



Natural Resources Conservation Service
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PACIFIC ISLANDS AREA - STATE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA

Sept. 18, 2013; 1:00 – 3:00 pm

UH TIPG; 2424 Maile Way; Saunders Bldg, Room 713

Purpose: To obtain Feedback from Partners

1. EQIP Resource Priorities
2. Conservation Innovation Grants
3. Conservation Initiatives—Coral Reef, Water Quality

Introductions

Angel Figueroa (NRCS)

The NRCS PIA Director wants STAC meetings to be opportunities for NRCS partners to provide input regarding NRCS priorities with the following NRCS objectives in mind:

- Conservation
- Civil Rights
- Keeping our house in order (i.e. timely and accurate execution of contracts)

STAC participants asked to submit suggestions to NRCS

Partner Reports

Figueroa

Arlene Rosenkranz (NRCS, Pohnpei) would like more focus on water quality issues with piggeries
Carl Evensen suggested contacting Glen Fukimoto, a specialist on pig waste management, and specialist Mike Dupont

State Resource Assessment

Ben Schmidt (NRCS)

Purpose:

- method for states to document resource needs
- establish priorities within the state
- link assessment with technical assistance and financial assistance needs
- inform/influence the agency's performance metrics

Resource concerns – future focus:

- Soil erosion – e.g. on cropland, range exceeding T
- Soil quality degradation – e.g. SSURGO, organic carbon
- Excess water – e.g. SSURGO data
- Water quality degradation – e.g. 303(d), NRI acres
- Degraded plant condition

Helping People Help the Land

An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer



- Air Quality
- Livestock production limitation
- Inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife
- Insufficient water

To think about going forward:

- What are your conservation priorities or focus?
 - o Controlling access road erosion?
 - o Controlling coffee berry borer safely?
 - o Improving piggery management?
- What conservation practices are needed?
 - o Any changes in standards and specifications?
- What criteria should be used for applications and ranking?
- What are the emerging natural resource concerns or program needs?

Comments:

Hudson Slay (EPA) – Regarding coral reef watersheds, suggested “backing up” from focus on NRCS practices to look at the “big picture” link between land-based pollution and the aquatic environment.

Beth Boxler (DLNR) – commented on the fencing costs share rate under EQIP; said she asked FSA to increase funding for CREP because rates are inadequate; FSA told her they would follow NRCS cost share rates, so she would like to discuss raising rates with NRCS.

Shirley Nakamura (NRCS) – Currently finalizing cost share rates for FY14, so input still welcome
Adam Reed (NRCS) – NRCS headquarters tells PIA what components can be used, and a flat payment rate is used by NRCS. So receipts showing actual costs would be helpful.

B. Boxler – Deer have been introduced on the Big Island, which will increase fencing costs.

Angel Figueroa (NRCS) – Taller fencing for feral ungulates being considered by NRCS

Lawrence Duponcheel (Tinian SWCD) – Need to test water quality in streams near piggeries on small islands; need EQIP funding in Pohnpei.

Angel Figueroa – Pohnpei not eligible for Farm Bill programs, but wants to see if this can be changed.

Ben Schmidt (NRCS) – Some cost sharing may be possible in lieu of Farm Bill; other national governments may be interested in funding conservation

Programs Questions for the Partners

Shirley Nakamura (NRCS)

FY14 Farm Bill sign-up deadlines -

Request input on months of sign-up deadlines:

#1 – Mid-October 2013

#2 – Mid-December 2013

#3 – Mid-March 2014 (will announce this sign-up only if needed)

Note: Interested applicants may sign-up for Farm Bill Programs year-round. Exact dates will be announced at least 30 days before deadline.

Request input on FY14 EQIP natural resource priorities:

- A** - Soil Erosion (> T)
- B** - Soil Quality Degradation (Org C declining at > 100 lbs/ac/yr, saline soils)
- C** - Excess Water (potential wetland soil landscapes)
- D** - Insufficient Water (stressed aquifers; aridic/xeric/ustic soil moisture regimes)
- E** - Water Quality Degradation (sediment loss, runoff)
- F** - Degraded Plant Condition (degraded pasture/forest)
- G** - Inadequate Habitat for Fish & Wildlife (count of species)
- H** - Air Quality (EPA non-attainment zone)
- J** - Livestock Production Limitation (degraded pasture; rangeland in drought categories 3 & 4)

1. EQIP

- a. The natural resources priorities for the EQIP program. What do you want us to emphasize? What are the main practices?

Comments:

Hudson Slay (EPA) – How is funding prioritized? Does available funding match priorities?

