



**USDA Nebraska State Technical Committee
Lancaster Extension Education Center, Lincoln NE
Wednesday April 3, 2014 12:30PM
Meeting Minutes**

Welcome, Introductions and Overview of the State Technical Committee Process including Local Working Groups – Craig Derickson, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist

- Craig welcomed the committee and thanked everyone for their attendance. Attendees are listed on pages 4-6.
- All of the PowerPoint presentations and handouts presented today will be available on the NRCS Nebraska website <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>.
- Craig reviewed the NRCS General Manual Policy on Local Working Groups (LWG) and State Technical Committee and Subcommittees (these are posted to the NRCS Website as well).
- The USDA-NRCS Farm Bill website is also a great resource for all of the latest information on Farm Bill Program updates: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Farmbill>.

New Subcommittees of the State Technical Committee – Brad Soncksen, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (PowerPoint presentation)

- Subcommittees analyze and refine specific issues.
- Subcommittee meetings are open to the public but not required to be publicly advertised like the State Technical Committee meetings.
- Subcommittee recommendations are presented at State Technical Committee meetings.
- NRCS Program Managers Chair the subcommittees and Co-Chairs, such as Dennis Adams with the Forestry subcommittee, are encouraged.
- Dennis Adams discussed three handouts covering the Emerald Ash Borer, Forestry Talking Points for LWG meetings, and LB 634, the Nebraska Wildfire Control Act of 2013 (all posted to the Nebraska NRCS website).
- Soil Health, Tribal, and the Historically Underserved are new subcommittees this year.
- It was suggested that a Wildlife subcommittee be added as well.

Update on Current Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 Program Status – Brad Soncksen, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (PowerPoint presentation)

- Two new watersheds will be covered by the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) this year: Bazile and Wahoo Creek.
- See PowerPoint for full details.

Overview of 2014 Farm Bill impacts on NRCS Programs – Brad Soncksen, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (see PowerPoint presentation)

- Brad covered 3 broad groups of the new conservation programs including:
 - Financial Assistance Programs - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP);
 - Easement Programs - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP); and
 - Partnership Programs - Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

New Programs Q & A

Regarding the distribution of funds among the separate easement programs (i.e. Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) and Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP)) in the ACEP Program, Brad noted that this information has not yet been released from NRCS National Headquarters.

A question was asked about if there have been specific changes to WRP. Brad answered that proposed rules are being developed now, and final rules should be out by fall.

Traci Bruckner expressed concerns regarding proposed expanded numbers of resource concerns in CStP for FY2015 and wanted to know if micro resources concerns are being considered.

Elbert Traylor expressed interest in hiring through ACES – how can we get assistance on projects? Craig and Brad explained that ACES employees are contract employees that can work full or part time. Craig and Brad will watch for additional information to distribute on the ACES program this Farm Bill. Also, a fact sheet is available on the NRCS Farm Bill website.

With the new option of renewing CStP contracts, NRCS Nebraska has the opportunity to double our CSP contracts this Farm Bill.

USDA, at the national level, is working to identify Critical Conservation Areas (CCAs) for use in the new RCPP program. There will only be 8 CCAs for the whole nation.

CRP – Conservation Reserve Program (Farm Service Agency Administered) – Greg Reisdorff, FSA Program Specialist (PowerPoint presentation)

- There are no Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limits in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 for most conservation programs. Beginning in FY15, the AGI limit will be set at \$900,000.
- General CRP sign-up has not been confirmed yet for this year.
- We currently have the lowest CRP acres enrolled in Nebraska since 1988.
- Drought assessment: 30% of the state is in D2 status or greater right now.
- The proposed changes in management activities Greg discussed will require input of the State Technical Committee. Input can be submitted directly to Greg Reisdorff, greg.reisdorff@ne.usda.gov, by the end of April.

Watershed Rehabilitation funding available across Nebraska – Tim Haakenstad, NRCS State Conservation Engineer (PowerPoint presentation)

- April 4 is the deadline for sponsors to submit a request for funding. NRCS must submit the final request for approval on April 11, 2014.
- Two types of project assistance will be requested on April 11th. Project site assessments are one of the types of requests which include evaluation of the dam's current condition, evaluation of the dams meeting current design criteria and evaluation of the population at risk if a dam failure would occur (hazard classification). The other type of assistance request is funding of the complete rehabilitation of the dam which includes planning, design, and construction oversight technical assistance funds plus the funds needed to construct the rehabilitation.
- There is great interest from the Nebraska NRD's to utilize this program which will create a large workload for NRCS. One of the State Conservationist's challenges will be to maintain the staff needed to support the Watershed Rehabilitation Program along with all the staff needed to support all other programs in Nebraska.
- The sponsor will provide 35% of the project implementation cost and Federal funds will cover the remaining 65%.
- Dan Schulz ---Question---watersheds have changed since the 50s and 60s, and dams built back then may not have provided appropriate flood protection. Will that be taken into consideration? Yes.

