

## Colorado State Technical Committee

Hotel Colorado, Glenwood, Colorado

October 15, 2009

Welcome: **Allen Green**, State Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), welcomed everyone, introductions were made, the agenda was reviewed and attendees were urged to actively participate. Meeting attendees were invited to list priority resource concern issues and comments on the flip charts located to the side of the meeting room.

### State Technical Committee, Watershed-level Conservation Input Process

**Tim Carney** NRCS – Assistant State Conservationist – Programs reviewed the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill) rules for the State Technical Committee and Local Work Groups. In Colorado, stakeholder input as provided in NRCS sponsored meetings in the 10 major geopolitical watersheds will function as Colorado State Technical Committee (STC) local work groups. The meetings are called Watershed Conservation Input Forums (WCIF).

Watershed Conservation Input Forums process will begin in Fiscal Year 2010 and will be conducted each fiscal year at least until the 2008 Farm Bill expires (September 30th, 2012). The forums will provide participants the opportunity to help guide and make recommendations regarding NRCS programs and activities to the State Technical Committee and the NRCS State Conservationist. Forums will also provide an opportunity to showcase Conservation District Leadership within local communities.

The Forums will be chaired by the Colorado Association of Conservation District (CACD) Watershed Association President and administered by the NRCS Area Conservationist. The WCIFs will meet at least once per year in order to submit reports and recommendations to State Conservationist and STC by June 1. Meetings will be composed of a diverse mix of agricultural producers, owners/operators of nonindustrial private forest land, and public agency and private sector professionals. Meeting invitations are to be provided to NRCS, FSA, U.S. Forest Service, Conservation Districts, agricultural producers, agribusiness, and owners of nonindustrial private forest lands, state agencies including the Colorado Dept of Agriculture, Division of Wildlife, State Forest Service and Water Resources Division. Non-profit Organizations with a history of working with agricultural and non industrial forest land producers are also to be invited.

Meeting agendas are developed by the Watershed President and NRCS Area Conservationist. The Area Conservationist is the responsible NRCS representative. Agenda may include but are not limited to recommendations on natural resource priorities and concerns in the watershed, natural resource concerns not currently addressed in the watershed, techniques for outreach to historically underserved citizens, watershed level program ranking criteria, conservation and natural resource partnership opportunities, conservation practice standards and innovative conservation practices and approaches.

WCIF meetings are separate from any other Watershed Association meetings.

### State Technical Committee Subcommittee Structure and Process

Tim Carney discussed the STC subcommittee process and recent invitations to committee members for existing and new technical subcommittees for agronomy, air quality, forestry, grazing lands, and wildlife issues. The Technical subcommittees are comprised of members of the larger State Tech Committee with specialized expertise and interest in the various disciplines and NRCS staff with the associated technical expertise.

Subcommittees will be called upon to meet periodically as input is requested for agency guidance. Examples include wildlife subcommittee recommendations for conservation priority areas, and forestry subcommittee recommendations on priority practices for EQIP emphasis.

### Forestry Subcommittee recommendations for conservation practices and Statewide Strategic Forest Assessment

**Greg Sundstrom** – Colorado State Forest Service reported that the STC Forestry Subcommittee met on October 6th. The Committee recommends adding Air Quality to Conservation Stewardship Program – Colorado's "Priority Resource Concerns" for Non-Industrial Private Forestland. The Committee recommends focusing EQIP funding on proactive forest management. Forest stand improvement practices to create healthier forest conditions should be highest priority. The Committee feels other funding sources are available and should be used where reactive forest management is needed. Members of the advisory committee recommend that State Technical Committee members be notified when Watershed Work Group meetings are scheduled.

Future action items for the committee include the review of cost share payment schedule for Forest Stand Improvement Practice, review Forest Management Conservation Activity Plan outline following Pilot Project, and the review EQIP forestry application screening/ranking tools.

Greg then summarized the progress of the Statewide Strategic Forest Assessment project. A map was presented showing the progress in developing data layers. The 2008 Farm Bill calls for assessment and strategy to be developed. The assessment is scheduled for release in the spring of 2010. The State Technical Committee will be kept informed of the process and opportunity to comment in future meetings.

