

Odessa Armstrong, Programs Financial Assistance Specialist from NRCS was the moderator for the State Technical Committee Meeting held at the Doyle Conner Building.

Odessa introduced Russell Morgan, Florida NRCS State Conservationist. Russell welcomed all and began by stating that at this time, the USDA does not have a budget, but they are working on a Continuing Resolution. There is no Farm Bill as of yet, but NRCS is still working on prior year contracts.

Odessa then introduced the new Public Affairs Officer for NRCS, Renee Bodine. Renee thanked all for attending and told a little more about her background at the Forest Service and NRCS in Arizona. She stressed that it is more important than ever to get the positive stories and success stories out into the public eye. She stated that she looks forward to working with all the partners.

Odessa presented a Power Point presentation on NRCS's Financial Assistance Programs. She restated that there is currently no Farm Bill and that NRCS is working off a Continuing Resolution. Odessa also spoke about the new Energy Initiative, the Everglades Initiative, the Long Leaf Pine Initiative, the Gulf of Mexico Initiative, the National Water Quality Initiative, and the three other National Initiatives: Organics, Energy, and Seasonal High Tunnel.

She spoke about EQIP, WHIP, and CSP. EQIP benefits for the last three years include \$48 million spent on 500,000 acres being treated. WHIP benefits include \$2 million on 35,000 acres includes Gopher Tortoise conservation. CSP has spent \$3 million on treating 100,000 acres.

Next up was NRCS's Wetland Reserve Program Coordinator, Crenel Francis. Crenel began by stating that Florida's WRP program is the largest in the US, having the most acres, spending the most money to protect Florida's water quality and quantity and restoring wetland wildlife habitat.

He went on to say that of the \$460 million spent in the last five years, 95% of it was in the Northern Everglades, that there are ongoing WRP activities and due diligence must be had in the acquisition of the easements as not to expend valuable time and resources on fruitless endeavors.

Currently, there are 46 easements in the Plan & Design stage covering 11,000 acres, and with the help of partners, South Florida Water Management District, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, the US Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Corps of Engineers, restoration of these acres should be complete within seven years.

Crenel continued talking about the five WRP Easement Restoration projects currently in progress composing of 20,000 acres, and that most of those must be worked on during Florida's dry season.

Crenel concluded by speaking of the Monitoring and Management annually of GRP, FRPP, and WRP 30 year easements already in practice.

Next Odessa introduced Ken Morgan, NRCS Program Specialist, on the Southeast Regional Payment Schedule Team.

Payment schedules have changed in the past three years:

- FY12 Fifteen practices were paid based on regional developed payment schedule (The Southeast region includes FL, GA, AL, SC)
- 1-20 unique practice scenarios have been developed for each practice
- FY 13 all practice cost were based on the Regional payment schedule
- FY 14 – continued to use the costs from the FY13 regional payment schedule – Florida has 80 different practices and 300+ practice scenarios.

Possible additions to available Conservation Activity Plans include prescribed burns, feed management, springs development and crop management for residue management systems.

Next Odessa introduced Scott Sanders from Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission. Scott talked about Wildlife Best Management Practices for Agriculture which includes developing practical and meaningful Wildlife BMP's and being accountable for conservation occurring on working lands.

Scott spoke about how he has developed over the past four years the State Imperiled Species Management System. The State is the 1<sup>st</sup> line of defense to reduce the threat of a species becoming endangered. Currently there are 64 Species on the Florida list with 16 being recommended for removal from the list. BMP's are being developed together with the landowners and FDACS to ensure that changes in environment do not lead to the destruction of feeding and breeding habitat for imperiled species. Scott continued with how important it is to document agricultural practices where the wildlife thrives.

Scott spoke about BMP's for Aquatic Species, ensuring to address water quality, temperature, and sediment concerns. He spoke about BMP's for burrowing wildlife species, such as for Burrowing Owls and Gopher Turtles on crop lands. Scott talked about the importance of buffer areas for wading birds during nesting and fledgling seasons.

Scott also talked about developing Range maps for range restricted animals.

#### Guidelines for Wildlife BMP's

- Voluntary – non regulatory
- focus on avoidance and minimization – not recovery
- BMPs are tied with activities
- make easy for practitioners to understand and use
- Represent an alternative to Incidental Take Permits for state listed species.

Odessa introduced Doug Crawford who developed software for soil conditions. He talked about how it would measure soil moisture so the landowner would know when to irrigate, and help to manage soil nutrients.

Susie Bishop of Highlands SWCD was introduced next and spoke about how their area would like to have Smut Grass considered as a high concern/category 1 invasive plant species.

Additionally, she noted that out of their local working group meeting it was noted producers should be enrolled in a FDACS BMP with an active NOI to qualify for NRCS funding programs.

Lastly she discussed Variable Rate Technology/Tree See being a part of cost share in NRCS programs.

Russell Morgan, State Conservations gave his closing remarks.