**Session Notes**

**State Technical Advisory Committee**

**November 4, 2021 9:30a-11:30p - Teleconference**

**Attendees:30**

Roylene Comes at Night

Nick Vira

Anna Lael

Allan Walker

Ben Bonella

Gary Barr

Carolyn Kelley

Ron Cummings

Dan Dormaier

Nathan Gallahan

Danielle Gelardi

Keith Griswold

Bonda Habets

Harold Cruz

Ernie Holt

Deborah Johnson

Erin Kasmarczyk

Kristina Ribellia

Greg Kurz

Lee Hammer

Patrick Lewis

Michael Crowder

Nick Peak

Angela Reeseland

Robert Compton

Ryan Tippett

Stuart Crane

Holly Taylor

Tom Saulser

Larry Johnson

**Opening Remarks – Roylene Comes at Night**

* Majority of staff teleworking for more than 1.5 years
* Direct hiring of 17 entry level positions, many have only met others thru MS Teams
* COVID requirements continue
* Shifting from Resource Management System (whole Farm planning) to Progressive planning
* Understanding everyone’s roles and responsibilities, not doing everything for everyone
* Continuous software updates
* More program funds expected
* Having to learn a new “game to play”
* 2021 Assistance by Program - $41,321,157 Total
* New Programs: WaterSmart, Preliminary Investigations for Funding, Urban Conservation, Climate Farming, EQIP-CIC

**Introduction and Housekeeping – Nick Vira, NRCS State Partnership Liaison**

**CSP Outreach to Foresters – Keith Griswold/Nathan Gallahan**(PP presentation)

* CSP Outreach Opportunities - Utilization of the conservation stewardship program is inequitable across the state, which significantly degrades our ability to support farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners, while unfairly burdening key teams with increased CSP workloads.
* We have new software and systems that are reviewing our performance nationwide called dashboard system. How can we shift the burden across state and increase participation
* Few goals and objectives for this initiative:
  + Increase non-industrial private forestland (NIPF) applications and CSP utilization statewide,
  + Help field staff meet 30 active contracts-per-planner goal.
  + Helps NRCS-WA meet NHQ goals of $30 million in CSP obligations.
  + Increase CSP needs through increased CSP application backlog.
  + Trial a communications method that can be tailored and utilized to increase program participation across the NRCS enterprise.
    - Analyze and organized EQIP land use date by team for future communication targeting and utilization.
* Propose a focused communication campaign include the following activities:
  + External Public:
    - Produce and provide flyers for CSP 101 information, including links to service-center locator and website information. Provide to partners (CD, WSCC, Tribes, WACD), NGO (Land Trust), production groups (Cattlemen’s Association, NW Natural Resources group, etc.)
    - Produce and mail CSP flyers to previous EQUP applicants w/completed forestry practices.
    - Produce and provide external media kits, including PSAs and availability of subject matter experts, and other programmatic information to local radio, broadcast, NGO and print media.
    - Externally, STC announcement to partners describing the importance of CSP participation across the state, CSP training provided by field staff, and opportunities of increased adoption of CSP program within WA.
* Will be proposing a focused communication campaign, including the following activities:
  + Provide additional training to staff and interested partners on CSP, this will include:
    - Enhancement Activities training by SRC staff
    - Resource Concern tools training by SRC staff
    - How to complete CSP assessment training by SRC staff
    - Conservation desktop training by ASTC-P staff
    - Benefits of CSP program training by ASTC-P staff
    - Hot to complete CSP Ranking training by ASTC-P staff
    - How to create agreement items within a CSP contract training by ASTC-P staff.

* CSP NIPF Forestry Outreach – Target previous EQIP contract holders that have not had a CSP contract
  + Run report in Protracts and IDEA of EQIP contract holders that applied PS 660, PS384, PS666
  + Create post card and mail to above-listed EQIP applied practice contract holders informing them of CSP and local NRCS Service Center
  + Mail postcard to 352 previous EQIP participants in early December.

