

**State Technical Committee Meeting
Monday March 30, 2009
NRCS State Office**

Persons Present:

Anne Heasley- RFWHP	Janice Reid- NRCS	Nicole Ciccaglione- NRCS
Barbara Phillips- NRCS	Jim Barresi- NJFS	Ron Phelps- NRCS
Bill Brash- MSCD	Kim Korth- NJF&W	Sam Conard- Farmer
Charles Roohr- SADC	Liz Thompson- NJFB	Sharif Branham- NRCS
Christine Hall- NRCS	Marie Banasiak- NJFB	Tim Dunne- NRCS
Dave Clapp- NJDA	Maria Collazo- NRCS	Tom Drewes- NRCS
Gail Bartok- NRCS	Mike Westendorf- RCE	

Welcome:

Tom Drewes opened the meeting at 10:00 and welcomed everyone. He gave a brief update of future expectations of the agency under the new administration. Dave White is the new chief of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Mr. White has extensive experience working with the NRCS as the local, state and national level, and from 2008 to 2008 he was the State Conservationist for Montana.

Outreach Committee

Barbara Phillips gave an update on outreach efforts. She explained they are working on a google calendar of all partner events to facilitate coordination. The committee will be meeting immediately following this meeting.

Program Committee

Janice Reid gave an update on Programs. The 2009 program deadlines were not established last week at the sub-committee meeting, since the eligibility software has not been released for our use. It is very hard for NRCS to set deadlines until software is updated and rules are established.

Janice explained the Air Quality funds available through EQIP. This is a separate allocation of about \$750,000, which means it must have separate ranking criteria. Janice reviewed the proposed list of practices and ranking questions with the committee, and stated that other practices can be added that have a positive effect of 2 or more in the CPPE under air quality.

Old Business

CRP/CREP/SAFE – At the last minute Nancy Coles was unable to attend today's meeting so there was no report.

National Funding Announcements – Janice discussed the several new opportunities currently available. Details were emailed to all committee members and partners as they were released. The Agricultural Water Enhancement Program deadline for application was extended to April 10. The national competition for Conservation Innovation Grants has passed; Tim will update us later on the state competition. There were two national proposals submitted to us for State Conservationist Review. The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative deadline for applications is April 24. Finally, the Emergency Watershed Protection Program's Flood Plain Easement application deadline was March 27; NJ received three applications.

State Funding Announcements – Tim announced that the state competition for Conservation Innovation Grants would be announced shortly, and that there is approximately \$212,000 available. NJ's program is capped at 5% of our EQIP allocation.

Janice went into detail about new FRPP application process. Eligible entities must work with eligible landowners in advance or requesting funds. Funds will be provided to specific parcels of land. The deadline to apply is May 1. Once an entity is determined to be eligible, they will continue to be eligible to request funds for additional parcels for three years.

New Business

EQIP Conservation Activity Plans – Janice mentioned opportunities for Technical Service Providers (TSPs) in the 2008 Farm Bill for the development of EQIP Activity Plans. We need to work with partners to determine who may be eligible to become a TSP, and which Plans we might want to offer under the 2010 program.

There was some discussion on the difficulties in working with the TechReg system. NRCS recently made some improvements to the system. Best way to find the site is to google TechReg. Mike said that the recently enacted Ag Waste rule in NJ is leading to more interest in developing CNMPs and that there is an opportunity for funding these plans through EQIP. Rutgers is providing several workshops across the state and has developed an informative brochure on the new state rule.

Conservation Planner Certifications – Tim discussed the NRCS Conservation Planner Certifications. The policy was finalized March 10. Tim also mentioned that the required courses are listed in AgLearn, the USDA's online training system. Interested people can gain access to AgLearn through an eAuthentication process. Anyone who meets the requirements can become a certified planner. He will be happy to answer any questions anyone has about the process. The new requirements will be posted soon on our website.

Conservation Stewardship Program – Janice went in detail on what used to be called the Conservation Security Program. The 2008 Farm Bill includes the language establishing the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) as a program intended to encourage producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities and improving maintaining and managing existing conservation activities.

Training is currently scheduled for April, pending publication of the rule. Until the rule is final we don't really know much except payments will be capped at \$15 acre per year, which is part of the statute. We have been asked to determine the geographic regions and various funding pools we want to have in the state; and to specify the three resource concerns that we will require participants to address. After some discussion, it was recommended that we maintain one state-wide pool for the resources soil quality, water quality, and wildlife.

Janice handed out copies of "resource-conserving crop rotations" to every one. She mentioned that Fred Kelly has worked up a table that will be more useful in New Jersey based on soil erosion and soil quality. The national guidance would allow rotations that are eroding above T to be considered a conserving crop rotation. Tim suggested that we should go with Fred Kelly's recommendation. The final decision will be made after we review the rules and participate in the training.

NJ-AWEP Proposal – Christine Hall discussed the AWEP Proposal that North Jersey RC&D is planning to submit. The project will focus on four sub-watersheds in the Raritan Basin. Christine

went into detail about the resource concerns of temperature, bacteria, suspended solids, and phosphorus that have been identified. She also updated the committee with the partners that are involved in the proposal currently include: NJWSA, NJDA, Farm Bureau, RCD, SCDs, and the Raritan Watershed Agricultural Committee. RC&D is requesting \$2 million of AWEF funding over 5 years.

Open Discussion

Kim mentioned mini grants available – details are all on the Division of Fish and Wildlife web page. Only certified non-profits can apply for the grants.

Christine Hall reported that RC&D is hosting a Carbon Trading workshop, Marketing Carbon Credits: Opportunities for Ag and Forestry, April 30th at the Pequest Trout Hatchery. The workshop is targeting forest and farm landowners, agricultural producers, private consultants and agency staff.

Christine also discussed that North and South Jersey RC&D are working together on a farm energy audit project. The RC&Ds are partnering with EnSave, a private company in Vermont, to hold an energy audit data collector training session. The trained data collectors will serve as the local contact to gather farm specific information, which would be transmitted to EnSave in Vermont for the energy audit to be completed. EnSave received Conservation Innovation Grant from NJ-NRCS in 2008 to support this project.

Janice mentioned that two other CIG grants will be showcased at the Soil and Water Conservation Society annual meeting in July. NJ Audubon is involved in both grants with local farmers and will facilitate development of the poster presentations.

Next meeting will be Wednesday July 8, 2009.

Meeting adjourned at 12:20 pm.