

LOUISIANA STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE TELECONFERENCE

ALEXANDRIA, LOUISIANA

JANUARY 5, 2012

RECORD OF AGENDA ITEMS AND COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Kevin Norton, NRCS State Conservationist, opened the meeting at 9:30 a.m., and welcomed the meeting participants. (See attendance list attached.) Norton reviewed the agenda and commented on the agenda items to be discussed.

◆ **CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)**

John Pitre, Acting NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, stated the Conservation Stewardship Program is a continuous sign-up. First application pool cut-off is January 13, 2012; this has since been changed to January 27, 2012. Three hundred six applicants have been received. The final manual was released in November 2011, several changes were made.

David Williams, NRCS Soil Conservationist, commented on the significant changes to minimum acre requirement for non-industrial private forest land in Louisiana. The release of the new manual makes this no longer applicable; there is not a minimum size requirement. Soil erosion was lost as a priority resource concern because of lack of available enhancements under this resource concern. Proposals to add energy as the fifth resource concern for soil erosion to maximize opportunity for participation in the program were discussed.

Buck Vandersteen, LFA, asked how energy and biomass work? Norton commented at this time, no CSP enhancement for biomass work. Energy is for pump conversion.

Vandersteen asked how many non-industrial private forest land owners to-date have been able to sign up into CSP? Williams commented that 119 contracts for non-industrial private forest land, and obligated \$592,546 on 58,559 acres.

◆ **WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM (WRP)**

John Pitre stated the first application cut-off date is January 20, 2012. WRP is a continuous sign up. National Geographic Area Rate Caps were approved by the National Headquarters in December and there were no changes.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) National Geographic Area Rate Caps has two changes of the five zones. Zone 4 which is the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley went from \$1200 to \$1000. Zone 5 which is the Florida Parishes went from \$1200 to \$1400.

An advanced bulletin of the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) with the proposal dates states proposals needs to be submitted to the State Conservationist by February 10, 2012. The State Conservationist will review and forward with justification to National Headquarters by February 24, 2012, at which time a selection will be made. A partner would have to apply for the financial assistance option or technical assistance option. The NRCS website has specific requirements for formatting the application. Attached to these minutes for your information, is the announcement on the General WREP Announcement.

Ronnie Ulmer, The Nature Conservancy, asked if a WREP application is in two eight-digit HUCs would it be counted as two different applications? Scott Edwards, NRCS State Resource Conservationist stated it could be one application; it would have to be delineated exactly where they are located.

◆ **GULF OF MEXICO INITIATIVE (GoMI)**

Edwards stated the Gulf of Mexico Initiative is designed to help producers in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas improve water quality and ensure sustainable production of food and fiber. NRCS is launching an innovative water and wildlife conservation effort along the Gulf Coast which will deliver up to \$50 million in financial and easement assistance over 3 years in 16 priority watersheds. This infusion of conservation funds represents an 11-fold increase in conservation assistance in these priority areas. Three priority waters in Louisiana are targeted for participation in the new Gulf of Mexico Initiative:

- Bayou Come-Grand Bayou Watershed and Bayou St. Vincent-Little Grand Bayou Watershed, both in the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary
- Bayou Grand Marais Watershed in the Mermentau River Basin.

EPA (unclear of speaker) asked are applicants adjacent to the watersheds eligible if within the eight-digit HUC? Edwards stated applicants' needs to be within the 12-digit HUC, if applicant is just outside the area NRCS can work with you on technical assistance and other Farm Bill Programs can help with implementation.

EPA (unclear of speaker) asked how much money did Louisiana get? Norton stated exact figures are not known, \$50 million over three years; \$20 million has been set aside for six different programs. Norton stated NRCS will accept and evaluating applications and submit to National Headquarters and they will be distributing the \$20 million across the five states.

Edwards stated the National Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) for FY 2012 has been announced. Twenty million dollars will be available of which \$5 million has been held specifically for the Mississippi River Basin Initiative. National CIG is a two phased approach with a pre-proposal due January 31, 2012; and April 6, 2012, is the deadline for full proposals. Louisiana NRCS will offer a State CIG. The request for proposals will come out the first week of February. Louisiana will use a one stage approach with full proposals due March 15, 2012. The maximum award will be \$75,000 each.

◆ **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

Andy Dolan, USFWS, asked if there will be discussion on T&E ranking revisions to the WRP Program? Edwards stated it's too early in the process and will need to discuss it at the next STC meeting.

Ronnie Ulmer stated he doesn't have a clear understanding of what effect the cost share of The Nature Conservancy has on the ranking points. At the last WRP meeting Marlin Jordan stated there was going to be point threshold for WRP rankings and he would like to know what it is. There is a section of the scoring that evaluates the cost effectiveness and the contribution of partner or landowner to restoration and it factors into the segment of evaluation criteria. The threshold has points score that reflect applications that are high environmental value that need to move very quickly in the program. The threshold is 1700 points.

Marlin Jordan, NRCS, stated there is a potential of 200 points if the landowner is willing to accept better than 75% of the restoration costs or reduce by 75%.

- ◆ **Next Meeting Date** – The next face-to-face meeting will be April 11, 2012. Members will be notified 30 days before the meeting for specific details and an agenda will be provided.

10:30 a.m. – Meeting Adjourned

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LIST OF ATTENDEES

Kevin Norton, USDA-NRCS
Scott Edwards, USDA-NRCS
Tim Landreneau, USDA-NRCS
Charles Guillory, USDA-NRCS
Randy Cheveallier, USDA-NRCS
John Pitre, USDA-NRCS
David Williams, USDA-NRCS
Chris Coreil, USDA-NRCS
Johanna Pate, USDA-NRCS
Garret Thomassie, USDA-NRCS
Morris Houck, USDA-NRCS
Marlin Jordan, USDA-NRCS
Jerry Urserly, USDA-FSA
Andy Dolan, USFWS
Jess Barr, LCP
Stephen Minvielle, LCFA
Ronnie Ulmer, TNC
Jim Bergan, TNC
Nathan Crisp, USDA-NASS
Dwight Landreneau, LSU Ag Center
John Westra, LSU Ag Center
Kristy Rogers, LDEQ
Luke Lewis, NWTF
Christian Richard, Vermillion SWCD
Jeff Durand, LRGA
Buck Vandersteen, LFA
Maura Wood, NWF
Harry Jones, EPA
Sylvia Ritzky, EPA
Phil Turnipseed, USGS
Matt Rota, Gulf Restoration Network
Brian Kemp, Gulf CPR
Juli Kemp, Gulf CPR
Jerry Booze, EPA Gulf of Mexico