

WILDLIFE & FORESTRY
STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE WORKGROUP
Wednesday, November 30, 2011 – Meeting Summary

Attendees:

Don Riley – NRCS	Patrick Farrell – NCWRC
Robert Horton – NRCS	JohnAnn Shearer – USFWS
Dewitt Hardee – NCDA&CS	Susan Woodall – FSA
Sean Brogan – NCDFR	Tim Jones – FSA
Ned Jones – NC Trout Unlimited	Natalie Woolard – DSWC
Scott Pohlman – NC NHP	John Isenhour – NCWRC
Mark Jones – NCWRC	Robert Bardon – NCSU Ext. Forestry
Julie Elmore – NRCS	Michelle Lovejoy – NC FSWC
Dick Fowler – NC ASWCD	Dick Hamilton – NCWF
Misty Buchanan – NC NHP	Rusty Painter - CTNC
Tim Gestwicki – NCWF	Fred Harris – NCWF

10:05 start Agenda

Brief Introductions (name/organization) by all attendees

Meeting Purpose is the more focused subcommittee of the State Tech Committee. Important role of information sharing, direct feedback and providing detailed information on topics of interest to partners.

May 12, 2011 Summary

All Action Items from May 12th meeting were addressed including:

State list of prescribed burners: Role of prescribed burning in the Farm Bill, how to get partners involved, etc. JohnAnn’s feedback: “Don challenged Sean and I to come up with a list of prescribed burners to handout to landowners in the event the forest service was unavailable.” Compiled lists in the forest service districts, fire councils, type of burning: do they burn in-stand, site prep burning, etc. Registered forester numbers and burner certification are examples of data collected. 2 Things that still remain: First, everyone on that list needs to be contacted and have information verified and make sure they are comfortable handing it out to the public. Some may be unable to take on new business. Second, the fire council has recommended that there be a letter attached that gives landowners information and tips about prescribed burning. The new SWAT position that the Forest Service is hiring with NRCS funding can facilitate these efforts. Purpose is to have a statewide, accurate list of able, willing and qualified burners that can assist private landowners with burning. The list will be up to date and accurate. Forest Service is still coordinating the development of this SWAT position and plans a mid-December conference call to tie up final loose ends.

Verification of State Technical Committee Members: List of names/contacts of individuals and organizations provided at the May 12, 2011 meeting were either added or confirmed to be accounted for on the complete list of State Technical Committee members. It was noted that one attendee was

not notified through the Doodle poll process of the meeting. The reason is not known, but this error will be corrected.

CRP Update: Tim Jones – List of current practices. There are approximately 111,000 acres in CRP right now in NC. Results of sign up 41, August 2011, contracts effective October 1, 2011. General sign-up practices are an opportunity to enroll larger acres on the farm. Continuous signups are typically for smaller buffer acres. General are typically whole field enrollments of trees and grasses. Actual numbers of acres accepted in NC is quite a bit greater than what is in the system because some counties are behind in their reporting due to issues with conservation planning. Report states 6,300, NC actually has 7,700 acres accepted. We estimate 7,000-7,300 that will enter into contracts (some offers typically drop). Typical enrollees are older landowners who are getting out of farming but still want annual revenues.

General sign-up is competitive on a national basis. Tree practices and establishing a cover that have higher wildlife benefits receive more EBI points. We have to provide a job sheet on each of the practices being offered.

FSA anticipates another General Signup in calendar year 2012, but not sure when that might happen.

Explained difference between Management and Maintenance under CRP.

Management: limitations on cost share, \$50/yr and a cap of \$100/ac for 10 year contracts and \$125/ac for 15 year contract, intended to enhance/improve the CRP practice, CRP offers 50% cost share.

Maintenance: NO COST SHARE, expectation on landowner to keep practice intact for life of contract.

ACTION ITEM:

FSA would like this committee to assist with input with the following:

- Practice Guidance Jobsheets (CP1, CP2, CP3, CP3A, CP4D) – Jobsheets passed out
- Management recommendations overview/update.
- Maintenance requirements – guidance on how participant should maintain the practice and set expectations to accomplish the likelihood of the practice surviving contract period.

Entire list of present cost share rates can be provided to anyone who is interested. Simply contact Tim for that list. Feedback is also good for those who know practice costs to make sure they are keeping up with current costs in the field.

Discussion:

Mark Jones: Read FSA policy for FSA CRP Management Activity Development Team (2 CRP paragraph 428). Stated that categories are confusing to anyone not familiar with the intricacies of CRP. Jobsheets are too complex for public to comment. Wants FSA to convene a CRP team that meets regularly. Stated that there have been problems over the 26 year history with lack of management in the southeast when it comes to forest maintenance and management. CRP is dynamic and changes each farm bill. Mark wants a standing subcommittee that meets regularly.