**Buy-Protect-Sell: Provision Criteria for Transactions in Washington – Keith Griswold** (PPE presentation)

* Easements-Buy/Protect/Sell (BPS)
  + A buy-protect-sell transaction, wherein NRCS enters into an ALE-agreement to provide cost-share assistance for the purchase of an agricultural lad easement on eligible private or Tribal agricultural land that is owned or is being purchased by an eligible entity o a transitional basis for the purposes of securing the long-term protection of natural resources and the agricultural nature of the land and ensuring timely transfer of the ownership of the land to a qualified farmer or rancher subject to the additional requirements specific to buy-protect-sell transactions.
* Land Eligibility - Private or tribal land that otherwise meets the eligibility requirements of this part that is owed or in the process of being purchased by an eligible entity may be determined eligible for ACEP-ALE as part of a buy-protect-sell transaction if ALL OF THE FOLLOWING CRITERIAS ARE MET:
  + (i) The otherwise eligible land is also subject to conditions, as determined by NRCS, that necessitates ownership of the parcel by the eligible entity on a transitional basis prior to the creation of an agricultural land easement, such as-
    - Imminent threat of development or fragmentation into parcels below the median size of farms or chances in the country or parish as determined by the USDA’s most recent National Agricultural Statistical Survey (NASS);
    - Planned or approved conversion of grasslands to more intensive agricultural uses; or
    - Part of the documented eligible entity program to transition ownership of agricultural lands to historically underserved farmers or ranches.
  + (ii) At the time of application, the eligible entity must provide NRCS evidence that the eligible entity either –
    - Owns the land; or
    - Is in the process of actively purchasing the land. Such evidence may include a valid purchase agreement, a statement from the existing landowner that they are unwilling or unable to sell a conservation easement themselves, or sufficient funds to complete the purchase of the land.
  + (iii)The eligible entity is able to meet all applicable ACEP-ALE general requirements and all specific provision related to buy-protect-sell transactions identified in this part and supplement guidance specific to buy-protect-sell transactions.
* Ineligible Lands
  + Lands owned by a State or Local government – Lands owned in fee title by a State, including an agency or a subdivision of a State, or a unit of local government are ineligible for ACEP-ALE, this includes that such lands are ineligible for a buy-protect-sell transaction
  + (Only Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are eligible for BPS option)

Questions or comments from the STAC can be sent to Nick or Keith, please provide to them within the next two weeks.

**EQIP Conservation Incentive Contract (CIC) - Keith Griswold** (PP presentation)

* Statutory Requirements - Conservation Incentive Contract (CIC)
  + Identify watersheds (or other appropriate regions) – HPA
  + Determine relevant land uses within HPA
  + Identify up to 3 priority resource concerns by land use
    - Consistent with the 8 CSP State identified priority issue concerns
  + Fund annual payments and installation payments
  + Contracts at least 5 years, and no more than 10 years
  + Prioritize applications addressing priority RC’s
  + Evaluate applications against similar ag and forestry
  + Proposal Principles
    - Payment rates for installation like EQIP
    - Annual payments like CSP
    - Does not require entire operation
    - EQIP-CIC Priority Resource Concerns a subset of State CSP Priority Resource Concerns
    - Promote conservation systems
    - Utilize Climate Change Mitigation management practices plus 3 drought practices
    - No structural or vegetative practices in FY22
    - Drought practices:
      * Drainage Water Management (554)
      * Forage Harvest Management (511)
      * Irrigation Water Management (449)
* CIC Framework for FY22 – Allocation for FY22 –
  + States must allocate at least $200,000 or 5%, whichever is greater; but no more than 20% of their EQIP-General allocation
  + For WA that is $675,000 (5%0
  + Additional guidance and training will be forthcoming from NHQ
  + CIC High Priority Area – Ground Water Areas
    - Yakima Aqifer
    - Odesso Aquifer
    - Walla Walla Aquifer
  + CIC High Priority Area – Cropland Wind Erosion
    - Majority of Central and Eastern Washington

How were these areas selected? – Water Quantity issues

* + CIC High Priority Area – Statewide Forestry

Have Bonda take a look at the 509 enhancement standards and see if a deep nutrient monitoring enhancement is available in the system

**Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) Update & Public Law 566 – Larry Johnson** (PP Presentation)

* PL-566 - Small Watershed Program (Overview)
  + Flood Prevention (Flood Damage Reduction)
  + Watershed Protection
  + Public Recreation
  + Public Fish and Wildlife
  + Agricultural Water Management
  + Municipal and industrial Water Supply
  + Water Quality Management (flood protection)
  + Assistance on Private vs Public Land
    - Financial and Technical Assistance can be provided on Public and Privately held land.
      * Public Land: Structural Watershed Project
      * Private Land: Land Treatment Watershed Project
  + A Project Sponsor(s) is required in order to:
    - Apply for federal assistance,
    - Assist with the Watershed Plan development, and
    - To implement the watershed plan after it is approved.
  + Sponsor Responsibilities
    - Financial Commitment
    - Power of Eminent Domain
    - Acquisition of Permits and Licenses
    - Authority to Levy Taxes
    - Lead Public Participation
    - Operations and Maintenance – Not to exceed 100 years
  + NRCS Responsibilities
    - Financial and Technical Assistance
    - Preparation of the Watershed Plan
    - Prepare Land Rights Maps as needed for Project Construction
    - Engineering Design Activities
    - Preparation of the Operation and Maintenance Plan
    - Operation and Maintenance Assistance – Inspection and Consultation
  + Implementation (Four primary steps)
    - Preliminary Investigation feasibility study/report (PIFR) – 6-9 months
    - Application for Watershed Planning Assistance – 6 months
    - Watershed Plan/EA or EIS Development – 2 to 4 years
    - Watershed Plan Implementation – 3 to 8 years
* Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP)
  + Why are wildfires a concern?
    - The burning of litter and organic material can reduce infiltration,
    - Increase surface runoff and erosion, and
    - Lead to Hydrophobic soils (hydrophobic soils repel water which can lead to flash floods and debris flows.
      * Significant factor for flash floods are:
        + Soil Burn Severity (Low, Medium, High)
        + The extend of “High” soil burn severity
  + EWPP Assessment Overview
    - LiDAR Cross Section
    - Building Location
    - LiDAR Cross Section – Pre-Fire CFS
    - LiDAR Cross Section – Post-Fire CFS
    - Process helps screen out areas that are not high risk

