

**MINUTES**  
**State Technical Committee Meeting**  
**Raleigh, North Carolina**  
**March 1, 2013**

The meeting convened at 10:06 am at the NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services Agronomic Conference Room, 4300 Reedy Creek Road, Raleigh. [Click here for a list of participants.](#)

Greg Walker, Assistant State Conservationist-Programs, opened the meeting and welcomed participants. Greg and Julie Elmore, Natural Resources Specialist, introduced Duke graduate students who are working on a project to identify State Technical Committee partners. Greg reviewed the agenda and introduced Terrance Rudolph, Acting State Conservationist in North Carolina. Terrance spoke briefly about his background and his experience in North Carolina thus far.

[Click here for presentations presented at the meeting.](#)

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Status Update Fiscal Year 2013 - Greg Walker, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist - Programs**

**FY 2013 Funding and Program Timeline:**

Greg provided an update on EQIP. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is currently in the throes of first batching period for national initiatives.

The 2013 EQIP program will be very similar to the 2012 program. There continues to be a high volume of forestry; however, there is a downward trend in waste lagoon closures. Costs are increasing for Ag Chemical handling. Spill Prevention Containment Countermeasure is still a pilot; one or two applications have been received. The irrigation efficiency resource concern improves water use on existing irrigation systems.

Greg discussed 2013 funding levels. North Carolina received a little more money this year than last year due to a high rate of success with seeing contracts through to completion. The funding levels are assigned target levels that are based on historical participation.

- North Carolina is short of its target on receiving organic applications this year, and this has been the trend for the last three years. There are still two more batching periods remaining to receive more applications.
- North Carolina received more applications for on-farm energy, and additional funding may be added.
- The target for Seasonal High Tunnels was met in first batching period.
- Halfway to Longleaf pine in second batching. North Carolina received 2,200 applications so far this year vs. 1,600 last year, and we are only halfway through the application period.

Workload is rapidly outpacing manpower. NRCS is not allowed to move unused initiative funds into General EQIP funds.

NRCS is required to obligate 60% to animal agricultural contracts and target 10% of funds for Socially Disadvantaged/New/Beginning Farmer. Funds must be obligated by July 1.

Batching dates:

February 15 – General EQIP and National initiatives

March 15 – General EQIP and National initiatives

April 19 – National Initiatives

**Q:** Can land trusts, landowners, etc. assist NRCS with application process in any way?

**A:** The more others know about the processes and rules of EQIP the better prepared partners are to assist.

**Q:** Is general forestry separate from the Longleaf Pine Initiative?

**A:** Yes, forestry is part of General EQIP. About \$900,000 is available for forestry.

### **NRCS National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) – Greg Walker, NRCS**

#### **Background/Purpose of the Initiative**

The National Water Quality Initiative started last year, but it was unclear if it was going to continue year after year.

The NWQI addresses high priority water resource concerns in small watersheds with streams or water bodies in one or more of the following categories: Impaired, Threatened, TMDL, Critical ([see presentation for category definitions](#)). Greg reviewed the requirements and definitions for the initiative. NWQI emphasis began in 2012 targeting up to three 12-digit HUCs.

In 2012 the following watersheds were included in NWQI in North Carolina: Upper Mitchell River, Little Fisher River, Big Creek. We can continue with these three watersheds in 2013, or we can request approval to remove two and replace them. NRCS needs to consider current staff levels, historical participation, existing monitoring data, state watershed management plans, and state water quality support to determine which watersheds to consider. This decision must be made by March 15 in order to meet the July 1 obligation date, and NRCS in North Carolina is requesting feedback from the committee.

Water quality impairments for NWQI are related to nutrients, sediment and pathogens. This initiative restricts a large amount of money to a small piece of real estate.

### **Partner discussion of Watersheds – Julie Elmore, Natural Resources Specialist, NRCS**

Input from this discussion will help target funds effectively for fiscal year 2014. Any funds that are not spent will be reallocated to other states in subsequent years. However, NRCS staff resources are sometimes constrained, and the ability to effectively use those funds can be diminished.

Julie displayed maps showing impaired watersheds based on NWQI and the 2012 selected watersheds. The maps also show watershed initiatives from partners to see where there is overlap for collaborative opportunities.

The group discussed different variables for potential watershed candidates. The biggest issues seemed to be in smaller tributaries where cattle have access to the stream. Access control is one of the most effective conservation measure, both in terms of cost effectiveness and in practice.

Sediment and fecal coliform E. coli are the main pollutants being addressed. Mitchell only had one or two major contributions of sediment, which will improve the Yadkin section. NRCS does not have a rare species layer, but will get that data to take it into consideration.

Contracts sometimes are cancelled due to economic strain on participant, which in turn can affect NRCS funding. Such producers may be eligible for Limited Resource assistance.

