

Colorado State Technical Committee Meeting
USDA Forest Service Building – Golden, CO
May 21, 2012

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

Meeting Presenters: Eugene Backhaus, NRCS
Billy Merritt, FSA
Ken Morgan, CPW
Phyllis Woodford, CDPHE
Stacy Kolegas Beaugh & Kristen Jespersen, Tamarisk Coalition

Jamie Spakow, RD
Phyllis Ann Philipps, NRCS
Dawn Jackson, NRCS
Harley Ernst, GLCI

Minutes by: Charlene Lucero

Welcome – Phyllis Ann Philipps, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Welcomed everyone and thanked everyone for attending and explained how important it is to have the State Technical Committee.

Follow up – Eugene Backhaus, State Resource Conservationist (NRCS)

- Introductions
- Two Technical Guide Notices went out since last meeting. 656 and 657 came out with some practices. If you did not get notices let us know and will get them out to you. There were a number of new practices and a few cancellations. There will be a hard copy available for your review. The 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.
- Minutes and presentations are posted on NRCS Technical [website](#).

Rural Development (RD) Report - Jamie Spakow, Acting State Director

- Application cycles are coming out for housing preservation grants, some portions of the applications address energy.
- Currently working with partnerships with renewed energy
- RD is leading the FAC and becoming more interactive with other agencies. Our agency is thinking more of just facilities. Colorado is a StrikeForce State and we are supposed to find ways to work together and reach folks that we have not reached before for USDA programs. RD is the leader of the StrikeForce. There are 29 counties in Colorado that qualify for our outreach to underserved and first time qualifiers.

Farm Service Agency (FSA) Report - Billy Merritt, Program Manager

- Reviewed FSA's website and contact information. <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>.
- General signup 43 March 12-April 13
- Expiring CRP on Sept. 30, 2012 US 6.5 million acres CO 572,000 acres
- Refer to PowerPoint for current statistics on CRP contracts and acres on NRCS Technical [website](#).

- Colorado's FY2011 CRP Payments
 - Annual rental..... \$65.6 Million
 - Cost share..... \$433,232
 - Incentive..... \$1.9million
 - Total..... \$68 million
- Colorado has 7 of the top 25 Counties in CRP acreage nationally with Baca County leading the nation.
 - #1) Baca County (274,281 acres)
 - #4) Weld County (224,344 acres)
 - #6) Washington County. (201,060 acres)
 - #8) Kit Carson County. (198,744 acres)
 - #10) Kiowa County (192,222 acres)
 - #16) Prowers County. (163,354 acres)
 - #25) Lincoln County (145,248 acres)
- Colorado CRP Acres by Conservation Practice (CP)
 - CP1, introduced grasses.....37,000 acres
 - CP2, native grasses.....635,000 acres
 - CP4D, wildlife habitat.....513,000 acres (#1 in the nation)
 - CP10, existing grass.....964,819 acres
- Top Ten States in CRP Acreage. Colorado is #5 with 2,226,572 acres
- Cropland limit Waivers
 - Nine Counties in the US have a waiver to exceed 25% of the county's cropland acres to be enrolled in CRP
 - Colorado has seven of the nine.
 - Baca.....35%
 - Bent.....30%
 - Crowley.....35%
 - Kiowa.....30%
 - Las Animas....29%
 - Prowers.....30%
 - Pueblo.....35%
- SAFE = State Accres For wildlife Enhancement
 - SAFE proposals address state and regional high-priority wildlife objectives. SAFE practices provide the flexibility to meet the specific needs of high-value wildlife species in a participating state or region
 - Lesser Prairie Chicken SAFE Map shown
 - 21,500 acres allocated 12,043 acres enrolled
 - Plains Sharp-tailed Grouse SAFE map shown
 - 6,475 acres allocated 1,668 acres enrolled
 - Short-Grass Prairie Buffer SAFE map shown
 - 11,475 acres allocated 1,475 acres enrolled
 - Western Slope Grouse SAFE map shown
 - 12,600 acres allocated 6,200 acres enrolled

State Technical Committee Structure Reports and Discussions

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

- Subcommittee met last week and very engaged with doing things to enhance wildlife.
- Power Point presentation covered 4 SAFE proposals. Refer to PowerPoint presentation at [NRCS Colorado Technical Resources State Technical Committee](#).
- 1. Expand the Shortgrass SAFE Buffer proposal reviewed the map. Propose larger map area to allow for more landowners to sign up.