### Wildlife Subcommittee

**Ken Morgan** – Colorado Division of Wildlife reported on recent activities of the STC Wildlife Subcommittee. The subcommittee provides recommendations (to the State Technical Committee) for the state WHIP plan that incorporates priorities of the State comprehensive wildlife action plan and similar plans and initiatives. The subcommittee also makes recommendations concerning the development and ranking of WHIP and EQIP programs and applications including defining species and priorities relating to the state comprehensive wildlife action plan, recommending programmatic practices in each watershed by species, recommending seed mixes by species, and advising on matters related to CRP, expiring CRP contract lands treatment and SAFE priorities.

Tim Carney thanked Ken and the members of the Wildlife Subcommittee for their work and discussed the 2008 Farm Bill WHIP rule change that includes invasive species management and control as eligible for inclusion in WHIP agreements. He further discussed the Colorado NRCS recent WHIP funding of \$ .5 to .75 million per year, where

the Colorado EQIP budget is approximately \$26 million per year. Tim pointed out that the Colorado EQIP expenditures for invasive species related practices far exceeded the total state WHIP budget, and asked the Committee for recommendations regarding the priority for invasive species work under WHIP in light of the critical species and habitat issues as discussed by Ken Morgan in his subcommittee report. The consensus of the State Technical Committee members was that WHIP should continue to prioritize critical habitat and species conservation systems and practices, and that EQIP and partnership projects should be the primary NRCS financial assistance mechanism for invasive species control work.

Farm Service Agency Update

**Trudy Kareus** Colorado Director of the USDA-Farm Service Agency thanked the STC for the opportunity to meet and discuss FSA program issues. She introduced Billy Merritt – FSA Conservation Program Specialist who updated the STC on the Conservation Reserve Program.

Nationally, 3.9 million acres of CRP contracts expired 9/30/09. 1.5 million acres were offered option of extension. CRP Enrollment Authority reduced from 39 million acres to 32 million acres by 2012 Requirement of 2008 Farm Bill.

The criteria used to offer extensions to eligible contracts were that the contracts scored in the top 30% Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) nationwide and had an Erodibility Index (EI) of 15 or greater. The EBI has been used by USDA to prioritize and rank CRP offers since signup 10. The National EBI process will be used to rank and prioritize offers for enrollment into CRP for general signup offers.

The National EBI includes 5 environmental ranking factors and a cost factor. The factors are Wildlife Habitat Cover Benefits, Water Quality Benefits from Reduced Erosion, Runoff and Leaching, On-Farm Benefits of Reduced Erosion, Enduring Benefits, Air Quality Benefits, and Cost.

The FSA HANDBOOK that provides rules and guidance for the CRP is 2-CRP (Revision 4) Exhibit 19 and can be found at:

- <http://intra3.fsa.usda.gov/dam/handbooks/handbooks.asp>

Colorado 2009 expiring CRP lands statistics were presented as follows: 714,626 acres expiring, 334,972 acres offered extensions, 47% expiring acres considered eligible for contract extensions. The amount of expiring CRP contract acres in Colorado are:

2009.....714,636 acres  
2010.....450,203 acres  
2011.....344,527 acres  
2012.....261,622 acres  
1,770,988 total

The amount of expiring CRP contract acres nationally are:

2009.....3,889,577 acres  
2010.....4,453,460 acres  
2011.....4,389,560 acres  
2012.....5,557,436 acres  
18,290,033 total

Options for CRP contract lands not eligible for extension include continuous CRP for small highly desirable acreage which includes such practices as filter strips and riparian buffers. There is also the SAFE program option. Cropland Base acres may have been reduced when lands were enrolled in CRP. Participants should contact their County FSA Office to discuss options.

For questions contact Bill Merritt at [billy.merritt@co.usda.gov](mailto:billy.merritt@co.usda.gov) or 720-544-2887.

### Rural Development Agency Update

**Jim Isgar & Pattie Snidow** of the USDA Rural Development Agency discussed RD programs.

USDA/- RD provides for rural Colorado including:

- Housing - build and renovate homes, rental opportunities
- Community Facilities – fire stations, hospitals, medical clinics, child development centers, assisted living, nursing homes.
- Business – Planning and assistance to businesses and cooperatives to include value added producer programs
- Infrastructure – water and waste water, electric, broadband, renewable energy, and telecommunications.
- Rural Development has over 40 programs ranging from housing, community facilities, business & cooperative development, to infrastructure.
- Ag – No production, but can fund Value Added Producer Grants and Coop Development (Rural Cooperative Development Grant)

In FY09, over \$400 million were invested in Colorado.

