

**STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**  
**February 19, 2009**

In attendance:

**State Technical Committee Official Members**

AGENCY/GROUP	REPRESENTED BY
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service	Niles Glasgow
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service	Erica Westbrook
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service	Angela Yarborough
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service	Craig Ellis
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service	Eric Fleming
USDA-Farm Service Agency (USDA-FSA)	Kenneth McCaskill
USDA-Farm Service Agency (USDA-FSA)	Linda Floyd
USDA-Rural Development	
Cattleman's Association	
Clemson University	Pat Layton
FSA State Committee	
National Wild Turkey Federation	
SC Association of Conservation Districts (SCACD)	Greg Henderson
SC Commission for Minority Affairs-Native American Affairs	Marcy Hayden
SC Commission for Minority Affairs-Research & Policy Services	Benjamin Washington, Jr.
SC Department of Agriculture (SCDA)	Becky Walton
SC DHEC	
SC Department of Natural Resource (SCDNR)	Barry Beasley
SC Department of Natural Resource (SCDNR)	Judy Barnes
SC Department of Natural Resource (SCDNR)	Marc Cribb
SC Farm Bureau	Bill McMeekin
SC Forestry Commission	Scott Phillips
SC Forestry Commission	Russell Hubright
SC Grasslands Coalition	James Riley Hill
SCRWA	Jill Miller
SC Soybean Board	
SC State University	
SC Wildlife Federation	

U. S. Environmental Protection Agency	Denise Tennessee
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	Joe Cockrell
U. S. Geological Survey U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Others: Forest Landowner Tree Farm Southeast RCAP	Walt McPhail Robert Britts, P.E.

Handouts were distributed.

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Niles Glasgow, State Conservationist. He welcomes the committee members and meeting participants. Everyone introduced themselves. Mr. Glasgow updates everyone on the purpose of the State Technical Committee. The State Technical Committee was setup to advise the State Conservationist on Farm Bill Implementation for the greater good of the state.

You can request to be on the State Technical Committee agenda, along with getting participants input on changes and updates of policies procedures and standards. Mr. Glasgow reminds everyone that their input is valued and needed.

Agenda items were discussed as follows:

**1. Program Summary & Updates.....Craig Ellis**  
(EQIP, WHIP, WRP, GRP, FRPP, CCPI, HFRP & CSfP)

The members were informed of the proposed funding for the Farm Bill Conservation Programs. Increased attention is given to privately owned forestland. Conservation funding in the 2008 Farm Bill has increased by nearly \$4 Billion. An explanation of the information, funding, and ranking criteria for each program was given.

**A. WRP- (Wetlands Reserve Program)**

1. This is a long-term or permanent easement program that provides cost-sharing to producers who agree to restore wetlands on agricultural lands.
2. The acreage cap has been raised to 3.041 million acres through 2012. (That is an increase of 766,200 new acres)
3. The enrollment options are as follows:
  - Permanent easements
  - 30 year easements
  - 30 year contract option for Tribes
4. Restoration of wildlife habitat is a priority.
5. To be eligible you must farm wetland or converted wetland, together with the adjacent land that is functionally dependent on the wetlands.
6. The 2008 rules states that: now eligible land in WRP includes cropland or grassland that was used for agricultural production prior to

flooding from the natural overflow of a closed basin lake or pothole, as determined by the Secretary.

7. Changes for easement compensation is as follows:
  - Fair market value (based on value of land, appraisals or market survey)
  - Geographic area rate cap
  - Landowner offer
8. Specifies cost-assistance for maintenance activities
9. Payment schedule is as follows:
  - Those less than \$500,000; may provide easement payments in not more than 30 annual payment.
  - Those more than \$500,000; may provide easement payments in at least five, but not more than 30 annual payments, except that if the Secretary determines it would further the purpose of the program, then the Secretary may make a lump sum payment.
  - The restoration agreement payments may not exceed \$50,000 per year.
  - With WRP a landowner must have owned the land for 7 years and units of government are not eligible.
  - The Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC) was explained.
  - Explained the ranking tool.
  - Extra points are given to offered lands joining other protected areas in the ranking tool.

**B. GRP- (Grassland Restoration Program)**

1. Has not been funded in past 3 years.
2. Funded for approximately \$250,000.
3. It offers easements and restoration.
4. Rental agreements comprise 40% of the funding nationally. A rental payment of \$8-9 per acre annually can be expected in SC. SC NRCS would like to do more rental agreements than easements if allowed.
5. Historically underserved clients, is a category that has been added, for additional points.
6. Contract or easement recipients must follow a grazing management plan that includes prescribed grazing practices.
7. Landowners with expiring CRP agreements will receive extra points on their ranking.
8. Extra points will be awarded for grassland diversity, including warm season native grasses.

