

Minnesota State Technical Committee Meeting
July 12, 2012
Stearns History Museum
235 33rd Avenue South
St. Cloud, MN

DRAFT MINUTES

Participants:

Wayne Anderson, MN PCA	John Linc-Stine, MN PCA
John Baker, USDA ARS	Riley Maanum, MN Corn Growers
Don Baloun, NRCS	Andrew Martin, Senator Klobuchar's Office
John Beckwith, MARC&D	Linda Meschke, Rural Advantage
Ian Cunningham, Pipestone SWCD Supervisor	Aaron Meyer, MRWA
Lindberg Ekola, MFRC	David Miller, MDA
Les Everett, U of MN	Sheldon Myerchin, USFWS
Warren Formo, MAWRC	Rhonda Osterman, NRCS
Wanda Garry, FSA	Thom Peterson, MN Farmers Union
Jeremy Geske, MN Pork Producers	Jodie Provost, MN Wildlife Society
Matt Holland, Pheasants Forever	Jill Sackett, UMN
Al Kean, BWSR	Brenda Tonn, NRCS
Tim Koehler, NRCS	Dale Walz, Stearns SWCD
Tom Kroll, MN Forestry Assn	Barbara Weisman, MDA
Jim Kukowski, MN Soybean Growers	Dwight Wilcox, MDA
Jim Lemmerman, BWSR	Dave Zumeta, MFRC
Dave Leuthe, MN DNR	

Don Baloun, NRCS

- Welcome
- Introductions
- Minutes from the March meeting. Updated minutes will be posted on the web site. Let us know of any changes to be made and the final minutes will be posted on the web site.

Field Office of the Future – Don distributed a letter from NRCS Chief White and NACD President Gene Schmidt outlining their vision of the Field Office of the Future. The letter asks for the State Conservationists and Soil and Water Conservation District Association Presidents to develop an open, transparent, and inclusive process with staff, partners, other stakeholders, and customers to develop a plan that evaluates the organizational effectiveness of the field offices within your authority. More information and handouts are posted on the MSTC web site.

Don would like the MSTC to consider setting up a subcommittee to discuss what the Field Office of the Future should look like. The subcommittee would look at what a producer/landowner/farmer needs when they walk in to a conservation office. The subcommittee would use the questions posed by Chief White and NACD President in the letter sent out to the states (posted on web site). This would be accomplished by conference call with NRCS supplying the conference call information. The MSTC Field Office of the Future Subcommittee was approved by the MSTC. Ian Cunningham and Riley Maanum will co-chair this committee. Ian and Riley will review the MSTC for who they

think would best serve on the committee. Would like to have the committee meet and review the information requested on the letter and try to report back by August 15 if possible.

Questions, Comments and Discussion

Wanda Garry, FSA – CRP

1. Section Info.
 - a. Introduction
 - b. At the STO level, Alex Dubish, Program Specialist, accepted a position out in Montana as the GIS Program Specialist.
 - c. County Offices are extremely busy completing crop certifications, Cost Share Requests, Preparing for 2012 CRP Annual Rental Payments, SU43 and enrolling acres in CCRP.

2. General Signup 43
 - a. General Signup 43 was held from March 12th through April 13th, 2012.
 - b. List of Accepted/Rejected Offers was released on May 25th.
 - c. Acceptance was based on 6 Environmental Benefit Index factors.
 - d. EBI cut off level was 209 points
 - e. Minnesota fared well with 85% acceptance across the State.
 - f. Breakdown: (On Conservation June 2012 Highlights)
 - g. Total Offers = 2904 for a total of approx. 120,000 acres
 - h. Accepted = 2480 for a total of 99,716.7 acres.
 - i. On National Level, the Signup was better than expected
 - j. 3.9 acres accepted Nationally
 - k. Counties are busy reviewing all offers to ensure the EBI information is correct.
 - l. Producer notifications have been issued
 - m. NRCS is working on field verifications of existing cover.
 - n. Conservation Plans must be completed by mid August. (August 10, 2012)
 - o. SU43 CRP-1 must be approved by September 14, 2012.

