



STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

WEDNESDAY, MAY 29, 2019

Start: 9:05 a.m.

End: 11:45 a.m.

Welcome and Introductions, Scott Crockett.

Thank you for joining us today we will have three presentations and technical discussions. We will discuss increasing the number of State Technical Committee meetings and set a tentative date for the fall 2019 meeting.

Cassie Storms, Assistant State Conservationist, Management & Strategy

State Conservationist position was advertised, and the job announcement closed Friday, May 17, 2019.

Second round of EQIP ranking has started we are requesting additional funding.

Alaska currently has a total of 41 staff in place - critically low. Seeking to hire an additional twelve positions with five vacancies currently submitted to FPAC for approval to hire.

Scott Crockett, Acting State Conservationist

Serving as Acting State Conservationist until a selection is made.

Funding is very low. It is a challenge to maintain status quo.

Overview of the purpose of the State Technical Committee. Topics from a customer-perspective are not appropriate for Committee meetings. A fact sheet that explains Committee role and function was provided.

Scott will ask the Committee to provide comments on Alaska NRCS' easement valuation process and next year's ranking criteria during the Fall meeting.

Members of the Committee have requested more frequent meetings. NRCS will schedule three meetings per year with options for sub-committee meetings between. The next meeting is proposed for October.

Input from the Committee results in improvements to NRCS program and technical assistance delivery.

*VISION: Productive Lands – Healthy
Environment*

*MISSION: Helping People Help the Land
An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer*

Christy Cincotta, Tyonek Native Corporation - RCPP presentation.

In 2015 Tyonek received RCPP financial assistance - currently 4-years into the project utilizing several partner programs.

- Contributions from NRCS, USFWS, Tyonek Native Corporation, and others.
- Partners include ATCA, Native Village of Tyonek, Tyonek Native Corporation, and others.
- Accomplishments to date:
 - Worked with ATCA to provide technical assistance to TCDs.
 - Completed 4 of 5 symposiums and the one remaining is in the planning stage.
 - Hired a tech at ATCA for all TCDs to provide support to the smaller TCD.
 - Completed 8 out of 10 site visits for tech assistance.
 - In process of training 6 Tyonek staff for NRCS Apprentice Planner certification.
 - Completed Tyonek Area Watershed Action Plan.
 - Tyonek action plans available:
<http://ttcd.org/?s=action+plan&x=0&y=0>.
 - Monitor watershed health.
 - USFWS to sample for salmon; added 27 miles to the salmon catalog.
 - Salmon and stream temperature monitoring at 13 sights.
 - Addressed invasive pike through 4 communities pike derbies and 2 suppression netting efforts.
 - A total of nine (9) conservation practices implemented mostly through culvert installations. Twenty-one miles of stream has been restored along with 600 feet of stream bank and habitat.
 - Tyonek grown. Demonstration to TCDs and Native villages.
 - Engaging citizens - reached 311 individuals.
 - 5 interns hired.
 - Produced and stored 2500 lbs. of food this past year.
 - Implemented control measures for invasive plants on Tyonek land.
 - Forest Stewardship Plan - permanent plots 6 total monitors on 3-year rotation. Two forest conservation plans for fire breaks and moose browse.

RCPP Update 2019 -Presentation document is available and can be requested by contacting Dee by email phillma.covalt@usda.gov. It is a large file and will most likely have to be mailed utilizing USPS.

Scott: Control and eradication of invasive species is typically outside of NRCS mandate. Ag Marketing Service might assist with the marketing of the pike as food.

Angela Peter, Executive Director ATCA

- Working on partnership meeting. Collective voice for conservation meeting August 27, 2019. Training session with first nations institute August 28 and 29th.

- Conducted and scheduled site visits.

