

State Technical Committee Minutes

Richmond, Virginia

May 28, 2013

Wade Biddix, NRCS ASTC-Programs, opened the meeting at 10:04 a.m. He welcomed everyone, introduced himself and asked those in attendance to do the same. Attendees stated names and agencies represented. A sign-up sheet was passed around the room and all were encouraged to pick up hand-outs from the front table.

Attendance: Wade Biddix (NRCS), Jack Bricker (NRCS), Emily Horsley (FSA,) Gary Moore (DCR), Libby Norris (CBF), Ron Wood (NRCS), Betsy Bowles (DEQ), Todd Groh (DOF), Ray Dorsett (NRCS), Patricia Stansbury (VABF), Mark Schonbeck (VABF), Seth Coffman (Trout Unlimited), Jim Schroering VCE), Dale Gardner (Water Stewardship), Blaine Delaney (NRCS), Patrick Vincent (NRCS), Diane Dunaway (NRCS), Maribeth Pettigrew (NRCS Recorder). **Connected via teleconference:** Greg Frey (VSU/VCE), Mark Dubin (UMD/MAWP/CBPO), Jim Baird (AFT), and Tim Sexton (DCR).

Jack Bricker, NRCS State Conservationist – Opening Comments: We have a full agenda. This is the first meeting we've had since the Caroline County meeting that kicked off the Soils Health campaign. That was an excellent meeting. We may do something similar in Blackstone in June or July. I thought this had been a record year and took a look at the finance sheets; it has been a good year, but 2011 was actually the record. NRCS seems to have plenty of money, even though furlough has been threatened. That is finally off the table for USDA employees. The Senate is pressing the issue a bit with a Farm Bill. Even if it is done by mid-June, it wouldn't reach the President's desk until October. Unless the stars really do line up in a way I've never seen, there will have to be an extension of the current Farm Bill. Mark Schonbeck mentioned that he had heard the House was going to be talking about it in June, and it seemed like it could be sooner. Jack assured him that it probably would not be before the end of the calendar year.

Wade mentioned that the Farm Bill extension is causing a problem with payment limitations for some program participants (limit is \$300,000 for the 2008 Farm Bill). Unless we get a new Farm Bill, that will still be an issue. And even if we do get a new Farm Bill, there won't be time to get all the program policies in place before FY-14, so the bottom line is that we'll be working with the same program next year.

Program Updates:

Emily Horsley– (FSA) – (handout) CRP/CREP – There had been a moratorium on CRP and CREP activity, but a couple of weeks ago those sign-ups started again. A number of acres are scheduled to expire. We are contacting those producers to see if they want to re-enroll. We have been close to the enrollment ceiling in the Southern Rivers area.

Sign-ups are now available – only top offers will be accepted. Users should be encouraged to be competitive. She provided a fact sheet on EBI and announced that sign-up will continue through June 14.

Gary Moore – (DCR) – Things still working in the Southern Rivers.

Diane Dunaway – (NRCS) – Easements – (Handout) – Reviewed FRPP, GRP and WRP standings. The issue this year with FRPP is that people are not able to come up with matching money (50%). Currently, there are 12 easements in the acquisition process. One closed this month; 2 or 3 will be closing in the next 2 or 3 months.

GRP – received funds for rental agreements, but none for permanent easements. Have some applications but will have to wait until there is funding.

WRP – recently received \$1.2 million total with \$500,000 for new easement acquisitions. We are compressing a years’ worth of work into a few months. 12 easements are in the acquisition process from FY-12. We are finishing up monitoring for the year.

Tree stands – we need guidance on how to handle these structures on easement land. Diane referred to handout that she and Blaine had created and asked for guidance from the group on how to deal with structures that are not obviously rustic and customary. Recommending that staff take a picture and send to the state for consideration. Wade added that we need to make sure that there aren’t any buildings or structures other than tree stands on wetlands. There may need to be more documentation in the record if there is a structure or something on the fringe.

Gary Moore questioned the review process and wondered about the possibility for an appeal process with the decision making. Wade noted that the DC out in the field is the one involved in the decision-making and that we’d always have the option of working with the landowner on compatible use authorizations.

Diane stated that we’ve come up with a handful of potential violations and our approach has been to try to work with the landowner and find a friendly solution. Litigation would be the last resort for violations. Dale Gardner asked for clarification; Diane explained that we had a situation where there was a shed that had to be excluded from the easement. Another case – a large bus had to be removed from the easement area.

Wade added that the whole nation is realizing there is a lot of easement land out there and there are problems with dumps sand trash piles. First approach, let’s document the existing tree stand – if it gets beyond what is normal and customary, we will work with the landowner to resolve. Todd asked a specific question, and Wade stressed that decisions really need to be made on a site by site situation.

Libby asked something about compatible use – Wade clarified that applicants may apply for a compatible use authorization. Diane explained one situation with a boardwalk to give an example.

Mark Schonbeck made an observation about guidelines. There were some questions and discussion (including the participation of Patricia and Libby). A conclusion from the discussion concerned the danger of including too much detail in guidelines, with the bottom line conclusion that it is better to determine decisions on a case by case basis. Wade emphasized that we need to make recommendations at the local level, but the final decision is made in the State Office.

Ron Wood; Patrick Vincent – (NRCS) - Organic/WHIP/EQIP/CSP – (Handouts) - We received \$45,000 in WHIP for the Golden Winged Warbler Initiative; on a handful of wildlife applications under EQIP, we are trying to get some people to switch to the WHIP funds because of that available money. For wildlife EQIP, there has been \$700,000 in contract approvals and pre-approvals. It has been a good year on the wildlife side of things. All these numbers are on the handout. The energy initiative is going extremely well with 6 pending applications. On the Organic front, there’s about a \$100,000 less than last year and 5 pending applications. Dale Gardner asked what the cost share is on that – Ron explained that it’s a regional allocation.

Mark Schonbeck asked about the cut off for EQIP organic. Answer: it was last Friday a week ago. It’s closed unless there’s some kind of special initiative. Ultimately things have to be obligated by July 1.

Ron pointed out that he’d left out longleaf pine and pointed out those numbers. We have contracted for more acres this year than ever before.

The last sign-up/batching period closed on May 17th. The end of this week is the deadline for field staff to do ranking and cost estimates. We probably have a few more applications than normal and are trying to iron out eligibility issues due to FSA’s migration to a new software system called MIDAS.

Ron stressed that there is a \$20,000 per year limitation on organic applications set by Congress; we could spend a few more dollars this week if eligibility issues are straightened out.

Libby Norris asked re: shifting money from one fund to another – Wade says there are some categories we can't move, but a lot of them, we can. Next week after all the rankings and costs are in, those kinds of decisions will be made. We cannot skip over ranked applications to find funding that matches. Funding decisions are made based on highest ranked applications, not according to how much money they want.

Patrick's presentation. Look at EQIP and CBWI funding spreadsheets. EQIP budget – money obligated for 641 contracts so far this year. 157 applications have been pre-approved but not moved to contracts yet. Reviewed contract and application numbers by the various fund pools. There has been a lot of activity with conservation activity plans - we funded every application we got. There are a lot of cropland contracts in the Smithfield area. In addition, we recently received an additional \$200,000 in forestry funding – backlog numbers will come down.

Patrick mentioned National Water Quality Initiative. Last year we had three watersheds to focus on. We didn't have a lot of success with those designated last year. We will start three NEW ones this year and are having much better success so far. He pointed out the maps with locations of watersheds on the news release.

CBWI has been allocated almost \$9 million – discussion of numbers on handout. 125 eligible and pending applications including cropland and pasture applications.

Dale Gardner asked what “no cost” means. Clarification: there is cost – the cost estimate just isn't in the system yet.

Wade said we have plenty of applications. There will be another funds assessment July 1 to assess needs of the various states, and, at that point, there can be a shift. We had a 12% increase in funding this year; we are down in staff numbers, but up in contracts. We may not be able to handle it all; may need to get help from forestry side or wildlife biologist's side. We can't continue to add money available and expect existing staff to handle, but we will try to fully utilize the funds we do have.

Dale Gardner asked re: leftover funds in “Socially Disadvantaged”. Wade clarified re: the applications for new and beginning farmers; we are required to put about 10% of our funding into those groups and those considered historically underserved. Five percent of funding has to go into new and beginning and another 5 to historically underserved. They can compete in individual fund pools or in their focused category. They get a higher payment; about 75% jumps to 90%.

Jack Bricker stated that NRCS has gone from giving out \$1 for every \$4 asked, to giving out 80 cents out of every dollar requested. It seems like we are fast approaching that one to one ratio, so the decline in field staff is definitely an issue.

