

**WYOMING STATE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
March 3, 2016
Casper NRCS State Office**

Members Present:

Michael Ranta
Jim Cochran
Jennifer Hinkhouse
Brent Lathrop
Jennifer Zygmunt
Sol Brich
Cindy Hottel
Ben Begalke
Butch Parks
Kerry Olson
John Crisp
Mary Schrader
Josh Sherman
Brian Jensen
LD Gilbertz
Eric Schacht
Jeff Combs
Scott Sutherland
Dave Pelatz
Rigo Lopez
Rusty Schwartz
Dennis Sun
Holly Kennedy

Members via Teleconference:

Bob Mountain
Karri Cary
Julie Kraft
Summer Schulz
Gillian Bee
Cheryl Mandich
Sue Lowry
Mark Hogan
Martin Grenier
Colin Betzler
Justin Williams
Chris Wickman
Slade Franklin
Bobbie Frank

Grant Stumbough, NRCS Partnership liaison started the meeting at 10:05 am with introduction around the room. He discussed the agenda, and introduced Astrid Martinez, Wyoming State Conservationist.

State Conservationist Update – Astrid Martinez:

Astrid welcomed the group and updated the committee on several issues to include:

- **State allocation update:** (see attached)
 - 10.3 million in EQIP
 - Approximately 60 percent of EQIP budget will be allocated to the local level accounts
 - Wyoming was allocated \$2 million for Conservation Easements and have requested and additional \$4 to \$5 million from national headquarters.

- **Personnel changes:**
 - James Bauchert was selected as the State Soil Scientist and will be starting his new position later in March
 - State Resource Conservationist (SRC) is still vacant but is in the process of being filled. Randy Wiggins will be acting SRC for the next 30 days
 - Michael Neuenschwander was selected as ASTC- Management and Strategy. Michael comes from the Food and Drug Administration. His tentative EOD date is April 17, 2016.

- **Wyoming Ducks Unlimited Regional Conservation Partnership Project (RCPP) – Astrid asked Martin Grenier with Ducks Unlimited to provide an update**
 - Funding for the project was recently announced by National Headquarters
 - Project is entitled the Southeast Wyoming Wetland Partnership
 - Partners include NRCS, Wyoming Stock Growers Agricultural Land Trust, Intermountain Joint Venture and others.
 - Project area includes south and east of the North Platte river
 - Goals are wetland development, improve water quality and prevent the conversion of agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses.
 - \$1 million was award
 - Plan to enhance the capacity of the project by hiring a partnership coordinator
 - The project will utilizing Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs (ACEP), EQIP, and other Farm Bill Programs
 - Project will start this summer

- **National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)**
 - Two projects were selected to include one in Big Horn County and one in Washakie County (Alamo and No-water creeks)

- **Soils Survey meeting in Cheyenne**
 - Purpose of the meeting was to prioritize areas for soil survey work and to also identify additional funding sources
 - NRCS will target Sweetwater, Sublette County, and Carbon County for increased soil survey efforts

- **New RCPP program announcement** will be sent from National Headquarters in 2-3 weeks. Grant will send to the committee as soon as the announcement is made.

Sage Grouse Initiative Update – Brian Jensen, State NRCS Wildlife Biologist

Brian introduced himself and provided the committee with an update of the Wyoming SGI 2.0 program (power point presentation is attached).

Conservation Easement Framework – Ben Bigalke, Conservation Easement Specialist

Ben introduced himself and provided the committee with an update of the Wyoming Conservation Easement program (power point presentation is attached).

DEQ/NRCS White Paper- Jennifer Zygmunt, Sol Brich, and Grant Stumbough

- The purpose of the white paper is to identify ways that NRCS and WDEQ programs and services can be coordinated and/or linked together to strengthen watershed planning efforts resulting in increased implementation of voluntary conservation practices to effectively address priority watershed concerns.
- The white paper identifies cross training needs to improve staff's understanding of each agency's programs and services to improve efficiency and effectiveness.
- The paper thoroughly describes the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program, Non Point Source (NPS) program and all NRCS Farm Bill programs
- The paper also identifies training needs, opportunities, and areas where the two agencies can coordinate activities, programs, and services to assist local people in resolving water quality concerns.
- The next step is for NRCS leadership and DEQ leadership to review and make final comments on the white paper for final approval.

