

**State Technical Committee Meeting
November 19, 2009
Minutes**

Attending: K. Brown, SCC; S. Carney, FBC; G. Crews, NRCS; D. Day, FBC; B. Deecki, NRCS; C. Derickson, NRCS; B. Dersham, US F&W; D. Dostie, NRCS; M. Dubin, UMD; C. Fetzer, FSA; D. Fiesta, DEP; B. Frantz, NRCS; D. Goodlander, SCC; M. Goodson, NRCS; D. Heicher, SRBC; G. Hazard, PA Farm Bureau; B. Isaacs, NRCS; H. Latshaw, NRCS; J. Malot, NRCS; S. Marquart, PACD; K. Martin, Furmano Foods; M. McDonough, NRCS; S. McDowell, EPA; L. Moist, PSU; J. Myers, PA No-Till Alliance; K. O'Neill, CBF; M. Pruss, PAGC; D. Putnam, Wildlife Mgmt Inst.; M. Pyle, PCO; R. Ramsey, The Nature Conservancy; M. Raub, CB Comm.; S. Robbins, Pheasants Forever; M. Roberts, US F&W; C. Rohr, DEP; J. Russo, ZedX, Inc; E. Sanders, NRCS; H. Smeltz, NRCS; G. Smith, NRCS; N. Soto, NRCS; F. Suffian, EPA; K. Thompson, NRCS; P. Vanderstappen, NRCS; M. Wertz, PCO; J. Whiteside, Lancaster Co. C.D.; S. Zimmerman, PDA;

Welcome and Introductions – Craig Derickson

With this meeting we will have more order and organization, beginning with the newly organized subcommittees: Fish & Wildlife, Forestry, Grazing, Communications & Outreach, Nutrient Management, Air Quality, Organics, and Energy & Bio-fuels. The most significant issues these subcommittees will attempt to accomplish are in the Farm Bill programs. These are independent of this meeting and a subcommittee representative will present recommendations.

2010 is another year of tremendous conservation opportunities because of the program resources we have. In recent years, PA has had between \$15M & \$20M in the different financial assistance programs (with EQIP being the largest), but including WHIP, AMA, etc. Last year was the 1st year of the new CBWI program. We had \$5.5M in the CBWI in 2009. We are going up to \$10M this year in CBWI alone (the same scope at the entire statewide EQIP program), and in 2011 that will increase another \$5M.

The challenge is coming up with enough people to work with the farmers, make calls and bring those currently not participating to a point of minimum conservation systems. We must engage with those landowners who had previously not responded to our conservation message and applying practices.

2010 Program Expectations Overview and Budget Update

- More money than last year.
- The Ag Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) and Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) are both designed to receive requests for proposals, targeting NRCS conservation money to watersheds, geographic areas, and resource concerns. NRCS would offer dedicated funding if approved (money is set aside). Looking to agencies for responses. AWEP is targeted at water quality/quantity. CCPI is much broader with soil erosion, air quality, etc. CIG could be farmer, university, or a unit of government proposal to get federal matching funds (using innovative approach not used in EQIP).
- CREP and continuous CRP are still available. EQIP is similar to this past year, with the funding about the same as last year.
- Money dedicated for the air quality initiative has increased in counties not meeting standards for particulate matter and ozone precursors.
- We will continue the organic option this year, a little under \$800,000 set aside for those who are organic or transitioning to organic.

- Continuing the forestry effort state initiative; the FRPP allocation is just over \$4M. These are continuous sign-ups with periodic rankings.
- GRP received more than last year for easements and rental agreements, and HFRC submitted a proposal with help from other agencies.
- WHIP funding is down from last year, about \$650,000 for this year but we could get extra money if we have extra projects.
- Conservation activity plans are new this year, adding air quality, ag energy plan and IPM plan. Also PA could be involved in a national pilot to test hoop houses (more info to come).