Dale Gardner noted to Wade that it has been discussed previously, but the question comes up again about the possibility of having a data entry person to try to help take care of some of the administrative/paper work. Jack addressed that question. Response: A data entry person still costs money. We are trying to address a lot of that need with volunteers. Demands on the administrative side of the house are always increasing. Our state is doing fine in terms of use of money, but on a national level, NRCS fails the audit every year.

There ensued a discussion of workload throughout the state; it is challenging in heavy ag. areas, like the Eastern Shore and the Shenandoah Valley. That is one of our continuing challenges – to meet the need of landowners, but also take into account our staff realities and limitations.

Jack Bricker – (NRCS) – STRIKE FORCE – a Board of Directors has been set up including RD, Food and Nutrition, VSU, FSA and, of course, NRCS. Also the Risk Management Agency (RMA) will be joining the group at the next meeting. The object is to coordinate USDA efforts to get more producers and small businesses enrolled in government programs. Will be setting up a tour with Rural Development to acquaint people with loan availability. Food and nutrition here in VA will be using some food and nutrition dollars at local housing projects during the summer school months – that idea came out of our local VA Strike Force; it will start to be utilized nationwide. For this summer feeding program, VA will be the national model.

RMA will be on board; many partners want to become involved. Our partners can float the idea that other agencies can come and make suggestions and get involved. The Board will decide which ideas are viable.

NRCS recently received an additional \$611,000 in EQIP funds that were made available in Strike Force counties.

Presentation: CIG – Blaine Delaney – handout – This is the most we've ever allocated to the State CIG projects. 16 pre-proposals – 9 selected and asked to submit full proposals, which are due by June 28. Of those nine, 7 meet the priority need of soil health. The other two are within the suggested topic areas.

Jim Baird asked question re: feedback for those applications not accepted: Blaine said that would be going out by May 31.

Last year, we funded three CIG projects on the state level; hopefully this year it will be more than that. We are trying to get new technical info and practices to improve soil health. That is the objective of these CIG projects.

Edge of Field Monitoring – Wade – June 14 - handout – picture with monitoring equipment. \$7 million allocated nationwide for monitoring edge of field; these will be in the field 2-5-10 acres – paired watershed control situations. Can use data collection and analysis for up to 9 years. Will use EQIP funds for the needed conservation practices. War Branch and Gap Creek have been approved as the two watersheds. We are looking to evaluate conservation system performance. Sign is ongoing now. Farmers can apply. Hoping landowners will partner with universities and other agencies to work on this project. Money can go toward monitoring equipment, cost of data collection and analysis, or the installation of conservation practices. They must monitor for one crop rotation cycle with no planting, then two crop cycles after implementation of the conservation practices. Perhaps universities or partner agencies can help fund some of the cost of the equipment, monitoring or conservation practices. This is a new approach; just came out a few weeks ago; we'll throw it out there and see if we get applications. They may only fund a few projects nationwide

Mark Schonbeck asked if the fields had to be owned by the same landowners. Answer: It could be joint, but would take a commitment from multiple applicants. Hoping to find one landowner; that would be easier. Right now, it is just for cropland; may eventually be pasture too. It is limited to those two designated watersheds: War Branch and Gap Creek.

This just went out – if we get an application from an interested landowner, we will submit to HQ and then we will work to acquire partnership and support.

It is a very ambitious schedule and landowners in those watersheds can apply. We'll see what kind of applications we get.

Ray Dorsett – (NRCS) – State Resource Assessment (handout) – We've been asked to share in a nationwide assessment; we have until next Friday to finalize. We need to look at 2014, 2015, and 2016 with the goal of evaluating resource concerns, using acres as indicator. If we look at employee numbers – comparing to financial budgets, we have 11% fewer staff in ratio to the dollars we're getting; this is forcing us to reassess priorities and look at the Farm Bill – that's where we get money to pay staff. This nationwide assessment will

allow us to bring some national funding for state and local concerns. Hopefully we will be able to compare state to state, assuring that the same info is coming in for comparison – apples to apples; assessing current and future workload. More money, less staff – all our Farm Bill contracts are about 3 years in length – work that has to be done with the continuing concerns too.

Some of the areas to look at: soil erosion, soil quality degradation, excess water, livestock production, inefficient energy, air quality.

We can compete for a national pool of money after we've finished this resource assessment. However, it is a bit of a shot in the dark, since we're operating under the old Farm Bill and there's a lot of uncertainty with the national budget.

Dale Gardner noted that it might be easier if we had a two year cycle – Congress allocates on a fiscal year basis, so we don't have the option for multiple year applications. Jack said he didn't see this happening – even though it would be less stress. It's all got to be planned on an annual appropriation. Yes, it does put a lot of stress. All federal agencies have to deal with it.

In this discussion, we haven't even mentioned CSP – that is still upcoming. It is stressful, but it's just the reality - for us, but also for the field offices. The timing of everything creates stress. We are going to have an enrollment period for CSP in 2013.

Libby Norris talked about their lobbying – she asked re: chart. Answer: it reflects field staff only, not all area and state office employees.

Wade - FY 14 Program Year Preparation - We've sent out letters to SWCD chairs for Local Work Groups (LWG) – encouraging input from these groups by end of June; any suggestions, program changes, things that need to be included, tweaked - we'll have that info back by end of June. Wade also asked members of the STC to give that kind of input to be included in this information gathering. If you know of problems or issues regarding our payment schedules, let us know anything we might need to incorporate with updating payment schedules for FY-14. There will be a SO review of this info; will be looking for sub-committee volunteers. Hope to have that information to share at the July meeting.

Agency Updates:

Gary Moore – (DCR) –turmoil in DCR; last General Assembly took a bunch of responsibilities from the Stormwater Management Division and gave back to DEQ. Only about 20 people left in DCR itself. Many of their analysts going over to DEQ – they are currently referring to themselves as Division of “to be determined”. They are organizing and moving offices. Only two DCR regional offices are to be kept open – one in eastern part of state and one in western. There is a commitment of \$24 million in state cost share for next year; challenging times...

Libby Norris – (CBF) – they've been advocating really hard on the new Farm Bill; trying to maintain conservation funding as part of it and hoping for technical funding to go with it. There are still big projects on the ground in the Valley. Libby's primary focus has been more on the Eastern Shore, working with Tina Jerome, NRCS District Conservationist. They've been looking at CREP sites. She also has been working closely with Bob Glennon, Private Lands Biologist. One other big project concerns 3 CIG national grants – farm inventories - private contractors and people on the ground doing work in VA and PA re: nutrient input on individual farms. Working on software. Partnering in Northern Neck; coming to Culpeper next year. Software developed by NRCS. Mainly looking at practices and systems. Right now going through process to determine what will be inventoried on farms. They try to look at the whole farm, not just individual practices. Farms' participation is voluntary.

Mark Schonbeck – (*VABF*) – VABF is included as part of a National CIG that is integrating organic and sustainable farming. That is one thing they're working on; also involved in Farm Bill advocacy. Conservation and technical assistance are priorities for them.

Betsy Bowles – (*DEQ*) – Involved in Virginia Pollution Abatement; going through to make changes and ensuring consistency. Right now we have 150 farms covered. Those amendments should be going forward sometime around March. Trying to make sure VA pollution abatement stays in sequence – hope that will be released soon. At proposal stage with the State Water Control Board. Needs to be reissued by November. On another front – assessment evaluation program – 60 meetings with different partners and organizations to promote the program. About 200 evaluations have been completed; sets up priorities at some of those, roughly 50% on site assessments. They are doing this on a statewide basis.

Libby Norris asked if there is any internal guidance. Answer: Betsy said she did a training to try to focus them and move forward. Next week, they are doing a mandatory training – specific staff in regions – also talking about discharge and kinds of methods.

Wade asked re: hearing from EPA airborne pollutants – have heard a lot – what's happening? Answer: Have to wait for WV law suit to be resolved – poultry facility given an order; EPA wanted to drop lawsuit, but judge wouldn't let them. Big change – not talking about entire farm; foundation of building is production area. Wade indicated there are some offerings for livestock and confinement that we may want to include and asked that NRCS be kept informed.

Todd Groh – (*DOF*) – past history – CREP meetings held across the state; they are focusing on getting hardwood trees planted correctly. 187 people turned out for training. Speaking of training: sponsoring issue oriented field days, set up for June. Bringing resource professionals together, part of open land initiatives. All look at different things – want to be able to look at differences. Just now sending out information re: locations. Along the same lines, we have been holding forest certification workshops; this is becoming a priority. Allows landowners to be certified, saying they are handling their land properly.

