**Idaho State Technical Committee**

**Jan. 21, 2020 @ 8:00am – 1:00 p.m.**

**Idaho State NRCS Office**

**9173 W Barnes Drive, Boise, Idaho 83709**

8:00 Welcome and Introductions – Curtis Elke, State Conservationist, NRCS

NRCS

* Curtis Elke
* Ron Brooks
* Lori Kassib
* Bruce Sandoval
* James Eller

Tanya Oldham – Idaho Dairymen’s Association

Bas Hargrove - TNC

Dirk Mendive – Rep. Fulcher’s Office

Casey Atterbury – Sen. Crapo’s Office

Jason Pyron – FWS

Chris Johnson – Idaho Rural Water Association

Lynn Tominaga – Idaho Ground Water Appropriators

Sal Palazzolo – Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game

Katie Carver – DEQ (Regional)

Janet Valley – USFS

Mike Sommerville – IASCD

John Lillbaug – Idaho Forest Owners Association

Julia Ashoval – DEQ

Delwyne Trefz-- ISWCC

Staffing Update

Hiring has resumed and we have been able to bring on 8 Soil Conservationists a, Rangeland Management Specialist and ??????

24 vacancies remain. In light of this, NRCS is going to continue to rely on our partners to help us fill  
 the gaps.

The Re-Organization plan will be submitted on Jan. 22 to NRCS national leadership. We are moving to

a Team Structure of 17 Conservation Delivery Teams with co-operative Locally-led Work Groups. This is expected to provide more availability to customers.

NRCS is not closing any offices at this time. We had been looking into that scenario due   
to staffing issues.

Other national News: NRCS is working to streamline the application process with a single program-neutral application.

**Key Discussion Topic**

*Is there a need to increase payment rates to 90% on certain NRCS practices to increase use and or adoption?*

Facilitated by Ron Brooks, EQIP Program Manager, NRCS

The new Farm Bill is going to allow NRCS to select up to 10 practices to increase payment rates on to encourage adoption of those practices.

Practices selected by the STAC for recommendation to the State Conservationist following nearly 1 hour of wide-ranging discussion:

1. Tillage/Residue Management (345)
2. Critical Area Plantings
3. Range Planting
4. Farmstead Energy Improvement
5. Tree Planting (612)
6. Streambank Restoration
7. Pond Sealing (520)
8. Fire Break
9. Sediment Basin (350)
10. Riparian Buffers

**Proposed conservation initiatives and funding allocations for each**

Presenter: Ron Brooks, EQIP Program Manager, NRCS

Special Project recap for FY 2020

This is the last year for this type of special projects –they are being replaced by the Locally-Led Work Group pools

* Lemhi – 2 year project, $250,000 annually, total $500,000.
* Hangman Creek – Cd’A Tribe (Plummer FO)
* Cover Crop and Wildlife Depredation -- $100,000 (one landowner trial)

Following presentation of the funding breakdown for state-wide initiatives, there was discussion involving the apparent removal of flood irrigation from those initiatives. It was recommended to the State Conservationist that Flood Irrigation be restored to the initiatives list. The State Conservationist concurred with the recommendation.

**Cheatgrass Challenge update**

Presenter: James Eller

Eller noted that the partnership has been working on this for a year and that they are headed in the right direction – We have a strategy, products are being developed and Field Meetings are scheduled for:

* + Marsing – Feb. 18
  + Arco – Feb. 19
  + Pocatello – Feb. 20
  + Jerome – Feb. 21

Curtis noted the Western Governors Association is supportive of the Challenge, which dovetails with their Western Invasive Species Commission (WISC).