WRP – Barry Frantz/Noel Soto (Handout – flyer with application on back)

- \$3.7M in this program, over \$1M obligated last year.
- Need help from all to get sign-ups, with a broader range of land to be enrolled and how to install it (not so excavation dependent). Have the money now need hydric soils.
- Changes: eligible lands will be private lands only. Farmers/land owners must own the land for easements and for restoration agreements (10-years) must show evidence of control of the land.
- Must comply with: AGI (\$1M average over last 3 years), highly erodible lands and wetland conservation provisions. Contact FSA to file or update file.
- Wetlands degraded are eligible, priority converted are eligible. 3 options – perm easement, 30-year easement/restoration agreement (10 years) (want to see more permanent easements). We buy some of the rights and landowner keeps title of land.
- Talking about collaborating with other agencies to change the mode of operation to respond to this additional opportunity.

Q: does that include lands owned by non-profits? A: yes

Q: if not meeting AGI can work still be done by NRCS?

A: no, could work with F&W to help (WRP only for those meeting AGI). If looking for TA or design help could be options.

Comment: Also have GRP – we buy easements and have rental agreements; from 10, 15, 20 years. We work with FSA – NRCS will allocate and FSA pays funds.

Program Overview – Ed Sanders (Handout of PowerPoint slides)

- Beginning farmer and socially underserved took 5% of funds.
- Practices – almost 2800 in EQIP, 2500 in CB, 300 in WHIP, 221 in AMA. CBWI – priority was Core 4 practices -- opened up in rest of the Bay. Priority general is other practices.
- Can fund up to May with all practices.
- Priority core more than \$2M, priority general \$2.25M.

CSP – Katrina Thompson (Hand out of PowerPoint slides)

- Previously termed “Securities Program”, now “Stewardship Program”
- Continuous sign-up with ranking periods and allocated “acre-wise”.
- PA split into 8 geographic regions. Regions picked resource concerns to focus on which drove control to local basis, picking 3-5 to focus on.

- Must have control of erosion on other lands and on HQ to be enrolled (not to solve problems, but enhancements not currently done -- adopting).
- Single payment for every year, 5 years.

Q: resource concerns – who developed list of concerns, landowners?

A: NRCS (national) for all states; within each category there are 27 micro-concerns.

Q: are ‘animals’ livestock?

A: primarily wildlife habitat, addresses domestic as well.

Q: 81,000 submitted – how many will be contracted?

A: offers will be made to all, up to landowner to accept.

Q: are the enhancements state-specific?

A: national and state – took national enhancements and gave PA guidance.

A: Send e-mail with comments/suggestions to Barry/Katrina and those will be sent to NHQ.

Comment: Not as broad as what a typical conservation practice is – allowing us to go beyond typical to new areas to benefit resources. This is a starting point...should have opportunity to add to list of enhancements.

Craig: These programs are continuous -- can always sign up. Only intermittent with ranking is done on applications on hand. Going into 2010 have nearly 10,000 practices to be built and applied (within 3,000+ contracts). The real work lies in getting those practices on the ground. Glad to see a diverse group of interest here because we must open up process to get good benefit; with help and TA given by different agencies. Need collaboration and people to get good things done.

Comment: Fish & Boat Commission difficulty is NRCS processes don't jive with regulatory process in real world. We are asking NRCS to be flexible in how to accomplish this broad mission.

LWG Process – Barry Frantz (Handout)

- Representatives of local ag and environmental agencies. Can now have non-governmental participate.
- Directed field staff to work with local and county levels.
- Putting 25% of weight of ranking systems on locally developed questions.
- Resource concerns were broad, with support for traditional problems: erosion, wildlife habitat, invasive species, etc. Can NRCS help for spraying for insects/weeds, etc? No, trying not to use money for annual spraying concerns.
- Local questions more important now. Must be 25% of ranking total, local is 25%, leftover on state questions, cost benefits, etc.
- Screening tool – if don't pass, not ranked. Weed out low significance projects.
- Other issues – last year stopped funding boundary issues.

Craig: this comes from Chief White and Ag Committees in Congress. Having Local interest and local involvement equates to stakeholder interest and value. We expect to have more discussion about LWG issues to incorporate their ideas (could have presentation/discussion by local groups who have issue to pursue).

Q: what will be the end result of this effort? Will local programs look different?