Asa'carsamiut (Mt. Village) TCD	February 25- March 1, 2013; July 20-22, 2016
Kuigglugmiut (Kwethluk) TCD	March 11-15, 2013
Nunivak Island TCD	January 20-23, 2014
T'ee Drin Jik (Arctic Village/Venetie) TCD	January 28-29, and; November 22-23, 2016
Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission dba CRITR TCD	2015
Prince of Wales TCD	October 5-8, 2015
Tuyuryaq (Togiak) TCD	February 3-6, 2015; March 5-7, 2019
Nuvendaltun (Nondalton) TCD	August 17-19, 2015; June 11-13, 2019
Ketchikan TCD	July 22-25, 2019

- ATCA may reorganize to increase participation.
- We are already working on program development, policies and procedures, and receiving input from TCDs.
- Working with APU to offer courses in Alaska toward Planner Certification.
- Pete Peschang requests that ATCA consider a TCD statewide meeting and a capacity meeting at the request of Karen Linnel.

Karen Sonnen, NRCS Range Management Specialist.

Overview of reindeer grazing planning and range monitoring and importance of lichen to reindeer success.

Monitoring remote range in Alaska is challenging and expensive. NRCS works with herders to develop rotational grazing plans that will save the lichen for winter use and allow it time to recover from grazing.

UAF reindeer research program, BLM, and NRCS have a cooperative agreement to manage 24 grazing enclosures on the Seward Peninsula to monitor lichen recovery. The Reindeer research Program will be unfunded as of June 30. NRCS has agreed to take over management of the data set.

NRCS receives requests to assess rangeland condition. Villages seek to know about forage resource and potential. St Lawrence Island has requested help – the cost is around \$12-15,000 per day.

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd normally bypasses the Seward peninsula, but in the late 80 and early 90's they moved onto the peninsula where 15 reindeer herds grazed. Entire herds of reindeer were swept away by the migrating caribou. Now there are just 4-5 herds remaining.

Charles Parker inquired about using the T-Scan sights for monitoring.

Karin Sonnen: These sights will be of limited value for rangeland monitoring.

Rose Fosdick via teleconference line: Seward Peninsula, where much of the Reindeer activity has been active for 100+ years. SCS / NRCS produced some maps that were very useful.

Vegetation maps of Seward Peninsula – Range Survey done in the late 70’s and early 80’s, which are still very appreciated and useful today. The Kawerak Reindeer Herders Association would like the Seward Peninsula to continue to be monitored and assisted by NRCS.

NRCS is hoping to have funds to monitor the enclosures on State Lands.

Amanda Crowe, Assistant State Conservationist – Programs

This information comes from talking points handed down to us by National Headquarters.

- No new NRCS programs were added, and none were eliminated.
- The Conservation Title increases funding for EQIP, ACEP, and direct funding for RCPP.
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program contains improvements to make it more efficient and effective.
- Grasslands receive some focus through the new Grassland Conservation Initiative within CSP and the continued incentives to protect grasslands of special environmental significance within ACEP.
- Wildlife resource concerns are supported through the Working Lands for Wildlife effort, through ACEP-WRE, and through increased funding levels through EQIP.
- Urban growers’ concerns will receive increased consideration under the Conservation Innovations Grants and the availability of additional funding for soil tests and related activities.
- EQIP expands opportunities for Conservation Activity Plans to include soil health planning, planning for resource conserving crop rotations, and precision conservation management planning. Soil testing was also added as an eligible practice under EQIP.
- This Conservation Title also requires collaboration with community water systems.
- It specifically recognizes that producers are facing resource concerns created by extreme weather events and enables NRCS to help assist producers adapt to and mitigate against increasing weather volatility.

The new 2018 Farm Bill offers On-Farm Trials that support adoption of innovative approaches, practices and systems on working lands. On-Farm projects feature collaboration between NRCS and partners to implement on-the-ground conservation activities and then evaluate their impact. Incentive payments are provided to producers to offset the risk of implementing innovative approaches. Up to \$25 million annually is available for On-Farm Trials. Funding goes directly to partners, which in turn provide technical assistance and incentive payments to producers to implement innovative approaches on their lands. Producers receiving On-Farm Trials payments must be eligible to participate in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The maximum On-Farm Trials award for 2019 is \$5 million. The minimum award is \$250,000. The due date for applications is July 15, 2019. More information is found at:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/cig/?cid=nrcseprd1459039>

Scott, Acting State Conservationist

- Review of the sub-committee meeting regarding cost-estimates for Farm Bill programs.

