USDA STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING
Iowa Soybean Association/Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance
1255 Southwest Prairie Trail Parkway
Ankeny, IA  50023

December 13, 2018
1:00 P.M.

MINUTES

Present:  Kurt Simon, State Conservationist-Chair, NRCS; Steve Hopkins, IDNR; Gregg Pattison, USFWS; Ben Gleason, IA Corn Growers; Joe Otto for Jennifer Terry, IA Environmental Council; Curt Goettsch for Amanda De Jong, FSA; Joe McGovern, INHF; Kelsey Fleming and Jamie Cook, Pheasants Forever; Jeff Jensen, Trees Forever; Sean McMahon, IAWA; Susan Hickey for Kristin Kashenbrenner, TNC; John Whitaker, CDI; Jarrett Pfrimmer, Kelly Schott, and Brandon Myer, Meskwaki Tribe; Sarah Carlson, PFI; Suzan Erem, SILT; Jean Eells, WFAN; Jace Klein for Charlie Schafer, Ecosystem Services Exchange/Agri Drain; Linda Kinman, Iowa Association of Water Agencies; Bruce Barnhart, LICA; via phone: Rick Robinson, IFBF.  Others not members: Todd Pederson, TNC; Todd Bogenschultz, Brian Hickman, and Brandon Gloves, IDNR via phone: Liz Hobart, GROWMARK; Darren Manthei, Kevin McCall, Jon Hubbert, Lori Altheide and Shelly Grimmius, NRCS

Welcome/Opening Comments – Kurt Simon, State Conservationist
Kurt opened the meeting thanking everyone for attending.  Thank you, Sean for setting up the meeting room today.  It’s nice to meet outside of downtown Des Moines.  And thank you to the Iowa Soybean Association for letting us come to their building.

New Farm Bill Status Update
The Senate and House have approved the 2018 Farm Bill and heading to the President’s desk for signature.  There are some minor changes, CSP and EQIP are flag ship programs and will remain as separate programs but shows increasing in CSP funding and decrease EQIP funding.  EQIP funding for livestock has decreased from 60% to 50%; funding for wildlife has increased from 5% to 10%.  Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreages are going to be increased over the five-year period from 24 million to 27 million acres.  New program under CRP is Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP).  This is opportunities for individuals to set aside ground similar to CRP but they are shorter term contracts to improve soil health.

Approval of Minutes from September 13, 2018
Kurt asked if there were edits/corrections for the minutes from the September 13, 2018 meeting.  Sean McMahon made the motion to accept the minutes as written, Joe McGovern second, motion carried.

State Off-Site Method Update – Darren Manthei
Kurt introduced Darren Manthei, Assistant State Conservationists for Compliance.  Darren came to Iowa approximately four months ago from Texas and has a wealth of experience in wetland compliance.  First time in Iowa to have a State Wetland Compliance Specialist.

Darren provided background information on the previous state off-site method – 2 years ago Federal Register Docket NRCS 2016-0012 provided notice of revisions to the state off-site method determinations.  A copy of the State Guidance for Wetland Determinations including State Offsite Methods, Iowa Natural Resources Conservation Service for the 1985 Food Security Act, as amended. 2017 Revised Version Released December 2018 was provided in the meeting packet.  There were detailed discussions with the group.
CRP Update – Curt Goettsch
Iowa CRP Totals as of the end of October 2017 - Iowa has the Nation’s largest CRP program with 109,068 contracts, with the third largest number of acres under contract at 1,786,530. Of the more than 109,000 contracts 100,479 contracts are under 50 acres in size. In fact, more than 67,000 contracts are under 10 acres in size. Iowa’s average size of a CRP contract is 16.38 acres.

CRP 2017 Program Year Report - Iowa landowners have enrolled 223,686 acres in to CRP on 9,875 contracts. On September 30, 2017, Iowa had 214,997 acres expire. Meaning over the last year Iowa saw a net increase of 8,689 acres of CRP. Currently FSA is not taking application for the CRP program. FSA is finishing up CRP Sign-up 50 (Program Year 2017) with a deadline of January 12, 2018. At some point after we expect the USDA to look at where we are at Nationally with respect to the 24 million-acre CRP Cap. At that time decision could be made as to how and which CRP programs might be made available in 2018.