A: resource concerns and questions – impressed by how they said they would use money. Will go back and say ‘that looks good’ (will work with individually). Not many practice-related recommendations, so not a big impact.

Q: how many LWGs had been able to meet by the time the report was done?

A: started with county-basis, not sure on how many met. Usually see one LWG per county.

Q: in the past the alloc of funds was made on multi-county team basis, could do ranking?

A: looking to implement this – with more expensive projects, having pool of money.

Subcommittee Reports

Wildlife – Mike Pruss, PA Game Commission

- Large subcommittee: Game Commission, NRCS, CBF, Fish & Boat Commission (FBC), Pheasants Forever, US Fish & Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy.
- Charged with looking at identifying priorities based on state comp wildlife action plan for fish and wildlife and looking at how to deliver programs and outreach.
- Game Commission had worked with NRCS to develop sensitive species list – no changes. FBC identified rattlesnake and bog turtle as sensitive species. Bog turtle and brook trout should be added to CBWI. FBC has developed in stream fish habitat manual.
- Recommend NRCS consider adopting engineering streamlined processes.
- USF&W discussed joint funding position with NRCS to deliver and implement WRP on the ground.
- Pheasants Forever representative interested in outreach thru local groups for programs and TA provided in other states thru grants and RFPs, professional wildlife biologists.
- Prescribed fire guidelines in state and have national standards identified down to state level – recommend that NRCS adopt if they meet guidelines.
- CBF suggested focusing practices on riparian forest buffers, tying to their practices (thru CREP, EQIP, and WHIP), by making scoring process better for forest buffers, could be accomplished in ranking processes.
- Discussed NRCS ranking form and the need to do payment rate reviews – no specific recommendations.

Forestry – Mike Lester, Bureau of Forestry

- Opportunities with CSP.
- Field staffs not aware of capabilities of each staff. Looking forward to tighter cooperation with NRCS field staff to get practices on ground.
- Working on educational materials to go to NRCS field staff, as well as joint educational needs, getting both staffs together, learning what each other’s work is and get to know each other.
- Barriers identified: stewardship plan, still have to get into FSA systems; need to smooth out because of legal constraints. GIS layers must be in FSA system also and this is mechanical issue to get done.
- Other challenge is to make sure projects are viewed with same criteria as statewide. Getting characterization of projects to solve this.
- Successful year with 425,000 of forestry projects, learned quite a bit on that.
- Not pushing prescribed fire now because we don’t have the staff trained on this. Working with The Nature Conservancy to get folks in tune with that.
- Looking at deer fence as possible practices. Had priority watersheds as forestry practice this year.
- Would like to move priority watersheds into more CB counties. Want to see two areas linked because the biggest challenges are in the center part of state with riparian areas.

- In 2008 Farm Bill requires Bureau of Forestry to do state assessment. State Technical Committee (STC) is listed in state assessment. Want to work with NRCS to engage all on where we are with forestry issues in state assessment.

Nutrient Management – Mark Goodson, NRCS (handout)

- All partnership issues related to nutrient management (NM) are environmental issues related to NRCS' ongoing commitment to conserve natural resources.
- Active membership at first meeting, eager to meeting with NRCS leadership and partner agencies to make progress in feed and nutrient management.
- Came to focal point that implementation of NM in field is essential place to begin. Have good science, planning, education and outreach, but need to get positive environmental impacts that won't occur unless practices are implemented. Had strategy, science, economic models, innovative thinking. Want to present ideas to leadership in detail and get more guidance from STC on how we can help you to get NM done.
- Idea of lowering protein fed to dairy herds – game changing opportunity available.

Craig: Significance of NM issue and TMDL within the Chesapeake Bay is important. Need to go down to finite geography, looking at issues such as transportation, incineration, composting, etc., and must think broadly. Teaching farmers is an important task. The PA and Susquehanna portion of the nitrogen reduction in the TMDL is 41M pounds per year from all sources. Ag's share is at least 60% (20-25M pounds of nitrogen annually).