Robert Horton: Would like to find out what states around us are doing and requiring for management.

Sean Brogan: Forest Service spends a lot of time with Jobsheets and has been offering feedback to FSA.

Tim Gestwicki: Would like to participate in the process for offering feedback and would like to be included in any CRP team that would be formed.

Don: CRP has its own set of policy, so those offering feedback should take time to understand those requirements. For instance, no management can be planned in the final two years of a contract. This might alter when recommendations are made to require prescribed burning. Remember that CRP is a nationally ranked program.

CREP is the cooperative agreement between FSA and the State of North Carolina. There are nine CRP practices offered under CREP. Yadkin-Pee Dee East, all river basins are eligible for CREP.

Natalie: CREP

26,000 acres are in long term, 30 year to permanent easements. Many funding sources are pushing for permanent easement enrollment. CWMTF grants are a major contributor of funding. There has been a dramatic increase in permanent easement enrollment since 2006 when the program was revised and expanded making it easier for landowners to understand. Approximately 90% of new enrollments have been permanent. Interest and enrollment has overwhelmed our staff land surveyor. We have had to contract some of the work out as a result. Long term success is being realized already including more than 725 stream miles protected state wide.

CREP is contributing to the LLPI. 1100 acres enrolled 426 acres are permanent.

Another change several years ago was to allow existing trees in permanent easement allowing the opposite side of the stream to be enrolled as well. Won't get CRP, but will get payments for easement from the state.

Seeing lots of interest in Surry and Yadkin counties, including a very successful legislative field tour that recently occurred.

Forest Service and Division of Soil and Water moved over to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture (NCDA). This affected our ability to acquire easements. The Council of State and Dept of Ag staff has resolved this issue since October.

Our Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF) grant expires July 2012. The past grant was for \$3.5 million. By July we will only have a few hundred thousand left. We will re-apply in January.

Schedule F needs to be presented prior to receiving funding for CREP or CRP. It appears that some of those requirements will be fixed in the short session. The intent was that the applicants receiving cost share were true agriculture operations. This limited all the different avenues that land can be a farm. This complicated matters and we hope it will be fixed soon.

Annual report will be complete and on the division's website by the end of the year. Willing to provide copies to those who are interested.

Still need a CREP manager. Do not know when that position will be filled.

Question (Mark): How many acres of pine are in CP22?

Answer: Not 100% sure due to tracking system, but historically many were planted to Loblolly.

2010-2011 NRCS Program Review: Julie

NC currently only receives +/- 2% of conservation funds available from the Farm Bill. This includes EQIP, WHIP, etc. This 2% does not include technical assistance dollars. However, technical assistance is tied to the amount of program dollars a state receives.

Last year NC NRCS received an initial allocation of approximately \$12 million dollars for EQIP, and we were able to bring in an additional \$4 million at the end of the year as states were not able to use all of their allocations. This extra fund infusion is very rare, but shows we are able to do much more than we receive annually.

Comment (Tim Gestwicki): I am interested in these numbers. They will help when promoting NRCS and Farm Bill interests in the state.

2011 EQIP Forestry had an allocation of \$638,000. Area 1 (mountains) received a significantly lower allocation as compared to Area 2 (piedmont – highest) and Area 3 (coastal plain). However, Sean Brogan stated that this mirrored the trend for Forest Development Program.

2011 WHIP had an allocation of \$1.3 million. Approximately \$1 million was allocated to the Longleaf Pine Initiative. The remaining balance was allocated to HPAPs across the state.

Account Name	Allocated
FEDERAL WHIP FA	\$61,402,271.00
North Carolina WHIP FA	\$1,333,347.00
FEDERAL EQIP General FA	\$865,475,321.87
North Carolina EQIP FA	\$17,335,592.00

Forestry is a funding category within EQIP accounting for 4% of the NC Allocation in 2011

NC FORESTRY SUMMARY	\$638,076.43
Forestry Area 3 EAST	\$218,772.89
Forestry-Area 1 MTNS	\$95,965.79
Forestry-Area 2 PIEDMONT	\$323,337.75

2012 Programs Forecast

We do not have our 2012 allocations yet. Congress has yet to settle on the President's 2012 Budget.