FY 2009 Accomplishments include assistance to 1411 new rural homeowners, 3 rural community water projects, over 650 jobs saved and/or created through business programs and 21 entities received funding for essential community facilities.

RD Programs include funding for agricultural producers for planning activities and working capital expenses. The Rural Business Enterprise Grant program is available to finance and facilitate the development of community economic programs that assist small and emerging individual business enterprises in rural areas. Funds may be used for revolving loan fund, technical assistance, or other business development.

The Rural Business Opportunity Grant program aims to promote sustainable economic development by funding feasibility studies, technical assistance, business and economic development, planning and training.

The Rural Energy for America Program provides grants and loan guarantees for funding for agricultural producers and rural small businesses with purchasing and installing energy efficiency improvement\* projects, renewable energy\* systems, or necessary capital improvements\* to existing systems (Guaranteed Loans, only).

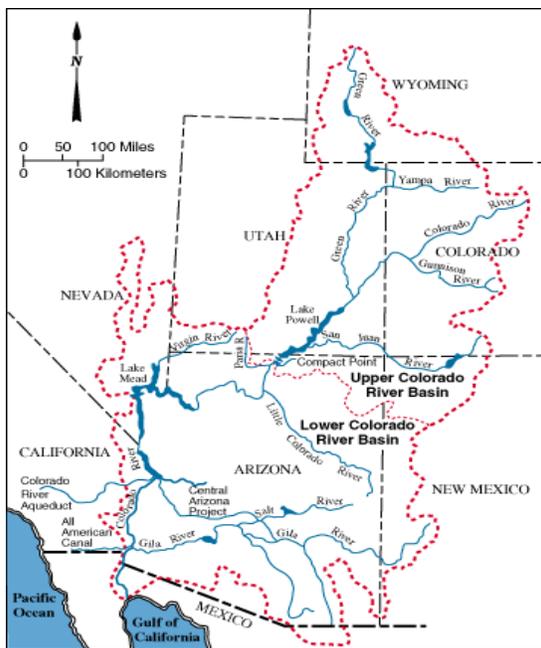
RD Water and Waste Water Programs provide funding for water, sewer and solid waste projects. Applicants may be Public Bodies, and non-profits and others primarily targeting rural communities with populations of 10,000 or under.

For additional information on Rural Development programs visit the webpage at: [www.rurdev.usda.gov/co](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/co)

**Colorado River Salinity Control Program- History and Future Directions**

Travis James, NRCS Salinity Control Program Coordinator provided background on the Colorado River watershed and the history of the salinity control program.

The Colorado River drains 246,000 miles and approximately 155 million acres. Water from the Colorado River serves 7.5 million persons in the U.S. portion of the Basin and, through exports within the western U.S. another 25.4 million persons outside the Basin. The River irrigates 2.3 million acres within the Basin and an equal amount through exports outside the Basin in the western U.S. though exports. Colorado River hydro power facilities generate 12 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity. The River also serves 2.6 million persons and irrigates .5 million acres in Mexico.



The Colorado River Compact of 1922 divided the Colorado River Basin at Lee Ferry and apportioned 7.5 million acre feet (maf) of water to the Upper Basin and 7.5 maf to the Lower Basin. The Upper Colorado River Compact of 1948 provided 50,000 acre feet annually to Arizona with the remaining 7.5 maf apportioned as follows:

Colorado	51.75 %
Utah	23.00 %
Wyoming	14.00 %
New Mexico	11.25 %

The Lower Basin States could not agree how to apportion their 7.5 maf. Hence, the U.S. Supreme Court decree (*Arizona v. California et al.*) in 1964 allocated:

Nevada	.3 maf plus 4 % of the surplus water available
Arizona	2.8 maf plus 46% of the surplus water available
California	4.4 maf plus 50% of the surplus water available