Almost hate to mention – Reforestation of Timberlands (RT) Program is going to be able to put \$1.4 million out, July 1 – June 30. For forestry, that's a lot. The General Assembly matched those funds. Todd thinks that we are seeing an increase in EQIP because of what has happened with forestry.

Jim Schoering – (*VCE*) introduced himself as new with Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Greg Frey – (*VSU/VCE*) – Stated that VSU is hoping to focus efforts on what's important in VA and not get caught up in “university” egos. He is looking forward to collaboration with NRCS.

Jay Jeffries – (*VDGIF*) – VDGIF is going to try to participate more in STC. Quail recovery program is alive and well. All five positions are currently filled. 2 other things – VA is hosting the 2013 National Bobwhite technical committee. It consists of 25 state entities. It will be in Roanoke in July. Referred to Todd Groh (*DOF*) – wanted to talk about the collaboration between VDGIF and VDOF. They are helping to fund/cost share to advance early successional habitat, primarily in pine. Todd said they are hoping to have this arrangement in the future and be able to work together for a whole year – there are 4 practices that are very friendly to individual landowners. Those monies are unspent that come from Quail Initiative.

Jim Baird – (*AFT*) – BMP adoption system; we are working to establish BMPs; working with technical service providers. Not a replicated strip trial. Try to put a standard practice and then at yield time, analysis savings and/or cost. If there is an loss in production, farmers will be reimbursed. Very interesting; working with a sharp group of guys; Chris Lawrence was there from NRCS. Trying to get private fertilizer companies involved and getting input from all involved. PSNT outperformed farmer's practice – farmers did make money – the majority.

Also very pleased to get grant from license plate trust – will be sending us all applications.

Mark Dubin – (*UMD/MAWP/CBPO*) – University of Maryland – last week they held a 2 day workshop. Over 100 folks from around the watershed; folks from the ag. community specifically, but also agency and academic folks. Good input from community about developing CB watersheds. Will continue discussions and follow up. Funding for this was from USDA and NFWF. Some suggestions will be coming from that two day workshop.

Wade Biddix – (**NRCS**) in closing, asked if there was anything else that anyone wanted to add. Patricia Stansbury mentioned budget things – out in a no till field the other night; could hear bobwhite in distance; there aren't that many left. She expressed the idea that sometimes our practices are at cross purposes... so small animals sometimes don't have a chance. Mark Schonbeck emphasized that it is up to all of us to let people know what's out there - what's available.

Mark Schonbeck asked about final State CIG proposals. Answer: We can share those once the full proposals are done. Some information is propriety.

Wade closed, reminding the group that NRCS will appreciate our partner's help with Outreach in the months to come. He adjourned the meeting at 12:30. The next meeting is scheduled for July 23, 2013, at 10 a.m.

State Technical Committee
Agenda

May 28, 2013 - 10:00 a.m.
NRCS State Office Conference Room

Welcome and Opening Remarks	NRCS - Bricker
Conservation Reserve Program (CRP & CREP)	FSA - Horsley DCR - Moore
FY-13 Status of Program Funding Easements WHIP, Organic, and Special Initiatives EQIP, CBWI and CSP	NRCS - Biddix NRCS - Dunaway NRCS - Wood NRCS - Vincent
StrikeForce Initiative	NRCS - Bricker
State CIG	NRCS - Delaney
Edge of Field Monitoring	NRCS - Biddix
State Resource Assessment	NRCS - Dorsett
Preparing for FY-14 Program Year Local Work Group Input from State Technical Committee Update Payment Schedules	NRCS - Biddix
Agency Updates	All



Next Meeting - July 23, 2013

State Technical Committee

Henrico, Virginia

May 28, 2013

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) Report

- 16 CIG Pre-proposals (\$853,000 requested) were received
- \$75,000 is the maximum Virginia CIG Award
- **9 applicants** have been asked to submit full proposals
- **June 28, 2013** is the deadline for submission of their full proposals
- **CIG Topics** addressed by the 9 applicants asked to submit full proposals are:
 - **Soil Health (Priority Need) – 7**
 - Silvopasture – 1
 - Precision Agriculture – 1

There are 10 national standards that will be released any day now. Of these, seven are used in Virginia.

Engineering

Amendments for the Treatment of Agricultural Waste (Code 591) – updated.

Building Envelope Improvement (Code 672) – new. This practice was originally included in Farmstead Energy Improvement (Code 374).

Lighting System Improvement (Code 670) – new. This practice was originally included in Farmstead Energy Improvement (Code 374).

Sprinkler System (Code 442) – update of contents, new name. Formerly *Irrigation System, Sprinkler*

Waste Separation Facility (Code 632) – updated contents. Formerly *Solid/Liquid Waste Separation Facility*. Name changed to reflect that there may be a need to separate solids. Example: sand and manure.

Waste Treatment (Code 629) – updated.

Ecological Sciences

Fence (Code 382) – updated.

FRPP :: Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

- For the FY-13 allocation of \$3,436,976, we received two applications totaling \$1,625,000; this leaves an unspent balance of \$1,811,976.
- 12 FRPP easements are in the acquisition process, with 10 partners, total 2,054 acres. (3 FY-11 parcels with 4 partners, 9 FY-12 parcels with 6 partners.)
- One FRPP easement closed this month, on 81 acres in Clarke Co.

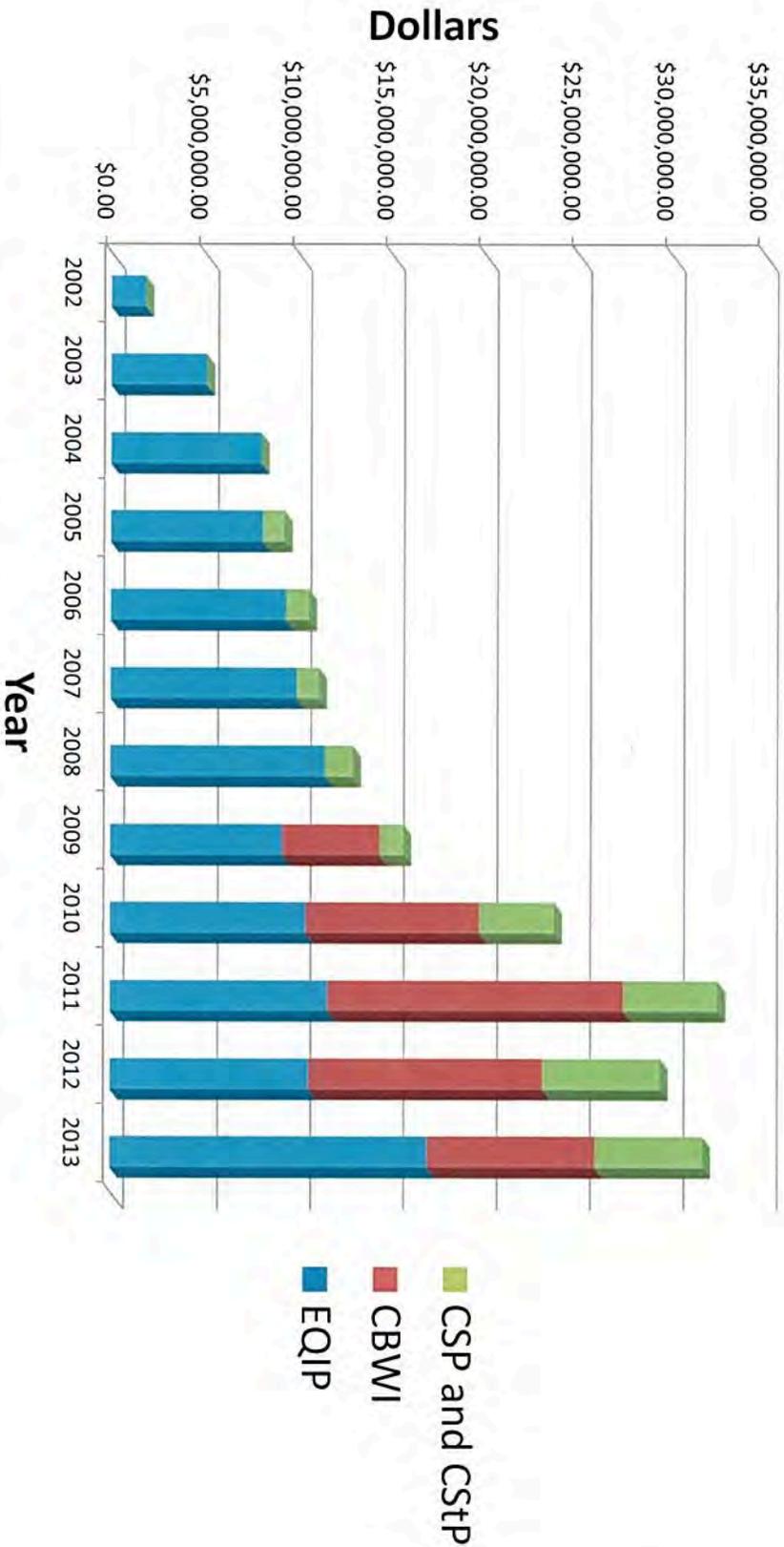
GRP :: Grassland Reserve Program

- We received new FY-13 allocation of \$8,000 for GRP Rentals.
- We have two GRP Rental applications totaling \$24,000, and so have requested additional funds.
- No funds were allocated to Virginia for GRP Easements.
- 2 GRP easements are in the acquisition process, one each from FY-11 and FY-12, closing is expected in FY-13, total 181 acres.
- NRCS annual monitoring is finishing up on all easements.