Shirley Nakamura – National NRCS policy dictates that 60% of EQIP funds be set aside for livestock.

Adam Reed – Ranking sheet used to determine priorities.

Ben Schmidt – State Resource Assessment (SRA) looked at endangered species involved in ag land only.

Angel Figueroa – Suggested sharing ranking tool with public. Asked Hudson Slay to provide input on priorities and ranking tool criteria.

Kip Dunbar – Can the EQIP application approval process be accelerated?

Anne Rosinski (NOAA/DLNR) – Watershed initiatives should be a priority.

Beth Boxler – DOFAW watershed initiative should be a priority.

Paula Levin – What source does NRCS use for species counts? Are they based on numbers or quality? What does “excess water” mean? How important is wetland restoration vs cropland?

Angel Figueroa – Wetlands Restoration Program (WRP) encourages voluntary restoration.

Shirley Nakamura – Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) funding also possible.

Carl Evensen – Concerned about draught in East Hawaii and elsewhere in PIA. Also concerned about climate change and a possible increase in wildfires. Suggested using a new resource: the Pacific Fire Exchange.

Paula Levin: Suggested working with USFWS when ranking priorities because USFWS has done GIS mapping that could be helpful.

2. EQIP – FY14 Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

- a. The nature and types of proposals to consider for a robust Conservation Innovation Grant RFP in FY 14 for PIA. What do you suggest we entertain and fund?
 - Request input on CIG priorities:
 - Nutrient Management
 - Energy Conservation
 - Soil Health, Soil Quality
 - Sustainable & Organic Agriculture
 - Productivity & Environmental Health of Forestland
 - Preservation & Enhancement of Wildlife Habitat
 - Others?

Comments:

Shirley Nakamura – Some EQIP money available for CIG; FY14 sign-up will follow; are the priorities of the past still a priority today?

Angel Figueroa - Does NRCS have too many priorities or too few?

Paula Levin – Is PIA at liberty to eliminate some priorities? NRCS should prioritize sustainability over ag productivity.

Laura Brezinsky – Prioritize forests.

Beth Boxler – Prioritize forestry and give examples when putting out RFPs.

Jolene Lau (NRCS) – There is a spreadsheet on the national NRCS website that shows examples.

Angel Figueroa – Suggested attaching a link to that spreadsheet to RFPs.

Jolene Lau – It is also possible to subscribe to the website.

3. EQIP – Initiatives

- Coral Reef Initiative (CRI): Will not request CRI funding in FY-14
 - Prepare for FY-15
 - a. What areas to focus on for PIA in FY-15? What watersheds? What proposals might you have that we need to consider?

Water Quality Initiative (WQI): What areas to focus on for PIA in FY-14? What watersheds? What proposals might you have that we need to consider?

- If we receive WQI funding in FY-14, what areas should we (PIA) focus on?
 - Hawaii
 - American Samoa
 - Guam
 - Saipan
- Are there existing proposals for land treatment that we should consider to address water quality in impaired areas?
- If we receive WQI funding in FY-14, criteria for proposing watersheds may include:
 - Impaired Water Bodies (Nutrients & Organics, Suspended Sediment & Turbidity, Pathogens, Pesticides)
 - 303(d) Listed Water Bodies
 - TMDL Designated Waterbodies or Streams
 - Drinking Water is Threatened or Impaired
 - 12-Digit HUCs

Comments:

Shirley Nakamura – Even though no CRI funding available in FY14, can still apply for funding through EQIP.

Hudson Slay/Shirley Nakamura – do we have eligible farmers?

Hudson Slay – Determine overlap between NRCS and EPA. Suggested forming a sub-committee for coral reefs.

Angel Figueroa – Focus on salvageable reefs.

Shirley Nakamura – asked Anne Rosinski to serve on sub-committee, who in turn suggested a colleague.

(AT THIS POINT, NRCS-PIA DIRECTOR FIGUEROA HAD TO DEPART, AND SHIRLEY NAKAMURA TOOK OVER AS CHAIR FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE MEETING.)

4. Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)/CStP

- Anticipate receiving WHIP funds in FY-14
- 15-year contract option available for Essential Plant & Animal Habitat
 - Critical habitat designated under federal or state law (mapped by FWS via GIS)
 - Occupied plant or animal habitat
 - Any habitat for at-risk animal species (unoccupied at-risk animal habitat is eligible if its reasonable that the at-risk animal species will occupy the land)
- In FY-14, what wildlife habitat areas should we (PIA) focus on?
 - Hawaii
 - American Samoa
 - Guam
 - Saipan
- What plant or animal species should we focus on?