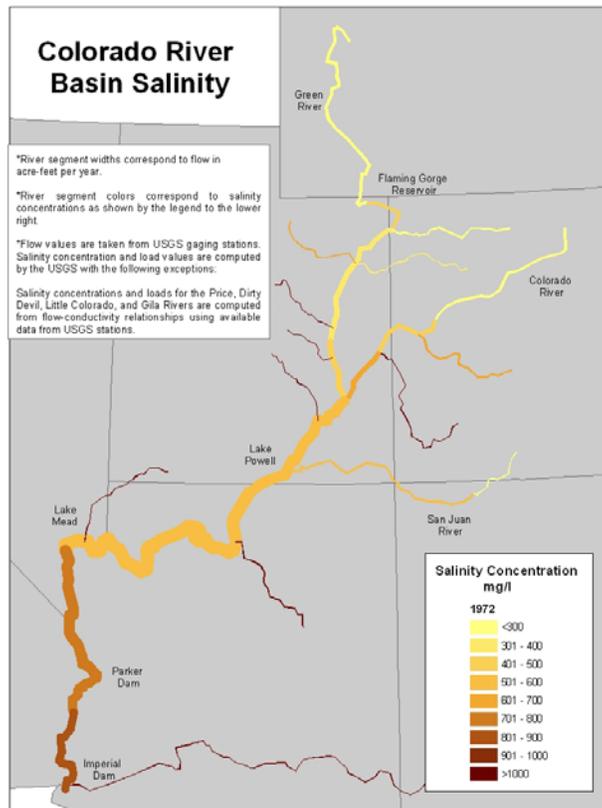
The “Mexican Water Treaty of 1944” Article 10 requires:

1.5 maf Delivery to Mexico
7.5 maf to Upper Basin

7.5 maf to Lower Basin = 16.5 maf  
1.5 maf to Mexico

The long term average flow of the Colorado River is 15 maf, so the shortage is made up from storage.

Colorado River salinity concentrations were increasing in the late 1960's and coincided with other factors to facilitate initiation of the Colorado River Salinity Control Program. The Clean Water Act was enacted in 1972 and concurrently Mexico indicated water quality related damages from water deliveries were increasing.



Ongoing discussions between the seven Basin States and several federal agencies lead to the establishment of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum (Forum) in 1973. The Forum was created for interstate cooperation and to provide states with the information necessary to comply with Section 303(a) and (b) of the Clean Water Act. The Forum is composed of representatives of the seven states appointed by the governors of the respective states. The Forum was instrumental in developing an integrated and regional approach to salinity control that assisted in the enactment of the Salinity Control Act of 1974.

In 1975, the Forum proposed, the states adopted, and the U.S. EPA approved Water Quality Standards for the Colorado River. The Standards include:

1. A plan of implementation to maintain average annual flow-weighted salinity concentrations at or below the 1972 levels while allowing the States to their full apportioned water supply.
2. Numeric criteria at three locations (currently adopted as);

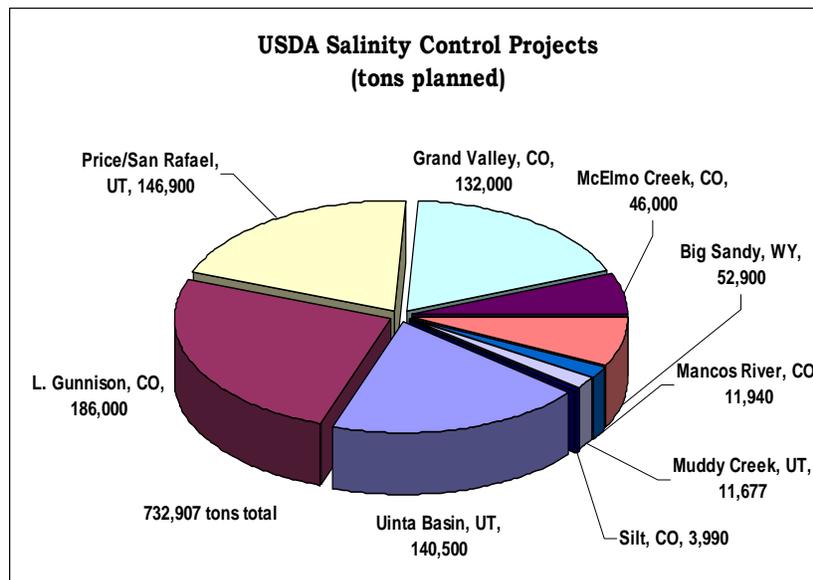
Below Hoover Dam	723 mg/l
Below Parker Dam	747 mg/l

At Imperial Dam 879 mg/l  
 (The mean for 2008 at Imperial Dam was 728 mg/l.)

