



United States Department of Agriculture

New Jersey State Technical Committee Minutes of September 12, 2012

Those in attendance:

Audrey Moore, USEPA Region 2
Barb Phillips, NRCS
Bob Ericksen, National Wild Turkey Federation
Christine Hall, NRCS
David Clapp, NJDA
Dean Collamer, Growmark FS
Dominick Mondì, NJNLA
Elizabeth Ciuizio, USFWS
Eric Schrading, USFWS
Fran Grasso, NRCS
Fred Kelly, NRCS
Gail Bartok, NRCS
Janice Reid, NRCS

John Cecil, NJ Audubon
John Gibbons, USDA, NASS
Justine Cook, NOFA NJ
Kathleen Hitchner, NJDEP
Kathy Hale, NJWSA
Kristina Heineman USEPA Region 2
Lauren Rega, NRCS
Liz Thompson, Farm Bureau
Mike Westendorf, RCE
Nancy Coles, FSA
Nancy Paolini, NRCS
Sam Conard, Farmer
Steve Eisenhauer, Natural Lands Trust

Janice Reid welcomed everyone at 10:05. Janice is hopeful that NJ NRCS will have a new State Conservationist for the next State Technical Committee meeting in December.

The June meeting minutes were emailed prior to the meeting and a few copies distributed. The minutes were reviewed and accepted as presented.

Old Business

Programs Subcommittee Update

Janice Reid reported the program funds for FY 2012. We ended receiving some extra money in AMA of around \$218,000. With that, we were able to obligate 11 contracts.

In EQIP, we received \$4.6 million with 206 contracts obligated. This is almost twice the contracts we typically have. Due to contracting changes and the national initiatives, we have more, small contracts. This is not what we'd like to see as it takes a lot of time to manage the contracts and we'd like to see our people out in the field as opposed to managing contracts in the office.

In WHIP, we ended up with a little over \$207,000 dollars. We wanted to acknowledge our partners in helping us provide outreach for the new Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative with such a short turn around for the bog turtle and golden winged warbler. Our partners really stepped forward in helping with our outreach. We ended up with 10 signed contracts, 5 for each species.

AMA – Agricultural Management Assistance Program
AWEP – Agricultural Water Enhancement Program
CAP – Conservation Activity Plan
CCPI – Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative
CIG – Conservation Innovation Grant
CRP – Conservation Reserve Program
CREP – Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
CStP – Conservation Stewardship Program

Helping People Help the Land

An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentive Program
FRPP – Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program
GRP – Grassland Reserve Program
HFRP – Healthy Forest Reserve Program
SAFE – State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement
WHIP – Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program
WLFW – Working Lands for Wildlife
WRP – Wetlands Reserve Program

In AWEP, we had a little over \$60,000. Next year we will be trying something different with AWEP to hopefully increase sign up in the program. The sign up period for AWEP will be held concurrent with the general EQIP sign up. In the past, we have had the sign up after the general EQIP.

Compared to the other programs, with CSP we only obligate funds one year at a time. With the other programs, we obligate the entire contract up front. We have a total of 42 CSP contracts for \$278,000 dollars.

Easement Programs:

For FRPP, we received an additional \$1.1 million to bring the total to almost \$8.9 million. We were able to fund 26 parcels with 3 entities. In WRP, we had over \$1 million for new acquisitions, and obligated just over \$200,000 for restoration contracts.

The program subcommittee meeting met in July. The committee recommended no changes to our fund pools and ranking unless there are significant changes to the farm bill. Nationally, our programs are becoming more regionalized year after year. The initiatives are a good example. This is all related to the agency trying to get a clean audit and consistency from state to state. Last year, 15 payment schedules were regionalized. This year, we are required to regionalize all payment schedules for the FY 13 program year.

Lauren Rega indicated that more details will follow on how the regionalized payment schedules will be implemented. The costs are developed nationally using metadata and cost analysis, but have been individualized for each state. However, the scenarios will be determined by each region. Our region is the mid-Atlantic region and consists of NY, NJ, MD, DE, and PA.

