Farm Bill 2014 – Shirley Nakamura**

- The New Farm Bill was signed on February 7, 2014.
- With the New Farm Bill a preference will be given under EQIP and CSP for Veteran Farmers and Ranchers when the following are met:
  - Was discharged or released, under conditions other than dishonorable from U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, its reserve components and the National Guard.
  - Meets definition of beginning farmer or rancher and has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 consecutive years.
  - If the participant is an entity, all members of the entity must meet the above two requirements.
- AGI Provisions with New Farm Bill:
  - Beginning FY-15, the new AGI provisions will be effective for EQIP, CSP, RCPP, and ACEP (no AGI for these programs in FY-14).
  - AGI may not exceed \$900,000 and does not distinguish between on-farm and off-farm income. The previous limit was \$1 million unless 2/3 of income was from on-farm sources.
  - Removes ability to waive AGI except under RCPP.
- EQIP Advance Payments with the New Farm Bill:
  - Increases advance payments to up to 50% of payment amount for eligible practices to purchase materials and supplies.
  - Provides flexibility for repayment of advance payment if not expended within 90 days. Participants now have up to 90 days to install the practice rather than 30 days.

- Veteran farmers/ranchers, along with other historically underserved producers, are eligible for advance payments.
- Programs which sunset with the completion of Farm Bill 2008 and not offered in Farm Bill 2014 are WHIP, and easement programs FRPP, GRP, and WRP. The three easement programs will be combined into one program, ACEP.
- Programs offered under the 2014 Farm Bill:
  - EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentives Program
  - CSP – Conservation Stewardship Program
  - AMA – Agricultural Management Assistance Program
  - ACEP – Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
  - HFRP – Healthy Forests Reserve Program (no funding in FY-14)
  - CIG – Conservation Innovation Grants
  - RCPP – Regional Conservation Partnership Program
    - Furthers the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water, and wildlife on a regional scale.
    - Funding Allocation: 25% for State Projects, 40% for National Projects, and 35% for projects in Critical Conservation Areas.
  - VPA-HIP – Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program
    - Program formerly administered by FSA.
    - Provides block grants for state & tribal governments.
    - The purpose is to encourage owners and operators of private farm, ranch and forest lands to voluntarily make land available for access to the public for wildlife dependent recreation under programs administered by states and tribes.

**Review of FY-14 (Allocations, Applications, Obligations) – Nicola Giardina, Jessica McArthur**

- **EQIP** – Regular – Nicola Giardina
  - At least 5% of regular EQIP funding will be for practices benefitting wildlife habitat.
  - EQIP program payments are limited to \$450,000 for all EQIP contracts entered into from FY-14 to FY-18.
  - Estimate \$6,385,787 to be obligated for FY-14.
  - Estimate 143 EQIP contracts obligated in FY-14.
  - Priority Resource Concerns in FY-14: improved water quality and reduced soil erosion.
- **EQIP** – Initiatives – Nicola Giardina
  - National Water Quality Initiative – Hilo Bay: \$369,054 (4 contracts)
  - National On-Farm Energy Initiative- \$1,905 (1 contract)
  - National Organic Initiative (Certified & Transition): \$0 (0 contracts)
  - State Seasonal High Tunnels: \$93,427 (9 contracts)
  - State Wildlife: \$308,374 (5 contracts)
- **AMA** – Jessica McArthur
  - Estimate \$268,489 to be obligated in FY-14.
  - Estimate 4 contracts will be obligated in FY-14.
  - AMA is only offered in Hawaii in the PIA.
- **CStP** – Jessica McArthur
  - Obligated \$4,678 in FY-14 (4 contracts).
  - Land uses and acres benefitted: pastureland – 446 acres.

- **CIG** – Nicola Giardina
  - Estimated amount to be funded in FY-14 is \$77,357.
  - Estimate 2 projects funded in FY-14.
  - Projects to be Funded:
    - Demonstration of beneficial practices for pollinator habitats in conjunction with successful farming practices.
    - Demonstration of seasonal cover crops to increase soil health.
- **RCPP** – Nicola Giardina
  - Number of Pre-Proposals received for the State Funding Pool: 8 pre-proposals.
  - Amount of RCPP funds requested: \$7,585,661.
  - Number of Pre-Proposals asked back for Full Proposals: 2 pre-proposals.
  - Selection Announcement is set for November 14, 2014.

