

State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting

Tuesday, August 5, 2014

Jeff Harlow opened the meeting. Sherre Copeland was absent so Jeff conducted the meeting.

Jeff conducted roll call.

Peter Bautista discussed STAC oversight of Local Working Group Process:

Local Working Group FY 15 report:

LWG Kick-off meeting was on March 24, 2014 for the FY 2015 Program LWG process. Again this year, 75% of allocations by Land Use Accounts were to be directed to the top 3 identified resource priorities with remainder to go other local priorities as selected from the State Resource Assessment. A change for this year was that NRCS requested information regarding LWG interest in participating in national and state initiatives and special projects. Submittal D/L was May 16th 2014.

The LWG information was compiled and presented during the meeting. Reports to be posted following meeting. As with previous years, the LWG information compiled and discussed will be used for Financial Assistance (FA) Allocations development and submittal to headquarters by August 30, 2014.

In addition, it was mentioned that the LWG is a subcommittee of the STAC and their input compiled and provided to NRCS for use in its budget and program delivery is testament of its integral part of the locally led process.

Peter asked if the STAC had any recommendations to provide NRCS relative to the LWG report findings for statewide consideration, such as other statewide initiatives and / or priority focus. Additional comments and recommendations could be sent to Sherre Copeland by August 16, 2014, Friday.

A question came up about how to refine the LWG process. Can there be a sort of catch all to capture everything outside of three priorities? Peter said that the state tried to make it that way in FY 2015 process and will try to be more clear about the process in the future. The state attempted to provide flexibility in the category of other. Jeff and Peter said they would look at the guidance and try to make the process more clear. There's a feeling that the process is limiting and needs to be more efficient. Peter spent some time explaining the process. Categories can be broken down further.

Peter Bautista, State Resource Assessment:

The state tailored the SRA to mesh with LWG process. The current SRA expires the beginning of 2015. Peter explained the past resource assessment process. The current SRA was established with input from the LWGs in 2011, but some felt that this wasn't proper use of the LWG. NRCS is working on a proposal to have WACD and possibly WSCC help facilitate update of the SRA and to ensure it is able to dovetail other strategies and long range plans into the assessment. NRCS will engage the STAC in strategizing to update the SRA. Send recommendations through Sherre or through the STAC. Dave Vogel: WACD is interested in working with NRCS on the SRA and is looking at how to take information from the LWG that may or may not fit a program, to look beyond program-centric to what the resource concerns really are. NRCS has been encouraging LWGs to move in this direction for several years. The initiatives identified by a LWG may or may not fit a program. We want to look at how we can take resource concerns and incorporate them into a program. How can LWG and districts fit into the SRA process? Dave asked if there has been an

assessment to determine if this SRA effectively addressed the resource concerns it was designed to address. Peter said an assessment had not been conducted but stated it was a good idea. He suggested having an assessment of the past SRA completed by the next WACD conference at the end of September. Peter will have an assessment of SRA by next WACD meeting. Peter feels he can have information SRA Assessment of Accomplishment available by mid-October. The new SRA inventory assessment work can be started in FY 2015, following feedback from the LWGs with guidance to be provided on determining future priorities using past LWG priorities and SRA assessment of accomplishments. After LWGs provide NRCS all their new resource priorities, NRCS would then compile them and prioritize the state's top priorities. He at the least needs to know what new SRA priority resource concerns the state will address by the beginning of 2015. It would take a minimum of 6 months for NRCS to perform GIS inventory analysis and development treatment maps of new state resource priorities. A new SRA publication would probably be available for use in FY 2016.

The STAC had concerns that there might not be enough time to redo the SRA by Spring 2015. They suggested holding a LWG meeting in fall to share and review the SRA assessment of accomplishment. NRCS guidance on new SRA priority determination process to be provided for opportunity for LWG meeting and development of new priorities and submittal to NRCS, in order for NRCS to be able to compile results in coming out with new SRA statewide priorities by Spring in FY2015 and start the SRA inventorying and publication process by sometime in 2015. The STAC agreed if at a minimum the new SRA resource priorities were identified by the spring of FY 2015, the LWG process could be managed that year without a publication and maps, but would like to have the SRA publication completed in FY 2015 for FY 2016 use.