Farm Bill Programs Update – Jon Hubbert
Jon provided an updated copy of At a Glance, Iowa NRCS, October 2018 along with several state maps with EQIP, EQIP-RCPP, CSP, Easements, CRP Contracts, and State Cost-share practices numbers, acres, and obligations per county and went through in detail. Not having a new Farm Bill at this time, we have limited authority to work on EQIP, CSP, and easements. There was a detailed discussion from the group.

Jon also provided the FY19 Iowa MRBI Watershed state map showing West Branch Floyd River, Deep Creek, Prairie Creek, Eagle Creek, Walnut Creek, Roberts Creek, West Fork Crooked Creek, Cedar Creek, and Lower Skunk. Another state map for the National Water Quality Initiative – FY19 Selected Watersheds showing Big Spirit Lake, Wall Lake Inlet, Badger Creek, Cedar Creek, Headwaters Wolf Creek, Lost Branch Chariton River, Lower South Fork Chariton River, and Upper South Fork Chariton River.

Iowa’s Early Obligation option for select National Program Initiative or Landscape Conservation Initiatives include:
  - National On-Farm Energy Initiative
  - FY19 On-Farm Energy CAPS
  - FY19 CAP 132
  - FY19 Iowa CAPS – newly created statewide sub-accounts for all other CAPS
  - High Tunnel System
  - Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project
  - FY19 Emergency Drought Relief
  - RCPP – Midwest Ag Water Quality Project
  - RCPP – Upper Cedar Watershed Urban/Rural Partnership

Kurt provided an overview of the Optimal Productive Office (OPO) dashboard that is being developed through Accenture. This dashboard shows exactly what work is being done in a specific office, able to project staffing needs, etc. – a decision tool for NRCS resources. It half way through production, but when it’s fully up and running, Kurt will provide a demonstration at a future meeting. Kurt provided details on how this effort started and proceeding. There was a detailed discussion from the group.

Sub-Committee Reports
CIG – Steve Hopkins (Attachment #1)
Steve thanked Marty Adkins for providing the talking points for the CIG Sub-Committee Meeting held on December 3, 2018. Steve highlighted the recommendations on verbiage changes for the 2019 CIG applications. Once NRCS receives their budget, we can send out a Request for Proposals (RFP). Linda Kinman made the motion to accept the Sub-Committee’s recommendations as written in their minutes, Sarah Carlson second, motion carried.
Steve wanted to thank Sarah Carlson for sharing the sub-committee report at the last meeting. Also thank you to Paul Goldsmith for his expertise and support during the time he was the EQIP Program Manager. Paul will be retiring on January 3, 2019 and a celebration will be held at the Peace Tree Brewery from 4-7 pm. Kurt mentioned Paul will be greatly missed. An advertisement for the position will be announced soon.

CRP – Sean McMahon (Attachment #2)
Sean provided a copy of the CRP Sub-Committee meeting minutes from December 7, 2018. Below is a recommendation to the entire State Technical Committee. There was a detailed discussion. Sean McMahon made the motion to accept the Sub-Committee’s recommendation, John Whitaker second, motion carried. Note: Susanne Hickey, TNC, has had enough time to digest the recommendation - opposed. The State Technical Committee would ask Farm Service Agency to forward this recommendation to their National Headquarters for consideration.

Include CP12 Food Plot as an available practice consistent with 2-CRP (Revision 5) Amendment 34, Exhibit 11 page 43 for the purpose of Iowa’s CREP Wetlands program. Allow for winter cover to be established in the form of a shrub or perennial planting, in total not to exceed 10% of the contracted acres. CP12 Food Plot and Winter Cover acreage shall not impact the wetland’s water control structures and must be planned to ensure the wetland structures are kept clear of shrubs and plantings with roots that could compromise the integrity of the wetland structures.

Iowa Partners in Conservation (IPC) Awards Update – Jon Hubbert
Successful applicant proposals must originate from Iowa and focus on one or more of these conservation issues:
- Build soil health on cropland.
- Improve environmental and economic performance of grasslands, woodlands and wildlife areas.
- Support the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy.
- Build capacity to better manage and maintain watershed infrastructure.