WRP :: Wetlands Reserve Program

- Considering all FY-13 allocations, we received \$1.2 M:
\$500,000 for new easement acquisitions, and
\$700,000 for restoration and monitoring on existing easements.
- 12 WRP easements are in the acquisition process:
3 from FY-11 and prior, and 9 from FY-12; closing is expected in FY-13, total 365 acres.
- 16 restorations are in the planning process or underway.
- 3 restoration plans were completed.
- NRCS annual monitoring is finishing up on all easements.

Financial Assistance Programs



Payment Schedules

Background

The 2008 Farm Bill provided NRCS with new authority to make program payments to participants based on the typical costs of conservation practice installation, rather than the actual costs. To reflect the new law, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and other programs were changed. The terms “cost-share” and “incentive payments” were replaced.

Payments now mean financial assistance for estimated costs incurred for conservation practices. Materials, equipment, labor, and training needed for a practice are included. Estimated foregone income may also be included for some conservation practices. Foregone income accounts for an estimate of the net income loss associated with the adoption of a conservation practice. Foregone Income includes estimated income losses for a change in land use or for land taken out of production or the opportunity cost associated with the adoption of a conservation practice.

NRCS developed and implemented the new payment schedule system beginning with Fiscal Year 2008 EQIP and other program payments including the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, the Agricultural Management Assistance Program, and the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program.

What is a Payment Schedule?

NRCS tailors resource management solutions to meet the needs of the resources and the producer’s objectives. These management solutions are accomplished through site-specific conservation planning and technical assistance.

Payment schedules standardize the method used for establishing financial assistance payments for practices needed in those solutions. They provide the basis for the amount of financial assistance provided for implementation of conservation practices.

What role do conservation practice standards play?

Each payment schedule contains scenarios that are based on an NRCS conservation practice standard. These scenarios describe the geographic area, typical resource setting, and natural resource concerns to be addressed. They also include the components and activities required to meet criteria in the conservation practice standard.

Each scenario describes the application of the practice based on the most common landscape setting. It includes

- how the practice is implemented,
- typical quantities and units,
- materials and other inputs used, and
- methods of implementation.

The typical scenario documents the technical adequacy of the practice. It also provides the authority for the final payment rate.

Contact: Chad Wentz, 804-287-1668

New Funding Available for Monitoring Activities in Smith Creek

Richmond, VA, May 21, 2013 – Shenandoah Valley crop producers now have a unique opportunity to partner with USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service to demonstrate how conservation practices are working to improve local water quality. With new edge-of-field monitoring offerings, farmers in the War Branch and Gap Creek sub-watersheds of Smith Creek can receive NRCS payments to install monitoring equipment, collect and analyze data, and track and measure the performance of conservation systems over time.

Interested producers should sign up by **June 14** to be considered for FY 13 funding for two conservation activities: monitoring system installation and data collection and evaluation. Monitoring activities will involve a multi-year commitment based on individual crop rotation schedules. NRCS will assist the participant to pair a control field (no management practices) with a treatment field (practices have been installed) and analyze the water flowing off the land. It is expected that the landowner will work jointly with a university or nonprofit organization to perform the monitoring activities in the contract.

“We selected War Branch and Gap Creek because they are located in the NRCS Smith Creek Showcase Watershed,” says State Conservationist John A. Bricker. “Over the last three years, we have conducted extensive outreach activities in Smith Creek, inventoried many of the farms there, and had success with accelerated implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs).”

“We also benefit from a longstanding partnership with nongovernmental organizations and federal, state, and local agencies and have a commitment from the U.S. Geological Survey to do in-stream water quality monitoring in Smith Creek over the next several years.”

Virginia’s priority needs for edge-of-field monitoring systems include those that address or investigate:

- Water quality benefits of cover crops; species selection and purpose (nutrient capture, erosion protection, and/or soil health).
- Matching buffer or filter width needs with slopes, erodibility, tillage and crop rotations.
- Water quality benefits from a conservation system with at least one practice that simultaneously helps producers avoid, control, and trap nutrient and sediment runoff.
- The effects of timing of commercial and manure nutrient application and/or the use of amendments/inhibitors on production and nitrogen and phosphorus losses.

The additional Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding is part of a \$7 million national allocation to implement these activities in watersheds associated with various NRCS initiatives, including the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative (CBWI).

For more information about this funding opportunity, contact Harrisonburg District Conservationist Cory Guilliams at 540-433-2901, ext. 118, or Strasburg District Conservationist Mike Liskey at 540-465-2424, ext. 108. For more information about NRCS’ programs, initiatives and services in Virginia, contact your local NRCS office or visit us online at www.va.nrcs.usda.gov/.

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Helping People Help the Land

FY-13 EQIP Budget Allocation 5/28/13

Fund Code	Account Name	Allocated	Contracts	Contract Approval	# of Preapprovals	Preapproved	Funds Remaining	Eligible/Pending	No Cost	Funding Request For Existing Applications
76F 51	Virginia	\$17,017,650.00	641	\$11,476,788.29	157	\$2,992,845.12	\$2,548,016.59	299	118	\$3,934,385.72
76F 51 AQ	Aquaculture	\$90,665.00	14	\$70,000.00	4	\$20,000.00	\$665.00	1	1	\$0.00
76F 51 BF	Beginning Farmer	\$813,295.00	20	\$773,268.00	1	\$26,822.00	\$13,205.00	20	8	\$492,139.00
76F 51 CA	CAPS-Conservation Activity Plans	\$187,730.00	77	\$139,955.00	22	\$46,120.00	\$1,655.00	12	5	\$12,305.00
76F 51 WQ	Chesapeake Monitoring	\$30,000.00	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	\$30,000.00	0	0	\$0.00
76F 51 CC	Cropland - Christiansburg	\$76,641.00	4	\$76,641.00	0	\$0.00	\$0.00	0	0	\$0.00
76F 51 CF	Cropland - Farmville	\$379,764.00	15	\$366,794.00	0	\$0.00	\$12,970.00	0	0	\$0.00
76F 51 CH	Cropland - Harrisonburg	\$267,460.00	8	\$159,281.00	4	\$107,480.00	\$699.00	14	5	\$68,990.00
76F 51 CS	Cropland - Smithfield	\$1,553,085.95	76	\$1,354,606.00	10	\$151,463.00	\$47,016.95	6	4	\$17,480.50
76F 51 FS	Forestry - Statewide	\$934,502.45	72	\$668,558.45	3	\$59,600.00	\$206,344.00	82	7	\$730,438.00
76F 51 2	FY13 Certified Organic	\$79,758.00	0	\$0.00	1	\$2,040.00	\$77,718.00	2	2	\$0.00
76F 51 4	FY13 On-Farm Energy	\$472,962.45	82	\$362,773.10	11	\$81,599.35	\$28,590.00	6	4	\$3,710.00
76F 51 3	FY13 Organic Transition	\$189,882.00	3	\$95,375.00	4	\$68,398.00	\$26,109.00	3	2	\$6,000.00
76F 51 5	FY13 Seasonal High Tunnels	\$545,000.00	66	\$381,643.60	20	\$117,619.60	\$45,736.80	20	13	\$39,634.20
76F 51 GG	Greenhouse Gas Project	\$1,000,000.00	2	\$12,492.00	5	\$484,000.00	\$503,508.00	1	1	\$0.00
76F 51 IW	Irrigation Water Management	\$123,957.00	12	\$123,957.00	0	\$0.00	\$0.00	2	1	\$10,000.00
76F 51 AC	Livestock in Confinement - Christiansburg	\$1,652,159.00	10	\$1,204,437.00	3	\$444,797.00	\$2,925.00	22	13	\$1,084,965.00
76F 51 AF	Livestock in Confinement - Farmville	\$1,033,863.00	7	\$851,244.00	2	\$182,619.00	\$0.00	7	3	\$124,050.00
76F 51 AH	Livestock in Confinement - Harrisonburg	\$680,442.81	11	\$424,244.00	6	\$188,029.10	\$68,169.71	18	7	\$325,219.07
76F 51 AS	Livestock in Confinement - Smithfield	\$49,005.00	4	\$49,005.00	0	\$0.00	\$0.00	1	1	\$0.00
76F 51 LP	Long Leaf Pine Initiative	\$206,669.00	5	\$206,669.00	0	\$0.00	\$0.00	0	0	\$0.00
76F 51 FM	NWQI - Fifteen Mile Creek	\$225,318.00	1	\$79,379.00	0	\$0.00	\$145,939.00	0	0	\$0.00
76F 51 MR	NWQI - Smith Creek - Mountain Run	\$225,318.00	1	\$87,338.00	1	\$3,391.25	\$134,588.75	0	0	\$0.00
76F 51 WB	NWQI - Smith Creek - War Branch	\$225,318.00	0	\$0.00	3	\$71,279.42	\$154,038.58	1	0	\$0.00
76F 51 PC	Pasture - Christiansburg	\$1,697,548.75	39	\$1,500,346.75	2	\$91,881.00	\$105,321.00	11	7	\$146,768.00
76F 51 PF	Pasture - Farmville	\$1,090,011.70	31	\$874,976.00	12	\$200,672.00	\$14,363.70	4	1	\$98,281.00
76F 51 PH	Pasture - Harrisonburg	\$426,681.15	9	\$187,495.00	7	\$233,274.00	\$5,912.15	38	16	\$197,245.95
76F 51 PS	Pasture - Smithfield	\$64,178.00	5	\$61,170.00	0	\$0.00	\$3,008.00	2	2	\$0.00
76F 51 SD	Socially Disadvantaged	\$864,793.00	9	\$864,793.00	0	\$0.00	\$0.00	9	2	\$229,488.00
76F 51 CG	State CIG	\$400,000.00	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	\$400,000.00	0	0	\$0.00
76F 51 SF	StrikeForce	\$611,000.00	1	\$3,149.00	5	\$118,156.00	\$489,695.00	2	0	\$343,000.00
76F 51 HA	Wildlife - Aquatic Wildlife Habitat Creation	\$16,040.00	0	\$0.00	2	\$16,040.00	\$0.00	1	1	\$0.00
76F 51 HM	Wildlife - Habitat Maintenance	\$116,383.50	16	\$88,226.50	3	\$26,582.00	\$1,575.00	3	2	\$2,000.00
76F 51 HC	Wildlife - Upland Wildlife Habitat Creation	\$617,041.89	41	\$364,287.49	26	\$250,982.40	\$1,772.00	11	10	\$2,672.00
76F 51 13952	FY13 EQIP Reserve	\$45,224.40	0	\$44,684.40	0	\$0.00	\$540.00	0	0	\$0.00
	Balance Available	\$25,951.95	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	\$25,951.95	0	0	\$0.00
	Totals	\$17,017,650.00	641	\$11,476,788.29	157	\$2,992,845.12	\$2,548,016.59	299	118	\$3,934,385.72