**FY-15 NRCS Programs – Request STAC Input** - Nicola Giardina, Jessica McArthur, Karen Dearlove

- Responsibility of STAC:
  - Provide information, analysis, and recommendations to USDA on conservation priorities and criteria for natural resources conservation activities and programs.
  - Identify emerging natural resource concerns and needs.
  - Recommend state program policy based on resource data.
  - Make recommendations to the NRCS PIA Director on requests and recommendations from the local working groups.
  - Assist NRCS with public outreach and information efforts.
- Sign-Up Deadlines (EQIP & AMA) – Nicola Giardina
  - October 17, 2014
  - December 19, 2014
- Priority Resource Concerns for FY-15 – Nicola Giardina
  - Water Quality Degradation – Ground or Surface (nutrients, pathogens, pesticides)
  - Soil Erosion – Sheet, Rill, Concentrated Flow, Wind
  - Soil Quality Degradation – Organic Matter Depletion
  - Insufficient Water – Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water
  - Livestock Production Limitation – Inadequate Livestock Water
  - Degraded Plant Condition – Undesirable Plant Productivity & Health, Excessive Plant Pest Pressure, Wildfire Hazard/Excessive Biomass Accumulation
  - Inadequate Habitat for Fish & Wildlife
  - Air Quality – Particulate Matter

Comments: Energy issues in CNMI discussed and the need for other options to expensive power. Suggestions given for EQIP funding possibilities and under R&D programs. Jeff Castro (CNMI rancher) problems with invasive species affecting cattle ranch (mimosa, ivy gourd). Shirley suggested EQIP can help with noxious weeds and invasive species and that field office can give him assistance.

Arlene Rosenkrans, NRCS, Pohnpei, asked why biodiversity loss was not a specific resource concern. Tony Ingersoll responded that it probably fits under inadequate habitat.

- Funding Allocations – EQIP – Nicola Giardina
  - Funding Allocations will be for each Field Office under crop, grazing and forest lands.
  - Funding Allocation for Statewide/National Concerns will be for the following:
    - Farmstead/Animal Feeding Operations
    - Coral Reef Initiative
    - Water Quality Initiative
    - Energy
    - Organic (Certified & Transition)
  - Funding Allocation must include the following:
    - 60% Livestock Related Project
    - 5% Practices That Benefit Wildlife Habitat
    - 5% Beginning Farmer/Rancher
    - 5% Socially Disadvantaged Producer
  
- EQIP Coral Reef Initiative – West Maui and Am. Samoa – Nicola Giardina
  - Proposed Project Area for West Maui will remain the same as FY-11, FY-12 and FY-13.
  - Proposed New Project Area in Am. Samoa at Faga’alu Bay.
  - No funding for the Coral Reef Initiative has been authorized to date.
  
- EQIP Water Quality Initiative – Watersheds – Nicola Giardina
  - Proposed Project Area for FY-15 is Hilo Bay (area addressed in FY-12, FY-13, FY-14).
  - Proposed New Project Area is North Kohala - Pelekane Bay and Waiulaula Watershed.

Comments: Tui Anderson, Hawaii Rural Water Association, said that the North Kohala watershed area is a sensitive aquifer with high chloride levels and degraded grazing lands. DHHL may put in a new well but this could possibly be problematic.

Question from CNMI attendee regarding the target area selection process. Shirley mentioned that NRCS asks for input on appropriate areas from FWS, DOH and others partners. NRCS also looks at who has the most local input/participation so the biggest problem area may not get the focus or the attention. Nicola also mentioned that EPA and NRCS got together with other agencies to identify high priority areas, but local work groups can initiate new priorities and elevate local concerns. Shirley said she would be happy to work with CNMI, Guam, and others, but local input is needed. Tony Ingersoll suggested that ways to demonstrate need is by establishing baselines.

Tui Anderson suggested that the Ugum Watershed could be an ideal candidate because of the bottom surface water treatment plant nearby.