Emphasis will be placed on projects that:
- Provide direct technical assistance to agricultural producers through NRCS Field Offices.
- Build technical capacity of NRCS employees, partner field conservation employees, third-party vendors and non-affiliated private company employees.
- Build the capacity of local watershed groups to develop and implement effective projects.
- Leverage non-Federal and non-government resources to achieve positive natural resources conservation outcomes.
- Provide county-level and one-on-one outreach to farmers and landowners on USDA conservation programs and services in the highlighted (shaded) counties shown in Figure 1.

Applications are due February 4, 2019. Research proposals will not be accepted, nor considered. Kurt mentioned depending on our budget we are going to hold between $3 million to $5 million for IPCs. There is a cap of $750,000 per proposal. Marty Adkins is the lead if you have questions. There is a training session available on January 3.

Agency Announcements
Kurt Simon – NRCS has posted the Wetland / Highly Erodible Land (HEL) Compliance Interim Rule in the Federal Register last Friday. It’s open for 60-day comment/review period. Kurt provided details from the website.
Steve Hopkins – DNR Watershed Improvement announced a request for pre-applications for new watershed planning grants. Deadline is February 28, 2019. Funding for 9 element watershed management plan to address an impaired water - $75,000 grant. Contact Steve if you have questions.
Sarah Carlson – Practical Farmers of Iowa is holding their conference today with the Cooperators’ Dinner this evening. Sarah provided details of the Research Meeting. Sarah asked if there is one person within Iowa NRCS that coordinates county events so all counties know what each are doing/planning? Contact Laura Crowell, State Public Affairs Specialist, or Jason Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist. Planting date by planting rate study to see if cover crops planted later should have a different rate.

Suzan Erem – Suzan wanted to shout out to Shawn Dettmann, ASTC-FO in West Union, for getting their new grant manager in front of the district conservationists meeting in northeast Iowa.

Sean McMahon – Nominations are being accepted for the 2019 Iowa Watershed Awards to spotlight the work of a watershed coordinator.

Jarrett Pfrimmer – The Meskwaki Natural Resources are finishing up going through a merger, receiving agriculture subsidies on the settlement on a national scale. If you know any deserving people who could apply for the Lead for Water and Air go to the Meskwaki website at https://www.meskwaki.com/ to apply.

Susanne Hickey – Through the 4R Plus project, TNC has five continuing education courses targeted for certified crop advisors (CCA).

Todd Bogenschultz – Wildlife Extension Specialists at Iowa State and South Dakota State received a large grant to evaluate cover crop use for wildlife. They will be meeting in Washington County.

Jean Eells – Women Food and Agriculture Network is be holding another series of meeting for women who live in larger urban areas but maybe own rural lands. WFAN is on it’s third year in the CIG. Any help or assistance you can provide in promoting the meetings to help with soil health would be much appreciated.

Closing Comments – Kurt Simon
Kurt thanked everyone for being here. Truly appreciate your passion, dedication and guidance to him in this process. Your input is valuable and look forward to hearing and appreciate you in your efforts. Thank you!

Meeting adjourned at 2:34 pm.

Attachments

Future Meeting Dates
1:00 pm – Locations to be determined
June 14, 2018 – Iowa Farm Bureau, 5400 University Avenue, West Des Moines
September 13, 2018 – LICA Farm, 1741 290th Street, Melbourne
December 13, 2018 – Iowa Soybean Association/Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance
The following are points discussed for the 2019 CIG:

2019 Iowa CIG Talking Points

- The Conservation Innovation Grant program for 2019 is on hold, pending passage of the new Farm Bill.
- Assuming the CIG authority remains in place, the Iowa Conservation Innovation Grants announcement will wait until we receive a go-ahead from the National CIG Program Manager and receive a template for the announcement itself.
- The Iowa CIG Sub-committee of the State Technical Committee is working to be ready as soon as we receive a go-ahead. The sub-committee has met to review resource priorities for an Iowa announcement.
- The priorities are remaining the same as in 2018, namely:
  - Habitat,
  - Water Quality and Quantity, and
  - Soil Health.
- The sub-committee is recommending a few changes to specific issues to be addressed under the three stated priorities, as follows:

1) Habitat
The vast majority of Iowa is privately owned, and most privately-owned land in Iowa is engaged in agriculture. NRCS and its partners help farmers and private landowners address wildlife habitat needs through the conservation planning process and conservation practice implementation. The same practices that improve wildlife habitat often also help improve water quality, soil conservation and other resource concerns. Projects must address one or more of the following issues:

- Demonstrate the environmental benefits (water quality/wildlife) of managed grazing practices.
- Demonstrate practices that benefit Monarch butterflies, pollinators and other wildlife.
- Evaluate the potential use of carbon credits in grasslands and grazing systems.
- Evaluate and quantify the economic and environmental benefits of converting existing row crop areas to perennial grazing systems.
- Evaluate the potential benefits of agro-forestry/forest management to woodland health.
- Evaluate practices that reduce gully erosion within forest lands.
- Demonstrate practices that benefit pollinators within forest lands.

2) Water Quality and Quantity
NRCS supports ongoing implementation of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy, projects that address impaired waters, and projects at all scales to improve water quality. The scale and intensity of crop and livestock production in Iowa provide a myriad of challenges and opportunities related to water quality. At the same time, increasing annual, seasonal and geographic variability of precipitation in the Midwest challenge farmers to manage cropland grazing land and wildlife land to meet immediate economic needs and overall environmental goals. 2018 CIG proposals must address one or more of the following water quality and/or quantity priorities:

- Evaluate and quantify the economic benefits of practices that improve water quality.
- Demonstrate practices that improve water quality, including practices that reduce bacteria levels and that improve the biological health of waters.
- Demonstrate creative ways to increase farmer’s implementation of Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy practices.
- Demonstrate creative ways to implement the Iowa Nutrient Exchange in watersheds.
• Demonstrate and evaluate economics, soil and water quality benefits of a three-year or longer extended crop rotation.
• Demonstrate and evaluate economics, and soil and water quality benefits of integrating manure/nutrient management and cover crops.

3) Soil Health

Soil Health Management Systems

Soil Health Management Systems (SHMS) are a collection of NRCS conservation practices that focus on maintaining or enhancing soil health by addressing all four soil health planning principles: minimize disturbance, maximize soil cover, maximize biodiversity and maximize presence of living roots. A SHMS is a specific cropping system and contains practices that treat the entire field. When applied as a system, SHMS achieves the greatest soil health benefit by creating systemwide synergistic effects. Information obtained through soil health assessments can be used to develop a SHMS to target specific identified constraints. NRCS invites proposals that support the adoption of SHMS in one or more of the following areas:

- Evaluate and quantify the economic and water quality benefits of practices that improve soil health.
- Validate techniques that evaluate soil health metrics and practices.
- Demonstrate the economics of cover crops.
- Evaluate cover crop species performance in monocultures and mixes.
- Evaluate and quantify the economic and environmental benefits of integrating managed grazing into cover crops.
- Evaluate and demonstrate the best management practices for managing different types of cover crops.