Peter requested for other comments and or recommendations on the SRA revision process to be provided to Sherre ASAP.

Jeff Harlow, RCPP Program

The RCPP program was announced in May 2015. Jeff explained how the program was rolled out. The state received a number of good proposals. NHQ has notified those who were invited to submit full proposals. Notification should have come from Mark Rose. Full proposals are due by 2 October. Accepted proposals will be announced by 14 Nov.

Results: NHQ received 52 pre-proposals in the national pool. WA submitted 4 and all 4 were invited to submit full proposals. NHQ had 84 CCA pre-proposals submitted. WA submitted 6; 3 were asked to submit full proposals. WA state submitted 14 pre-proposals for the state pool. WA applied national and state-level ranking questions and submitted all ranking scores to headquarters. Each state was asked to identify only its top 2 to receive invitations for full proposals. FY 16 requests will start sometime in the fall, probably November 2014. The state will not release results until NHQ gives approval to release. Not aware that any of the proposals were moved to different categories. Don't think there is a lot of room to merge proposals, i.e., combining approved proposal with unapproved proposal, but Jeff will find out. Jeff will double check to make sure notifications of accepted/rejected proposals were sent out. The STAC wanted to go on record that they felt there was miscommunication on how state proposals were going to be competed. They thought that all proposals would be competed at the national level instead of each state only submitting their top two. The STAC wondered if a decision had been made at the national level that each state would have two proposals funded regardless of how they ranked. The STAC suggested a letter be sent to Roylene expressing their concerns once all the ranking and selections are done.

Jeff Harlow: STAC input on EQIP Ranking Questions for 2015

Jeff asked the STAC for input on the state EQIP ranking questions. Can't touch national questions, but have discretion on state questions. Questions are the same for tribal ranking proposals. Jeff will send questions out to STAC for them to review. CAP questions will remain the same as all CAPs are funded.

Dave Kreft: STAC input on Healthy Forest Reserve Program Project Areas for 2015.

At the last STAC meeting, Sherre teed up this topic and asked for the STAC to be prepared to help identify priorities for the HFRP in case there was an opportunity to request funding or submit applications at any point during the current Farm Bill.

Brief overview of program. WA did not receive funding in 2013 or 2014, but the program was re-authorized in the new Farm Bill. Dave read the purpose of the program from the handbook: enhancing private forest lands to provide habitat for protected species. Options for enrollment, 30 year tribal land use contracts, 30 year easements and permanent easements. Funding for HFRP is currently not in the President's budget for next year, however, the RCPP could identify funding for HFRP. The program is administered by NRCS in coordination with USFW and NOAA. Even though the President's budget for FY 2104 doesn't include funding for the program Dave suggests still going forward with HFRP proposals because the budget will change before it is finalized. He suggests focusing on small, critical areas in the state as the best strategy for acquiring funding. We don't have any information yet on how it will be administered as re-authorized in the Farm Bill; rulemaking has not yet occurred. NRCS is convening a meeting on selecting critical grasslands for protection ahead of NHQ requests and could do the same for HFRP if the STAC feels it is appropriate. .

Dave Kreft: Wetland Restoration Easements

Received information on funding for new wetland easement enrollments, enough to fund about 400 acres. Agricultural land easements received funding for about three easements. The funding received this year is significantly less than in the past. Nationwide, the funding level for easements is about 50% of what had been offered in the past. Agreements need to be completed in about a month and a half.

STAC Roundtable:

Lee: Proposal for HCP by county. Opportunity for easements will be available through program. Being able to pursue Section 10 ESAs. The proposal covers the entire county. CD will be conducting the monitoring. It is a completely voluntary program. USFW assisted with the write-up. Just about ready to go to the Federal Register with it. Working on funding.

Ginger Phalen, USFW: The service has come out with a draft pre-listing conservation policy that was published in the Federal Register July 22nd. The policy focuses on species of concern and candidate species.

Dave Vogel: He would like all CDs to think about the role the CDs can play in the SRA process. Send Dave proposals and input.

Next STAC meeting is scheduled for September 23, 2014

Jeff: State has requested \$1 million for deferred grazing to help fire areas. Haven't heard anything about Emergency Watershed Program requests.

Meeting Adjourned.