The Colorado River Basin States, and Federal Agencies including the Bureau of Reclamation and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service administer a variety of on-farm and off-farm salinity control projects to manage and reduce salinity in the River to the benefit of Upper and Lower Basin municipal, agricultural and industrial water users, and to comply with international agreements to meet water quality standards for water delivered to Mexico. The original work was authorized by the COLORADO RIVER BASIN SALINITY CONTROL ACT (Public Law 93-320, 6/1974). In the 2002 Farm Bill, NRCS salinity control work was amended to be authorized through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Current Colorado River Salinity Control Program Implementation credits various agencies with 1,105,500 tons of salt load reduced from the river annually. The Bureau of Reclamation is credited with 601,000 tons/year, the Natural Resources Conservation Service land treatment programs are credited with 463,900 tons/year, and the Bureau of Land Management with 40,600 tons/year reduced from the River.

Various model run analysis project that 1,850,000 tons must be controlled annually by 2020 to meet River water quality salinity numeric criteria.



USDA Salinity Control Unit Summary Thru 2008

Unit	Controls (tons)	Potential (tons)	Percent of Goal	Costs	* Annualized Costs	Projected Total Cost	Annualized Cost per ton
Uinta Basin, UT	137,426	140,500	98	\$88,874,177	\$7,367,669	\$90,862,150	\$54
McElmo Creek, CO	23,326	46,000	46	\$16,645,459	\$1,379,909	\$32,825,649	\$59
Silt, CO	2,908	3,990	31	\$2,174,278	\$180,248	\$2,983,277	\$62
Muddy Creek, UT	0	11,677	0	0	0	\$11,655,523	\$75
Lower Gunnison, CO	93,113	186,000	47	\$57,686,525	\$4,782,213	\$115,233,036	\$51
Manila, UT	2,183	17,430	6	\$1,971,052	\$163,400	\$15,737,725	\$75
Grand Valley, CO	92,658	132,000	69	\$48,759,426	\$4,042,156	\$69,462,369	\$44
Price/San Rafael, UT	53,930	146,900	29	\$20,142,084	\$1,669,779	\$54,865,050	\$31
Mancos, CO	2,438	11,940	14	\$4,334,171	\$359,303	\$21,226,416	\$147
Big Sandy, WY	55,957	83,700	67	\$13,347,780	\$1,107,866	\$19,965,495	\$20
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>463,939</b>	<b>780,137</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>\$253,934,952</b>	<b>\$21,052,543</b>	<b>\$434,816,690</b>	<b>\$45</b>

\*Cost per ton based on amortization over 25 years at 6.625% interest (.083)

Tim Carney summarizes the quantified economic damages model of the BOR which estimates downstream damages to municipal, industrial and agricultural water users at \$150 per ton of salt in the river, and conversely, the program benefits of at least \$150 per ton of salt removed from the river. Mr. Carney also noted that the BOR estimates the unquantified damages to be at least equal to those quantified in their model. The BOR and partner agencies are currently updating the salinity program economic damages model. NRCS, BOR, and State Agency salinity control program partners evaluate all projects based on a combination of environmental and economic benefits and constraints.

Travis James estimated that about \$40 million should be available in 2010 for salinity projects across the upper Colorado River Basin. Some “Special Projects” funded by the agencies include

- Vegetation and Soil Crust Study, Badger Wash, Colorado
- Transit Sources of Salinity Loading in the San Rafael River, Utah
- Using GIS & Remote-sensing to Map Rangeland Salinity Source Areas, UT
- Center Pivot Irrigation Demonstration, Delta, Colorado
- Use of SPARROW Model to Estimate Salt Loads in Sparsely Sampled Basins, UT
- Estimating the Effects of Conversion of Ag. Land to Urban Land on Deep
- Percolation of Irrigation Water in the Grand Valley, Colorado
- Habitat Restoration on Numerous Sites in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming  
Going Forward
- Use of SPARROW Model to Estimate Salt Loads in Sparsely Sampled Basins, UT.
- Implementing and quantifying salt control outside of the delineated project boundaries.
- Implementing surface manipulation, vegetation and herd management to reduce salt loading from grazinglands.
- Providing financial incentives to upgrade current or ageing irrigation systems.
- Financial incentives for rotational fallowing.

