

FORESTRY TALKING POINTS FOR 2014 LWG MEETINGS

Background

- The Agriculture Act of 2014 (AKA 2014 Farm Bill) was signed by President Obama on February 7, 2014. The main provisions that affect forestry in Nebraska are included in Title II – Conservation, and Title VIII – Forestry.
 - The Nebraska Forest Service’s “Nebraska Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee” (NFSCC) also serves as the “Forestry Subcommittee” of the NRCS State Technical Committee (STC).
 - EQIP is the main source of federal financial assistance for landowners to implement conservation forestry practices in Nebraska. The primary forestry related practices are:
 - 380 Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment
 - 391 Riparian Forest Buffer
 - 612 Tree/Shrub Establishment
 - 650 Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation
 - 660 Tree Pruning
 - 666 Forest Stand Improvement.
 - For 2014 EQIP, nine priority resource concerns are identified in the national “Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative” as follows:
 1. Soil Erosion/Soil Health
 2. Soil Quality Degradation
 3. Excess/Insufficient Water
 4. Water Quality Degradation
 5. Degraded Plant Condition
 6. Inadequate Habitat for Fish & Wildlife
 7. Livestock Production Limitation
 8. Inefficient Energy Use
 9. Air Quality.
 - EQIP ranking pools are administered at three levels - Local, State, and Area (Beginning Farmer & Socially Disadvantaged). LWGs will develop ranking questions and determine point scores for the following priority resource concerns:
 - Soil Erosion/Soil Health
 - Excess/Insufficient Water
 - Degraded Plant Condition
 - Livestock Production limitation
- The NRSC State office will develop ranking questions and determine point scores for the following priority resource concerns:
- Soil Quality Degradation
 - Water Quality Degradation
 - Inadequate Habitat for Fish & Wildlife
 - Inefficient Energy Use
 - Air Quality

Forestry Issues

- Tree/shrub planting for windbreaks, wildlife habitat, watershed protection, and other conservation purposes has drastically declined in recent years, from 3.0 – 3.5 million during the 1980’s and early 1990’s to about 1.0 million annually in recent years.

- Removal of shelterbelts and riparian woodlands has accelerated, primarily due to increased commodity prices and land values.
- Most existing forestland and shelterbelts are not managed sustainably.
- Nebraska's forests are experiencing increasing and/or imminent threats from damaging agents including, wildfire, insects (e.g. Mountain Pine Beetle, Emerald Ash Borer), diseases (e.g. Pine Wilt, Thousand Cankers Disease), and land use conversion.

Recommendations

The LWGs should evaluate current EQIP policies/procedures relative to tree/shrub planting and/or woodland improvement practices and make recommendations for improvement, including:

- The current format, which identifies where the forestry practices are assigned in the nine priority resource concerns, is confusing, particularly at the local level. It would be clearer to list all available practices under each priority resource concern (both State and Local) so people understand that all of the practices are available for each resource concern. This would help in developing ranking questions and point scores for each resource concern. For example, the primary forestry related practices (380, 391, 612, 650, 660, 666) generally apply to all nine priority resource concerns.
- Emphasize conservation tree planting and forest stand improvement practices in the application ranking procedure.
- Continue to reserve a special "funding pool" for forestry practices that would compete in a separate application ranking system from other agricultural practices.
- Increase the payment rates for selected conservation tree planting and forest stand improvement practices to provide better incentives for landowners to plant conservation trees and manage existing forestland.
- A requirement that NFS District Foresters review all practice plans involving "forest stand improvement" and "windbreak renovation".
- LWG recommendations relative to forestry be made available to the Forestry Subcommittee for review prior to STC meetings.