FY-13 CBWI Budget Allocation 5/28/2013

Fund Code	Account Name	Allocated	Contracts	Contract Approval	# of Preapproved	Preapproved	Funds Remaining	Eligible/P ending	No Cost	Funding Request for Existing Applications
97F 51	Virginia	\$8,967,000.00	157	\$4,735,086.70	131	\$3,657,927.40	\$573,985.90	125	36	\$1,798,008.94
97F 51 AB	CBWI - Animals in Confinement	\$3,052,585.85	21	\$1,866,207.50	8	\$820,636.80	\$365,741.55	27	7	\$881,732.09
97F 51 CB	CBWI - Cropland	\$2,463,421.90	90	\$1,314,863.00	51	\$1,112,899.30	\$35,659.60	24	6	\$282,186.00
97F 51 FC	Forestry CPI	\$167,000.00	5	\$77,680.00	8	\$77,575.00	\$11,745.00	22	6	\$138,995.00
97F 51 NF	CBWI - New Farmer	\$775,324.00	12	\$474,670.00	11	\$261,307.00	\$39,347.00	1	1	\$0.00
97F 51 PB	CBWI - Pasture	\$2,216,661.80	23	\$899,076.00	34	\$1,254,946.30	\$62,639.50	50	16	\$446,682.85
97F 51 SB	CBWI - Socially Disadvantaged	\$233,092.00	6	\$102,398.00	3	\$130,563.00	\$131.00	1	0	\$48,413.00
97F 51 TU	Trout Unlimited	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	\$0.00	0	0	\$0.00
97F 51 13979	FY13 CBWI Reserve	\$192.20	0	\$192.20	0	\$0.00	\$0.00	0	0	\$0.00
	Balance Available	\$58,722.25	0	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	\$58,722.25	0	0	\$0.00
	Totals	\$8,967,000.00	157	\$4,735,086.70	115	\$3,657,927.40	\$573,985.90	125	36	\$1,798,008.94

Funding Available for Monitoring in Smith Creek

NRCS has received new EQIP funding to partner with farmers to demonstrate how conservation practices are working to improve water quality in the War Branch and Gap Creek sub-watersheds of Smith Creek. This funding is part of a \$7 million national allocation to implement edge-of-field monitoring in watersheds associated with various NRCS initiatives, including the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative (CBWI).

We selected War Branch and Gap Creek because they are located in the NRCS Smith Creek Showcase Watershed where we have had success with BMP installation and partnerships. Farmers in these areas can receive NRCS payments to install monitoring equipment, collect and analyze data, and track and measure the performance of conservation systems over time.

Interested producers should sign up by **June 14** to be considered for FY 13 funding.



Participating producers will install monitoring equipment to analyze water flowing off the land.

Key Issues with “Edge of Field Monitoring”

Only approved for Cropland to address:

- Excessive Nutrients and Organics in Surface Water
- Excessive Suspended Sediment and Turbidity in Surface Water

Use a “Paired” Design for Monitoring Watersheds

Three Primary Purposes:

- Evaluate Conservation System Performance
- Validate and Calibrate Models
- Inform On-Farm Adaptive Management

Funding Available for:

- Monitoring Equipment - System Installation
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Conservation Practice Installation

Priority Monitoring Needs

- Water quality benefits of cover crops, species selection, and purpose (nutrient capture, erosion protection and/or soil health)
- Matching buffer or filter width needs with slopes, erodibility, tillage and crop rotations.
- Effect of timing of commercial and manure nutrients and/or the use of amendments/inhibitors on production and nitrogen and phosphorus losses.
- Conservation systems with at least one practice in the Avoid, Control and Trap categories simultaneously.

Data for Virginia all areas (1-4)

Year	Farm Bill FA per year	Contracts obligated per FY	Permanent Field Office FTEs per year	Total applications per year	BMP
FY04	\$13,023,578.13	592	103		
FY07	\$16,567,010.60	685	73	752	\$11,492,542.83
FY08	\$19,781,317.87	867	77	1077	\$12,395,179.07
FY09	\$21,159,139.14	882	81	1242	\$14,784,644.50
FY10	\$29,691,927.16	1066	96	1718	\$16,091,792.15
FY11	\$38,285,453.00	1341	89	1933	\$7,780,800.00
FY12	\$35,097,868.22	1033	93	1757	\$34,140,615.00
FY13	\$31,130,945.00		81		\$21,500,000.00

Data Sources:
 ProTracts
 NEST
 National Programs Website
 WLA 2007 2009 2012
 Virginia Employee Directories

***FY2004 application data not included due to rollover of FSA EQIP data skewing results (included ineligible and PY applications).

Contact: Wade Biddix, 804/287-1675

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FUNDS AVAILABLE TO FARMERS TO IMPROVE VIRGINIA WATER QUALITY

Richmond, VA, April 26, 2013 – State Conservationist Jack Bricker announced today that the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service in Virginia has received \$675,974 for an initiative to improve water quality in selected areas in Virginia.

With the help of local partners and state water quality agencies, NRCS selected three watersheds where on-farm conservation investments have the best chance to improve water quality: **War Branch** and **Mountain Run** in Rockingham County and **Fifteenmile Creek** in Washington County.

Mountain Run and **War Branch** are two of four watersheds that make up the Smith Creek Watershed. Both have documented impairments caused by sediment, nutrients, and pathogens. While the land in these areas is varied, the majority is in pasture and hayland with unlimited livestock access to streams.

Fifteenmile Creek in Washington County is a tributary to the South Fork Holston Lake near the Town of Abingdon. Pathogens from unrestricted livestock access are the major cause of the impairment. The predominant land use is pastureland with some scattered hayland and cropland fields.