**Local Work Group Update – Nick Vira** (PP Presentation)

* Posting the Local Work Group reports and will be located on the STAC webpage under the meeting material for today and reports will be getting sent out shortly
* The local work groups will be convening in the summertime around June and will be asking for reports; questions or feedback.

**New and adopted Practice Standards – Bonda Habets**

* New WA Standards coming
  + 400 - Bivalve Aquaculture Gear and Biofouling Control – added purpose for Bivalve Aquaculture Gear and Biofouling Control – added purpose for risk to species of concern (yellow poly cord pollution)
  + 576 – Livestock Shelter
  + 808 = 336 - Soil Carbon Amendment with compost and biochar, on Federal Register on Dec 15 for comments.
* Conservation Practices to be updated FY22, most with ***minor*** revisions for better clarity
  + 315 – Herbaceous Weed Treatment
  + 490 – Tree/Shrub Site Prep – added consideration
  + 595 – Pest Management
  + 590 – Nutrient Management
  + 600 – Terrace
  + 610 Saline Sodic Management
* Conservation Practices to be updated FY22 with ***major*** revisions
  + 511 – Forage Harvest Mgmt – added two soil health purposes: soil organisms and aggregate stability resource concerns
  + 512 – Forage & Biomass Planning renamed Pasture/Hayland Planting – added Air Quality purpose, includes use of Ecological Site Descriptions and Forage Suitability Groups

**Top 10 Conservation Practices for 90% Funding – Bonda Habets**

* 313 – Waste Storage Facility – Water quality
* 329 – Residue and Tillage Management, No Till – Erosion issues
* 340 – Cover Crop – Erosion issues
* 386 – Field Border – Erosion issues
* 391 – Riparian Forest Buffer – Erosion and Salmon habitat
* 396- Aquatic Organism Passage – Salmon habitat
* 420 – Wildlife Habitat Planting – general wildlife and Monarch Butterfly
* 612 – Tree/Shrub Establishment – Post Wildfire Restoration
* 645 – Upland Wildlife Habitat – General wildlife
* 666 - Forest Stand Improvement – Wildfire Hazard reduction

**NRCS Farmed Wetland Hydrology Changes –** posted on the Federal Register**– Bonda Habets**

* NRCS three-step wetland determination process:
  + Step 1 – Wetland Identification
  + Step 2 – Determination of Wetland Type, assign WC labels
  + Step 3 – Determination of Size
* Hydrology indicators need to be more defined (added)
  + Met the following hydrologic criteria (i) if not a playa, pocosin, or pothole, experienced inundation for 15 consecutive dates or more during the growing season or 10 percent of the growing season, whichever is less, in most years…

**FSA Clear 30 Maintenance Rates – Patrick Lewis** (PP Presentation)

* 30-year contract for certain conservation practices that is a little different and one of the things that the STAC is needing to do is to talk about maintenance rates.
* Normally maintenance rates mid-contract management would only do once over a 10-year contract vs. now potentially every 3 years over a 30-year contract.
* Run initial rate list through the STAC before taking it to committee and get rates established.
* All rates on attached list are not-to-exceed
* Proposed: Code: MgmtBeaver2 - to add cost share component for: Maintenance: Beaver cage tree protectors in riparian buffers (50% of the actual cost not to exceed $125 per acre

**Welcome Angela Reseland of WDFW – Angela Reseland**

* New Farm Bill Coordinator for WDFW

**Adjourn**

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| Deadlines/Action items: |  |
| STAC committee | Any additional comments or feedback for Patrick Lewis regarding maintenance rates |
| STAC committee | Concur with 75% and 90% payment schedule rate to Bonda |
| Next STAC Meeting – January 6, 2022 |  |