**C. EQIP- (Environmental Quality Incentives Program)**

1. Funding authorities have increased by \$3.4 billion.
2. The payment limit is calculated over a 6 year period @ \$300,000 per person.
3. More opportunities have been given for the “New/Beginning” and “Socially Disadvantaged” farmers.
4. There is more focus on forestry management, energy conservation, organic, specialty crop production and air quality practices with this program.
5. 10% of available EQIP funds will be used to assist New/Beginning and/or Socially Disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.
6. SC NRCS obligated \$9.2 million in EQIP funds in FY '08.

**D. CSIP- CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP**

1. Replaces the Conservation Security Program.
2. It supports the ongoing stewardship of private agricultural lands by providing payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources.
3. There are resource concerns that are identified in a watershed area:
  - 5% of funds will be made available to New/Beginning and/or Socially Disadvantaged farmers.
  - Non-industrial, private forest land incidental to ag. operation is eligible, but cannot account for more than 10% of acres enrolled nationally.
  - \$200,000 per entity limitation in a 5 year contract.
  - Animal waste storage is not eligible.
4. SC NRCS obligated \$3.2 million in CSP funds in FY '08.

**E. WHIP- WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM**

1. This program is used to help develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land.
2. It is limited to private agricultural land, non-industrial private forestland, and tribal lands.
3. There is a contract limit of \$50,000.
4. Funding is authorized at \$85 million per year.
5. The agreements are good for up to 15 years.
6. SC NRCS obligated \$1.4 million in WHIP funds in FY '08.
7. The cost share rate is set at 75% and 90% for historically underserved clients.

## **F. FRPP- FARMLAND PROTECTION PROGRAM**

1. Eligibility focuses now on protecting the agricultural use and related conservation values of the land by limiting non-agricultural uses of the land. Some forestland is eligible.
2. The federal cost-share cap is 50% of appraised fair market value of the easement.
3. Cooperating entity share must be at least 25% of purchase price in funds. The landowner may donate 25%.
4. Two additional state questions have been added to the FRPP ranking tool addressing the following;
  - Historically underserved clients.
  - Sponsor entity-guaranteed matching fund.
5. SC NRCS obligated \$1.3 million in FRPP funds in FY '08.

## **G. CCPI- COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE**

1. Focuses on leveraging technical and financial resources on conservation priorities in watersheds and airsheds of special significance.
2. Funds are awarded to projects with partners from state and local governments and agencies, Indian tribes, and non-governmental organizations that have a history of working with agricultural producers.
3. It is implemented through multi-year agreements, with partners selected through a competitive process and not to exceed 5 years.
4. 6% of EQIP and WHIP funds must be targeted towards this program.

### **QUESTIONS/ANSWERS/COMMENTS:**

- Q. Can these funds be used towards projects such as Indian Creek? A. Funds can be set aside for the individual landowners based on if the project proposal is approved.
- Q. Have the watersheds been identified? A. The watershed teams are explained, a map is disbursed and a website is given.
- The Limited Resource, New/Beginning, Small Farmers and Social Disadvantaged farmers will receive a 90% rate of cost share.
- Subaccounts will be established to allow competition at the watershed level for Cropland, Pasture/Hayland, Forestland and Wildlife land.
- Under WHIP and EQIP historically underserved farmers will receive 90% cost share funding and 75% for all others.
- A Socially Disadvantaged farmer or rancher is defined as a “Member who has been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of the group without regard to their individual qualities.” New/Beginning farmers must have been farming for less than 10 years.

- Forestland is defined as land that has existing or is capable of growing trees.
- A TSP must be certified.
- Forest planners must be registered foresters to write a forestry management plan.
- Small farmers in SC are defined as “Limited to 107 acres and a maximum of \$63,000.00 in family income”.
- An eligibility criteria on for EQIP was discussed. Producers must have produced at least \$1,000 of an ag. commodity 2 of the past 5 years or be engaged in a forestry operation.

**RESOURCE CONCERNS for STATE RANKING QUESTIONS (EQIP & WHIP):**

The resource concerns for the state questions on the EQIP and WHIP ranking tools were discussed. The Committee was asked for items of concern to be developed into questions by NRCS. The items were categorized into groups. There was a grouping for general resource concerns that would apply to those categories competing statewide and as general questions for the other groups. The specialized groups were; Cropland, Pastureland/Hayland, Forestland, and Wildlife land. These specialized groups would compete on the watershed basis. The concerns are summarized below by group. Some of the concerns may be included in multiple groups when the ranking tools are developed.