- EQIP – Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) – requested input on the following CIG priorities for FY-15 – Jessica McArthur
  - Nutrient Management
  - Energy Conservation
  - Soil Health, Soil Quality
  - Sustainable & Organic Agriculture
  - Productivity & Enhancement of Wildlife Habitat (i.e., pollinator habitat)

Comments: Tony Ingersoll clarified that State level EQIP funds for CIG is separate from the National CIG program.

Steve Rafferty, Trust for Public Lands, commented that pig farms need help with cleanliness to qualify for other programs. Adam Reed stated that NRCS is currently funding such programs that address technical improvements and waste management issues. Shirley mentioned that CIG programs can help to spread the word about new techniques.

Tui Anderson commented on groundwater recharge in the PIA, especially for low lying islands subject to salt water intrusion. For example, need to look at improving groundwater recharge via reforestation, screens to catch fog drip, invasive trees that are water hogs. He mentioned that Lanai already gets 85% of groundwater recharge from fog drip.

- Payment Schedules – Nicola Giardina
  - Payment schedules are currently being developed based on resource concerns to be treated in PIA.
  - As of FY-14, we have payment schedules for Hawaii, Guam, Am Samoa, Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.
  - Payment schedules are developed for standard and historically underserved clients.
- ACEP – requested input on ranking criteria – Karen Dearlove
  - Provided an update on the new, consolidated Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and its two components:
    - Ag land easements (ALE) – former programs of Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) and Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) are consolidated
    - Wetland reserve easements (WRE) – former program of Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)
  - New ranking criteria for FY-15. Proposed changes, only applicable to the state criteria, involved deletion of points for proximity to cultural resources with substitution of points if recommended by local conservation district, as well as proposed slight changes in scoring for a couple other remaining state criteria.
  - Ag conservation management plans will now be mandated for all future proposals; all easements must now have conservation plans.
  - Planning needs to focus on lands in ag use with minimum of invasive species.
  - All proposals must be certified by FSA at time of application.
  - Recent issues that created easement problems due to the presumption of overestimation of property value. ACEP utilizes the Uniform Standards for Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) Appraisal for determining easement value.

Comments: Steve Rafferty stated that the new ACEP easement criteria probably justifies a meeting of its own given the difficulty of easements in Hawaii and PIA. Also, the extra criteria could make it more difficult to complete nationally. Karen Dearlove responded that the extremely late announcement for easements for FY-14 created an unusual circumstance for NRCS. She does not expect this to be the norm from FY-15 going forward. The new ranking criteria should further help prioritize those projects most ready to proceed. Steve Rafferty suggested a meeting with Hawaii land trusts, NRCS, and maybe Kip Dunbar. Shirley Nakamura said that this can be done. Karen Dearlove commented that State ranking criteria and interim regulations will need to be set first. Meeting should also include attorneys and key

farmers/ranchers. Steve Rafferty said that attorneys have not been encouraging clients to participate and also that more education and communication would make partners feel better about participating in the program. No other questions or concerns were expressed in regards to the proposed changes to state criteria. Karen mentioned that unlike previously, areawide analysis is not justified unless there are several parcels in the same area; individual appraisals will be used instead of areawide market analysis; not enough comparables for areawide analysis.

#### **NRCS PIA –Technology Update – Bart Lawrence, Tony Ingersoll, Amy Koch**

- State Resource Assessment (SRA) – Bart Lawrence
  - PIA completed SRA on Aug. 29, 2013 with final allocations expected in October.
  - New this year, CTA special initiative, will focus on two resource concerns; pollinator habitat and soil health.

Comments: Benton Pang requested a copy of SRA. Shirley Nakamura said that NRCS could not give out this report but could summarize and distribute.

- Vegetation Guide – Tony Ingersoll
  - The original Vegetation Guide developed by Bob Joy, contains plant species information which corresponds to the information in NRCS’s Conservation Practice Standards and Specifications in Section IV and the PIA Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).
  - Adam Reed has recently converted the Vegetation Guide into a spreadsheet and jobsheets. Standards and specifications have been combined with the jobsheets.
- Soil Health – Amy Koch
  - NRCS National Initiative, “Unlock Secrets In The Soil,” will include:
    - Videos and brochures/handouts
    - Special workshops: 3 workshops are planned this month in CNMI (Saipan, Tinian, Rota) and a 2-day training session planned in Hawaii.
    - Special Out Reach activities
  - Soil health is the continued capacity of the soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans.
  - Principles to improve soil health:
    - Keep the soil covered at all times
    - Maximize diversity
    - Keep living roots in the soil
    - Minimize soil disturbance
  - Why is soil health important?
    - Benefits productivity and profitability
    - Increases organic matter
    - Prevents soil erosion, increases infiltration
    - Improves water and air quality
    - Boosts water and nutrient use efficiencies
    - Provided habitat for beneficial soil life
    - Ensures soil will be productive for many years
  - How to improve soil health:
    - Crops – cover exposed soil and add mulch and compost
    - Grazing – implement a grazing management plan