“The additional funds we received under the agency’s **National Water Quality Initiative** will mean more opportunities to help farmers and forestland owners to install needed conservation practices that manage nutrients, pathogens and sediments,” said Bricker. “Water quality practices benefit the farmer by lowering input costs while providing cleaner water for neighbors and the community and healthier habitat for fish and wildlife.”

Eligible producers will receive assistance for installing conservation systems that include practices such as fencing livestock out of streams, installing alternative water sources, planting riparian forest buffers, improving vegetative and forest cover, implementing prescribed grazing and, in some cases, edge-of-field water quality monitoring.

As part of this initiative, NRCS is also piloting its new Water Quality Index for Agricultural Runoff. The tool will help landowners determine how alternative conservation systems they are considering will impact water quality improvement. Additionally, state water quality agencies and other partners will do in-stream and watershed-level monitoring to track water quality improvements in some watersheds.

Helping People Help the Land

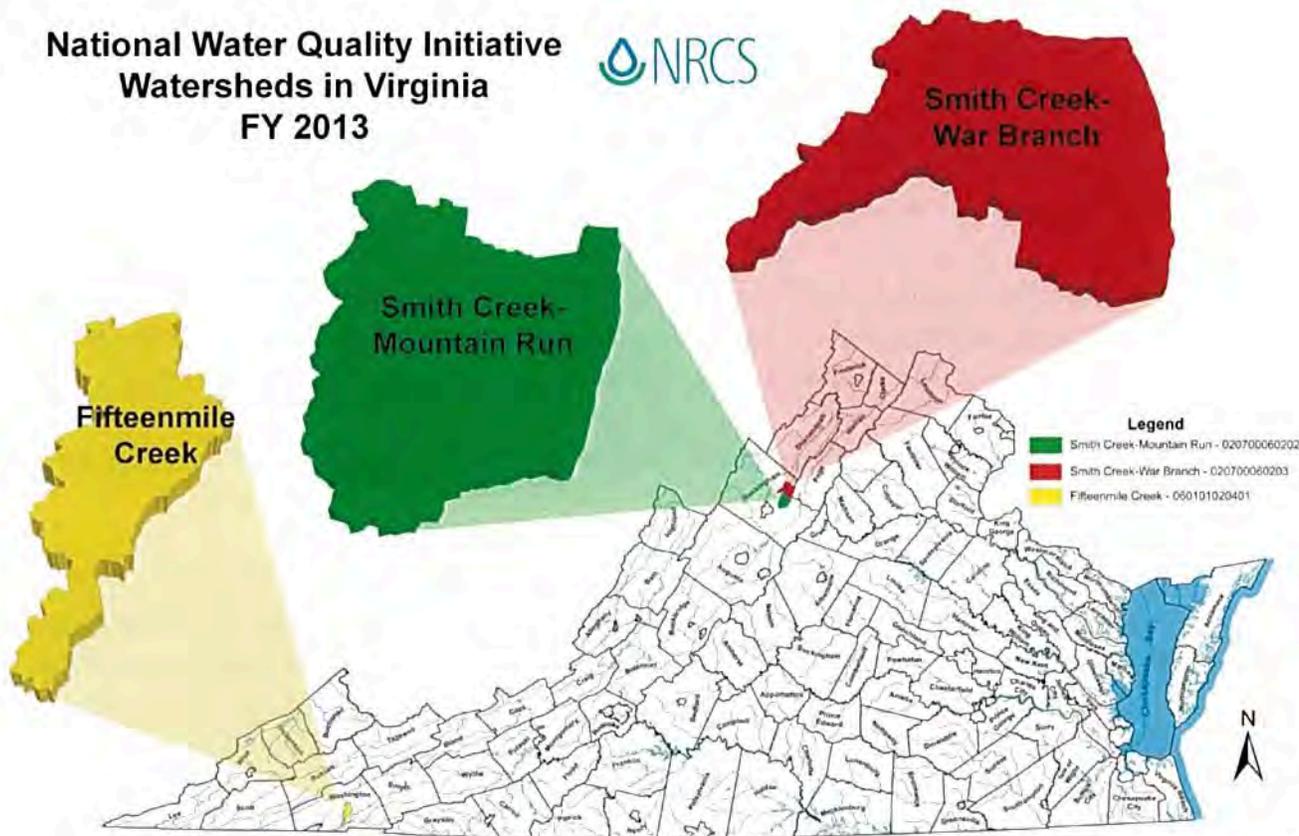
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NEWS RELEASE

NRCS accepts applications for financial assistance on a continuous basis throughout the year. Application deadlines for funding consideration during this fiscal year are **May 17, June 21 and July 12**.

For more information about NRCS' programs, initiatives and services in Virginia, contact your local NRCS office or visit us online at www.va.nrcs.usda.gov/.

National Water Quality Initiative Watersheds in Virginia FY 2013



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Helping People Help the Land

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FACT SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARM SERVICE AGENCY

February 2013

Conservation Reserve Program, General Sign-Up 45, May 20 through June 14, 2013

Overview

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will hold a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general sign-up from May 20 - June 14, 2013.

CRP is a voluntary program that helps agricultural producers use environmentally sensitive land for conservation benefits. Producers enrolled in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers to control soil erosion, improve water and air quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 to 15 years. Accepted contracts for CRP sign-up 45 will begin Oct. 1, 2013.

FSA administers CRP, while other USDA agencies and partners provide technical support. More detailed information on CRP is available in the FSA fact sheet, "Conservation Reserve Program."

Submitting CRP Offers

Land that is not currently enrolled in CRP may be offered for enrollment during CRP sign-up 45. In addition, CRP participants with contracts expiring on Sept. 30, 2013, may submit offers.

To submit CRP offers, producers must visit their local FSA office. FSA will accept offers only during the sign-up period. To find a

local FSA office, visit the USDA website at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

Eligible Producers

To be eligible for CRP enrollment, a producer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to the end of the CRP sign-up period, unless:

- The new owner acquired the land due to the previous owner's death;
- The ownership change occurred due to foreclosure where the owner exercised a timely right of redemption in accordance with state law or;
- The circumstance of the acquisition presents adequate assurance to FSA that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

Eligible Land

To be eligible for placement in the CRP general sign-up, land must be cropland (including field margins) that is planted, or considered planted, to an agricultural commodity four of the six crop years from 2002 to 2007, and be physically and legally capable of being planted (no planting restrictions due to an easement or other legally binding instrument) in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity. Alfalfa or other multi-year grasses and legumes grown in a rotation not to exceed 12

years may be eligible for CRP sign-up 45.

Additional Cropland Requirements

In addition to the eligible land requirements for the CRP general sign-up, cropland must meet one of the following criteria:

- Have a weighted average erosion index of eight or higher;
- Be expiring CRP acreage or;
- Be located in a national or state CRP conservation priority area.

CRP Payments

FSA provides CRP sign-up 45 participants with annual rental payments, including certain incentive payments and cost-share assistance.

Rental Payments

In return for establishing long-term, resource-conserving covers, FSA provides rental payments to participants. FSA bases rental rates on the relative productivity of the soils within each county and the average dryland cash rent. County office staff working with the producer will calculate the maximum CRP rental rate for each offer prior to enrollment. Producers may offer land below the rate to increase the likelihood that their offer will be accepted.

FACT SHEET

CRP General Sign-Up 45

February 2013

- **Cost-Share Assistance**
FSA provides cost-share assistance to participants who establish approved cover on eligible cropland. The cost-share assistance cannot exceed 50 percent of the participant's costs to establish approved practices.

Ranking CRP Offers

FSA will rank offers for CRP sign-up 45 according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). FSA collects data (primarily based on location, soils information and selected conservation practice) and determines the environmental indices for the land offered.

FSA ranks each eligible offer in comparison to all other offers and selects from that ranking. After the sign-up ends, the Secretary of Agriculture will decide where to make the EBI cutoff. Those who have met previous sign-up EBI thresholds are not guaranteed a contract under this sign-up. Producers may consult with local FSA and Natural Resource Conservation (NRCS) staff on how to maximize EBI points and increase the likelihood that their offer will be accepted.

More information on EBI for CRP sign-up 45 is available by reading the FSA fact sheet, "Conservation Reserve Program Sign-up 45, Environmental Benefits Index."

CRP Continuous Sign-Up

In addition to CRP sign-up 45, producers at any time, when authorized, can participate in CRP continuous sign-up, in which producers can enroll the most environmentally sensitive land.

More information on CRP continuous sign-up is available in the FSA fact sheet, "Conservation Reserve Program Continuous Sign-Up" located at www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/crp_sign_up_2013.pdf

For More Information

For more information on CRP, contact a local FSA office, or visit FSA's website at www.fsa.usda.gov/crp.