Several roll-out teleconferences and new information are scheduled in the upcoming weeks. The programs subcommittee meeting will meet October 4th in Columbus at 9:00 to discuss any changes needed.

Outreach Subcommittee Update

Barbara Phillips reported that the subcommittee met on August 1st.

- The Hispanic and Women farmers claim process will be open September 24, 2012, through March 25, 2013. More information will be forthcoming.
- Two workshops are on the schedule: Cover Crop for Soil Health in the Coastal Plain on October 18th at the Cape May PMC, and pasture seeding training on September 19 at the Snyder farm.
- Three districts with outreach agreements with NRCS have been working on developing workshops for those that may not be familiar with USDA programs. A seminar for forest landowners will be held on October 2nd. Another workshop on specialty crops is being planned at an Asian Pear farm.
- A national soil health initiative will be emerging in the next several months, and a lot of print and audio visual products are being developed for this effort. Wetlands restoration training is on hold until we determine an appropriate time.

A series of energy fact sheets were developed with an agreement through Rutgers. The fact sheets were made available at the meeting and can be downloaded from the NRCS NJ website at: <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/energy/index.html>.

New CRP, CREP, SAFE Activity

Nancy Coles distributed a status report on CRP, CREP, and SAFE. There are currently 309 contracts with 330 practices and 2, 448.1 acres in CRP. Rental rates averaged a little over \$72 with total annual rental payments of \$183,050.

CREP – The average contract size is 3.7 acres. The contracts are very small because we are trying to address the very sensitive lands and take them out of production. The average rental rate is also a little higher at \$136.30.

SAFE – There was little activity in SAFE since the last report. Another contract was added to the Ag Heritage project area. There has been no activity in the grassland habitat project area. The Raritan Piedmont has not had any movement going forward either. We have not heard anything regarding increasing acreage in the Raritan Piedmont. To date, \$606,944 has been disbursed to the farmers' hands this year. That includes rental payments. There is rumor that CRP acreage will be decreasing in future years.

There is discussion nationally that CRP could be opened up to haying and grazing in the event of a drought or other extreme situation. Environmental groups would need to sign off that the acreage could be opened up to feed livestock if there is an extreme situation. There is a 25% reduction in the rental payment if they decide to graze. This usually is opened up to the practices with cool and warm season grasses and permanent wildlife habitat. This was brought up to discuss a what-if scenario and to let the groups know that this is a possibility for the future if New Jersey were to experience an extreme drought situation.

GRP to date has \$55,371 with the majority in rental payments. We picked up 2 contracts for 24.5 contract acres. This is a joint program with FSA and NRCS.

Haying and grazing fact sheets are available on the [FSA website](#) if you're interested in more information.

Status of the National Water Quality Initiative

When we last met, we were working on the new national water quality initiative. We worked with several of our partners to identify the watersheds for the initiative. We ended up selecting Upper Cohansey River, Upper Salem River, and Upper Alloway Creek watersheds.

23 applications were received for the initiative, which resulted in 7 contracts - 4 contracts in the Upper Cohansey and 3 in the Upper Salem. The contracts totaled \$287,000, which was above the 5% of our total EQIP funds. The main practices were cover crop, irrigation water management, and irrigation practices that would be water conserving. The time of year was definitely a problem along with the short turnaround of ten business days from application deadline to contract deadline. With the early, warm weather, many producers were not available.

We received very positive feedback from the Cohansey Area Watershed Association. There was a lot of local media outreach. Thank you to everyone that helped to pull together the information in such a short timeframe.

A question was posed about the monitoring portion of the initiative. It is unfortunate that DEP does not have enough money to support the 319 funding requests that it receives, so the monitoring portion of the initiative has not been finalized.

Christine Hall mentioned that she received a call from Bill Rawlyk, with the Open Space Institute, to help identify geographic areas for protection of open space and farmland. He would

like to talk to us about proposing the Upper Cohansey River, Upper Salem River, and Upper Alloway Creek watershed as part of a funding request he is developing for submission to the William Penn Foundation.