**Review of and recommendations regarding the Farm Service Agency (FSA) Cost Rates for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**

Presented by Jenny Perisol, Farm Service Agency

Introduction of FSA leadership

* Tom Daley – FSA State Director for Idaho
* Charles Newhouse – FSA, Farm Program Chief for Idaho
* John Mills – FSA new District Director for Western Idaho

Soil Rental rates

Contracts that expired in FY 2018, 2019 and 2020 are eligible to enroll so long as they have been kept in and managed as grassland

Idaho SAFE projects now falls under general CRP

* Hope to eliminate urgency to offer the ground
* Run out of acres
* General sign-up every year through FY2022
  + First SAFE re-enrollment
* SAFE buffer and wetland practices will remain available under continuous CRP

Curtis: CRP – NRCS workload increase under the changes to CRP. We have a plan, and we have agreements with Idaho F&G and others to bring on staffing to assist.

According to USFS, there may be some technical help from IDL through USFS CRP funding

Haying and Grazing – Policy is not out yet.

Discussed changes to Mid-Management activities

Discussed changes Management Activities

FSA has consulted with NRCS Idaho leadership on this topic

FSA plans to utilize NRCS Idaho numbers and consulting on not to exceed numbers

The question was asked whether FSA has the flexibility to change payment percentage? The answer was “No.”

The percentage for ECP is 75% and for Beginning and Historically Underserved is 90%

The is a great number of CRP acres expiring in FY2020 and FY2021.

Changes to CRP will have an impact.

Question was raised whether landowners leaving CRP would be interested in CSP or CGI?

Answer: I think they would with soil rental rates having dropped

One area where we are coming up short in FPAC is county-level cross selling of programs

**RCPP Update**

Presenter: Lori Kassib, ASTC-Programs, NRCS

In 2018 Farm Bill, RCPP became a stand-alone program with an allocation of $300M nationally. $150M goes to the 8 critical conservation areas – Idaho is not in one.

Applications were due Dec. 3

Applications will be initially reviewed at the state level by the State Technical Review Committee

1 made the cut

Sent up to National

Announcement is expected be made in March

How do are applications considered under the new Farm Bill

Impacts – social, economic as well as basic conservation impacts are examined

What is the Partner Contribution?

Partners are NO longer allowed to use individual landowners’ cost share as   
matching funds

Innovation

Partnership and Project Management

Vetting (see PowerPoint)

Perhaps an opportunity for some STAC members to be part of the review team

Feedback

Asking why proposal didn’t make it to the review process – portal issues perhaps?

Classic Timeline (see PowerPoint)

Announcement for FY2021 will be in July

Renewals Timeline – new aspect of program

New RCPP coordinator in February

Guidance should be out in May

Match fatigue from other agencies

There may be opportunities to expand on what you are already doing rather than starting something new. May be opportunities to piggyback or think outside the box.

Curtis – maybe go corporate – Amazon, Micron, but I don’t know how to do that.

What are

11:25 – Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Grassland Conservation roll-out. – Lori Kassib, ASTC-Programs, NRCS

Bundles

Hard to sell the program if the available activities are not applicable to our producers

We can make recommendations to national

Program is underutilized in Idaho

GCI has gotten more interest

Timeline for enhancement requests – see PowerPoint

May be time to get in a suggestion, but unclear

CSP renewals – Mid March (FY2014, 2015, 2016 contracts)

CSP coordinator – maybe this person could conduct a half-day training for partners?

CSP will be going through CART.

Question re: how is Activities defined?

BMPs look a lot like enhancements

EQIP is structural, it is an entry level program

CSP in management, it could be a great tool for Dairy

11:40 – Conservation Innovation Grant Program changes – Lori Kassib, ASTC-Programs, NRCS

It’s an opportunity to do some really cool stuff

A bridge between research and wide-spread adoption

Can help counter slow adoption in certain areas

Who are our innovators? Not only Universities – producers. Here is an opportunity for those cutting-edge farmers, ranchers, timber producers.

Late March/Early April sign-up for Idaho.

$75,000 cap lifted by National. We are sticking with $75,000 for now. Opens discussion

Easement discussion

Wade Brown

Sal – Would need to be heavily supported by Industry

Bas – pushback

Fiscal argument

Personality conflicts playing out

Coalition was criticized – maybe if the Ag industry led it?