Air Quality – Heather Smeltz, NRCS (handout)

- Taking back-seat role to let STC come to us with issues. PA's extremely lucky to have Dr Eileen Wheeler, who serves on the National Air Quality Task Force.
- Current technology recommendations to improve funding and TA thru air quality area: expand counties funding for air quality thru EQIP designated funds.
- Want more current based on 2006 assessment, perhaps PA could lead charge.
- Payment schedule for air quality practices – more practices to be added could be part of air quality system.
- Initiate making odor management a cons practices, part of air quality management.

Q: in suggested BMPS, what was logic to include forest riparian buffer?

A: utilization of nitrates -- large enough buffers could contribute to in-stream services for the transfer before it gets to the stream.

Comment: bay program office looking at AQ being important component. Encourage everyone to be active.

Craig: will follow up on new national practice standards.

Organics – Gwendolyn Crews, NRCS (handout)

- Thru EQIP with new FB, 2009 first time focused on dealing with organic ops separate from non-organics.
- Discussed differences in language on how certified programs work and how NRCS works.
- Difference for payment scenarios and practices recommended: newness of organic and outreach – no recommendations.
- PA Certified Organic (PCO) had concerns with EQIP structure. Not intended to prevent problems from happening. Want to point out there is a separate ranking pool for organics which is good because it allows operators to compete against other operations in similar situation.

- Organic operations are smaller with vegetable, herb ops and interested in irrigation. National HQ said irrigation was not to be included – this was discussed.
- Moveable field structures also discussed and this is a new practice looked at piloting.
- Discussed outreach -- will continue efforts to reach larger groups. How can NRCS better meet needs of organic sector? Application and contracting – once relationship is built this a benefit. Working with NRCS and PCO to train employees in differences in language, how we identify resource concerns, etc.
- Conservation Activity Plans: piloted transition to organic in 2009 -- will again this year. Offered thru TSP. If involved with certification process cannot participate in making site-specific recommendations on farms.
- Want to work with PCO and other organic organizations to identify people with experience to identify plans, outlining operation rules.

Craig: when we began initiative past year expected some success and interest; we were surprised by the number of people certified and the number of producers involved in organic. This is an important area in terms of what can be accomplished, with room for more opportunity.

Communications & Outreach – Molly McDonough, NRCS

- Put together plan on what would be completed.
- Discussed general outreach needs for all programs.
- Starting point -- help get more partners in STC; some groups are under-represented (specialized groups).

Craig: continue to work and be more effective. Want to see follow-up news releases with something that has more meaning. Want ideas on how to get word out, whether NRCS has info on other websites or blurbs on program activities.

Q: specialized communications plan CB WS plan put on hold – what is prospect on moving that forward?

A: not sure on current status but will check into this.

Q: getting message to partners not on field level traditionally not involved in programs this is helpful to educate our people on ground.

Energy – Bob Deecki, NRCS

- Tried to stay within practices currently offered but looking to add some.
- Focused on how energy could be saved and used efficiently (electric and fuel consumption).
- Recommend adding solar water systems to pumping plant practice.
- Prescribed grazing – less tractor time could save energy; drip irrigation – more efficient/less costly than sprinkler irrigation type. Conservation cover/cover crops – not disturbing fields/potential to harbor bio-mass.

Comment: biomass pilot was significant for wildlife habitat when established. If implemented state-wide this would be a huge benefit.

Grazing – Jana Malot, NRCS

- Committee needs to be expanded and PA GLCI has not met yet – will report next meeting.

Q: is there a need for a water quality (stream/habitat, etc) subcommittee? A: will look at this.

Q: group to work with CBWI program?

A: as we continue to work with this movement will need to have discussion on coordinating this and after the next session might re-visit this thought.

Comment: discussion on water quality/water quantity, in a gas movement in NE PA how does this impact the conservation plan?

A: watching this activity -- many interested. Haven't tried to use resources yet, could be based on a personal request -- looking to state/local agencies to take lead; could be conservation measures to look at thru programs.

Comment: vast scope of issue to deal with and NRCS capacity. Organizations are suggesting innovative approaches, offering technical assistance to train NRCS staff -- encourage State Office to promote this type of interaction between different agencies to try to cooperate.