Question: How come Washington County is not included in this map?

Answer: Washington County is covered in another proposed map.

Suggestion was made that “We could approve this with understanding that this will be revisited”.

Noe explained the ideas behind the new proposed area maps.

- Is there any dissent on the proposed of the new map area for the expansion of the Shortgrass SAFE Buffer proposal?
- None

Action: The recommendation will be moved forward to FSA.

- 2. Lesser Prairie Chicken (LEPC) SAFE Recommendation
 - STWSC recommendation - to request a 50% enhancement of existing habitat to be eligible for program application.
 - Most of these enrollments will be from expiring CRP lands.
- Is there any dissent on the proposed LEPC SAFE proposal?
- None

Action: No dissent and will move this forward to FSA committee.

- 3. Expansion of West Slope SAFE boundary to include Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties. Hand-out was passed out during presentation.
 - The existing Colorado Western Slope SAFE area does not cover many portions of Columbian sharp-tailed and sage-grouse range suitable for this program in Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties where cropland, expired CRP, or expiring CRP lands are present.
 - Expansion of this SAFE area will provide more producers the opportunity for conservation and more potential to allocate the available SAFE acres designated for these species.
 - Refer to map on PowerPoint and hand-out for Hydrologic Unit Codes for the proposed expansion area.
- Is there any dissent or questions regarding this proposal?
- No questions or dissent.

Action: Move forward to FSA.

- 4. Colorado Upland Bird SAFE Recommendations
 - Maintain and improve populations of upland birds

- Enrollment of new cropland and existing/expiring CRP to maintain populations of wild birds
- Vegetation established and managed on enrolled acres will support habitat needs of target wildlife species for 10-15 years
- Acreage request: 20,000 acres
- Review map of Upland Bird SAFE and Land Use. No CRP in the northeast area of the state and this will work on this corner. Objective is to get more landowners enrolled.
- A 10 page hand-out was passed around at time of presentation which included project goals, description, benefits, costs, monitoring, and map boundaries.

What were the western boundary criteria?

Primarily based on target species, used existed map CPA25. Anybody in that CRP zone if they are within the boundaries of adhere to conference report kind of negates the options in Adams, Baca, Bent, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Kit Carson, Lincoln, Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Prowers, Sedgwick, Washington, Weld, and Yuma.

Still is cropland and still has to follow criteria and policy of that program.

What is the advantage of overlapping? Provides flexibility in use of the program and allows inclusion of pivot corners. It also allows for more diversity of the species, i.e., pheasants, Scaled quail, Bobwhite quail, Greater Prairie chicken, etc.

Where do we stand on asking for more acres even though we have not exceeded our current use? We are at 43% of delivery of acres. Neighboring states are at 80-90%. We are trying to make this more marketable. Getting to the 90% will take some extensive work but it is possible. With so many CRP acres expiring we need something to come back and deliver these proposed acres. This new proposal should encourage new sign ups.

We have two CREPs that we still do not know where they stand.

- We will need to review current acres and see where unused acres stand. There was plenty of discussion regarding the proposed plan. A voice vote was taken to decide to move forward.
- Voice vote; I's take it.

Action: Move proposal forward to FSA. The shape files will be sent to Billy.

Comment: SAFEs are stand alone practices along with mid contract management. SAFEs are continuous and cost shares are 50% and this will have an increase sign up incentive.

