Colorado State Technical Committee Meeting
Morgan Community College - Fort Morgan, CO
February 22, 2012

Meeting Held By: Phyllis Ann Philipps, State Conservationist, NRCS
Eugene Backhaus, State Resource Conservationist, NRCS

Meeting Presenters:
Eugene Backhaus, NRCS
Phyllis Ann Philipps, NRCS
Dawn Jackson, NRCS
Greg Sundstrom, CSFS
Jim Sharkoff, NRCS
Rebecca MacLeod, NRCS
Billy Merritt, FSA
Ken Morgan, CPW
Phyllis Woodford, CDPHE
Rachel Murph, NRCS
Craig Metz, EnSave

Minutes by: Charlene Lucero

Welcome - Phyllis Ann Philipps, State Conservationist, NRCS

- Welcomed everyone and explained the role of the advisory of the State Technical Committee.
- Update and feedback is vital for locally lead process.

Follow – up – Gene Backhaus, State Resource Conservationist, NRCS

- Introductions
- Review of last meeting minutes.
- Minutes and presentations are posted on NRCS Technical website.
- Updated technical guide notifications will be sent out to STC members and be able to review notice on eFOTG. If you have suggestions or recommendations on the notices please do so.

Rural Development Report – Cheryl Scofield, Northeast Area Director, RD

- no report

Farm Service Agency Report – Billy Merritt, Program Manager, FSA

- Reviewed FSA's website and contact information. Website can be accessed here.
- CRP Update:
    - 25 years of CRP
    - General Sign up 43 Dates March 12 through April 6, 2012.
    - Fiscal Year 2012 Expiring CRP - Review of the top 10 counties with expiring CRP (refer to PowerPoint presentation).
    - Review 25% Cropland Waiver Counties and Counties with waivers to exclude Continuous CRP.
    - Explained ranking process, Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) will not change.
    - EBI – reviewed sub factors
- 2012 Farm Bill – Encourage everyone for their input and help shape the new farm bill.

Q: How many acres for this current sign up? Don't know yet. The Secretary will determine that. Really can't tell you.

State Technical Committee Structure Reports and Discussions

Wildlife Subcommittee Report – *Ken Morgan, Private Lands Program Manager, CPW*

- Introduce and provide recommendations to the STC
- Lesser Prairie Chicken (LEPC) Conference Report (refer to PP presentation)
    - Identifies practices implemented in NRCS programs, will not harm LEPC
    - Does not address CRP issues
    - Listing schedule: 12 month review August 2012, Decision August 2013
    - Landowner outreach. Susan Linner, USFWS, stated the efforts being done.
    - LEPC Action Area Change (refer to maps on slides 3 and 4 of PowerPoint) – identified opportunities of area of concern. Would like to request a recommendation to move forward.

Q: How will this map be used? Map was generated for Western Governors Association. Map is used for habitat targeting. In these areas you do not want wind energy. CRP can be used in the limited areas, how to use this map depends on the practice. Discussion of map borders for LEPC initiative and action area.

Q: Which map will be submitted to the FSA tech committee? When the map is agreed upon, it will need to be submitted to FSA in the form of shape files. The map that will be in the SAFE area is still being determined. Try to locate the other map that the committee had reviewed. Will come back after lunch with clear decision. Currently looking for the proper map.

- Emergency grazing on SAFE? No grazing for LEPC on the action area.
- Mid-contract management presentation.
    - Presentation given by Ed Gorman Specifically contrasting disking and haying activities in northeast Colorado.
    - FSA wishes to update the CRP – 1 Appendix
    - Discussion involving the vaue of haying to upland bird habitat. Problematic to befits to upland birds.
    - FSA can pay for the second MCM treatment after haying
    - NRCS will incorporate into upcoming NRCS CRP job sheets.
- CP 25 Rare and Declining Habitats - Recommendations
    - Eastern Colorado grasslands and west slope sagebrush steppe
    - Submit to FSA national office
- CP25 West Slope – Recommendations (refer to CRP CP 25 Proposal handout)
    - Expand existing area (see map on handout)
    - MCM Options – disking, interseeding, and prescribed burning
    - Haying and grazing not allowed
    - Seeding Matrix – see Appendix II in handout
    - GRSG and GUSG are both candidate species
    - MCM must be approved by a certified planner
    - Forbs chosen off of what is listed on the ESD