CBWI – Gary Smith, NRCS (handout)

- Working in priority watersheds, with priority practices -- be innovative.
- Going into 2009 surprised by funds, \$5.5M in 2009.
- Areas derived from EPA Chesapeake Bay office and USGS, coast data to define/describe watersheds with highest amounts of excess nutrients and phosphorous are overlaid with highest concentrations of ag operations. Used state 303D list of impaired watersheds and chose to operate in that much area in 2009.
- Going into 2010 this program continues to ramp up and expand quickly, funds doubled in 2010. PA initially allocated \$9.4M and there's a bit still being held. Maybe at least \$10M for CBWI program in PA alone.
- From DC and thru partners, notion of targeting, not new to NRCS, is a very supported and desired activity. Many DC interests want us to spend 100% of the CB allocation in just those priority watersheds.
- Will continue to finalize process and go forward with engaging districts and others in this activity.
- Having success with the CBWI won't be business as usual. Standard model now is they come to our office to apply, sign up. If we continue this for purpose of cleaning up bay would take another 40 years.
- Not accelerated enough to meet goals of CBWI and TMDL. Have to continue doing everything we were, everything all the time, everywhere.
- Success can be attained by going out and knocking on doors, making cold calls to farmers who have not been using our programs and not applying practices to address water quality. Will take a major effort to make contact. Assume that it takes twice as much time and is twice as hard to work with new farmer who has not participated in our programs.
- Will probably write an additional 700-800 contracts to utilize the \$10M and probably more than 2500 practices contracted for in 2010 alone.

Priority Practices – Barry Frantz/Ed Sanders

- In 2009 most money into core practices. Primary practices hoping to fund requesting input – bog turtle, brook trout. Supporting practices are used in general need to support primary practices.

Q: what about livestock exclusion, used only as supporting practice?

A: continue this, had stream fencing – only one to be funded; now in discussion to offer cheaper alternative to permanent fence – it matters on what category to put it in and what to fund.

Q: streambank stabilization not listed?

A: will look at this – keeping in mind scope and complexity on who will follow-thru with that.

Comment: suggest feed management and avoidance.

Q: is off stream watering and stream crossing included under something else?

A: in 2009 had those avail if agreed to fence cattle out and would fund if alternate water supply.

Comment: need to develop simplistic process to help people work thru application, planning process.

Comment: important with new outreach programs, bringing in those who had not participated in the past.

Comment: don't leave out effect with being quick and efficient. Also we look at forest landowners but they are not considered farmers, be careful not to miss them.

Craig: open to something to market and promote those options.

“SWAT” Teams – Gary Smith

- Need about 25 additional people over the next 3 years.
- Developed 5 key positions needed on these teams. They will be strategically located throughout the watershed. Those positions follow what the process of a farmer would do – administration, planner, contracting, technical work (2 levels).
- Need help with contribution agreements and hiring employees because we have a limited amount of money that goes towards personnel and staff.

Q: need educators to help reach those we haven't reached before -- could be added to those to be hired?

A: plan assumes people will sign-up, so yes, we need to address the outreach issue.

TMDLs and the Bay – EPA (Jim Shortle, PSU, Beth Lawyer, PSU, Jim Clark, Ext, Ed rajotte, PSU, Bob Cornic, EPA; Rich Patoot, Chesapeake Bay office)

