

**USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**  
**STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**MINUTES**

December 5, 2012  
9 AM to 12:00 PM

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

**Present:** *Carlos Suarez, NRCS; Greg Hendricks, NRCS; Gail Hendricks, NRCS; Odessa Armstrong, NRCS; Ken Morgan, NRCS; Jeff Woods, NRCS; Roney Gutierrez, NRCS; Dytra Lewis, NRCS; Mike Ziegler, Agriculture Resource Management; Annette Long, Save Our Suwannee, Inc.; Laurie Hurner, Florida Citrus Mutua; Buzz Eaves, FGLC; Mike Thomas, FDEP; Jim Handley, Florida Cattleman's Association; Erin Myers, USFWS; Jerry Joiner, Joiner Consulting, Inc.; Richard Gaskall, FDACS; Mike Hollway; Curt Williams, Florida Farm Bureau Federation; Joe Vaughn, Florida Fish & Wildlife; Charles Gautner, FDEP; Bill Bartnick, FDACS; Kris Serbesoff-King, TNC; Joseph Prenger, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation; Ashley Batt, US Customs & Border Protection; Paul Hornby, APHIS; Ray Hodge, Southeast Milk, Inc., Tony Grossman, Florida Forest Service; Mark A. Luchte, SWFWMD;*

**Carlos Suarez**, State Conservationist, NRCS, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. He gave an overview on the purpose of the State Technical meeting. The purpose of the State Technical Committee is to advise the State Conservationist on the implementation and technical aspects of the natural resource conservation programs and activities. An email is sent out to the members of the State Technical Committee announcing the meeting and requesting agenda items. A list of the Committee members can be found on the Florida NRCS website by clicking on this [link](#). This is where members and others who have been forwarded the email can request time to present to the committee. The information presented during the meetings are suggestions to the committee overall committee. The meeting is announced in the Gainesville Sun in a reasonable amount of time and then the meeting is held. Carlos reiterated NRCS is a conservation planning agency first and foremost. Farm Bills conservation programs are tools to help assist with that.

- Carlos announced that Chief Dave White retired as of December 3 and Jason Weller is Acting Chief until further notice.
- Carlos restated that effective January 14, 2013; he will be the State Conservationist of California. No news on who will be the acting state conservationist yet, but as soon as the information is received, he will distribute it.

NRCS is operating under a Continuous Resolution (CR) and NRCS Florida received its budget allocation on Friday, November 30, 2012. NRCS can provide Technical Assistance (TA) for the next six months.

- FRPP has been extended.

- No Authorization for WRP at this time, therefore we cannot accept any new applications.
- November 16th was the application period deadline for FY 2013 EQIP and WHIP. Applications received have that date will be held for funding consideration in FY 2014EQIP allocation was lower than NRCS has received over the past 6 years.
- WHIP allocation is the same as last year.
- NRCS needs your help to ensure that farmers that sign-up for assistances for practices follow through to implement those practices. The lack of contracts being fully implemented by participants can negatively impact future funding levels for Florida.
- GRP has not been authorized yet.

**Jeff Woods, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (ASTC), NRCS,** provided a Financial Assistant Program update. He can be reached at [Jeffrey.Woods@fl.usda.gov](mailto:Jeffrey.Woods@fl.usda.gov).

FY 2012 Programs

Allocations:

1. CSP – \$2.4M obligated to fund prior year contract payments (2010 & 2011)
2. EQIP - \$22.6M
3. WHIP (WLFW) - \$1.1M

Applications	Obligations
CSP – 87 applications received <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 Non-industrial Private Forest               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 12.8 k acres</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 67 General Ag Operations               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 19.9 k acres</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	CSP – 43 contracts on 26.7 k acres <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16 Non-industrial Private Forest               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 8.9 k acres contracted</li> <li>○ \$70.9 k</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 27 General Ag Operations               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 17.6 k acres contracted</li> <li>○ \$365 k obligated</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
EQIP – 1210 applications received <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 275.6 k acres</li> <li>• \$32.4 m estimated cost</li> </ul>	EQIP – 615 contracts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 212.7 k acres contracted</li> <li>• \$22.3 m obligated</li> </ul>
WHIP/WLFW – 106 applications received <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 26.3 k acres</li> </ul>	WHIP/WLFW – 77 contracts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21.5 k acres contracted</li> <li>• \$895 k obligated</li> </ul>

Northern Everglades Initiative - \$5.9 m

Gulf of Mexico Initiative - \$1.5 m

Longleaf Pine Initiative – \$100 k

National Water Quality Initiative - \$928 k

## **FY 2013 Funding**

We are currently operating under a Continuing Resolutions. Funds have not been allocated to states at this time.