There is concern about the impact staff resources will have on the ability for the initiative to be successful. NRCS needs to be able to show results of the initiative. It is necessary to use existing sources of data in order to show improvement over time.

Julie displayed a map with two watersheds in Surry County that NRCS is considering for 2013. These watersheds have the appropriate resource concerns, staff resources, and participation/application demand for water quality assistance. NWQI efforts can also be accomplished under General EQIP. Committee members suggested going forward with these two watersheds and starting to prepare other potential watersheds for future NWQI assistance.

Suggestion to include Indian Creek because local watershed groups are prepared and ready to start water improvement projects there.

NCSU has been notified by EPA that very extensive monitoring will need to take place. It is necessary to ensure that funded practices will be sufficient for demonstrating the requirements for monitoring.

### **Emergency Watershed Program – Western Landslides (January 2013) – Matt Flint, Assistant State Conservationist-Technology, NRCS**

Western North Carolina experienced a significant rain event January. The Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) is available when there is a storm event, typically hurricanes, but also when slopes are saturated. The program offers 75% federal match to 25% local match to restore to the property to pre-storm condition.

EWP is not an active program yet, but is an opportunity available to communities for restoring impairments to watersheds that threaten health, life or property. No eligibility decisions have been made, and no funds are currently available. Matt met with some of the effected community leaders to determine needs and lay a foundation for interested local sponsors who want the program in their community. EWP can only pay for repairs after a local agreement is in place. The program does not pay for damage to property or infrastructure, but rather for stabilization of the land/slope so that those

things can be subsequently repaired. The local sponsor has an operation and maintenance obligation once the site has been stabilized.

Matt displayed a map showing the location of landslide and its effects. There is a need to determine if debris accumulation and continued instability is a threat to downstream properties. NRCS is accepting EWP requests for assistance from local sponsors until April 1, 2013. North Carolina will form disaster survey report (DSR) teams to assess damage, determine EWP eligibility, come up with cost estimates and do environmental review of treatment alternatives. Funding is only available to shovel-ready projects.

Tim Jones mentioned that the Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers the Emergency Conservation Program to rehab farmland to pre-disaster condition. 75% reimbursable.

### **Wetland and Highly Erodible Land Conservation – Matt Flint, NRCS**

NRCS lost two critical employees in eastern counties during high demand for wetland determinations, and is struggling with workload for Wetland Conservation and Highly Erodible Land Conservation Compliance determinations. It may be necessary to change farmers' expectations on timeframe for getting a determination.

**Q:** Can Technical Service Providers fill in for these determinations?

**A:** Private consultants can do determinations and provide their findings to NRCS for review and concurrence. This practice has tapered off due to quality assurance issues because NRCS requirements were not being met.

### **Partner Updates**

#### **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) – Tim Jones, Farm Service Agency (FSA)**

General sign-up for CRP will be open May 20-June 14. Should present conservation priority areas be modified? Under CRP producers offer their land with a proposal for what cover they want to put on their land, and FSA evaluates these offers. FSA can't make recommendations to change anything on this sign-up, but may ask Forestry and Wildlife Subcommittee for recommendations for changes to criteria for selecting offers in the future. The subcommittee made recommendations to the national office in September for management activities; but FSA has not heard back yet. Accepted contracts will be effective October 1, 2013.

**Q:** Will the submitted recommendations be available for this sign-up?

**A:** The hope is that they will be approved to be in place for this general sign-up.

Continuous sign-up is not currently available due to lack of funding. Once funds are available, there will be a 4-6 week period before sign-up can resume, probably late spring or early summer.

#### **Longleaf Pine Discussion – Dwight Batts**

Dwight had six acres of Longleaf lost to hurricane Irene in 2011. The problem was lack of taproot, and was not just a local problem. This information is not being communicated to landowners who are

signing up for Longleaf pine. CRP and CREP participants do not appear to be eligible for disaster assistance to remove downed trees. There has been no management recommendation for handling a large fall. This may be helpful for landowners to know.

Mark Jones commented that lack of management of Longleaf pine stands may be part of the issue.

The committee decided that the Wildlife and Forestry Subcommittee will discuss this issue.

### **Subcommittee Meeting Dates for Spring/Summer 2013**

Subcommittees focus on more complex issues brought up in the State Technical Committee meeting. These groups are convened on an ad hoc basis.

#### Forestry and Wildlife

Topics: CRP management, Longleaf management, Invasive species list for NRCS Technical Assistance and Financial Assistance programs to publish in the Field Office Technical Guide.

Next Meeting: End of March – beginning of April to prepare for CRP before signup. Julie will send a poll for dates.

#### Easements

General coordination/briefing in the next few months.

#### Organic

Between now and June.

#### Energy

Need to integrate strategies. There is significant new demand in the state.

May-June.

#### Water Quality

Add new subcommittee for water quality.

The meeting adjourned at 12:14 pm.

/s/

Debra Ireland

Recorder

cc:

All State Technical Committee Members