- On tour of Chesapeake Bay Watershed in 16 public meetings, sending message on TMDL on CB developing loading budget for Bay on non-point and sediments.
- Incorporating state dialogue and asking to develop watershed implementation plan; well beyond tributary strategy. Going beyond TMDL and planning on implementation of TMDL and forming performance and accountability system.
- What reductions will be made, when, what load reductions every 2 years achieved? Asking states to identify what program capacity issues they have. Know we don't have enough program capacity (technicians, dollars) to do what we need to do as prescribed. Want states to figure out gap in programs and identify how to fill gaps over the years.
- Will be identifying federal consequences – implemented if a particular state can't deliver (2-year milestone plan). If state can't deliver loading reductions consequences would be delivered. Consequences not finalized yet, expect letter to go out in December to states.
- Think about including: (1) looking at grant programs EPA provides to states – if not delivering should they be withheld or moved to other states, (2) lowering threshold for MPDS permitting on CAFO operations, lowering animal thresholds on FDS permit and stormwater permitting, (3) modifying the TMDL to tighten up on point source loading, if not delivered maybe need to modify, (4) for new sources what about those?
- If the Bay is exceeding nutrient and sediment budgets should the sources be expanded? Perhaps deny EPDS permit allowing expansion. Aspects of TMDL is to not to make something EPA/state can take care of. Take the diet and go local.

- Challenging the numbers of the Susquehanna River Basin and Potomac and bring down to county scale, which makes sense from watershed organization perspective. No longer be Susquehanna-wide. Take down to local scale and develop 2-year implementations.
- Work with PDA, DEP, and DCNR, to help them make diet local. Some have said they need more time to put practices in place. We have to work with all that much closer to move this up to the next level.
- The need for \$2.5M in the next 3-5 years, OMB has approved some changes to our budget where the Chesapeake Bay has gotten increase on top of state implementation grants. This money could be used to get more personnel in the field. Want to see this in addition to 319 and implementation grants.

Craig: issuing bay-wide TMDLs, what is smallest level intended to issue at?

A: 6 states, district and EPA over last year & ½ to determine nitrogen, phosphorus budget; agreed to at state-level (nitrogen 200M lbs, phosphorous 15M lbs over 2 years). Have agreements on what the equitable portion of PA portion of Susquehanna, etc. based on per lb basis, how much do those different watersheds affect other basins? Agreed to about 19 major river basins -- PA can take reductions through Susquehanna basin. Less concern about where it comes from, but EPA TMDL regulations do not require implementation plan, but there's a clause that we need reasonable assurance that the nonpoint reduction on air side can meet their piece of nutrient diet. Asking PA to work with all stakeholders to take Susquehanna number, level and scale that makes sense for them; capture in watershed implementation plan and present to EPA; will be part of TMDL decision of record published by EPA.

Comment: should be both state and federal govt filling identified gaps. Agree we need federal and state money. There is pending federal legislation to provide additional monies. Part of the watershed implementation process should look at what program gaps and needs are (showing how to work collectively to systematically fill those). The more specific we can be the more attention we will get.

Comment – now that we know the TMDL load reductions, thinking about 2-year milestones developed, initial attempt to try to estimate amount and type of BMPS that need to be applied. Give more thought to what types of outcomes from ag BMPS would we invest in to meet the goal anticipated. Look at what is the complement of resource issues to be addressed.

Q: will load reductions be determined by counting practices using model?

A: use more of monitoring data and model output coming out of partnerships. Once practice is in place may take time to show itself. Do better job accounting for conservation practices put out there. Need to bring more monitoring data to the table and better accounting for the conservation districts. Want to be able to determine if trends are due to practices put in place, due to land changes, etc.

Q: 12-digit HUC scale, will that data be done by Bay Program staff or done at the state?

A: still working at Bay staff but working with other colleagues. Intention is to get model in the hands of folks who know how to run HFPP. To get into form that some technical folks can run for their part of watershed, so partners can use simpler versions and do test scenarios. Build into community model that works for us.

Trying to facilitate grass-root level efforts having locals get involved is one of the key components (working up thru the system).

Caution: be careful not to compromise stream habitat quality. Look at the health of the whole riparian system. Agree – will continue to reach out to partners on this issue. Looking at more local solution still need stream habitat benefit.

BMP team met and laid out comments for the STC: (1) funding of practices at county-level versus multi-county team level, (2) inventory needs....interested in doing assessment of approx 150 farms or more on where they are now and what their needs are, (3) modified transect within watershed with modified residue, (4) outreach plan to ensure info and materials are available for distribution (5) practice risk – aerial seeding made available; instances in Dauphin County not successful and landowners not compensated for expense. Concern with looking at innovative practices, prevent situations occurring in coming years.