Review and update of Nebraska Resource Assessment (NERA) and fund allocations to local offices – Kelly Klenke, Resources Assessment Specialist (PowerPoint presentation)

- NRCS has been using NERA data and the resource assessment tool since 2000.
- The NERA maps show areas of priority concern based on resource data.
- There was a question about the wells and irrigation used in the *Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water on Cropland* data set. Does this imply that the irrigation systems are all inefficient? No, not necessarily. The data is meant to show that there is a greater opportunity to improve the efficiency of irrigation in these areas because of the higher numbers of wells and irrigation in the areas.
- The high priorities for wildlife habitat indicate a high incident of vegetative materials that we would want to preserve.

Questions:

- Is degradation to wildlife habitats being validated by NRCS in the field to verify the accuracy of the data? No, we are only using the data as an indicator of opportunities for improvement.
- Is conversion from cropland to recreational use being considered? Only within a marginal reduction of the extent of the previous land use or resource concern.

Craig invited the committee members to provide feedback on this tool through the subcommittee meetings year.

Wrap up and Questions – Craig Derickson, State Conservationist

- Craig thanked everyone again for their participation and encouraged committee members to contact NRCS staff at any time with additional questions or concerns.

State Technical Committee Meeting Attendees: April 3, 2014

*	Designates call-in participant (69 participants total)
Anne Pamperl	Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality
*Barth Crouch	Playa Lakes Joint Venture
Ben Mullarkey	Audubon Society
Bill Armbrust	Farm Service Agency State Committee
Bob Bettger	Department of Natural Resources
Brad Soncksen	NRCS-Assistant State Conservationist/Programs
Bruce McIntosh	
Burdette Piening	Nebraska Grain Sorghum Board
Chris Helzer	The Nature Conservancy
Craig Derickson	USDA-NRCS State Conservationist
*Dale Schlautman	EA Engineering, Science, and Technology Inc
Dan Schulz	Lower Platte South NRD
Dennis Adams	Nebraska Forest Service
Don McCabe	Nebraska Farmer
Elbert Traylor	Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality
Eric Zach	Nebraska Game & Parks Commission
Ernie Pourier	Bureau of Indian Affairs
Felix Kitto	Santee Sioux Nation
Fred Christensen	Farm Service Agency State Committee
Gary Bergman	RC&D Council

Gene Zuerlein	Nebraska Game & Parks Commission
Greg Reisdorff	Farm Service Agency
Heather Duncan	USEPA Region 7
Jacob Alishouse	Nebraska Land Trust
Jake Holt	Pheasants and Quail Forever
*Jared McJunkin	National Wild Turkey Federation
Jason McCauley	Bureau of Indian Affairs
*Jason Moudry	Lower Loup Natural Resources District
Jason Schiebel	Netafim Irrigation Inc.
Jason Skold	The Nature Conservancy
Jim Luchsinger	The Nature Conservancy
*John Hansen	Nebraska Farmers Union
John Heaston	The Nature Conservancy
John Knorr	Nebraska Nut Growers Association
John Mayberger	USDA-NRCS Program Manager
*Jordan Dux	Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation
Kelly Klenke	USDA-NRCS Resources Assessment Specialist
Ken Lamb	Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality
Kenny Dinan	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Kent Zimmerman	Nebraska Department of Natural Resources
Kirk Schroeder	USDI- Fish and Wildlife Service
Lavaine Moore	Farm Service Agency
Larry Hudkins	Nebraska Cattlemen
Lindsey Salestrom	Nebraska Department of Agriculture
Mace Hack	The Nature Conservancy

*Marcia Trompke	Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District
Megan Baker	NRCS-Executive Assistant
Martin Massengale	UNL
Mike Crosley	Santee Sioux Nation
Mike McDonald	Visitor/Producer
Neil Moseman	Senator Deb Fischer's Office
Phil Erdman	Office of Senator Mike Johanns
Ralph Pieke	Lower Platte North NRD Board of Directors
Rich Torpin	NRCS Program Manager
Rich Walters	The Nature Conservancy
Rick Koelsch	UNL
*Richard Straight	USDA - Forest Service - National Agroforestry Center
Rod Fritz	Stock Seed Farms
Scott Gonnerman	Visitor/Producer
Scott Richert	Nebraska Soybean Association
*Susan Whitfield	No More Empty Pots
Tami Nordman	NRCS-Administrative Assistant
Tim Haakenstad	USDA-NRCS State Conservation Engineer
Tim Kalkowski	Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition
*Tim Weltmer	Soil and Water Conservation Society and USDA-NRCS
*Todd Wiltgen	Congressman Jeff Fortenberry's Office
*Traci Bruckner	Center for Rural Affairs
Wally Valasek	Soil and Water Conservation Society
Zach Rigg	NRCS Program Manager