



United States Department of Agriculture

NEW MEXICO
NRCS STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING
Adobe Connect Net Meeting, October 15, 2020

Introductions:

Kenneth Branch welcomed everyone to the meeting. Provided introductions of the instructors and reviewed the agenda.

Due to the amount of information NRCS is asking for feedback and recommendations by October 30, 2020 via email to Kenneth.branch@usda.gov

State Conservationist Update

Xavier Montoya Remarks: Continue to be flexible- NRCS had and continues to see lots of changes, not only with the 2018 Farm Bill but with the COVID 19.

FY 20 was a good year for us. We rolled out the 2018 Farm Bill as in person trainings which pushed our deadlines back. A direct impact of that was we were not in a position to request additional funds. In FY 21 we plan to put the deals up and be ready to request/accept additional funds.

We are still not fully staffed though we have hired more staff. We are hoping to get to our staffing plan numbers.

FSA Updates

State Executive Director Mike White Remarks:

Mike gave a brief introduction of himself. Mike noted the partnership between FSA and NRCS has been a long and good partnership.

FSA and NRCS continue to provide service to producers such as eligibility, CRP, ECP Jolynn Gray provided updates to CRP (SAFE) including existing and proposed projects.

The soil rental rates were also discussed. See the attached document titled "FSA Update" for details

Questions:

Debbie Hughes: Can we get a copy of all of these presentations after the meeting? We believe that Curry County needs added to this proposed project. Why was Curry County left out?

Answer: Kenneth Branch- We will post all materials to the NM NRCS website. Joilynn: This is the first time the SAFE proposal submission period has been open in over 10 years. The proposer saw it more efficient to propose projects in increments. Lea County has an existing project, Roosevelt County neighbors Lea. Other LPC area will be considered next open period if time allows.



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Debbie Hughes: Why is it only for 5,200 acres?

Answer: It's a project and it costs money. The proposer was considering all factors. The first project was approved for 2,600 acres; therefore, 2,600 additional acres were requested for Lea and 2,600 acres were requested to be established for SAFE in Roosevelt County.

Debbie Hughes: Why was Curry County able to get higher rental rate and every other county is so much lower?

Joilynn: That is the rate determined by DAFP using the NASS surveys. Data that producers provide to these surveys weigh in rate establishments.

Debbie Hughes: How many years is the CRP payment for?

Joilynn Gray: Contracts may be either 10 or 15 years. Annual payments are issued normally in the month of October, first payment in the following October after the contract becomes effective.

Programs:

Kenneth Branch presented an update on EQIP. An FY 2020 recap was given along with the proposed FY 2021 spending plan for the state. Kenneth ask that recommendations and feedback be sent to him via email (Kenneth.branch@usda.gov) by October 30,2020.

Kenneth proceed to give information for EQIP FY 2021. He reviewed high priority practices as well as priority resource concerns with weighted percentages, where feedback is needed by the committee. (for a complete list of resource concerns see attachment titled "Resource Concerns in EQIP national ranking template")

Other topic discussed was Water Management Entitles, Source Water, WaterSMART, EQIP Incentive and EQIP Disaster. Feedback is requested on all topic. Please see the document titled "EQIP Update" for materials/information presented on this subject.

Athena Cholas provided updates and ongoing activities to the Payment schedule. She noted some practices that NRCS New Mexico is currently reviewing. Feedback was requested from the committee by October 30,2020.

An Agriculture Conservation Easement (ACEP) program update was also given by Athena. During this update she provided a list of input needed from the committee. She also gave a basic breakdown of each easement type.

The Conservation Stewardship program was also discussed during this time. Athena provided some updates related to the funding levels in FY 20 as well as the fund codes established for the program. A list of FY 20 state priority resource concerns was show and feed back for FY 21 was requested. Athena closed out with some basic information regarding the Conservation Innovation Grants. Athena reviewed the 5 active agreements and listed some state priorities where input is needed.



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For full details of the materials presented please refer to the topic titled “Payment Schedule, CSP, ACEP, CIG Update”.

Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART)

Ana Gomes provided the committee an update on the new CART. She is presenting information on how the tool works, the workflow and the ranking questions. During this session is when state priority resource concerns were discussed.

Kenneth and Ana showed the group the minimum and maximum percentages for each resource concern. Kenneth requested the committee have recommendations for state priority resource concerns and weighted percentages to him by October 30,2020

For full details and for a complete list of resource concerns see the documents titled “CART Update” and “Resource Concerns in EQIP national ranking template”

Resource Technology (RTS):

Steve Kadas, NRCS State Resource Conservationist, gave an overview of the ecological sciences areas covered by the RTS staff. Steve introduced the new agronomist, Mark Kopecky. Mark gave a brief introduction of himself.

Steve proceed to give an update on the Soil Health strategy and principles as well as the new working lands for wildlife.

Steve shared the 4 primary rangeland threats to wildlife and working land as well as the new areas covered under the Southwest Willow Flycatcher Initiative and the Great Plains Grassland Initiative. The Key components of a strategy were also discussed.

For details see the material presented during the meeting titled “RTS Update”.

Regional Conservationist Partnership Program (RCPP)

Kris provided the deadlines of November 30, 2020 for the RCPP classic and noted that the AFA announcement would be coming out soon.

Kris reviewed the two RCPP projects funded for 19/20 and the two renewals.

For full details of the materials presented see document titled “RCPP Update”

Partner Updates:

New Mexico State Forestry- Andrew Frederick provided information on the New Mexico forest action plan. Please visit <https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.emnrd.state.nm.us%2FSFD%2Fstatewideassessment.html&data=02%7C01%7C%7C80cbef10df6940b94e2608d8714586e5%7Ced5b36e701ee4ebc867ee03cfa0d4697>

for details.



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Chat Questions and Verbal answers:

Jesse Juen: Is the disparity between applications vs. contracts unique to NM or a trend westwide?

Answer: Steve Kadas: Jesse, it's a nation-wide trend

Jesse Juen: Kenny, could range planting practice be used on old oil and gas activity sites that have been abandoned or the agency cannot find a responsible party?

Answer: AnaG: Hi Jesse, i'll add to whatever Kenny may respond, but yes, that could work but Critical Area Planting would better fit those abandoned sites. Kenneth: Each site will be a case by case basis based on the resource concerns

Debbie Hughes: Is EQIP incentive just for private land?

Answer: Kenneth Branch: We do not know at this time, we recently asked the same question to NHQ- waiting on a rely from NHQ

Debbie Hughes: Is EQIP incentive just for folks who already have EQIP contracts or only for new EQIP contracts?

Answer: Kenneth: We don't know at this time, was recently asked the same question to NHQ. We expanded our question to NHQ to include producer who have or would like to apply for CSP- Waiting on a response from NHQ

Debbie Hughes: Do you have to have the "possible loss of lives" to use these (EQIP Disaster) funds like EWP did?

Answer: Kenneth- No there does not need to be a threat to live and property, also you do not need a sponsor.

Debbie Hughes: Payment rates for fencing needs to be reviewed. Gates are not included and ranches in SENM in the oilfield areas may have to have 10-20 gates or cattleguards in one pasture.

Answer: Kenneth Branch(usda.gov): We will review the payment schedule components to see if gates is a listed component

Jesse Juen: Mark, can you share your email or number?

Mark Kopecky: Sure thing Jesse: mark.kopecky@usda.gov