- Alaska NRCS struggles to explain the high cost of doing business in Alaska to National payment schedule reviewers. We request that our partners provide us with actual transportation invoices if available.
- A new ranking tool, CART, is being rolled out for all NRCS programs. Training for NRCS has just started.
- NRCS encourages our partners to provide input on the ranking.
- The next Committee meeting is scheduled for October 10, 2019.
- A sub-committee meeting will be planned to discuss planner certification and CART.
- Charles Parker wants to know what the next step in the moist air process is? How will moist air incubation be evaluated as a practice standard.
- Theo Garcia indicated that Chickaloon has a moist air incubation system in place as an example.
- NRCS Mandated Curricula for Conservation Planners.
- National has specific certifications and there are state specific requirements also.
 - Three levels
 - Become familiar, know it exists
 - Understanding, can use KSA with Guidance
 - Proficiency without over sight of others. Is only required for some.
- Soil Cons take up to 2 years before they can go out on their own.
- NRCS only has 17 field staff. Phil is researching what it will take to get training out to the Conservation Districts.
 - Tyler Mockta has a master's degree in Forestry - which makes the transition to certified planner much easier.
- Apprentice / Certified / Master Planner can do training.
- We are trying to get one of our Tribal entities to become master planners.
- AVI and NRCS get together to perfect the in-state training so we do not have to send folks outside.
- Policy, expectation of quality skills.

Theo Garcia stated that a lack of certified planners limits their ability to apply for grants.

Scott: TSP is limited in Alaska and mostly applies to forestry. How can we look at this and what value is needed?

Will plan a sub-committee meeting and invite interested parties to participate.

Phil Naegele is working on policy for the planner certification process. We are on track, but it will be some months yet before we have a full process lined out.

Economics of Conservation Planning is coming to the state office August 20 – 22. It is required for Certified Planners.

General Discussion:

Karen Linnel requested a copy of the KSA's she thinks it needs to be a subcommittee meeting.

Dee will send the KSA's by e-mail. *Completed Wednesday afternoon, May 29, 2019*

➤ **Conference Room Attendees**

Scott Crockett, NRCS

Erick "Moe" Johnson, State of AK DNR

Trevor Dobell-Carlson, State of AK

Steven Holly, Tyonek

Kyla Gorgora, ATCA

Ken Backford, Knik TCD

Angela Peter, ATCA

Michelle Jezeski, NRCS Wasilla FO

Kristi Tapio-Harper, AK State Office

Amanda Crowe, AK State Office

Bryan Scoresby, FSA

Jeff Curry, FSA

Lisa Mounts, ATCA

Tyler Mockta, ATCA

Theo Garcia, Knik TCD

Charles Parker, AVI

Christy Cincotta, Tyonek

Ryan Maroney, NRCS AK State Office

Cassie Storms, NRCS AK State Office

Phillma Dee Covalt AK State Office

➤ **Teleconference Attendees**

Ronalda Angasan, AVI Ag Program Dir.

Michelle Jespersen, AVI Ex. Asst.

Will Putman, Tanana Chiefs

Michelle Edenshaw, POW TCD

Rose Fosdick, Kawerak Inc

Pete Peschang, Ahtna

Karen Linnel, Ahtna

Video Teleconference Attendees

Pam Voeller, NRCS, Homer FO

Karin Sonnen, NRCS Homer FO

Dorian Perez, NRCS Homer FO

Joanne Kuykendall, Fairbanks FO

The handouts that were shared during the meeting are very large files and not easily sent via e-mail. If you would like copies of the handouts, please send an email request to Dee at phillma.covalt@usda.gov or contact Dee by phone (907) 761-7747.