As a reminder, here are the 2018 Iowa CIG projects that are now underway:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>NRCS Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Iowa</td>
<td>Assessing the Effectiveness of Alternative Tile Intakes (ATIs) in 3 Representative Regions of Iowa</td>
<td>Demonstrate the effectiveness of ATIs in different regions of Iowa, both as a standalone practice and in conjunction with Water-Sediment Control Basins and Terraces; and Simulate ATI implementation in conjunction with other BMPs over a range of field conditions and management scenarios at the HUC-12 scale.</td>
<td>$74,666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Farmers of Iowa</td>
<td>Contract Grazing Cover Crops: Demonstrating Benefits for Both Row-Crop and Cattle Farmers</td>
<td>This project will 1) demonstrate feasibility of contract grazing cover crops; 2) show economics pertaining to both row crop and livestock farmer profitability; 3) conduct soil health analysis in control and treatment plots on each demonstration farm with the goal of documenting soil health differences correlated to the integration of cattle.</td>
<td>$74,576</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practical Farmers of Iowa</td>
<td>Reducing Cover Crop Costs and Maintaining Cover Crop and Cash Crop Productivity</td>
<td>Generate relevant, credible, third-party information on strategies that reduce cereal rye cover crop seed costs with on-farm conservation research trials using farm- scale equipment. Inform potential changes to NRCS, IDALS, and others’ recommended cover crop practices as a result of knowledge generated by the on-farm conservation research trials.</td>
<td>$74,876</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iowa State University</td>
<td>Field testing and demonstration of a modified woodchip bioreactor designed for phosphorus and bacteria removal</td>
<td>The goal of this project is to evaluate and demonstrate the removal of N, P, and E. coli in woodchip bioreactors designed with secondary treatment for P removal. We will achieve this goal through installing monitoring ports at multiple locations in two new bioreactors, designed and installed in collaboration with Iowa NRCS.</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast Iowa RC&amp;D</td>
<td>Understanding and demonstrating multi-cropping in eastern Iowa</td>
<td>Introduce multi-cropping management systems as an option to help achieve the goals of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy.</td>
<td>$40,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa State University</td>
<td>Evaluation and Enhancement of Saturated Buffers as a Conservation Drainage Practice for Agriculture Subsurface Drainage Treatment</td>
<td>To improve the understanding of the function of saturated buffer, aid in their design, and assist in further adoption, the proposed research will address the following objectives: 1. Conduct literature review and field investigations of saturated buffers in Iowa. 2. Develop a model of groundwater flow using both MODFLOW and SEEP/W. 3. Develop a probabilistic model for slope stability analysis for saturated buffers using SLOPE/W. 4. Compare field measurements for Iowa saturated buffer installation sites with groundwater and slope stability model results. 5. Investigate relationship between groundwater flow, depth of stream channel, and distance from streambed to distribution pipe on the slope stability and erosion susceptibility of the streambed face. 6. Develop design guidelines for implementation of saturated buffers in locations with greater than 8 ft. (2.4 m) of incised channel depth. 7. Identify and recommend stability and slope armoring techniques to mitigate risk of channel bank erosion and failure.</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
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CRP Sub-committee Meeting  
December 7, 2018  
1:30 – 3:00 PM

MINUTES

Attendees: Andy Asell, Vince Sitzmann, Todd Bogenschutz, Brian Hickman, Jon Hubbert, Alan Lange, Curt Goettsch, Rick Robinson (via phone), Sean McMahon

I. Welcome and Introductions 
The chair called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm.

II. Farm Bill Update on CRP 
Curt Goettsch provided an update on recent Congressional actions related to the Farm Bill. The Congressional Budget Office should complete scoring the bill by Monday, December 10th. The House and Senate Agriculture Conference Committee will review the Farm Bill the week of December 10th. FSA anticipates changes in the cap to 27 million acres. Some portion of that will be prescribed to grasslands. There will likely be a shift to using a percentage of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) average for rental rates for CRP rental payments.

Curt reported that the average size of CRP contracts in Iowa has declined from 25.41 acres in 2001 to 16.21 acres in 2018. The overall acres in CRP in Iowa is about the same during that time period – 1,831,195 acres in 2018 as compared to 1,802,922 acres in 2001.

II. CPA Priority Areas 
The CRP Sub-committee requested that Iowa DNR present a proposal to update the Iowa Conservation Priority Areas (CPAs) combining priority wildlife units with priority water quality assessment units. Andy Asell with Iowa DNR presented a first draft of the proposal and will make refinements which will be shared back with the CRP Subcommittee by mid-January. This is for general CRP sign-up only.

III. CREP Wetlands Wildlife-Friendly Seeding 
Various stakeholders recommended to the CRP Sub-committee to revisit the requirements for CREP wetlands seeding so that they might provide better wildlife habitat and forage by allowing food plots and winter cover. Food plots and winter cover are not currently allowed because CREP agreements specify a CP-25 mix.

Vince Sitzmann moved the following motion to: 
Include CP12 Food Plot as an available practice consistent with 2-CRP (Revision 5) Amendment 34, Exhibit 11 page 43 for the purpose of Iowa’s CREP Wetlands program. Allow for winter cover to be established in the form of a shrub or perennial planting, in total not to exceed 10% of the contracted acres. CP12 Food Plot and Winter Cover acreage shall not impact the wetland’s water control structures and must be planned to ensure the wetland structures is kept clear of shrubs and plantings with roots that could compromise the integrity of the wetland structures.

Todd Bogenschutz seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

IV. The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 pm.