- CP25 Midgrass Prairie – Recommendations (refer to Colorado CP 25 Midgrass Project Proposal handout)
    - Midgrass occurs in eastern CO particularly on sandy and wet sites.
    - Critically important to the federal candidate species lesser prairie chicken
    - Estimated losses to midgrass prairie is as much as 75%
    - Eligibility area is defined as the land area with the polygons in Appendix I
    - Fields offered for enrollment must have 51% of their area within the CP25 boundary
    - Seed mixes reflect native vegetation necessary for conservation of target upland birds
    - Mixes will have minimum of 5 grasses, 3 forbs, and 1 shrub
    - MCM can be disking, interseeding, and prescribed burning
    - Grazing prohibits as MCM practice handbook 2 - CRP
- CP25 Shortgrass Prairie – Recommendations (refer to Colorado CP 25 Shortgrass Project Proposal handout)
    - Habitat type that falls under the eligibility category of "other specifically identifiable habitats within a State with documented losses of greater than 70 percent since European settlement"
    - Much of Colorado is within the Central Shortgrass Prairie which is a grassland ecoregion dominated by warm season grasses.
    - Species of concern include burrowing owl, ferruginous hawk, mountain plover and swift fox.
    - The habitat region has been identified as an area of conservation concern by CPW,, Partners in Flight, TNC, RMBO and others
    - The CP25 designation would provide landowners and agency natural resource professionals with another valuable tool for restoring these diminished habitats
    - Reviewed eligibility – see slide 13 for specifics.
- Final Recommendation
    - Change the shortgrass prairie buffer map to be identical to the proposed CP25 shortgrass map.
- All materials given to Billy and he will proceed.
- Sage Grouse Initiative – a lot of money being channeled through EQIP. Seth Gallagher, Rocky Mountain Observatory, explained some positions and leads on projects for this initiative.
- Update on Private lands partner biologists – had meeting last week. Ken is acting as coordinator for all biologists. Seth discussed all the positions that RMBO has found funding for. Refer to slide 15 for positions, funding sources, and locations of private lands biologists.

Forestry Subcommittee Report *– Greg Sundstrom, Forest Management Division, CSFS*

- Presented contact information on PowerPoint presentation.
- Forest Planning CAP 106
    - Definition – per the CAP 106 Criteria
    - Coordination with State Forestry Agencies and US Forest Service - The updated criteria was appended by the addition of a national common forest management plan template as a tool to help meet Section 2506 of the Food, Conservation and

Energy Act of 2008 . The template is accompanied by a guide for its use, which must be followed when the template is used. The use of the template is not required because a Forest Stewardship Plan as approved by the State Forester meets the requirements of EQIP plan of operations. State Forester Jeff Jahnke has delegated FSP plan approval to District Foresters in Colorado. CSFS is in the process of incorporating State Forest Ag Program specifics into a state template which can be used as a FSP, ATFS, NRCS FMP and State Forest Ag Tax program plan.

- CAP 106 rates - Applications for forest planning assistance are not subject to screening and ranking processes. They must be prepared by certified TSPs.

