

**State Technical Committee Meeting  
March 8, 2011  
Minutes**

**Welcome (Denise Coleman):**

- NRCS has been busy this past quarter obligating a little over 50% of FA funds, and approximately 65% of funding has been allocated to specific applicants.
- WRP has almost 1,200 acres to be signed up.
- We are asking for more money in GRP for easements, with 617 acres currently enrolled.
- FRPP is rolling on sign-ups, with currently 9 applications.
- Basic conservation planning training has been going on over the past few weeks and this week, educating new employees on the NRCS “9 steps of planning”. More advanced staff attended Ag 102 compliance training with conservation partners and DEP to provide an overview of what 102 compliance regulations mean to NRCS.
- Conservation Boot Camp will be offered in April and PACD is set to announce trainings as well.

**Overview of USGS Programs and Selected Projects (Mike Langland, USGS):**

(PowerPoint presentation)

- PA USGS Science Center is arranged by basin.
  - New Cumberland serves as the District Office and Susquehanna Basin office.
- USGS organized into 5 major themes: eco-systems, climate change, energy and minerals, human health, water.
  - Focusing on 4 current PA projects: water quality network, Conewago Showcase, Big Spring Run, and emerging contaminants.
    - Water Quality Network (WQN) – in cooperation with DEP, EPA, and SRBC, to operate a network of surface water-quality monitoring sites.
    - Conewago – selected as one of three showcase watersheds, in cooperation with NRCS, USGS and EPA. A lot of active BMP applications. Basin is located in Lebanon, Dauphin and Lancaster Counties.
    - Big Spring Run – in cooperation with EPA, located in Lancaster County Hoping to increase denitrification.
    - Emerging Contaminants – cooperators are Fish and Boat Commission, DEP, PDA, and Dept of Health. USGS doing sampling in surface and ground water, fish tissue, macro-invertebrates.

Q: what are pre-cursor signals to know if we are on the right track? In stream, stormwater, etc?

A: with Conewago trying to identify macro-invertebrates. Variability in stream flow will be hard to see in water quality. Short-term could be farmer participation.

Q: what is USGS doing with Marcellus Shale?

A: working through WQN, sampling for certain parameters. Emerging contaminants not included in the WQN current list. State has set of standard sites and reference sites being monitored, which are placed in areas not affected by human landscape. USGS is also working

on several other studies with the Dept of Interior, Dept of Energy, EPA, local water authorities and Park Service on Marcellus sites.

Q: planning to do a full suite of parameters for Conewago?

A: everything but bacteria; will be a cooperative effort with PDA.

**Equine Assistance Guidance (Jana Malot, NRCS) (handouts):**

- Equine and EQIP: between 1993 and 2005, went from 175,000 to 255,000 head of equine, but down from 10 head to 4 head per operation.
  - Operations from across the state were selected to look at pasture and assess feeding, looking at nutrient management, manure handling, etc.
  - Follow-up survey on some operations across the state.
  - PA has not addressed equine with funding thru EQIP program.

Barry F.: do equine owners meet EQIP eligibility? Producing over \$1,000 -- is what they are doing an ag responsibility? We are asking for opinion and feedback from the committee.

Denise C.: who makes that determination? Nationally wanted extreme flexibility and allowing in one state and not another became problem; became a top down approach. Flexibility is back into the states.

- PA has been more conservative than neighboring states – equine is a growing industry in PA which has to be addressed.
- The number of women interested in horses is growing.
- With these upwards trends, should we consider making them eligible for assistance?
- Must still come through ranking and must have a legitimate resource concern.
- Under Act 38, having less than 8 animal units, producer is not required to have a nutrient management plan.

Q: basing on calculation of consumed usage -- does that open the door for a landowner with just two cows?

A: this is a current issue. Landowner would still be evaluated based on the severity of resource concerns.

Q: half of landowners are sending manure somewhere else? Where?

A: most sending to other ag operations, with high percentage of bedding.

Q: what is NRCS' role and responsibility with recreational owners for best management practices?

A: a lot of good horse workshops taking place in the NE part of state; but not reaching the majority. Need more technical assistance (TA) money.

Q: some outreach can be done with districts when creating plans; would like to see TA provided to confirm needs and then seek practice implementation funds thru EQIP. No practice funding resources are needed to understand what needs to be done on the land.

A: with the economy everything has changed. The owners don't have the disposable income as in the past.

- General consensus is to move forward and address these issues.
- We have been funding horse operations, but not many because not many are actually selling horses, which has been a key part of our criteria.

**Energy Efficiency and Renewal Energy Production (Dan Dostie, NRCS) (handouts):**

- NRCS formally recognized energy as a resource concern on Oct 25, 2010.
- NRCS policy limits the scope to reducing on-farm energy usage derived from fossil fuels and energy efficiency.
- Looking for opinions on how to focus efforts to develop and promote this subject.
- "National Conservation Practices with energy conservation added as a purpose will be out for public comment on the national register soon with a target date for release and use by July 2011"

**Subcommittee Reports:**

- **Fish & Wildlife (Mike Pruss) (handout):**
  - teleconf on March 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - Asking to get update from HQ on Golden Warbler issue. Denise: not discussed yet but will request update.
  - CREP amendments and status was discussed. Currently in state FSA office.
  - Partnership meeting held in November. Items discussed included:
    - contract management issued by FSA and FSA/NRCS joint CREP re-enrollment fact sheet, which is currently being developed by FSA.
    - partnership involvement on localized training with tech professionals; subcommittee members offered to partner with agencies in lower Chesapeake Bay area.
    - establishing formal subcommittee to assist State Conservationist.
  - Extending prescribed fire. Currently plan must be approved by NRCS, which brings questions. Looking to have plan in compliance with PA Fire Law.
  - Approved report on voluntary public access on private lands -- federal grant from FSA.
  - Localized follow-up meetings on April 5 in Clarion and April 12 in York.
  - Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake is a candidate for threatened or endangered species. Looking to have initiative covering several counties in NW PA. Needs combination of wetlands and upland grassy areas; need plant communities.