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Conservation Reserve Program Sign-Up 45 Environmental Benefits Index (EBI)

Overview

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will hold a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general sign-up from May 20 - June 14, 2013.

CRP is a voluntary program that helps agricultural producers use environmentally sensitive land for conservation benefits. Producers enrolled in CRP plant or maintain long-term, resource-conserving covers to control soil erosion, improve water and air quality and enhance wildlife habitat.

More information on CRP sign-up 45 is available in the FSA fact sheet, "Conservation Reserve Program General Sign-up 45, May 20 through June 14, 2013."

Ranking CRP Offers

FSA will rank offers for CRP sign-up 45 according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). FSA collects data for each EBI factor based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. EBI rankings are unique for each tract of land offered into CRP.

FSA assigns each offer a point score based on the offer's relative environmental factors. Each offer competes with all other offers. FSA determines offer acceptability based on the ranking results.

For CRP sign-up 45, FSA will use the following EBI factors to assess the environmental benefits for the land offered:

- Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from covers on contract acreage (N1);
- Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff and leaching (N2);
- On-farm benefits from reduced erosion (N3);
- Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period (N4);
- Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion (N5) and;
- Cost (N6).

N1 - Wildlife Factor Point score: 10 to 100

Factor N1 is an evaluation of the expected wildlife benefits of the offer and is comprised of three subfactors (N1a-c). The formula for N1 = N1a + N1b + N1c.

• N1a - Wildlife Habitat Cover Benefits (10 to 50 points)

This subfactor is an evaluation of the wildlife habitat cover offered. FSA assigns points for cover practice planting mixtures based on the potential value to wildlife within each state. FSA awards higher scores for cover types that are more beneficial to wildlife. Local USDA Service Centers have a list of approved planting mixes and the assigned point scores for each cover mix. Point scores are based on the weighted average score for cover mixes the producer selects. Native mixes of diverse species generally receive the highest point scores. Eligible cover practices under the N1a criteria are in Table 1.

(Producers should note that wildlife habitat cover selection is the most critical factor impacting wildlife benefits. Optimum cover types significantly increase the point score for this factor).

• N1b - Wildlife Enhancement (0, 5, or 20 points)

This subfactor provides up to 20 points for actions producers take to enhance the wildlife benefits for the offered acreage. Enhancement to the acreage is necessary in order to receive the points. For example, to receive 20 points producers may offer to establish a minimum of 10 percent of the acreage offered to pollinator habitat. Eligible practices under the N1b criteria are provided in Table 2.

• N1c - Wildlife Priority Zones (0 or 30 points)

FSA consulted with farm, commodity, wildlife and environmental groups to develop high-priority wildlife areas that would benefit from being enrolled in CRP. For land located within this defined geographic area, points are awarded for planting cover mixes to benefit wildlife species. This subfactor provides 30 points if at least 51 percent of the offered acreage is located within the wildlife priority zone and the weighted average N1a score is greater than or equal to 40 points.

N2 - Water Quality Benefits from Reduced Erosion, Runoff and Leaching Point Score: 0 to 100

One of CRP's main goals is to reduce the amount of sediment, nutrients and pollutants that enter our nation's waterways. Factor

N2 is an evaluation of the potential impacts that CRP may have on both surface and groundwater quality. N2 is comprised of three subfactors (N2a-c). The formula for $N2 = N2a + N2b + N2c$.

- **N2a - Location (0 or 30 points)**

This subfactor is an evaluation of the benefits of improving ground or surface water quality impaired by crop production. States have identified water quality zones for protection. At least 51 percent of the acreage offered must be within an approved water quality zone to receive 30 points. Local USDA Service Centers have detailed maps of the approved water quality zones.

- **N2b - Groundwater quality (0 to 25 points)**

This subfactor is an evaluation of the predominant soils, the potential leaching of pesticides and nutrients into groundwater, and the impact to people who rely on groundwater as a primary source of drinking water. Point scores are based on the weighted average leach index for soils offered for enrollment and the population that utilizes groundwater for drinking.

- **N2c - Surface water quality (0 to 45 points)**

This subfactor is an evaluation of the amount of sediment (and associated nutrients) that may be delivered into streams or other water courses. This factor is determined by potential water erosion in the watershed in which the offer is located.

N3 - Erosion Factor Point score: 0 to 100

CRP helps maintain the long-term productivity of the land for future generations. Factor N3 is an evaluation of the potential for the

land to erode as the result of either wind or water erosion. This factor is measured using an Erodibility Index (EI). FSA awards points for the weighted average of the higher value of either the wind or water EI, based on the results from Table 3.

N4 - Enduring Benefits Factor Point Score: 0 to 50

Factor N4 is an evaluation of the likelihood for certain practices to remain in place beyond the CRP contract period. N4 values are determined by calculating the weighted average score for all practices in Table 4.

N5 - Air Quality Benefits From Reduced Wind Erosion Point Score: 3 to 45

Factor N5 is an evaluation of the air quality improvements by reducing airborne dust and particulate caused by wind erosion from cropland. In addition, this factor has points for the value of CRP land that provides carbon sequestration. This factor is comprised of four subfactors (N5a-d). The formula for $N5 = N5a + N5b + N5c + N5d$.

- **N5a - Wind Erosion Impacts (0 to 25 points)**

FSA will determine the potential for the site to have wind erosion damage. FSA will award points based on potential wind erosion and the amount of population that may be impacted by the erosion. The potential wind erodibility is based on a climatic factor (wind speed, wind direction and duration of wind events) and soil erodibility.

- **N5b - Wind Erosion Soils List (0 or 5 points)**

A list of soils that are susceptible to wind and contribute significantly to nonattainment of air quality

standards has been developed. These soils have a dominant component of volcanic or organic materials that are highly erodible and can be transported great distances on the wind. If at least 51 percent of the offered acres are comprised of these soils, the offer is awarded five points.

- **N5c - Air Quality Zones (0 or 5 points)**

FSA awards a maximum of five points if at least 51 percent of the acreage offered is located in an air quality zone that contributes to nonattainment of air quality standards and the calculated weighted wind EI is equal to or greater than three.

- **N5d - Carbon Sequestration (3 to 10 points)**

The subfactor is an evaluation of the benefits of sequestering greenhouse gases by practice over the expected life of the practice. FSA awards points based on a weighted average of carbon sequestration benefits for all practices using the value in Table 5.

N6 - Cost

Factor N6 is designed to optimize the environmental benefits per dollar for CRP rental payments. Factor N6 is comprised of two subfactors (N6a and N6b). The formula for $N6 = N6a + N6b$.

- **N6a - Cost (point value determined after end of sign-up based on actual offer data)**

Offers with lower per acre rental rates may receive more N6a points and have increased chances of being accepted.

- **N6b - Offer Less Than Maximum Payment Rate (0 to 25 points)**

Offers equal to the maximum

FACT SHEET

CRP Sign-Up 45 Environmental Benefits Index

February 2013

payment rate will receive 0 points. Offers below the maximum payment rate will receive points according to the value in Table 6.

EBI Threshold for Acceptance

After CRP sign-up 45 ends on June 14, 2013, FSA will analyze and rank all eligible offers. The Secretary of Agriculture will then determine the EBI threshold used to accept offers. Because CRP is a highly competitive program, producers who would have met previous sign-up EBI cutoffs are not guaranteed an offer acceptance under CRP sign-up 45.

Making CRP Offers More Competitive

While the United States has over 360 million acres of cropland through the end of the fiscal year 2013, maximum CRP enrollment authority is 32 million acres. As such, the demand to enroll land in CRP is expected to be greater than the amount that FSA can accept.

To make offers more competitive, producers should consider the following:

- The single most important producer decision involves determining which cover practice to apply to the acreage offered. Planting or establishing the highest scoring cover mixture is the best way to improve the chances of offer acceptance.
- Producers should only offer the most environmentally sensitive land. Where possible, subdividing fields to include only the most sensitive acreage can substantially increase the point score for erosion and improve the water quality score and/or air qual-

ity score. Producers should consider enhancing covers for the benefit of wildlife or establishing pollinator habitat. In addition, producers may plant and manage hardwood or softwood trees that increase wildlife habitat values or restore certain rare and declining habitats. These potentially increase the EBI score in subfactors N1a and N4.

- Producers should consider accepting a lower payment rate than the maximum amount FSA is willing to offer.

FSA also encourages producers to consult with local USDA experts on steps to take to maximize EBI points and increase the likelihood that an offer will be accepted.

