

State Technical Committee Meeting

November 20, 2014

Mike Sullivan - Opening Remarks

Chief's 4 priorities: deliver excellent/innovative service, strengthen and modernize conservation delivery, enhance and expand science and technology activities, broaden our reach, customers, and partners. Need to be able to see yourself somewhere in/amongst in these priorities. AR examples supporting Chief's Big 4:

- Technical training for staff/partners
- Enhanced outreach assistance including development/access to new markets for HU
- Healthy Land and Waters – soil quality, cover crops, IWM
- Electronic tools – Client Gateway, similar to online banking
- Conservation planning – more 1 on 1 assistance in the field, good plans prior to contracts, funding metrics point this direction
- Continuous improvement – i.e. contract mgmt.
- Adequate staffing/sustainable workload for field staff
- Integrating State Water Plan into conservation delivery

New requirements/deadlines from HQ:

- **Receipt for services** are coming to the USDA offices. Required as part of 2014 Farm Bill – all three agencies will use. This should be a good thing – transparent information/protection for customers and tracking service/protection for agency. Working to develop a simple automated tool that will be launched in Dec.

Customers that come into one of our service centers are provided a receipt for service. Receipt is the promise that USDA is here to partner with all current and future customers as they seek support to help build or grow their businesses. USDA is demonstrating its commitment to help those producers who come to USDA looking for answers or opportunities.

Crop insurance – being re-linked to conservation compliance. Process is not any different, but are expecting some new customers. We are developing plans for assistance now. This will require the AD-1026 to be filed by June.

Administrative Staffing Plan – making progress. New structure nationally – setting up local staff. Kathy Anderson – ASTC (MS) – other positions advertised.

Program Staff - FY 2014 Program Funding Results

Lori Barker – FY15 Conservation Innovation Grant State Areas of Concern

CIG State 2015 Draft

To decide on the eight following areas of concern to address the resource concerns of Arkansas landscape.

Also to add any other areas that have not been met such as education and outreach as a suggestion.

Proposals must demonstrate the use of innovative technologies and/or approaches to address at least one bulleted topic in at least one numbered category listed below:

- Improved Nutrient Management to Improve Water Quality
- Using Integrated Pest Management to Address Herbicide Resistant Weeds
- High Tunnels - Conservation Technology Transfer and Seasonal High Tunnel House Management
- Organic - Integrated Pest Management to Pest Management on Organic Farms

- Invasive Species
- Irrigation
- Livestock Watering
- Soil Health

Corey Farmer –

EQIP FY 2014

Local Categories – (County Allocations)

Allocated - \$10,688,075.22

Obligated - \$9,311,426.97

Number of Contracts – 484

Statewide Categories

Allocated - \$727,749.00

Obligated - \$683,542.00

Number of Contracts – 37

Historically Underserved Categories

Allocated - \$1,707,103.36

Obligated - \$698,793.00

Number of Contracts – 49

National Initiative Categories

Allocated - \$2,268,067.92

Obligated - \$1,991,505.92

Number of Contracts – 77

Illinois River Watershed Initiative (Eucha/Spavinaw)

Allocated - \$3,312,478.60

Obligated - \$3,312,477.10

Number of Contracts- 123

Strike Force Initiative Categories

Allocated - \$1,653,919.00

Obligated - \$1,036,962.00

Number of Contracts- 58

AR Western Woodland (Forest Partnership Initiative)

Allocated - \$2,000,000.00

Obligated - \$1, 939,387.00

Number of Contracts – 102

Conservation Activity Plans (CAP)

Allocated - \$198,459.31

Obligated - \$77,111.31

Number of Contracts – 59

FY 2015 Program Implementation Schedule (see handouts)

May be additional signups

HU mandated

No national guidance on Strike Force yet

Question: new Farm Bill said at least 5% needs to be for Wildlife funding.

Answer: We haven't received our full funding yet. Allocation will probably be received in early December.

Question: Will there be a separate Wildlife Fund Category?

Answer: Statewide in FY 14 will continue in FY 15 as a priority.

Counties can get funding in State Pool if not specifically selected in County.

Jena Moore – CSP Funding Categories (see Farm Bill comparison handout)

500 applications have been submitted for renewal.

We have not received national guidance on competitive round.

The CSP demand exceeded funding available

We took on 20,000 acres and most were funded.
Farm Bureau assisted
Those getting in are considered high performers with good stewardship.
Participation is spread out.
Most land is cropland
Pasture land and forests payments are not as appealing.
NHQ may enhance this to make it more appealing.