Q: is there any interest from private sector to be proficient in prescribed burns?

A: yes, from TSPs in other states because PA burning season is different.

- **Feed Management (Dan Ludwig) (handout):**
  - Met March 7<sup>th</sup>. Discussions on:
    - status of subcommittee
    - Phase I TMDL for Chesapeake Bay released December 2010, precision feeding has a role in this.
    - NRCS feed management initiative
  - Expanding financial and technical assistance to industries not addressed yet.
  - Recommend holding funds to pick up more applications.

- Expanding to poultry operations. Inviting more members from swine and poultry industries to subcommittee.

Dan D.: 33 active applications were reported as lower than what was previously thought because in fact, many have already been obligated into contracts between CBWI and EQIP, and were no longer included in the 'applications' listing.

Kelly O. – a lot of participants not involved in NRCS in the past; taking longer to get applications and contracts finalized.

- **Forestry (Andy Duncan):**

- Progress in developing Forest Management Plan, which combines national standards and state standards of forest stewardship program.
- TSPs -- 9 certified out of 21. Have had 128 requests for forestry contracts thru EQIP.
- Successful TSP training held in Mansfield almost two weeks ago. Want to do the same in the NW and central part of PA. PSU has also expressed an interest in holding a training session for forest stewardship.
- Working on MOU to identify duties between NRCS and Bureau of Forestry field staff. Roadblocks should be alleviated when MOU is in place.
- Held 2 or 3 landowner conferences during the beginning of the year. Prime vehicle for getting word out on forest management and stewardship.
- Discussion between the Bureau of Forestry and the Game Commission in reviewing CAP 106 management plans for wildlife values.

- **Energy and Biofuels (Stacy Koch) (handouts):**

- Putting together workshops/trainings geared toward NRCS staff to help promote the energy concept.
  - March 17 – Bloomsburg, on energy efficiency and energy audits. Will address energy as a resource concern.
  - March 30<sup>th</sup> – Bloomsburg, on biomass and biofuels. To provide general background.
  - April 13<sup>th</sup> – Bloomsburg, on native grass/mobile pellitizer field day and demo.

- **Pasture/Grazing (Jana Malot):** committee thanked Denise for efforts on fence issue.

**Q:** definition of cropland under CRP.

**A:** a few EQIP applications to keep in cropland. Almost all under HEL is in cropland.

**Proposed Subcommittee Changes (Dan Dostie) (handout):**

The Nutrient Management and Feed Management Subcommittees wish to dissolve and reconstitute into two separate committees with a liaison between the two groups. We are asking for input and opinion on this.

Mark Goodson: represents NRCS at The PA Nutrient Management Advisory Board meetings under auspices of SCC. The nutrient mgmt education committee part of Act 38 program, a technical manual committee. Several members of those committees overlap.

Q: what agencies would be most appropriate to represent those committees?

A: could take folks already in both committees and ask them to recruit appropriate membership. Want more than just state agencies, have also NGO's and cross-representation of individuals to help with challenges.

No issue to split committees and Mark Goodson will meet with the SCC to recruit members.

### **Recommended PA Options for 2012 NRCS Financial Assistance Programs (Barry Frantz, NRCS):**

(PowerPoint presentation and handouts)

- Will be bringing together local work groups in the spring; looking for statewide input for the committee.
- Change was to streamline funding choices offered to farmers.
  - EQIP – General; EQIP – Air; and CBWI. Denise: product is not different and practices offered under programs are the same. Change is a reduction in the amount of time it takes field folks to rank applications.
- Looking for opinions from committee on initiatives for 2011.
- Funding Cycles:
  - 2011 – 1: application received by September 30
  - 2011 – 2: application received by October 31
  - 2011 – 3: application received by November 30
- Timeline:
  - Summer, look at pay schedule with input from local workgroups the end of July.
  - Put things together in August and September.
- Will most likely see a drop in our statewide money.

### **Implementation of Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) (Katrina Thompson, NRCS):**

(PowerPoint presentation)

- Highlighting CSP activities practiced in the Bay watershed.
- CSP targets Soil, Water, Air, Plants, Animals, and Energy.
- CSP 2010 – 1 & 2
  - Statewide 565 contracts
  - CBW- total of 310 contracts
  - Between 85,000 and 90,000 acres under contract
- CSP 2011 – 1
  - Acre allocation is 115,807
  - Chesapeake Bay Watershed estimate is 150 applications

**Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) (Noel Soto, NRCS):**

- National CIG due date for applications/proposals was March 4<sup>th</sup>
- Due date for state CIG is March 31<sup>st</sup>. Have two months to review.
  - May need help reviewing and evaluating those applications/proposals; asking STC committee members to help with this process.

**Closing:** Denise thanked all for attending and providing opinions and feedback.

**Upcoming meetings:**

June 15                      September 19