Comments:

Paula Levin – USFWS has staff on Guam, Saipan, and Kauai that can help.

5. Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

a. FY-14 Easement Valuation Method

- Request input on easement valuation method:
 - Conduct individual USPAP (Uniform Standards for Professional Appraisal Practices) appraisals in lieu of conducting an Area Wide Market Analysis (AWMA)
 - Value of WRP easement will be 85% of fair market value according to USPAP appraisals for all counties in the PIA

6. Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

a. FY-14 Easement Valuation Method

- Request input on easement valuation method:
 - Conduct individual USPAP (Uniform Standards for Professional Appraisal Practices) appraisals in lieu of conducting an Area Wide Market Analysis (AWMA)
 - Value of GRP easement will be the difference between the values of the unencumbered land and the proposed encumbered land

Comments:

Shirley Nakamura: No applications accepted since Sept 2012; hoping GRP will be reauthorized for next fiscal year.

Wally Jennings: Will submit comments by email.

7. Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)

- Overall Program Administration:
 - Protect agricultural use and related conservation values by working cooperatively with State, Tribal, local governments, and/or non-governmental organizations while leveraging the Federal investment with matching funds.
 - Entities requesting funding must submit a pending offer for each parcel in their proposal and have the required matching funds for the parcel(s) at the time of application.

Comments:

Karen Dearlove (NRCS) – Landowners cannot be the source of matching funds.

Shirley Nakamura - Land trusts usually provide matching funds?

Resource Technology Questions

Reed

Clarification of the Fencing Practice (382)

Background:

The use of fencing, on cropland and other land uses, has been in a state of flux in PIA for the last few years. Last year PIA was allowing fencing to exclude feral ungulates from all land uses as long as the practice was needed to install or protect previously installed conservation practice. For example: a fence may be needed to protect a micro irrigation system from being destroyed by feral pigs; or a fence may be needed to prevent deer from excessively browsing on a newly planted windbreak. However, recent conversations with program staff at NHQ have provided clarity and we learned that this usage of fencing was outside program policy.

Program Policy States:

Subpart I – EQIP Schedule of Operations – 515.81 Conservation Practices and Planning Activities

E. Ineligible Practices

(1) Ineligible practices are those—

- (i) In which the purpose is to enhance production without providing an identifiable conservation benefit or addressing a natural resource concern. Examples include –
- Fence (382) or Access Control (472) is ineligible if the primary purpose is to:
 - Separate ownership or exclude livestock from transportation networks or residential, commercial, or industrial areas
 - Exclude deer, hogs, or other wild animals from cropland
- Exception:** Boundary fence (property line fence) or perimeter fence is eligible:
- On expired or expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land to establish a grazing operation; however, the practice may not be installed until the CRP contract has expired.
 - On land to protect, restore, develop, or enhance habitat for wildlife or to exclude livestock from an environmentally sensitive area, such as a riparian area or wetland.
 - On land where the fence is an integral part of a conservation management system, such as a planned grazing system that facilitates improved management of grazing land.

In the practice payment scenarios of FY 14 we had to remove all mention of exclusion of feral animals as this is a pest management activity. Section 515.91b Ineligible Cost includes all cost associated with pest management with the exception of noxious and invasive weed control on non-cropland sites.

Summary:

- Fencing will not be allowed to reduce feral ungulate pressure on cropland.
- Fencing will not be used to manage pest.
- Fencing can be used to protect, restore, develop or enhance habitat for wildlife.
- Fencing can be used to exclude livestock from environmentally sensitive areas.
- Fencing can be used if it is an integral part of a conservation management system such as a prescribed grazing.

1. Feral Ungulates

2. Invasive

3. Grazing

Comments:

None

Summary, wrap-up & set up for next meeting

Make comments on agenda items to:

Shirley Nakamura, NRCS Asst. Director for Programs

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ATTENDEES:

Hudson Slay –EPA
Beth Boxler – DOFAW/DLNR
Carl Evensen-U.H. CTAHR
Laura Brezinski – Hawaii CC
Paula Levin - USFWS
Tom Camacho – FSA/Guam
Steve Peterson – FSA
Jody Chew – US Forest Service
Aileen Yeh – Puna SWCD
Noah Ching – Hawaii DOA
Kip Dunbar – Molokai (producer)
Lawrence Duponcheel – Tinian SWCD
Donna Ball – USFWS
Greg Takashimi – Hawaii DOH/Clean Water Branch
Michael Burke – Hawaii DOH/Clean Water Branch
Jill Ficke-Beaton – Mauna Kea/Hamakua SWCD
Margaret Fowler – Mauna Kea SWCD

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