Nancy Young – Ecological Sciences

No major changes from last year to schedules or CAPs
Copy of payment schedules will be on the NRCS website and sent out to the STC

Derinda Smith – FY 15 Conservation Stewardship Program Funding Categories

No changes from last year.

Kenneth Lee – FY 15 EQIP Local Special Project Proposal

I asked the committee on some suggestion for requesting EQIP Local Special Proposal.

A suggestion was to look at the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) projects that was submitted and fund one or two of those.

The Committee agreed that that was a great idea and we are to look into finding a suitable project.

Walt Delp –

Energy:

Funding directed toward implementations. Still reached a number of audits. Same plan this year.

Audits are no longer broken into two separate activities. They are now one, Agricultural Energy Management Plan. AgEMP 128

Building Envelope and Lighting now have their own separate standard. Heaters, power units and fans are still under 374 Farmstead Energy Improvement. All scenarios are the same.

We will continue to focus our efforts toward the livestock operations. Trying to establish separate funding pools between crop and livestock.

Audits must be completed for higher priority ranking. All except IWM and Pumping plant upgrades require audits. Crop improvements will rank best if they have IWM or reduction in pumping head.

Training of field staff is key goal this winter to increase technical skills.

Animal Waste

Last year for Waste Transfer. Hope to have waste hauling next year.

Irrigation

IWM will be the focus for our technical assistance – specialist located in Jonesboro office

Tailwater Recovery is back to under Ditches

Livestock Shade Structure changed from an interim standard to an approved national standard. Jeremy Huff and his grazing subcommittee will be evaluating for statewide use.

Watering facilities decreased to more in line with actual costs.

Contract Practice Payment Caps and Payment rates

Technical Staff

Payment limits were established for Energy practices. We tried to do it based upon three houses for lighting and building envelope, and radiant heaters. Based upon last year's contracts, this will result in 25% of the funding be available to other producers.

Increased Animal Mortality, In-Vessels and Freezers

Animal mortality limited to one freezer unit last year. More storage is needed so payment limit was tripled to meet the need.

Energy practices – limited funds. Needs to be spread out as much as possible.

Increased water wells to reflect changes in prices.

Randy Childress – Presented the ACEP-WRE Easement Payment Rates

GARC is based on Fair Market Value

This year there are new easement values

Land values increased. Irrigated land increased 40% over past few years to \$4,000 - \$5,000 an acre.

Last year:

Value of irrigated land: \$2400

Value of non-irrigated land: \$2000

This year:

Value of irrigated land: \$2900

Value of non-irrigated land: \$2100

There is a significant increase in the irrigated cropland in the delta

The values need to be close to what the GARC shows

Payments will not be less than any paid last year

There is no HU payment for Arkansas

This is a competitive program – property value is the only determining factor

There is progress in HU areas due to outreach meetings with producers

WRE

Last year bought 7,000 acres. This year will depend on the applications received

We always have more applications than funding

There were 70 carried over from last year that were unfunded

\$9 million received for WREP areas

There may be a reduction in two years based on surrounding state values

Mississippi and Louisiana do not differentiate between irrigated and non-irrigated land but Arkansas does.

Joe Krystofik – Controlled Access and Livestock Fencing (CALF) Initiative

(See PowerPoint presentation)

Nancy Young – Feral Hogs

Population increased – causes considerable damage

In the past NRCS has not been able to do much. Now Arkansas is in a pilot program with Louisiana and Alabama to monitor population.

APHIS is in charge of trapping – we are notifying them of the numbers.

When the population is lowered we can address resource concerns caused by damage

Areas of state affected:

Out of control populations in Ashley, Drew, Desha, Lincoln, and Arkansas counties

Emerging populations in western part of Arkansas River area of Pope, Yell, Logan, Johnson, and Sebastian counties.

We welcome input from partners

We asked APHIS how we could assist them with remote monitoring and gate closure.

There is a lot of damage in Riparian Areas

Jimmy Baker: Payment rates and schedules are being worked on.

\$400 - remote cameras

20 – 30 hours of skilled labor

\$300 – data plan for cameras

\$3500 – initial assessment

Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana is loaning equipment

George Rheinhardt –

Western Arkansas Woodland Restoration Project (see PowerPoint presentation)

- WAWRP is a Joint Chief's Cooperative Project between USFS and NRCS
- One of 13 in the country
- We received \$2 million a year for 3 years FA money for NRCS plus some TA Money
- Ouachita & Ozark National forests got \$1.3 million for projects inside the Forest.
- AFC received TA money from the USFS State & Private to help with the Program.
- All money was obligated in the Priority Area.
- 19 of the 29 counties received funds in first year.
- Have a proposal for another Joint Chief's Project for Shortleaf Restoration in the State.