For More Information

For more information on CRP, contact a local FSA office or visit FSA's CRP website at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp>

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Table 1 – Cover Practices (CP) for the N1a Criteria	
	Point Score
CP1 – Permanent introduced grasses and legumes	
Existing stand of one to three species or planting new stand of two to three species of an introduced grass species	10
Existing stand or planting mixture (minimum of four species) of at least 3 introduced grasses and at least one forb or legume species best suited for wildlife in the area.	40
CP2 – Establishment of new permanent native grasses and legumes	
Existing stand (minimum of one to three species) or planting mixed stand (minimum of three species) of at least two native grass species and at least one forb or legume species beneficial to wildlife.	20
Existing stand or planting mixed stand (minimum of five species) of at least 3 native grasses and at least one shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for wildlife in the area.	50
CP3 – Tree planting (general) 2/	
Southern pines (softwoods) – Solid stand of pines/softwoods (existing, according to state developed standards, or planted at more than 550 trees per acre).	10
Northern conifers (softwoods) – Solid stand of conifers/softwoods (existing, according to state developed standards, or planted at more than 850 trees per acre).	10
Western pines (softwoods) – Solid stand of pines/softwoods (existing, according to state developed standards, or planted at more than 650 trees per acre).	10
Southern pines (softwoods) – Pines/softwoods existing or planted at a rate of 500 to 550 per acre depending upon the site index (state-developed standards) with 10 to 20 percent openings managed to a CP4D wildlife cover.	50
Northern conifers (softwoods) – Conifers/softwoods existing or planted at a rate of 750 to 850 trees per acre depending upon the site index (state-developed standards) with 10 to 20 percent openings managed to a CP4D wildlife cover.	50
Western pines (softwoods) – Pines/softwoods existing or planted at a rate of 550 to 650 per acre depending upon the site index (state-developed standards) with 10 to 20 percent openings managed to a CP4D wildlife cover.	50
CP3A – Hardwood tree planting	
Existing or planting solid stand of nonmast producing hardwood species.	10
Existing or planting solid stand of a single hard mast producing species.	20
Existing or planting mixed stand of two hardwood species best suited for wildlife in the area.	30
Existing or planting mixed stand (three or more species) of hardwood species best suited for wildlife in the area.	50
Existing or planting stand of Longleaf pine or Atlantic white cedar - Planted at rates appropriate for the site index.	50
CP4B - Permanent wildlife habitat (corridors), noneasement.	
Existing stand or planting mixed stand (minimum of four species) of either grasses, trees, shrubs, forbs, or legumes planted in mixes, blocks, or strips best suited for various wildlife species in the area. A wildlife conservation plan must be developed with the participant.	40
Existing stand or planting mixed stand (minimum of five species) of either predominantly native species including grasses, forbs, legumes, shrubs, or trees planted in mixes, blocks, or strips best suited to providing wildlife habitat. Only native grasses are authorized. Introduced grasses are not authorized for and cannot be included in cover mixes for 50-point N1a scores for CP4B. A wildlife conservation plan must be developed with the participant.	50

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Table 1 – Cover Practices (CP) for the N1a Criteria

	Point Score
CP4D - Permanent wildlife habitat, noneasement	
Existing stand or planting mixed stand (minimum of four species) of either grasses, trees, shrubs, forbs, or legumes planted in mixes, blocks, or strips best suited for various wildlife species in the area. A wildlife conservation plan must be developed with the participant.	40
Existing stand or planting mixed stand (minimum of five species) of either predominantly native species including grasses, forbs, legumes, shrubs, or trees planted in mixes, blocks, or strips best suited to providing wildlife habitat. Only native grasses are authorized. Introduced grasses are not authorized for and cannot be included in cover mixes for 50-point N1a scores for CP4D. A wildlife conservation plan must be developed with the participant.	50
CP12 –Wildlife food plot <u>3/</u>	
Wildlife food plots are small non-cost-shared plantings in a larger area. Wildlife food plots will never be the predominant cover.	NA
CP25 –Rare and declining habitat restoration <u>4/</u>	
Existing stand or seeding or planting will be best suited for wildlife in the area. Plant species selections will be based upon Ecological Site Description data.	50
CP42 – Pollinator Habitat	
Existing stand or planting of a diverse mix of multiple species suited for pollinators.	50
Footnotes:	
1/ Cover that is existing or will be established must accomplish the purpose of the practice.	
2/ State Conservationist may revise the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) on planting rate to be consistent with CRP. The opening for southern and western pines must be a minimum of two acres up to a maximum of five acres in size for fields of 20 acres and larger. For smaller fields, the size is based on a percentage. Opening in northern conifers will be one-half to two acres in size. The opening may include buffers on the interior of the field. Field edges (borders) may be used if they are irregular in shape and average 30 feet in width. Natural regeneration of native herbaceous or shrubby vegetation with required maintenance may be permitted within open areas if it is consistent with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) technical standards and the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, and has concurrence from state fish and wildlife service (FWS) or U.S. FWS officials. Open areas of native grasses and/or shrub planting best suited for wildlife in the area is considered CP3 for EBI scoring and contract purposes.	
3/ CP12 acreage is not included in the weighted average point score. For example, a 50-acre offer with 45 acres planted to CP25 and five acres planted to a wildlife food plot would calculate a weighted average using only the 45 acres of the CP25 planting. This calculates as follows: 45 acres x 50 points (CP 25 EBI score) = 2,250 points. 2,250 points / 45 acres = 50 points.	
4/ Technical practice standards for the selected habitat type must meet applicable standards and be approved by FSA at least 30 calendar days before the beginning of sign-up.	

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Table 2 - Practices for the N1b Criteria							
Practice	Point Score						
Conversion of at least 51 percent of a primarily monoculture stand to a mixture of native species that provides wildlife benefits.	20						
Establishment of pollinator habitat (CP42) that remains in the location of the CRP-1. The habitat size, shape, and composition must meet the following requirements: Size	20						
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>CRP Acreage Offered</th> <th>Habitat Size Requirement</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Less than 10 acres</td> <td>At least one acre of pollinator habitat. Habitat areas must be at least 0.5 acre.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10 acres or greater</td> <td>At least 10 percent of the acreage offered in pollinator habitat. Habitat areas must be at least 0.5 acre.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	CRP Acreage Offered	Habitat Size Requirement	Less than 10 acres	At least one acre of pollinator habitat. Habitat areas must be at least 0.5 acre.	10 acres or greater	At least 10 percent of the acreage offered in pollinator habitat. Habitat areas must be at least 0.5 acre.	
CRP Acreage Offered	Habitat Size Requirement						
Less than 10 acres	At least one acre of pollinator habitat. Habitat areas must be at least 0.5 acre.						
10 acres or greater	At least 10 percent of the acreage offered in pollinator habitat. Habitat areas must be at least 0.5 acre.						
Annual or permanent food plot (CP12) that remains in the same location for the contract length, or rotated food plot (CP12) for which the location on the contract is moved during the contract length consistent with the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide up to 10 percent of a field, not to exceed 5 acres per field.	5						

Table 3 - Erodibility Index Points 1/					
EI	Points	EI	Points	EI	Points
4	1	10	22	16	79
5	2	11	29	17	92
6	4	12	37	18	97
7	7	13	46	19	98
8	11	14	56	20	99
9	16	15	67	21+	100

1/ EI of less than 4 = 0 points

Table 4 - Practices for the N4 Criteria	
Practice	Point Score
New hardwood tree, longleaf pine, and/or Atlantic white cedar plantings (CP3A) and CP25 (Rare and declining habitat restoration) if the plant community is existing or will be established to primarily trees.	50
Existing or enhanced stand of hardwood tree, longleaf pine, and/or Atlantic white cedar plantings (CP3A).	40
New pine/softwood tree (CP3).	30
Rare and declining habitat restoration (CP25) where the plant community is existing or will be established to a primarily grass and/or shrub complex, or CP42.	25
Existing pine/softwood tree - original contract signed as CP3.	20
CP1, CP2, CP4B, CP4D.	0

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Practice	Point Score
CP3 (Tree planting - general), CP3A (Hardwood tree planting), and CP25 (Rare and declining habitat restoration) planted to trees.	10
CP25 (Rare and declining habitat restoration) planted to grass/shrub complexes, and CP42 (Pollinator Habitat).	5
CP4B (Permanent wildlife habitat (corridors), noneasement) and CP4D (Permanent wildlife habitat, noneasement).	4
CP1 (Permanent introduced grasses and legumes) and CP2 (Establishment of permanent native grasses).	3
CP12 (Wildlife food plot).	0

Percent Below Maximum Payment Rate	N6b Points
1	2
2	4
3	6
4	8
5	10
6	12
7	14
8	16
9	18
10	20
11	21
12	22
13	23
14	24
>=15	25