3. Continuous Signup
 - a. Still have a lot of interest in CCRP
 - b. Counties are working with landowners who had rejected SU43 offers in order to offer acreage into a CCRP practice if eligible.
 - c. Back in March, Secretary Vilsack announced the million acre initiative to preserve grasslands and wetlands.
 - d. The National Office provided State the opportunity to request additional acres for State initiative practices.
 - i. CP23A – Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain
 - ii. CP33 – Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds (SE Corner)
 - iii. CP37 – Duck Nesting Habitat

 - e. Mid-June, National Notice CRP-715 provided States with additional Incentive Practice Allocations. MN did quite well.

Practice	Description	Requested	Received	Current Allocation
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CP23	Wetland Restoration, Floodplain	0	0	16,200
CP23A	Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain	50,000	42,094.00	35,500
CP33	Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds	500	500	650
CP37	Duck Nesting Habitat	20,000	8,804	8,900

- f. All pending offers have received approval authorization.
4. State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)
- Secretary Vilsack’s initiative included additional acres for SAFE projects.
 - MN currently has 1 SAFE project – Back Forty Pheasant Habitat.
 - On June 1, 2012, MN submitted a request for additional acres to the National Office.
 - National Office has indicated that release of additional acres won’t occur until possible the end of July.
 - MN’s has exhausted our current SAFE – CP38E acreage.
5. Conservation Programs
- Currently, MN has 1.56 million acres enrolled in CRP/CCRP/CREP/SAFE/FWP
 - Acreage Expiring on 9/30/12:
 - 6.5 million acres Nationally
 - MN – 292,000 acres, over 9000 contracts.

1. General – 249,000	CCRP – 43,000	Total	292,000
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 - As stated, SU43 acres accepted = 99,716.7 100,000
 - Current CCRP enrollments = 27,589.6 27,500
 - Total = 127,306.3 127,500
 - Leaves approximately 164,000 acres difference. However, some of these may be enrolled in other conservation programs.
6. 2012 Cost-Share Rates
- FSA updated the CRP C/S rates for 2012.
 - New rates were released on June 27, 2012.
 - SU42 and SU43 contracts not yet approved should be scheduled with the new effective rates.
7. Conservation Highlights (Handout)

Al Kean, BWSR - Easement Programs Multi-Purpose Drainage

Al Kean gave a presentation on Multi-Purpose Drainage. Al Kean, BWSR Chief Engineer, gave a presentation about Multipurpose Drainage, starting with the idea that drainage isn’t a bad word.

The presentation identified the multiple water management goals being sought these days (particularly water quality), the extent and necessity of agricultural and urban drainage in Minnesota, and some old and new conservation practices that are considered part of multipurpose drainage to achieve multiple benefits. The key methods used by these practices involve runoff hydrology management, erosion reduction, gravitational treatment and biological treatment. There was much discussion about some of the newer conservation drainage practices, such as drainage water management (DWM), including controlled subsurface drainage and woodchip bioreactors. It was noted that both EQIP and the state Conservation Drainage Program can now cost-share on planning and control structures for drainage water management on new pattern tile systems. Both programs also provide an incentive payment for DWM operation for the first 3 years. DWM planning is required to be done by NRCS TechReg certified TSPs for both programs. A limited number of people are certified in MN, but ADCM held another training session in northern Iowa in June. AI noted that the state Conservation Drainage Program for FY2013 includes a cost-share component for multipurpose drainage management planning for public drainage systems. He's hoping that at least a few public drainage authorities will participate in that program component and help evolve how best to implement multipurpose drainage.

You can find the presentation materials on the MSTC web site.

Tim Koehler, NRCS - Easement Programs (WRP, FRPP, GRP) 2011 Update

1. Obligation deadline has been extended to September 1
 - Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
 - ◇ Working towards goal of 12,000 acres enrolled
 - ◇ Majority of applications in combination with States' Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program administered by BWSR
 - ◇ Initiatives also still providing applications including:
 - Red River Basin Initiative
 - Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI)
 - Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)
 - ◇ Easements to protect farmland from development
 - ◇ One and only application was funded – Dakota County - \$1,118,400
 - Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
 - ◇ Disappointing signup. MN ended up turning back to Washington 75% of our allocation (\$300,000)
 - ◇ Funded
 - one easement in Norman County
 - three Rental Contracts
 - Water Bank Program (WBP)
 - ◇ Only one application funded in Polk County, MN
 - ◇ 30 acres
 - ◇ ND/SD had roughly 100 funded, primarily for flooded cropland, especially at Devils Lake, ND