WRP Program Status

Janice reported that we were able to make 4 offers this year for new acquisitions. This year, 2 offers are being made in Warren, one in Sussex, and one in Cumberland. It is positive to see acquisitions being made in North Jersey as the majority of our applications have been in South Jersey. Thanks to Beth Ciuzio for her outreach because a lot of those contracts have been the result of her efforts through an agreement with NRCS.

NJ and National CIG Update

If you recall, we changed the way we did CIG this year by requiring a pre-proposal that we would review first before requiring a full proposal be submitted. We had received 8 pre-proposals, 7 were asked to submit a full proposal, 6 actually submitted proposals that were peer-reviewed and rated. 4 were recommended for funding and we're currently moving forward. The results of the national CIG were just announced last week. We were unable to announce the state CIG until after the national component was announced. About \$155,000 will go out for the 4 contracts that we are working on.

Janice passed around several *thank you* posters that were distributed to the farm that we visited at the June meeting. She also distributed information provided by Jack Rabin on leaf mulching, which was actually a CIG grant on the soil health benefits of leaf mulching.

590 Nutrient Management Standard

At the June meeting, Fred Kelly spoke about the new 590 nutrient management standard being developed. We have until the end of the calendar year to get our state standard in line with the new national standard. The draft standard was sent out along with a brief summary regarding significant changes to the standard. Fred discussed specific changes being proposed to the NJ standard and is welcoming comments and input from the committee. Please contact Fred by November 1st if you have any comments.

State Technical Committee Survey

Christine Hall thanked everyone that responded to the survey. We received 27 responses. The survey indicated that most people felt the abbreviations and acronyms are confusing. The meetings are held at the right frequency. We will be talking more at the December meeting about the content and training. We rely on our partners to get our message out and it is important that our partners understand the programs and opportunities that are available. Thanks again to everyone for completing the survey.

New Business

Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative

Nancy Paolini discussed the updates on the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative. The national office wants us to keep you up to date on the initiative. The current software program that our field staff uses, *Customer Toolkit*, is quickly becoming out of date and we will be making a switch to a new program called the *Conservation Desktop*. At this time, the field has to use several programs to input and manipulate data and it is very inefficient. The new software will

streamline the process and allow data to be collected and entered once. The program will also be more communicative with other programs.

Testing for the new software is scheduled for this year. The full release is slated to take place by October 2013. In the interim, we are working on fixes to make the current program compatible with Windows 7.

The incentive of this new program is to get the field staff back in the field. We will be using "toughbooks", which are durable laptops, to be used out in the field for data collection.. NRCS looked at all the steps in the planning process and developed a new system that combined processes and eliminated duplicative processes. Pilot states will be testing the process and program in the next year. NJ is not one of the pilot states.

WRP 2012 Geographic Area Rate Cap

Every year we are required to set a GRP and WRP geographic area rate cap (GARC). We only set a WRP GARC since we get so few GRP. We base our GARC on the actual appraised values. When we make an offer, it is based on the lowest value (appraised value, GARC, Landowner Value). The GARC is established through a market survey. This time we spent more time with the appraiser to ensure that our needs were met in the survey report. The values are lower than previous years, but all real estate values have gone down. A summary of the report was sent out. The discussion is to split the rates between north and south jersey. We can split by municipality or by county. We're looking for feedback on what the best split would be.

A question was posed about how bog turtle fits in with the GARC. A follow up meeting on the GARC for those that are interested in further discussion can be arranged.

Field Office of the future

A hand out was distributed summarizing the field office of the future task. The task detailed how we will continue to deliver conservation by proactively looking towards the future in the event of budget cuts. Maria Collazo, Gail Bartok, and Christine Hall headed the project. They looked at several situations such as loss of technology, labor, offices, etc. They ran the scenarios to determine how we could make changes and what steps to take. They are looking for a focus group of 2-3 people from the State Technical Committee to provide input and continue to work proactively on this project. Dave Clapp and Audrey Moore volunteered to help with this.