Anticipated programs to be funded this fiscal year

- EQIP
  - General
  - GOMI
  - Northern Everglades Initiative
  - NWQI
  - Organic Initiative
  - Longleaf Pine Initiative
  - On-Farm Energy Initiative
  - Seasonal High tunnel
  - Conservation Activity Plans (CAPS)

Statutory requirements for EQIP Funds

- 60% of funds must be obligated to assist livestock operations
- 10% of funds must be made available to Beginning Farmers and Socially Disadvantage Producers
- CSP – No definite decision made for 2013 sign up
- WHIP – Funds will be received for the Working Lands for Wildlife to assist landowners with improving habitat for the Gopher Tortoise

**Roney Gutierrez, ASTC for Easements, NRCS**, provided an Easement Assistance Program Update. Roney can be reached at [Roney.Gutierrez@fl.usda.gov](mailto:Roney.Gutierrez@fl.usda.gov).

FY 2013 Geographical Area Rate Caps (GARC) have been established for Florida Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). Below are the GARC Areas for the state:

- Area 1 (Northwest FL) includes the following counties: Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Holmes, Washington, Bay, Jackson, Calhoun, Liberty, Gulf, Franklin, Gadsden, Leon, Wakulla, and Jefferson. Property easement values for these counties will be based on individual appraisals.
- Area 2 (North – Central FL) includes the following counties: Madison, Taylor, Hamilton, Suwannee, Lafayette, Columbia, Gilchrist, Dixie, Levy, Citrus, Marion, Alachua, Union, Bradford, Baker, Clay, Nassua, Duval, Putnam, St. Johns, Flagler, and Volusia.
- Area 3 (Central FL) includes the following counties: Lake, Seminole, Orange, Osceola, Sumpter, Hernando, Hillsborough, Pasco, Polk, Brevard, Manatee, Sarasoto, Hardee, DeSoto, Charlotte, and Lee.
- Area 4 (South FL) includes the following counties: Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin, Okeechobee, Highlands, Glades, Hendry, Collier, Palm Beach, Broward, Monroe, and Dade.

Q. How can we get more FRPP in the state? (Erin Myers)

A. We may get more flexibility but we will not know more until the new Farm Bill comes out.

**Kenneth Morgan, Program Specialist, NRCS**, provided the Regional Financial Payment Schedule. By policy, the least cost amount is what we have to go with. Ken Morgan can be reached at [Kenneth.Morgan@fl.usda.gov](mailto:Kenneth.Morgan@fl.usda.gov).

**Annette Long**, President of Save Our Suwannee, Inc. provided a Florida Springs Update. Her concern is that there seems to be a disconnect between the agencies. She is presenting the information to give straight facts to everyone. Lower rainfall is affecting our aquifers. Springs and lakes are drying up, nutrient pollution continues to rise. Can we get programs to keep forests up? Can we end cost shares for new wells and irrigation projects that result from conversions from less intrusive to more intensive land uses? Ms. Long would like NRCS and partners to make sure farmers know that the city is not the only avenue.

- Comment from Ken Morgan: NRCS does not cost share on irrigation wells or irrigation systems for land that has not been irrigated 2 out of the last 5 years. Annette Long hopes the committee will consider her request and help to restore springs, rivers, lakes and sustainable water supply for Florida's future. She can be reached by email at [Long5892@bellsouth.net](mailto:Long5892@bellsouth.net).

**Erin Myers of USFWS** and **Kristina Serbesoff-King** presented on Private landowner incentive programs Florida Invasive Species Partnership. They provided a draft document where they requested feedback for recommendations.

- Issue:
  - To manage invasive species on private lands, state and federal agencies in Florida offer many different incentive based programs. However, these programs are often not as effective or efficient in addressing the threat of invasive species as intended.
- Acton:
  - Recommendations to strengthen effectiveness of private land incentive-based conservation programs as they apply to the threat of invasive species to agricultural sustainability and to environmental health.
- Background:
  - The mission of the Florida Invasive Species Partnership (FISP) is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of preventing and controlling invasive non-native species through partnering to increase communication, coordination and use of shared resources in order to protect wildlife habitat, working agricultural and forests lands, natural ecological communities and biodiversity in Florida.
- Recommendations:
  - Teach them how to fish: Ramp up technical assistance.
  - Encourage ownership: Change matching structure so that agencies provide financial assistance throughout the "initial" treatment period.
  - Don't forget the stick: Withhold final payment until site is certified as under maintenance level control.
  - Change is good: Encourage a shift towards payment for ecosystem series (PES).

In closing, Carlos reminded everyone that NRCS Florida is hosting the Grazing Lands Coalition Conference Initiative (GLCI) in Orlando. He thanked everyone for their attendance, participation and dedication. He appreciates that Florida partners are very candid about the issues and respectable when you disagree. He appreciates you all trusting him with that. He wished everyone a great holiday season. The meeting adjourned.

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