NEW: Regional cost rates for EQIP and WHIP: NRCS does not pay on receipts/actual costs. We develop a typical cost scenario. Starting in 2012, practice cost scenarios will be developed regionally for 15 of the most commonly used practices. NC is included with Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky (Appalachian Region). In 2013 all practice codes will be regionalized. Forest Stand Improvement, Upland Habitat Management and Brush Management were regionalized in 2012. Issue to understand is you can only have eight (8) scenarios per region per practice. What that means is if there are priorities in NC, then we need to make sure those are the ones we promote within the region.

Question (Dick): Why is NRCS moving towards a regional cost list? ANSWER: Consistency (we think).

Comment (Robert): Forest Openings for Wildlife will not be available for cost share under Forest Stand Improvement in 2012.

Comment (Dick): This is a hindrance to locally led conservation.

Other NRCS Wildlife/Forestry related programs discussed:

CSP is a program that has a landowner driven process. It is for someone who has already done a good job, that could carry them a bit higher. Applicant will answer a questionnaire (CMT – Conservation Management Tool) that establishes a base line of conservation. Examples of enhancements include creating snag trees for cavity dwellers, patch burning, development of seasonal pools, etc. Important thing is that we can enroll forestland. The cap is \$40,000. The enhancements that we can utilize are developed at the national level. This is great for the conservation minded landowners who are already doing things fit the program well. Example enhancements for forestland: patch burning, riparian forest buffer, forest stand improvement, wildlife nesting structures, silvopasture, hardwood and conifer crop release.

NRCS Program Priorities:

Don – some questions we need to work together to answer include:

- What are the priorities?
- What should we be focusing on?
- Where are the forest communities that we need to focus on?
- Who are the landowner groups we need to interact with?
- What are the Habitat Priorities for the state?

Sean: **Wildlife Action Plan** http://www.wildlifeactionplans.org/north_carolina.html and the **State Forest Resource Assessment** <http://www.ncforestassessment.com/index.htm>. We have our priority layers. They are great starting points. Burning and thinning are two practices that forestry and wildlife

can agree on. They are easy practices that we all believe in. Longleaf will continue to be a big focus for the Forest Service. There is a short leaf initiative beginning. That may be something we look at closer.

Robert: We do rank based on Conservation Forestry Priority Areas. We give it extra points. As far as tree planting is concerned, there is not a lot of ranking priority. Anything that is not loblolly pine gets a boost in ranking. That includes short leaf, hardwoods, long leaf, etc. Thinning is also addressed in the ranking criteria.

John Ann: Agree with Sean. We also added in aquatic species/habitats and wetlands. We would like to see burning and thinning in a cumulative context so you get regional improvement.

Mark: Thinning and burning. There may be some disagreement regarding the level of thinning. Continue to promote heavier thinning. Water quality getting wildlife and water quality benefit with filter strips and field borders. Double bang for the buck. Continue to emphasize those kinds of practices.

Scott Pohlman: DENR has the conservation planning tool that connects. The conservation planning tool incorporates the Wildlife Action and State Forest Resource Assessment. Recommend that you incorporate it into the ranking process.

Ned Jones: Stream improvement. Keeping cattle out of the streams is a top priority. (Julie gave data on fencing dollars, channel stabilization, access control – which were in the hundreds of thousands of dollars for aquatic habitat improvement throughout the state)

Programs: What's working/What's Not

Sean: Longleaf money has been a huge help taking the pressure off FDP. It fits in with a lot of different groups' goals. That is definitely on target.

Mark: WHIP Longleaf Initiative: Are there things to do to ensure that the WHIP funded projects remain a habitat initiative (concern over straw production)? It's always a concern the shorter nature of the contracts. Need to continue to think about long term benefit. It is good to shift focus to the groundcover and away from the tree when we can. Don: What we have done is to prioritize our ranking. Existing stands that are in pretty good to good shape with intact ground cover are top tier. Existing forestland in cutover status, but has an intact understory, is the next tier. Transition from loblolly or slash into long leaf falls next. Lowest tier is crop and pasture conversion (planting trees on open land). We didn't want to compete with CRP and Forest Service and their program. If you have the habitat components already there, the likelihood to transition to straw is less.

Mark: Wildlife friendly thinning and savanna thinning: do we intend to have it?

Robert: Yes, we will have wildlife friendly thinning under the regional payment schedule. Savanna thinning will have to fall under wildlife friendly and restoration of declining habitats. The cost basis was questioned by the economist and it did not fall into the top eight (8) priorities for the regional team.

Mark: This type of thinning has tremendous potential in this state. We have a pine dominant state and there is tremendous potential to sell this practice from the mountains to the beach and really do a lot for wildlife on a large scale. It's a step in the right direction. There is good data out of Georgia showing that thinning leads to good timber volume. You get less trees but they do get bigger.