A question was posed asking if retirements were incorporated. The plan recognized retirements, but they were not directly addressed as a situation in the plan.

Local Work Group Report

NRCS values input from Local Work Groups. As the Farm Bill has changed over the years and National Initiatives have become more common, the Local Work Groups in NJ have not convened in recent years. NJ NRCS worked with the NJ Association of Conservation Districts to conduct an online survey and assessment to evaluate the current soil, water and related natural resource issues and concerns. A summary report of this survey was distributed and will be discussed in more detail at the next meeting.

Open Discussion

Liz Thompson – The Farm Bureau is preparing for their annual meeting. It is scheduled to be held on November 12 and 13. Let Liz know if you are interested in having a display. They are still lining up speakers for the event.

Mike Westendorf –

They are planning to host 2 twilight meetings on feed management for horse farms on October 4 and 16. One will be held in the south and one in the north and will show results and recommendations. A training day will also be hosted on December 1 for technical people to focus on mostly horses. More information to follow.

Fred Kelly reminded everyone that the cover crop field day will be held on October 18 at the Cape May PMC. The training will emphasize cover crop “cocktails” or blends of different crops for specific benefits. There will also be a portion on leaf mulching. There is a \$10 registration sign up and the deadline to sign up is October 5. The field day will be worth 6 CEUs.

Kathy Hale – Provided an update on the Ag minigrant programs. They keep going back and forth with edits and hopefully will be finalized soon.

John Gibbons – NASS is gearing up for the new Ag Census. The census covers everything from horses to organic production. John passed around information on the census. John also noted that the Trenton office will continue to be open.

Dave Clapp - Three grants were awarded as part of the animal waste management grant. One was awarded to the Walkkill River Watershed to develop an outreach and assistance program. Another was awarded to the North Jersey RC&D for a regional on-farm composting facility for equine owners. The third was awarded to the Rutgers Cooperation Extension of Salem for conducting Whole Farm Nutrient Mass Balance and Precision Feed Management Program plans for the livestock and dairy industry.

Kristina Heinemann – An EPA online tool was developed to promote source water protection. Kristina will send out the link when it goes live. It compiles resources together. It indicates there is not a lot of overlap in NJ with Agricultural land and source water pollution.

Audrey Moore – The pesticide AZM is cancelled on blueberries. EPA has extended that producers can use their current supply of AZM until September 30, 2013. They cannot purchase more after 9/30/2012.,.

Bob Eriksen – The long leaf pine initiative is renewed. They were signed as a partner on the golden winged warbler for developing plans. There will be a training next month in PA. 26 biologists are certified TSPs in wildlife and forestry.

Janice Reid – The bog turtle and golden winged warbler should continue next year in the working lands for wildlife initiative. New species may be added.

Kathleen Hitchner – The Neshanic ag mini-grant program that Kathy Hale referenced will serve as a model for future 319 grants in ag-dominated watersheds. The need for more 319 funding continues. New Jersey identified a need of 17 billion dollars to address the State’s nonpoint sources of pollution in EPA’s Clean Watersheds Needs Survey, but we only received \$2.6

million in 319 funding, down from \$3 million in previous years. The need in New Jersey is the highest nationally, but NJ is not the highest in 319 funding received

Dean Collamer – Mentioned he was representing Bill Angstadt. They have worked with the PA nutrient management subcommittee and he's happy to be part of the NJ meeting.

Eric Schrading – The Musconetcong River Restoration Partnership has been nominated for a Coastal America Award. The award ceremony will be held in the fall hopefully the new State Conservationist can attend

Janice Reid – A fact sheet was passed around on the soils department and how they can help landowners. The soils group has Ground Penetrating Radar equipment and a hand-held soil analyzer that can determine heavy metals in the soils. They are available to go out and help landowners.

Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will be held on December 4th, at 10:00 a.m. in the Somerset State Office.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:28.

DRAFT