

Salcha Delta Soil and Water Conservation District
Notes from Local Work Group
January 25, 2021

Local resource concerns discussed at the meeting:

Forestry

- Access roads for firewood and timber harvest
- Grid firebreak construction for wildfire management
- Increased presence of Spruce Bark Beetle and beetle-killed trees
- Burning crop residue and berm rows on farms
- Railroad right of way may help provide better access to some timber resources depending on its final route

Fish and Game

- Elodea in area lakes and water bodies
- Access for sport fishing
- Water quality of rivers and lakes
- Declining moose habitat as forest matures
- Bison access to grazing on farms as fences are installed
- Improving farm fence construction to make them more wildlife friendly
- Reduction of spawning habitat due to silt entering the spawning streams

Agriculture

- Soil health on farms
- Noxious weeds and vectors to farm ground
- Pest management
- Lack of rotation crops places added burden on chemical use
- Cover crop knowledge for local area
- Incorporating additional IPM strategies to avoid resistance
- Air quality during windy periods due to field dust
- Continued growth of livestock industry is putting pressure on waste management, grazing management, heavy use areas, and feed quality and quantity
- Proper storage and handling of fuel and chemicals

Discussion of priority resource concerns for Delta area:

We went through the Local Work Group assessment tool to rank the resource concerns. We noted that several resource concerns identified during the discussion are interrelated. For example, practices that stabilize the soil of adjacent farms can reduce silt flows into the spawning streams. The final agricultural priority resources were as follows, in order of importance:

1. Wind and Water Erosion
2. Soil Quality Limitations
3. Degraded Plant Condition

4. Storage and Handling of Pollutants
5. Pest Pressure
6. Weather Resilience
7. Livestock Production Limitation
8. Air Quality Emissions

Forestry Resource priorities:

1. Fire Management
2. Aquatic Habitat
3. Air Quality Emissions
4. Concentrated Erosion
5. Storage and Handling of Pollutants
6. Pest Pressure
7. Source Water Depletion
8. Terrestrial Habitat

We also discussed the ranking of the fund pools with the following results.

- General – 5 votes
- Soil Health – 4
- High Tunnel – 1 vote

Ranking Questions

The LWG would like to see NRCS allow points in the ranking for an application that addresses local resource concerns, even if the local concerns is not included in the state resource priority list.

CIG

The working group agreed that we should request an allocation for Alaska CIG grants. We discussed how limited we are in herbicide technologies for pest control and agreed that a valuable product of a CIG would be to gain knowledge about additional herbicides that would work in our area along with identifying other IPM technologies that would allow more diverse methods of weed control.

Special Project

The group also discussed the limitations we face with using precision agriculture due to our high latitude. Signal loss in some locations and pass to pass accuracy over all could be greatly improved using a ground based RTK unit for signal correction. If located in the right place, a single unit could serve the whole farming area. The large farms in Delta create the perfect opportunity to maximize the benefit of using precision ag practices such as variable rate application, sub-inch pass to pass accuracy for field operations, and steering guidance to reduce farming's impact on the environment.

The use of precision ag would significantly reduce over application of fertilizer and chemicals, which in turn reduces farming's impact to our soil and water resources. It would also reduce the amount of fuel needed for farming operations.

We would like to explore a special project partnership with NRCS to improve access to precision agriculture for the farmers in this area.