Air Quality Subcommittee Report– *Phyllis Woodford, Program Manager, CDPHE*

- RMNP Air Quality Initiative – reviewed background of initiative, presented graphs with 2002 NOx Statewide Emissions, 2002 Ammonia Emissions Statewide, and 2002 Front Range Ammonia Emissions. (Refer to PowerPoint presentation for figures)
- RMNP Nitrogen Deposition Reduction Plan endorsed by NPS, EPA, CDPHE & the Colorado Air Quality Control Commission in August 2007
  - Significant Aspects of the Plan:
    - **Voluntary** approach, no mandatory requirements or standards
    - Adaptive management approach based on a collaborative process
    - Sets long-term (25-year) resource management goals
    - Sets timeline and interim (5-year) goals to achieve nitrogen reduction goals starting in 2012 - 2032
    - Includes both short- and long-term strategies to achieve goals
  - Emission Reduction Efforts Included in the Plan
    - Nitrogen Reductions
    - Reduction Assumptions
  - Ammonia Reduction Efforts – Envisioned in the Plan
    - Point Sources
    - Agriculture – Best Management Practices
    - Domestic Area Sources
    - Other Area Sources
- Presented Interim Milestone graph – refer to slide 10 on PowerPoint.
- RMNP Nitrogen Deposition Reduction Contingency Plan - If milestone(s) are not met
  - Kicks off a process to develop a response if milestone(s) are not met
  - No new mandatory control measures proposed
  - Focus remains on voluntary reductions from BMPs and current programs (ozone and haze)
- RMNP Agriculture Subcommittee – Reviewed goals and achievements to date. Recognized subcommittee members on slide 13.
- Subcommittee Next Steps -
  - Outreach to producers and BMP implementation
    - Bring more stakeholders and ag expertise to the discussions
    - Continue to examine & question the science
  - Stress need for more research
    - BMPs

        - Improve identification of all potential sources of nitrogen to the park
        - Identify research gaps and needs
    - Document successes and failures
        - Integrate successes into existing NRCS programs and priorities
    - Next Meeting – May 16th at The Colorado Livestock Association, Board Room, 822 7th Street, Greeley, CO, from 9 am – noon.
- Concluding Remarks
    - Air quality issues at RMNP are a long-term problem.
    - Actions being taken today are shaping the dialogue, course and process.
    - Voluntary implementation of ammonia-reducing BMPs benefit Colorado agriculture by being part of the solution outside of a mandated regulatory framework.
    - Need to think holistically about all environmental issues facing Colorado's agriculture industry.
    - Bottom Line - N is a more pressing issue in CO than ozone.
        - NRCS air quality practices should focus on ammonia.

Grazing Lands – Rachel Murph

- Rachel went over objectives, purpose, and examples for the subcommittee. See PP presentation for specifics.
- Looking for volunteers or nominations of people that would be interested in being a part of this subcommittee.
- Send suggestions or questions to Rachel at Rachel.murph@co.usda.gov or (720) 544-2866.

Energy - ?

- Still looking for chair

590 Practice Changes – Jim Sharkoff, State Agronomist, NRCS

- Jim reviewed the NHCP Nutrient Management Conservation Practice Standard, Code 590 (January 2012)
    - What is Planning Criteria? Planning criteria establishes the minimum level of treatment required to achieve an intended purpose for the planning and application of a conservation practice.
    - PowerPoint presentation has all the specific information on 590 Practice Changes
    - Any questions regarding the material on the PowerPoint please contact Jim Sharkoff (720)544-2814

Q: How did changes come out? National sent out a year ago. A lot of agencies had their input and then sent out these updates.
Q: Are you using it now? No, we have until January 2013 to implement changes.
Q: Is there any flexibility? We cannot be any less restrictive. We cannot add a purpose unless approved by Deputy Chief.
Q: Is this for all producers or for only producers enrolled in NRCS programs? Only applies to Nutrient Management through NRCS program.

