PR STATE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
MARCH 30, 2016, 9:00 A.M.
HACIENDA LA ESPERANZA
FIDEICOMISO DE CONSERVACIÓN
MANATÍ, PR

MINUTES

Members in Attendance

Edwin Almodóvar, USDA NRCS
Norberto Gabriel, USDA-APHIS
Ramón L. Rivera, DRNA
Evelyn Huertas, US EPA
Natalie Giro, USEPA
Nilda González, USDA NRCS
Jaime Valentín, USDA NRCS
Ruperto Chaparro, UPR
Carlos Zayas Santiago, SUNIA
Kathy Rodríguez, PLN
José A. Castro, USDA NRCS (VTC)
Gregory Morris (DNRA)
Isela Ortiz Toro, DCSAS
José A. Sustache, DNRA
Carlos E. Irizarry, CSA DA
Sofía Burgos Caraballo, DRNA
Emma M. Quero Torres, DRNA
Soledad Gaztambide, PLN
Damaris Medina, USDA-NRCS

Excused: Magaly Figueroa, USFS; Sindulfo Castillo, SAJ; José B. Ramírez Tió, Farmer; Cristina Cabrera, DRNA; Leyinska Wiscovitch, USDA-APHIS-PPQ; (sent representative); Christian Torres, FLMM; Iván Llerandi, FWS; (Sent representative)

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. The moderator, Jaime Valentín, welcomed the audience and turned the floor over to the Chairman.

The ***Chairman Edwin Almodóvar****, welcomed everyone to the meeting and particularly appreciated the staff of Para la Naturaleza for hosting this meeting and for their efforts in making arrangements for the meeting. After the introduction, the Chairman asked everyone to introduce themselves.*

The next item in the Agenda was the welcome message from Katty Zorana from Para la Naturaleza.

José A. Castro (USDA-NRCS). *Considerable discussion was held about programs available during FY 2016. Provided an update of the Strike force initiative emphasizing that it is an effort of USDA to coordinate its activities among all agencies to better serve persistently impoverished communities to create self-sustaining long term economic development. The Strike Force initiative includes all USDA agencies in partnership with other federal and state government agencies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions and community and private groups. Briefed about the outreach our partners provide to the public of our programs and financial assistance. Answered questions to the present.*

Fernando Arroyo (USDA-NRCS) *came forward to provide information of the technical assistance NRCS provides and clarified some doubts of the procedures for assistance requests. Answer questions raised.*

Jaime Valentín (USDA-NRCS*) went on to discuss the opportunities available for CIG Grants during FY-2016. Informed of two workshops provided concerning soil health where a group of young farmers participated. They were interested in the conservation covers and cover crops.*

Agricultural lands can benefit from the WRP Program. Will follow the same procedures of EQIP program. Working on 2017 payment schedules. The payment schedule involves various disciplines. Every year prices have to be updated. Once we have the information it has to be sent to the National Office for approval.

***Ruperto Chaparro, Director of Sea Grants, UPR**, made an extensive presentation of the project "Application of the Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) to estimate Discharge and Sediment Yields from the Río Grande de Añasco Watershed, PR" subsidized by the Sea Grant Program of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR). He answered questions from the present. Presentation is attached.*

***Gregory Morris (DNER) Acquifer Recovery Strategy – (Marianela Torres and Emma M. Quero from DNER) -** Attached is the presentation with photos in Spanish. The following key points is the translation into English.*

- The south coast aquifer in the area of Salinas and Santa Isabel is subject to multi-year droughts characterized by water levels which decline over a period of up to 5 years.
- The Santa Isabel area especially has seen multi-year periods with aquifer levels below sea level, a clear indicator of the danger of saline intrusion.
- Low aquifer levels have occurred in response to the dramatic reduction in recharge from irrigation, together with increased withdrawals by municipal users, changes which began in the 1970s.
- Low water levels and the threat of saline intrusion into the aquifer is potentially detrimental to all users, but is particularly detrimental to agricultural users who have much less flexibility in relocating their wells as compared to municipal water users (PRASA).
- Rainfall and streamflow delivers water only sparotically, and storage in the aquifer or reservoirs is needed to convert intermittent natural flows into a reliable source of water supply.
- The availability of water for all users in the area from Patillas to Salinas has been further constrained by the 30% reduction in the storage volume at Patillas reservoir in January of this year due to dam safety problems. Patillas reservoir is the primary source of irrigation water from Salinas east.
- The most practical and effective way to provide more water storage volume to compensate for the volume lost at Patillas reservoir, and to simultaneously combat saline intrusion, is to increase recharge into the aquifer using the existing canal infrastructure to deliver water to: (a) cropped areas on permeable soils which can sustain high rates of irrigation delivery, and/or (b) discharge into dry river or creek beds which will allow water to percolate.
- DNER has prepared proposals for modifying operation Patillas reservoir to maximize aquifer recharge, using water which would otherwise be discharged to the sea, and applying this water to aquifer recharge.
- In the Santa Isabel area the identified source of recharge water is to divert flows from Río Coamo at the Coamo dam, which has been out-of-service for decades due to sedimentation.

- The Department is investigating alternatives to make available funding for the following types of activities to support recharge from Patillas reservoir:
  - ✓ Identification and mapping of potential recharge areas, including landowner coordination/negotiation.
  - ✓ Installation of deep observation wells to monitor the movement of saline intrusion in the aquifer (no such wells currently exist).
  - ✓ Aquifer modeling to optimize recharge and withdrawal strategies to maximize aquifer yield, and
  - ✓ Funds to prepare a preliminary engineering report detailing the elements and cost of the recharge system, and outlining the sequence of activities to be taken to gradually increase recharge, implementing the least-costly project components first and more costly or complicated components later.

Subcommittee Report – Wetland/Wildlife/Forestry:

- *Ramón Rivera from DNER representing Iván Llerandi, Chair of the WW&F Committee talked about a practice to recover the rainwater. Also briefed about the firebreaks project. They need to identify federal agencies for fire standards. They have agreements with NRCS for about four years.*

Carlos Irizarry from the Districts *– centered his presentation on the advantages and benefits of the coffee shade. It will reduce yield but better quality. Educational aspect is very important.*

In closing, the Chairman congratulated the group for their attendance and for the excellent presentations. He provided his phone number and email address should anyone needs assistance or help with the programs available in NRCS.

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Recorder: Nilda González, Executive Assistant to the Director of USDA-NRCS