Travis asked the audience for input for new special projects and innovative approaches to salinity control in the Colorado River. For example, a market based approach being piloted in the Plateau Creek watershed on the north side of the Grand Mesa utilizes regular EQIP funding for water quality projects, with an added salinity control bonus from the Basin States Program. Bonus payments are pro-rated using the \$150/ton economic damages model figure for funding salt savings. The Colorado State Soil Conservation Board, the Debeque Conservation District and the Basin States Program are partners in the project. The approach may be expanded throughout western Colorado pending the results of the two year study.

#### 2009 Financial Assistance, Easement & Stewardship Programs Activities and Accomplishments

**Tim Carney** summarized the NRCS FY09 Financial Assistance Programs. During fiscal 2009 (October 1, 2008 through September 30<sup>th</sup> 2009) NRCS began implementing assigned 2008 Farm Bill Title II Conservation Provisions. The Agency published and solicited public comment on Conservation Programs Interim and Interim Final Rules,

Technical Service Providers, the State Technical Committee and on certain Final Program Rules.

Selected FY09 NRCS Colorado initiatives include new partnership agreements through the CCPI and AWEP programs, expanded EQIP organic and general conservation program forestry emphases, increased Colorado River Salinity Program funding, emphasis on Short Grass Prairie issues including expiring CRP contract lands, prairie playa conservation, the integration of renewable energy practices in systems providing power to eligible natural resource concern practices, and the piloting of EQIP Conservation Activity Plans.

### NRCS Farm Bill Programs 2009 COLORADO

#### Accomplishments by Program

Program	Contracts Approved	Acres	Total Funding
Environmental Quality Incentives Program – <i>EQIP</i>	766	435,228	\$23.7M
Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program – <i>FRPP</i>	17	5,240	\$5.5M
*Conservation Stewardship Program – <i>CSP</i>	514*	645,942 +*	2009 Applications Submitted
Wetlands Reserve Program – <i>WRP</i>	1	575	\$362,250
Grassland Reserve Program – <i>GRP</i>	1	5,450	\$953,750
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program – <i>WHIP</i>	35	3,167	\$898,513
<b>Totals</b>	<b>820*</b>	<b>1.1M</b>	<b>\$31.4M</b>

### NRCS Farm Bill Programs 2009 COLORADO

#### Accomplishments by Natural Resource Concern – EQIP Contracts

NR CONCERN	CONTRACTS APPROVED	ACRES	TOTAL FUNDING
ACEQUAIS	22	5,168.2	\$325,009
AGRO-FORESTRY	31	1,735.2	\$294,700
ANIMAL WASTE MANAGEMENT	1	150.0	\$12,200
FORESTRY	51	4,059.2	\$1,470,108
GRAZINGLAND	131	255,628.1	\$4,524,940
RIPARIAN	11	179.0	\$421,878
SOIL MANAGEMENT	53	23,511.9	\$1,511,958
WATER QUALITY/QUANTITY	181	50,342.4	\$6,631,477
WILDLIFE	14	1,616.1	\$266,609

CCPI	13	851.8	\$333,003
ORGANIC	12	5,725.2	\$507,516
INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES	77	17,840.6	\$759,154
PLANNING	24	27,729.9	\$93,766
SALINITY	140	4,401.2	\$6,209,802
TRIBES	5	36,289.2	\$290,531
<b>Totals</b>	<b>766</b>	<b>435,227.9</b>	<b>\$23,652,651</b>

Organic Agriculture Initiative Summary:

- National Initiative: FY2009 & FY2010
- 2009 Colorado Activity
- 12 Contracts, 5725 acres
- Certified Organic Producers - 6 Contracts
- Organic Transition Producers - 6 Contracts

Conservation Activity Plans Summary:

- Agricultural Energy Mgmt (9)
- Comprehensive Nutrient Mgmt (2)
- Fish and Wildlife Habitat Mgmt (4)
- Forest Mgmt (6)
- Grazing Mgmt (10)
- Transition from Irrigated to Dryland (2)