NRCS Program Update – Dawn Jackson, ARC – Programs, NRCS

- EQIP Screening & Ranking Criteria Development
    - All rankings will be performed utilizing the Application Evaluation Ranking Tool (AERT) in ProTracts
    - AERT allows for National, Sate, and Local ranking criteria;
        - National Questions 25%
        - State 40%
        - Local 25%
        - Cost Effectiveness 10%
    - Factors considered in ranking
        - Degree of cost effectiveness of the proposed conservation practices based on broad averages of the cost and environmental benefit of each practice
        - The magnitude of the expected environmental benefits resulting from the conservation treatment and the priority of the resource concerns that have been identified
        - How effectively and comprehensively the project addresses the priority natural resource concerns
        - Use of conservation practices that provide long-term environmental enhancements
        - Compliance with Federal, State, local and Tribal regulatory requirements concerning soil, water and air quality; wildlife habitat; and ground and surface water conservation with higher ranking points given to plans that help producers avoid regulatory requirements, meet regulatory requirements, or reduce the potential for regulations
        - Use of conservation practices that provide long-term environmental enhancements
        - Compliance with Federal, State, local and Tribal regulatory requirements concerning soil, water and air quality; wildlife habitat; and ground and surface water conservation with higher ranking points given to plans that help producers avoid regulatory requirements, meet regulatory requirements, or reduce the potential for regulations
        - Willingness of the applicant to complete all conservation practices in an expedited manner
        - Ability to improve existing conservation practices or systems that are in place at the time the application is accepted or that complete a conservation system
        - Other locally defined factors, such as location of conservation practice, the extent of natural resource degradation, and degree of cooperation by local producers to achieve environmental improvements
    - For application ranking pools that include water conservation or irrigation-efficiency practices, priority is giving to applications which:
        - Are consistent with State law in which the producer's eligible land is located;
        - There is a reduction in water use in the agricultural operation;

        - Or where the producer agrees not to use any associated water savings to bring new land under irrigation production other than incidental land needed for efficient operation
    - May also consider:
        - Applicant's history of proper operation and maintenance of practices installed with program assistance for the practice lifespan
        - Awarding negative points for participants with contracts that are not on schedule or have had previous contract terminations
        - Achieving a higher level of treatment

Q: Who writes the ranking questions? Area staff, ECS, and NRCS write the questions.
Q: Can the committee be a part of the questions? We invite input on the practices or elements that can be used to separate one project from another. NRCS will continue to formulate the questions based on this input. You can provide comments or input at any time to Dawn Jackson, ASTC-P or through the locally workgroup process.

- GARC Development
    - Area-wide Market Analysis (AWMA)
        - Establishes fair market values of various lands that may be enrolled
        - Define market areas to be analyzed based on land use, productivity, land unit size, soil types and features, types and amounts of improvements, general topography and natural features, locations, irrigation water rights, etc
        - AWMAs are updated annually
        - GARCs are established from AWMA
        - GARCs are used in Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) and Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
        - Reflect the value determined to be fair compensation for the rights being acquired
        - Although NRCS acquires the majority of the property rights associated with the land, the landowner retains certain reserved rights; therefore, the GARCs will always be less than the fair market value in the AWMA or appraisal
    - To determine the fair compensation value, we use data from:
        - National, state or local agricultural statistics
        - Local information about the value of land leases for the rights being acquired
        - Historic values accepted and rejected by landowners for program participation
        - Neighboring geographic areas (neighboring states)
    - WRP – Most property rights are extinguished (prohibited) under WRP easements; fewer reserved rights retained by the landowner
        - GARC initially established at 80% of the AWMA fair market value
    - GRP – Property rights extinguished are development and cropland production, and haying/harvest rights and industrial or commercial energy development are restricted; all other rights retained by the landowner

        - GARC initially established at 60% of the AWMA fair market value
    - Consideration of acceptance and rejection factored in to values
    - GARCs then compared to neighboring state AWMA and GARC values
    - Neighboring GARC values should not vary by more than 20 percent
    - Reviewed Colorado FY 2012 WRP GARCs – this is sent out to all the committee.

Q: Do you review these every fiscal year? Yes, we go through the whole process every year.
Comment: Landowner can offer less but not more.

- NRCS programs and initiatives
    - General EQIP breakdown into resource concerns
        - Soil Management – Cropland
        - Grassland Improvement – Grass/Pastureland
        - Water Quality/Quantity – Cropland
        - Forestry/Agro-forestry – Forest/Cropland
        - Wildlife/Riparian – all land uses
        - Animal Waste – Headquarters/Cropland
    - Grouped by 10 watershed areas
    - Application funding – March 21
    - National initiatives – March 30, June 1
        - Organic
        - Energy
        - Air Quality
        - Seasonal High Tunnel
    - Landscape Initiative March 30, June 1
        - Sage Grouse – western CO (central & north)
        - Lesser Prairie Chicken – SE CO
        - Ogallala Aquifer – eastern CO
    - CSP Application period closed
        - Applications are being evaluated and ranked
        - Tentative funding March 30
        - Final funding decision by June 15
        - Nationally accepting 11 million acres
        - Received application for over 19 million acres
    - Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
        - Rental agreement or easement options
        - Easement can be with individual landowners or offered through a land trust or other entity
        - Applications accepted until Friday, Feb 24
        - Evaluation and ranking completed by March 2
        - Funding decisions – April 2
    - Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)
        - Will consider applications received by late March
        - Funding offers made mid-May
        - Focus this year completing restoration on existing easements
    - Farm & Ranch Protection Program (FRPP)
        - Permanent easements submitted by eligible entities