- Plant Material Center (PMC) – Revised Mission – Tony Ingersoll
  - Glenn Sakamoto is now in charge of the PMC.
  - The PMC’s mission has changed where plant releases will be only 5% of the mission with more connection with field office staff and clients. Demonstrations will be 30% of the mission.
  - A new position has been created, PMC liaison. Cynthia Shishido has been assigned to fill this position which will encompass half of her duties.
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**Closing Remarks – Shirley Nakamura**

- Tentative Future Meeting Dates: Wed., Mar. 18, 2015; Wed., Sept. 16, 2015.
- We may have an announcement of the new PIA Director at the next meeting.
- New agenda items are welcome. Email suggestions to: Shirleynakamura@hi.usda.gov

**Attendees:**

	<u><b>Name:</b></u>	<u><b>Agency</b></u>
<b>Oahu:</b>	Tony Ingersoll	USDA-NRCS
	Shirley Nakamura	USDA-NRCS
	Nicola Giardina	USDA-NRCS
	Karen Dearlove	USDA-NRCS
	Adam Reed	USDA-NRCS
	Donna Hopwood	USDA-NRCS
	Kevin Kinvig	USDA-NRCS
	Robin Kelley	USDA-NRCS
	Tony Rolfes	USDA-NRCS
	Tui Anderson	Hawaii Rural Water Association
	Benton Pang	USFWS
	Jennifer Higashino	FWS
	Hudson Slay	EPA
	Connie Laumann	FSA
Steve Rafferty	Trust for Public Lands	
<b>Hilo:</b>	Jill Ficke-Beaton	USDA-NRCS
	Spencer Nagata	USDA-NRCS
	Alicia Greene	USDA-NRCS
	Lehuanani Angay	USDA-NRCS
	Laila Jayyousi	USDA-NRCS
	Doug Beaton	Grazing Land Coalition
<b>Kealahou:</b>	Jessica Schmelz	USDA-NRCS
	Jim Sutter	USDA-NRCS
	Laura Nelson	USDA-NRCS
	Carl Rossetti	USDA-NRCS
	Bernard Vermeulen	USDA-NRCS
<b>Waimea:</b>	Matthew Wung	USDA-NRCS
	Reese Libby	USDA-NRCS
	Drew Stout	USDA-NRCS
<b>Kahului:</b>	Kahana Stone	USDA-NRCS

	Carl Hashimoto	USDA-NRCS
	Ryan Woolbright	USDA-NRCS
	Kylie Wong	Maui SWCD
<b>Hoolehua:</b>	Wallace Jennings	USDA-NRCS
	Morgan Puaa	USDA-NRCS
<b>Lihue:</b>	Rick Patterson	USDA-NRCS
<b>Guam:</b>	Bart Lawrence	USDA-NRCS
	Brent Schumacher	USDA-NRCS
	Jeff Wheaton	USDA-NRCS
<b>Am Samoa:</b>	Diego Ayala	USDA-NRCS
	Jessica Ludgate	USDA-NRCS
	Joe Uigalelei	Am Samoa SWCD
	Robinson Mulitalo	Am Samoa SWCD
<b>Saipan:</b>	Kendal Hicks	USDA-NRCS
	Pam Aguon	USDA-NRCS
	Jay Doronila	USDA-NRCS
	Martin Naputi	USDA-NRCS
<b>Palau:</b>	Mark Defley	USDA-NRCS
	Dr. Joe Miles	Bureau of Agriculture
	Yalap Yalap	Palau Conservation Society
	Clarence Polloi	Protected Area Network
<b>Pohnpei:</b>	Arlene Rosenkrans	USDA-NRCS