Rocky Mountain Area Update – Rigo Lopez, NRCS Area Conservationist

To date the Rock Mountain Area has 25 of 56 preapproved apps submitted to the AO for review. Below is the current status of the contract reviews:

- 16 – applications have been approved by the AO and sent to the SO for review
- 5 – applications reviewed and returned for corrections
- 4 – pending review (not started)

Worked with Districts to schedule Local Work Group (LWG) meetings as follows:

- DIV I scheduled for March 13 in (Greybull, Lovell, Powell, and Worland offices)
- DIV II scheduled for April 13th in Riverton, (Riverton, Lander, Ft Washakie, and Thermopolis offices)
- DIV III scheduled for April 14 in Lyman, (Rock Springs, Cokeville, Afton, Pinedale and Teton offices)

EQIP applications are as follows:

- Big Horn county 92 applications.
- Fremont county 98 applications

- Hot Springs county 17 applications.
- Lincoln county 16 applications
- Park county 60 applications.
- Sublette county 12 applications.
- Sweetwater county 4 applications.
- Teton county 3 applications
- Uinta county 7 applications
- Washakie County 45 applications
- Wind River Indian Reservation has 29 applications.

High Plains Area Update – Rusty Schwartz, NRCS Area Conservationist

- EQIP- High Plains Area
 - Currently High plains area has 70-80 preapproved applications that the field office are working on to obligate this April.
 - The status of those is that the field office has prepared the contracts and the Area office and State Office are checking them for accuracy, so we can move forward for funding.
 - The State goal is to have them obligated by April. This will be the earliest they have ever been obligated, which will give the landowner the opportunity to get the practices on the ground this spring.
- EWP
 - We had some preliminary indications that our EWP's are going to get funded. Those EWP's would be projects that were destroyed in the flooding last spring in Niobrara and Johnson County. We will have three projects tentative funded in Niobrara County and three projects tentative funded in Johnson County.
- LWG
 - Field Offices are working with the local Conservation Districts to schedule Local Work Group meetings for the FY-17 program year.
- Staffing
 - **Soil Conservation** position in Cheyenne, that was vacated when Randy Staples retired; we are working to fill that with a recent graduate.
 - **Civil Engineer** position in Douglas that we are going to fill with a graduating pathway student.
 - High plains has several **partner position** vacancies in the area.
 - National Wild Turkey Federation position in Newcastle. We are working out the details to secure the funding with our partners and look forward to filling it.
 - SWAT positions
 - Currently we have 2 vacancies, and we are working through the process to determine the best location to fill this position.
 - Bird Conservatory of the Rockies.

- We have a vacant partner position with Bird Conservatory of the Rockies in Gillette, One of the partners was unable to secure funding so we are working through the process to see if we can find someone else to get on board or how we want to address it.

Black Footed Ferret (BFF) Update – Brian Jensen, NRCS Wildlife Biologist

Brian talked about the pros and cons of implementing a Black Footed Ferret Introduction program in Wyoming (Power Point Presentation is attached). After Brian’s presentation, several comments and recommendation were made by committee members to include:

Wyoming Department of Agriculture:

- Concerned about how the BFF boundaries were going to be determined and how the ferrets would be kept within those boundaries.
- The Black Tailed Prairie Dog is a designated pest by the State of Wyoming which is the BFF’s **only** food source. This could cause legal problems for produces wanted to participate in the program.

Wyoming Stock Growers Association:

- Supports the 10(j) rule as it applies to the BFF.
- Concerned about how Black Tailed Prairie Dog boundaries (BFF habitat) were going to be determined and how they would be kept within those boundaries.
- Concern about utilizing limited state EQIP dollars to fund the BFF program.
- Did not view the BFF program as a priority for Wyoming NRCS.
- What is currently driving the BFF program and why?

Thunder Basin National Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association:

- Suggested that if NRCS wanted to initiate a BFF program in Wyoming, it should start with a pilot program in a designated part of the state where landowners supported the program, rather than starting with a program that would be implemented statewide.

Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts:

- Suggested utilizing the national RCPP program to potentially fund the program in a designated area or watershed where local people supported the introduction of BFFs and therefore avoiding the use of limited state EQIP dollars.

Brian also mentioned the Wyoming Game and Fish Department was going to host a meeting with partners in the near future to discuss potential BFF reintroduction locations, how many ferrets would be introduced and plans on how boundaries would be managed. The committee and Astrid felt it would be best to attend that meeting before making any final decisions on a NRCS BFF program in Wyoming.

Roundtable Discussion:

Jim Cochran recommended that NRCS provide more coordination and education in regards to implementing the RCPP program in Wyoming. Jim felt that NRCS could assist in coordinating information in regards to where RCPP projects are located, how to apply, and assistance in determining matching

dollars. It was decided that a RCPP training workshop would be conducted in Southeastern Wyoming upon National Headquarters sending out the FY 2017 RCPP announcement for project proposals. Jim will assist NRCS in this training and education effort.

Closing – Astrid Martinez, STC

Astrid closed with thanks to all and to travel safe!!!