**H. GENERAL**

1. Does the land included in the application lie within a watershed of an impaired stream according to the 303d list?
2. Is the land being offered in the application within a 319 project area?
3. Does the application include practices that exclude livestock from environmentally sensitive areas?
4. Does the application include practices that include stream restoration and protection?
5. Does the application include practices for buffers and/or field borders?
6. Does the application include practices that address invasive species control?
7. Does the application include practices that benefit threatened / endangered species?
8. Does the application include practices that benefit/protect ephemeral wetlands?
9. Does the applicant have an existing RMS conservation plan?
10. Is the applicant a first time participant?
11. Does the application include practices that address eroded areas?
12. Does the applicant produce culturally sensitive crops, such as heirloom crops, etc.?
13. Has the applicant completed or attended an educational event, such as a field day, workshop, class room course, etc, within the past year?
14. Is the applicant managing their grazing land with the inclusion of native warm season grasses?

## **I. PASTURELAND/HAYLAND**

1. Does the application include practices that address proper water management?
2. Does the application include practices that treat animal waste concerns?
3. Has the applicant attended an educational event concerning pasture/hayland within the past year?

## **J. CROPLAND**

1. Does that application include practices that conserve water?
2. Does the application include practices that sequester carbon?
3. Does the application include practices that provide pollinator habitat?
4. Does the application include practices that benefit soil quality?
5. Has the applicant attended an educational event concerning cropland within the past year?

## **J. FORESTLAND**

1. Does the application include prescribed burning?
2. Is there an existing forest stewardship plan/management plan on the land included in the application?
3. Is the forest being managed for uneven ages?
4. Does the application include practices for Longleaf pine habitat restoration?
5. Is the land in the application a certified Tree Farm?
6. Has the applicant attended an educational event for certified tree farmers within the past year?

## **K. WILDLIFELAND**

1. Does the application include practices for Longleaf pine habitat restoration?
2. Does the application include the planting of warm season native grasses?
3. Is the land in the application being managed or will be established to uneven aged forests?
4. Does the application include practices that benefit federally listed threatened / endangered species?
5. Does the application include practices that control invasive species?
6. Has the applicant attended an educational event within the last year that addresses wildlife?

**2. Fiscal Year 2009 CCRP Performance Goals.....Linda Floyd**

- Question that was put forth to the committee was; “What do we need to do to improve CRP?”
- Every year the goals are updated. This year and last years plan was reviewed.
- The 2009 goals for buffers in SC is 100 acres
- The 2009 goal for wetlands in SC is 10 acres.
- The SAFE practice is funding only one property at this time.
- Allendale, Bamberg and Barnwell counties are involved in the SAFE practice.
- Quails are the targeted species.
- Suggestion to expand the practices to adjoining counties such as Orangeburg, Colleton, Hampton and Dorchester. This addition must be authorized by the State Committee.
- The landowner must have prior farming practices.
- Planting of native warm season grasses.
- Specifications, practices and modifications will be looked into.

**3. Practice Standard Review/Technical Service Providers..... Erica Westbrook**

- NRCS is reviewing and will be updating this information.
- The information will be available through the EFOTG site.
- Please contact us with any comments/questions/additions you would like for us to consider.
- TSP certification:
  - SC has approximately 26 TSPs.
  - There is a step by step guide that allows individuals, businesses, and public agencies to register and become certified.
  - There is a national certification process.
  - Public comment is welcome.
  - NRCS is invited to the SC Society of American Forester’s meeting on May 28, 2009 to inform the members of the TSP requirements.
  - One or more individuals can be certified to represent an agency on its behalf when seeking certification as a Technical Service Provider; an individual must provide supporting documentation that he/she has the authority to provide technical services on its agencies behalf.
  - When applications begin to expire a generated letter is produced and the individual must reapply.
  - The State Conservationist has the authority to decertify a TSP.
  - A state average cost is established for payment to the TSP.

**4. 2008 NRCS Farm Bill Conservation Programs Public Net Conferences.....**

***Erica Westbrook***

- Explains what the net conference is about.
- Each net conference can be replayed if you are unable to attend.

5. *Other Items*.....

- The deadline for program funds to be obligated is usually April 1, but it may be extended until July 1.
- The new Secretary of Agriculture hails from the state of Iowa and holds high the issues including Carbon Sequestration, Energy Use, and Climate.
- NRCS plans to develop technical standards for solar and fuel usage.
- A new interim practice standard has been approved and will be offered under EQIP for Conservation Power Plant.
- NRCS will receive \$290 million nationwide from the stimulus package for the watershed programs.
- SC has requested funds for:
  - Darlington Flood prevention program.
  - Identify and improve watershed structures; that will be brought back up current technical standards.
- EWP floodplain easements will be offered. A limit of \$30 million per state has been established. The funds received will depend on the number of acres signed up.

*Meeting adjourned.*

The next meeting date will be delivered by email one month prior to the meeting. The meeting place will continue to be at the following address: Farm Bureau Federation, 724 Knox Abbott Drive, Cayce, South Carolina 29033, unless otherwise informed.

NILES GLASGOW  
State Conservationist