FY 09 EQIP Colorado CIG Funding Summary:

- 23 proposals submitted
- 10 grants selected for funding.
- \$582,697 Obligated to CIG Grants

FY 09 EQIP Colorado CIG examples

- Rangeland monitoring
- Shortgrass prairie species conservation and grazing
- Alternative potato crop rotations – SLV
- Nitrogen Ramp Calibration Strip Technology
- Biochar use to improve forest health
- Crop coefficients for improved irrigation mgmt
- Animal waste bio-energy conversion DSS

FY 09 Colorado WHIP Funding Summary:

- Request for Proposal Process
- 35 proposals funded
- \$898,513 obligated to benefit; SW Willow Flycatcher & Rio Grande Chub, Arkansas Darter, Long billed Curlew, Gunnison Sage Grouse, Northern Leopard Frog, Greater Sage Grouse, Preble's meadow jumping mouse, Long Nose Dace & Migrating waterfowl

FY09 Partnership Projects Summary:

- AWEP
  - Republican River Water Conservation District
- CCPI
  - Upper Arkansas River Restoration
  - Rio Grande Headwaters

FY 09 Easement Programs Summary:

	FRPP	GRP	WRP
APPLICATIONS	19	36	4
CLOSINGS in 2009	3	0	1
CURRENTLY PROCESSING	20	1	1

FY09 Conservation Stewardship Program Summary:

- FY09 applications received by Sept. 30th:
  - 514 applications submitted
  - 646,000 + acres
- Colorado allocation – 435,000 acres
- Contract ranking ongoing

Members of the State Technical Committee present offered the following comments/questions.

Q) Can we change the “no gas wells” policy on FRPP easements?

A) Sub surface mineral development policy is under review nationally, however we need to keep in mind the easements are targeted to prime farm and ranch lands.

Q) What amount of EQIP contracts were on forest lands?

A) 6000 acres

Q) Are we going to look at Colorado GRP easement compensation issues for land values in the state? Average values are too high in the east and too low in the west.

A) A discount of National Agricultural Statistics documented Colorado land values were used in FY2009. The compensation process will be reviewed for 2010.

Q) You reported that there was a shortage of landowner WRP interest...how short and why?

A) NRCS Colorado turned back approximately \$1.5 million to the national office for redistribution to other states.

- landowners not understanding program and wanting higher compensation
- need ideas for strategies to increase program interest

C. Did Colorado utilize all the FRPP funds allocated and were you able to use funds left from other states?

A. Yes that is correct. Colorado received approximately \$2 million in additional FRPP easement funds from NHQ and funded easement cooperative agreements.

NRCS Colorado FY2010 Programs

**Tim Carney** discussed planned NRCS FY2010 Financial Assistance Programs.

Partnership Opportunities are a key part of the 2008 Farm Bill. The two partnership opportunities are through the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) and the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP). CCPI is a flexible partnership program using combined EQIP, WHIP, and CSP authorities. NRCS Colorado estimates approximately \$2 million will be available for CCPI in fiscal year 2010.

The Agricultural Water Enhancement Program is a partnership program that uses EQIP authority. AWEP is targeted to watershed scale and group water quantity and quality

projects, projects that support consumptive use reduction including but not limited to rotational fallow, deficit irrigation, and other innovative approaches.

NRCS Colorado will use the 2008 Farm Bill CCPI and AWEP Partnership program opportunities to build on and fund the special initiatives formerly funded through single programs such as WHIP special projects funded through the statewide RFP process, and the EQIP plant invasive species initiative. Using CCPI and AWEP broader program authorities and adequate funding will facilitate effective partnership projects.

The Colorado River Salinity Control Program as discussed earlier by Travis James has new authorities and opportunities through USDA, BOR and the State Soil Conservation Board. The BOR and related state program authorities are currently being finalized in a "Report To Congress" through the Secretary of the Interior.

The NRCS Wetland Reserve Program has an aggressive goal of increasing enrollment 3 fold by 2012. The Agency is seeking State Tech Committee input and recognizes that partnering will be essential to accomplishing this goal.

NRCS is anticipating a national Sage Grouse Special Initiative primarily funded through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and EQIP. Private landowners and operators and public land agency partners will be critical to success of this initiative. Utilization of existing data and plans from the local and statewide Sage Grouse Working Groups is planned. Updates and consultation will be provided at future STC meetings.