2. WRP Monitoring
 - New National Policy that uses a 5-year cycle including 1-year on-site, 1-year land ownership review and 3-years of digital photography review. All WRPs are now flown yearly and that data is provided to NRCS for this process.
 - 2011 – we monitored 600 sites and in 2012 we are monitoring another 200 sites
 - A lot of follow-up needed to deal with potential violations and management concerns.
3. Easement Closings
 - NRCS and BWSR continue to strive to shorten closing timeline
 - 2011 – 100 easements closed and 2012 will be close to the same
 - Increased staff and title agents have shortened timeline
 - Done with 2009s and 50% done with 2010s
4. CRP Expiration
 - Continues to be a huge challenge with many thousands of acres expiring in the next few years
 - Kevin Lines, BWSR and many others focusing on this issue and securing technical and financial resources.
5. New Farm Bill
 - Senate approved, House formulating
 - Existing easements will be covered under new authorities
 - Consolidation of easement programs is proposed
 - Funding level proposed are substantial but smaller than 2008 FB
 - Easements will move from acres allocations to funding level governed

Questions, Comments and Discussion

MN Cover Crop Decision Tool – Jill Sackett, UMN Extension

Jill Sackett from the University of Minnesota Extension gave a presentation on the MN Cover Crop Decision Tool.

Cover Crop Decision Tool:

- A web-based tool for selecting species of cover crops to use in your rotation, for your specific purpose or need
- Midwest Cover Crops Council
–<http://www.mccc.msu.edu/>

The powerpoint presentation can be found on the MSTC web site.

AgBMP Loan Program – Dwight Wilcox, MDA

Dwight Wilcox gave a presentation on the Agricultural Best Management Practices Loan Program (AgBMP). The department's Agricultural Best Management Practices Loan Program (AgBMP) can provide a 3% interest loan for virtually any project that reduces or eliminates water pollution, including feedlot upgrades and manure handling equipment. The maximum loan

amount is \$100,000 with repayments of up to 10 years. The program has financed more than 12,000 projects with \$170 million in loans.

Examples of potential projects include:

- Manure basins and feedlot improvements, spreaders, tanks, hoses, and other application equipment
- Structural erosion control practices
- Conservation tillage equipment
- Septic system upgrades
- Well sealing and replacement, irrigation, secondary containment
- Any other equipment or practice that has a direct water quality benefit.

The program is administered locally by Soil and Water Conservation Districts or county Environmental Offices. The state's AgBMP Loan Program provides money to local banks which in turn issue loans to finance the type of equipment you may wish to purchase. Funds from the AgBMP Loan Program are available in all Minnesota counties and we have more than 250 participating lenders. Counties and lenders may have their own loan guidelines and credit criteria.

Because the program only offers loans from a revolving loan pool, revenues are constantly being generated from repayments. This allows implementation of projects that might not have a priority level or cost-benefit ratio necessary to qualify for cost share funding.

The AgBMP Loan Program is often coordinated with state and federal cost share to provide a full financial package to implement an eligible project.

The powerpoint presentation can be found on the MSTC web site.

Financial Assistance Programs Update - Brenda Tonn, NRCS

1. Our initial base EQIP funds have been allocated.
2. We received an extra \$1,000,000 to specifically fund more Livestock concerns-Ag Waste applications.
3. We received a \$450,000 allocation to fund the new DALCI (Driftless Area Landscape Conservation Initiative) in SE Minnesota.

Questions, Comments and Discussion

Certainty Subcommittee Briefing – Warren Formo, Don Baloun

Warren Formo gave a summary of the certification subcommittee report to Commissioner Frederickson, which consisted of a collective response to a series of questions the Commissioner posed to the committee to help frame the upcoming MDA Advisory Group discussion as the Agency works to develop the MN Ag Water Quality Certification Program. The subcommittee was a diverse group of farmers, ag organization staff and county SWCD representatives. The committee had a broad ranging discussion over the course of 6 meetings, and their final report

represents those basic principles that all committee members support for consideration by the Commissioner and the MDA Advisory Committee.

The next MSTC meeting is scheduled for September 13, 2012.

*All handouts are on the MSTC website: <http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/partnerships/mstc/>

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