        - Considering offers received by June 1
    - Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)
        - Funds offered through "working lands for wildlife initiative"
        - Objectives:
            - Restore populations
            - Regulatory predictability (certainty)
            - Best 'Bang for the Buck'
        - Targets specific to Colorado
            - Lesser Prairie Chicken (Candidate)
            - Sage Grouse (Candidate)
            - Southwest Willow Flycatcher (Endangered)
        - June timeline

Q: How popular is the high tunnel deal? Very popular. We installed over 50 high tunnels in our pilot year.

Energy CAPs – Guest Speaker, Craig Metz, President, EnSave

- EnSave is a technical provider for NRCS for the new Energy CAP
- What should a good energy audit contain? Refer to slide on PowerPoint presentation.
- Five step farm energy audit process
    - Initial interview
    - Farm visit
    - Energy analysis and calculations
    - Plan writing and delivery
    - Follow up with farmer
- Refer to the PowerPoint presentation for explanations of each step.
- Contact information www.ensave.com or call 800-732-1399.

Guest Speaker, Rebecca MacLeod, National Energy Efficiency Liaison, NRCS

- How NRCS and EnSave work together on energy use on the farm. Through the EQIP program was authorized to use energy audits. It still has to address a resource concern.
- Innovation activities to get the word out. Working with primary dairy states right now and Colorado is rising on the list.
- Energy plan is just like a conservation plan and information about the potential savings. Measures have payback period 3 to 5 years.
- Funding for implementation is available but you need to have an Agricultural Energy Audit. Responsibility of the engineering staff of NRCS.
- A TSP will have to be the person to do the initial interview and will provide the recommendation on the energy efficiency.
- You can go into our website and use assessment tools and you can get a ballpark figure of what you can potentially save. Stress on it's a big ballpark figure.

Q: What is after the audit and enrolled in EQIP? Once audit is in hand, producer comes into NRCS with plan. Still need to be ranked in EQIP and find out if there is funding available. Planning process is a little longer because of the audit portion.

Comment: Lighting upgrades is a big energy saver by upgrading fixtures and not just changing bulbs.

Closing comments – Phyllis Philipps

- Requested feedback on how the meeting is going.

Feedback:
Would like to see more producers?
Maybe go through your local working groups and send a representative to the meeting. Working through CACD would give the producer a voice.

It seems that there is less attendance because we had more ability to add input than before. Right now things are already rolled out. Input is good from local work groups but seem to be generally local and happy. We welcome any points of interest.

Before money use to come to each watershed and then split out on a fixed payment schedule, can we go back to that?
Currently the payment schedule is out of our hands, NHQ has made a Regional payment team. This is how practices will be paid to. Some costs may be higher than the payment schedule and as a state we may be able to place a payment cap on a contract.

Would the committee be interested in projects?
Local work groups have received letters on the potential projects. Deadline is May 1. We encourage the local work groups to attend meetings. Encourage folks to identify priority areas, geographic areas, projects. Get people passionate about a project that we can all rally around.

When we schedule the next meeting try to let people know in advance.
We will try to do our best to get a schedule out and get the meetings set regularly.
Coordinate on getting more critical meetings in Denver and other topics covered on outlying communities.

Let people know what feedback is needed for the agenda items prior to the meeting time, so these can be addressed at the meeting.

Maybe have a technical bulletin board or have a place to have suggestions or chats on what topics need to be discussed for future meetings.

If you have any feedback please contact NRCS.

Thank you for your attendance.