The NRCS is seeking comment and concurrence from State Technical Committee and technical subcommittee members through this and future meetings regarding state level priority resource concerns, conservation programs ranking criteria for EQIP, WHIP, and easements programs. The FY2010 general EQIP payment rate will be 65% of the typical cost of practices applied through the program. The exception is the EQIP Colorado River Salinity Control Program activities in existing salinity project areas (grand Valley, Silt, Lower Gunnison, Mancos Creek and McElmo Creek) where the payment rate is 75% of the typical cost of practices applied through the program. IN all cases Historically Underserved, Socially Disadvantaged and Beginning Farmer / Rancher EQIP participants receive higher payment rates.

For FY2010, NRCS Colorado is implementing a continuous funding process based on high priority projects for CSP, EQIP, WHIP, WRP. The highest ranked projects where conservation planning is up to date and the producers are ready and willing to implement practices will be funded through frequent funding cycles. Producers will be encouraged to work with staff to develop quality conservation plans and enter into shorter term conservation program financial assistance implementation contracts based on those plans.

#### Comments

C. C. Lair. Thinks it is commendable for the agency moving forward on focus on planning. Will there be issues of funding?

A) There may be funding issues but in the long run we anticipate better conservation financial assistance program contracts, and the process will be more efficient.

C. Will there be some kind of cut off.

A. We will start funding in November and wrap up by June.

Q) Is there some way we can suggest legislature on the expiring CRP lands. See if we can get overlap assistance.

A. There can be an EQIP contract applied for and contracted during the last year of a CRP contract. However, practices may not be implemented, nor financial assistance paid until the CRP contract has expired. NRCS uses an open, continuous EQIP sign up.

Closing Comments

**Allen Green** extends thanks to those planning the meeting and the providers of the presentations.

Next State Technical Committee Meeting will be a winter meeting in Lakewood, Colorado. Following the winter meeting, the subsequent State Technical Committee meeting will be held in Eastern Colorado. Dates and locations TBA.

Allen commented that the time and commitment of State Technical Committee members is appreciated. We are always looking for new ways to improve our programs. Please stay involved in the local level because the recommendations come through them. Please continue to go through the districts as they are important partners.

Meeting attendees were again invited to list priority resource concern issues and comments on the flip charts located to the side of the meeting room.

**Announcements/Comments from participants at the meeting:**

- CACD, the CACD annual meeting is being held being held at Beaver Run in Breckenridge on November 16-19.  
This is a new meeting. There will be training and special sessions.

**The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 pm.**

(Minutes compiled by Tim Carney - NRCS Colorado)

**Priority resource concern issues and comments as listed by October 2009 State Technical Committee meeting attendees:**

I. Range Land

- A. Private and public landowner / permittee incentives to conserve
- B. Riparian management to maintain water quality, wildlife habitat and in stream habitat

II. Wildlife Land

- A. Riparian habitat management/restoration to maintain/improve water quality
- B. Landowner incentives
- C. Better utilization of WRP:
  - 1. WRP Biologist
- D. CRP – Mid Contract Management - Clarification of Mowing Issue (cont.)

III. Forest Land

- A. Develop collaborative partnership on forest treatments with NRCS, RD, FSA, CSFS, USFS for full circle projects; “stumps to powering pumps.”

IV. Crop Land

- A. Create more markets in Western Colorado for orchard/vineyard crops that use drop and micro-spray (water conservation, salinity, and selenium).
- B. Irrigate to Dry land Crop Conversion Program water focused subcommittee of STC.
- C. General Comments.
  - 1. An AQ subcommittee could help NRCS to begin integrating/identifying the areas of overlap in AQ concerns and NRCS program opportunities. The existing RMNP Ag AQ subcommittee could be a good starting point for beginning this type of discussion. For example, “What opportunities might exist under the CCPI program?” The entire STC needs to be more aware of the unintended consequences when considering funding and programs, especially when considering environmental concerns (i.e. forestry subcommittee recommendations to chip vs. burn, which can provide a number of environmental benefits, not just AQ).
  - 2. CRP contract expiration allowance for overlap with sign-ups regarding Farm Bill conservation programs.

V. Pasture and Hay land

- I. Maintain range management