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

- Recommendation of Committee
 - Collaborate with NRCS on developing a targeted air quality initiative for FY13 that focuses on the implementation of conservation practices that can help lower agriculture's contribution of nitrogen/ammonia to sensitive ecosystems, such as those in Rocky Mountain National Park.

- Develop Targeted Conservation Effort
 - Strategically look at Ozone AQ Initiative boundary
 - Map across livestock and crop production sectors
 - Compare to National Park Service and CSU atmospheric modeling boundaries
 - Review NRCS AQ Conservation Practices
 - Identify beneficial BMPs
 - Missing BMPs
 - Develop a prioritized “Suite of Practices”
 - Goals & Results
 - Review Payment Schedule
 - Market the Nitrogen/Ammonia AQ Initiative

Refer to presentation at [website](#).

Grazing Lands – Rachel Murph

No report?

Guest Speaker, Colorado Riparian Restoration Partnerships: Opportunities for Collaboration - Stacy Kolegas Beaugh, Executive Director, Tamarisk Coalition & Kristen Jespersen

- PowerPoint Presentation done. Refer to presentation on website.
- Discussion on riparian restoration as it pertains to the southwestern willow catcher.

NRCS Program Update – Dawn Jackson, ARC – Programs, NRCS
FY12 Programs, Allocations and Approvals as of 5/21/12

- Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
 - Allocated \$20.5 million in General EQIP; Approved \$19.5 mil
 - ✦ Water Quality/Quantity 49%
 - ✦ Grazing 26%
 - ✦ Forestry 10%
 - ✦ Wildlife 8%
 - ✦ Soil Management 5%
 - ✦ Agro-Forestry 1%
 - ✦ Animal Waste 1%
 - \$ 1.0 million reserved for Water Quality Initiatives
- EQIP Initiatives – June 1
 - Ogallala \$1.85 million allocated
 - Air Quality \$1.6 million allocated
 - Organic \$323,000
 - Lesser Prairie Chicken \$296,000
 - Sage Grouse \$ 83,000
 - Energy
 - Seasonal High Tunnel

- Colorado River Salinity Program (EQIP)
 - \$6.05 million allocated; 90% funds approved in project area
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - 380,459 acres allocated and approved
 - \$2.9 million in annual payments (2012 – 2016)
 - Colorado average \$7.60/acre; National est. \$14.50/acre
- Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
 - \$737,000 allocated; 1 rental agreement & 1 easement approved
- Farm & Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)
 - \$7.1 million allocated; Applications due June 1

FY13 Conservation Programs

- EQIP Application Cutoff: July 1, 2012
- Targeted Conservation Proposals
- Targeting meeting for Conservation Easements

Targeted Conservation Project Proposals – Phyllis Ann Philipps, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Received # of proposals.
- Each proposal had a project that identified area, treatments, and a funding proposal.
- Projects have to proceed until moneys get allocated. Best thing out of these proposed projects is a conservation plan gets done.
- Colorado gets funding by outcomes. This will be able to tie things down to get things established and ready to go.

Open Table:

Colorado State Board – Grants available for Conservation Districts. Applications are being taken now. Probably get about 20 applications

Weed grants are out. Six conservation districts that receive funds and everyone is in the field.

Colorado Corn Growers – reports they are working with NRCS and CDPHE on air quality.

Randy Ristau - Likes the partnership with the water quality initiative that has recently come out.

Bill Noonan – Awaiting decision on listing of lesser prairie chicken, and moving conservation forward along with sage grouse.

Cattlemen’s Association – new to meeting.

Rio Grande CREP update

The agreement has gone back and forth with national and district. Agreement is very close with only a few edits away from final. It is in early stages of being completed. Public meeting in Alamosa is coming up, next meeting. Training will have to be involved along with getting

logistics in order. This is a water quantity issue to help stabilize the aquifer. Concern is soil erosion and an effort to see what is going to grow.

Seth Gallagher – Eight new partnership positions in the state. Currently moving forward on Sage Grouse initiative and looking at options for funding.

If you have any feedback please contact NRCS.

Thank you for all your attendance and participation.