Habitat Priority Area Proposal (HPAP): It is a long standing NC concept. We knew that WHIP funding was limited and often sporadic. We formulated HPAPs to take a regional area and ask what we are trying to accomplish here. The proposal can be sponsored by FWS, Quail Unlimited, Local SWCD board, etc. The proposal says that the sponsor and eligible landowners are behind the concept and that they want financial assistance to implement. HPAPs compete on a statewide basis for funding, but once funds have been allocated, only those applications within the designated region for the intended purpose are eligible. The hope is to get good quality work in a focused area. However, the quality of the projects has not been as strong. The issue is the projects coming in the door. NRCS is asking that partners assist by getting quality projects in the door. What is needed to improve the HPAP process?

Dewitt: Clear process, clear announcement. Selling benefit, idea, and trying to get the cost share dollars that fit that.

Tim G.: Clear process and clear information disseminated in easy manner.

JohnAnn: Educate partners on local level on HPAP. Educate folks in local NRCS offices on how to go through the process.

Robert: Brought up from the landowners to get organizations involved. American Tree Farm System, NC Woodlands, different wildlife groups/clubs. Educate them. See an increase in what we are trying to accomplish. Better approach.

Mark: Have targeted landowner outreach in high priority areas.

Sean: is there a form or application process?

Don: Answer: YES - The form is simple. It includes 12-13 questions, including what the ranking criteria will be.

Sean: Who administers the project?

Don: Answer: If the proposal is approved and funded, the administration is given to the DC for that area.

Longleaf Survival Issues - Robert

Several complaints/concerns have been received regarding survival of longleaf pine seedlings. It appears to be more problematic in fringe of NE. Northampton, Halifax, Martin. It appears that many are CP36 CRP crop field plantings.

Mark: Has noticed that following the 2011 Hurricane 8-20 ft tall long leafs suffered more than the loblollies. This gave the longleaf a black eye in Craven County and Southern Pitt, so there might be some need for education and outreach in these areas.

Natalie: CREP longleaf planting from Martin north has had several fields that needed to be replanted 2-3 times. Planting correctly, getting things just right. Make sure the site is mapped correctly with soils. Landowners got frustrated. Historical management of the site may be the issue.

We can say it's isolated in the Northeast part of the state.

Dewitt suggested problems with peanut fields.

Others: Sources of seedlings.

Sean said there are no widespread issues across the state.

Longleaf Understory Restoration: Want to jump to the other scenario where we have landowners who have no understory such as 3rd/4th loblolly rotation or crop/pasture conversion. We don't want to sell understory restoration as planting a single species of grass under longleaf. What we don't have is real good demonstrations where landowners have gone from point A to point B. What inputs went into the system? How many plugs of wiregrass? The information is emerging, but we need success criteria. We want to make sure we are doing the right thing with public dollars. What are we going to call success in the short term? What are we going to call restoration of an understory? What plant materials do we need?

Sean: Bladen Lakes State Forest could be a valuable tool. David Schnokey is NCDA manager for research forests all over the state. He might be a valuable contributor to the development of the success criteria.

Mark: There is good information coming out of Georgia. He can contact Reggie Jackson with GA DFR.

TSP/CAP discussion: (Robert defined CAPs and TSPs for committee) Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) - an individual can request a forest management CAP and get cost share for getting that plan written. The person writing must be a certified Technical Service Provider (TSP) through NRCS. Money for CAPs comes out of financial assistance. It is mandated that we must offer CAPs on: Forestry, Organic, Transition to Organic, Energy, Air Quality Plan, Pesticide, Pest Management, Nutrient Management, Spill prevention for EPA. Some of these areas we recognize that we don't have the expertise in house. Note: there is no obligation to the landowner that they implement what is developed under the plan. NC should have 25 TSPs available for the Forestry CAP in 2012.

Forum for Discussion as a Group:

NC Prescribed Fire Council - JohnAnn: Organization is now a non-profit to foster communication and coordination with a stake in prescribed fire. Brochures passed out and membership was encouraged.

Wildlife Federation: S399 Private Conservation Easement Incentive. 1265 Land and Water Conservation Fund has Senator Burr and Hagan on it. Good news for the state.

Dewitt: Grant Cycle 5 is due December 15th.

Don: Any group that is represented that would benefit from having NRCS come and talk about Conservation Planning, Farm Bill Programs, Eligibility issues, etc., we are happy to come out and do that. Just let us know.

Meeting Adjourned