Question about Land Use Advisory Board

Secretary of Interior Order on Big Game migration cooridors

ALE ranking questions

Half National

Half state

12:10 – STAC Schedule for the upcoming calendar year – Curtis Elke

We’re advocating for quarterly meetings

Shorter agenda – more discussion

We want to give you more time as well to share what you are doing

12:10 – Subcommittee reports – Get these from James

Agronomy committee has met several times

Nutrient Management practice standards

Organic has merged with Agronomy

Cheatgrass Challenge – Operating a bit like a Range sub-committee

Water Quality – Source Water Protection

* Ground Water
* Surface Water
* Both

National is going to track Source Water Protection

Lots of overlap between Source Water Protection areas and Idaho ag lands – should

Wildlife

Forestry

Revised practices

Agreement with Wild Turkey Federation for Forester position

USFS agreed to meet on shared forester position

State Forester is on list to be advertised.

Shared Stewardship meeting on tap to be held in early March with USFS and IDL

Guest – shared position employee people to come and speak on what they do

What do you want to get out of this?

More active involvement

Online repository

Get attachments

STAC crosswalk with LLWG – get results from those meetings and present to STAC at April meeting

Have the facilitators come in and present the summary?

Ideas re: partnering among other agencies. Shared success stories – snippet rather than full-blown story

Have the IDL partnership program person come and present

Round-robin is a bit much. Let’s hear about a project or a partnership.

An invited speaker provides better information

Really really liked the in-depth conversation/discussion

12:45 – Announcements from committee members

IDFG: Voluntary Access proposal requested $900,000

Any additional information? Not at this time

CAFÉ – Minidoka County – IDA purchased half the land and will gift it when it becomes operational

Partnering with CSI

Doing ZOOM meetings and at the IDA office

TSP

TNC – New Initiative call “Healthy Soils, Clean Water” Hired agronomist Brad Johnson to work with landowners

Innovation “insurance” program – if someone tries it and it fails, they will cover their loss

FWS – Working with IDFG on big game corridors and winter range

IRWA – Work with municipalities and utilities to stay in compliance with DEQ rules, developing protection plans, contingency plans for when systems go down. Cert riders to assist. Working with Source Water Protection to help mitigate water contamination

IDFG – CRP general sign-up is taking considerable time. Assisting as needed, but also staying up on policy information as it becomes available.

Monitoring information regarding flood irrigation in eastern Idaho.

ISWCC – Delwyne is getting up to speed in order to serve as Teri’s representative

Agreement has expired, but will continue partnership

Hope to assist TNC with their Healthy Soils initiative

USFS – State and Private Forestry

Getting Shared Stewardship up and running.

Tyler Ashcroft – Acting Shared stewardship Coordinator

Shared sales are going well

IDL has done a fabulous job

IDL is taking applications for Landscape Restoration Projects

IDL is taking pre-proposals for fuels and firebreaks

Conservation easements on high productivity forest lands

IASCD – Winter meeting, legislative work is in full swing

IFOA – Hiring of NRCS State Forester has been a big push for us

Landowner conference in Moscow. Each year it gets bigger. Past 300 this year.

Collaborations has been good – Good Neighbor Authority

Keeping our forests, forests – loss of forests for development

Meeting with Region 1 and 4 to bring on more shared positions

DEQ – Permits

* Corps
* Storm Water

Point Source Work

Non-Point Source work

401 Water Quality reports – Boise Regional Office

NRCS is looking to hire a Water Quality Specialist

Figuring out how we work together with you

Grant programs (on again, off again small program)

A little bit of money from Legislature for agricultural BMPs $200-$300K ask (traditionally $500K)

Appreciate NRCS assistance with 319 work.

Next State Technical Meeting – April 7, 2020

*Please note: This agenda is subject to change.*