

**AGRICULTURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE**

**Chair: Kevin Robling (South Dakota)**

**Vice-Chair: Tim McCoy (Nebraska)**

**Wednesday, September 25th, 2024**

**8:00 am—12:00 pm**

114th Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting

Madison, Wisconsin

Call to order, review agenda, introductions around the room

Approval of Minutes for the 2024 North American Meeting

* Minutes are approved.

Farm Bill Updates & Priorities

* Review of AFWA farm bill platform.
  + CRP
    - No change to CRP cap @ 40 million acres.
    - No change to rental rate limitations.
    - No change to payment limitations.
    - No change to cost share.
    - Cap on Grasslands CRP:
      * Most grasslands enrolled in the program are not at high risk of conversion and enrollment adds little wildlife value.
      * “Takes” funding from general and continuous CRP.
      * No change to grasslands cap @ 20% of the program.
    - No change to management of southern pines.
    - Exempting working lands from county cap:
      * **Alter language to be specific to CRP. Strike everything that is not grasslands.**
    - County Cropland Limitation waiver authority:
      * **Alter language to state that grasslands CRP does not count if it does not have a cropping history.**
    - No change/discussion on the remainder of CRP bullet points.
  + VPA-HIP
    - No change to $150 million funding ask and other bullets.
  + EQIP
    - Increase baseline funding:
      * This can be done with IRA funds, but a farm bill needs to be passed soon for this to be significant.
      * Provision is decided to be kept with no change.
    - No change to 10% for wildlife provision.
    - Amend 16 U.S.C. § 3839aa–5(a)(4) to explicitly allow forest landowners…
      * **Conversations are planned with the National Association of State Foresters. Brad and/or Shane will update the group on outcomes at future meetings.**
      * Brad Alexander and Joy Roy are willing to be part of this discussion.
      * No change to bullet.
  + ACEP
    - No change funding request.
    - No change to other provisions.
  + RCPP
    - **Add bullet on the need for advanced payments.**
    - No change to other provisions.
  + Forestry
    - No change to provisions.
  + Sod Saver
    - No change to provisions.
  + CSP
    - Discussion of SHIPP payments. Structure of program is not working as there are better options for landowners. No change to the AFWA platform is proposed.
  + Climate
    - **Payments for ecosystem services should be moved below the title.**
    - No other changes proposed.
  + Other recommendations
    - Stacking CRP and EQIP
      * The committee is in consensus that we support stacking CRP and EQIP practices.
      * This may need a statutory fix.
      * **Mark Norton (SD) agrees to tackle this issue to add to the platform.**
      * **Put towards top of the “Other Recommendations” list.**
  + Final updates
    - Potential change to FCEP platform bullet advocating for minimum enrollments between easement types.
    - Given the uncertainty of whether the novel program will be included in the farm bill, and the potential pushback from other organizations advocating for this program, the Forestry WG decided not to pursue this change.
* NRCS Updates: Jessica Groves
  + FY24 was a robust year for program expansion (IRA$) and program improvement efforts in ACEP and RCPP.
    - Application barriers for property heirs has been addressed. More to come on this in FY25.
  + Next year CSP is slotted for improvement efforts.
  + Technical training division will be ramped up in FY 5
  + $4.3 billion available for RCPP in FY25; increase of $1.3 billion from FY24.
  + FY24 program statistics:
    - EQIP: 160K applications, 44K funded.
    - CSP: 50% of program demand met.
    - ACEP: 10% of program demand met.
      * The low accepted enrollment is due to funding constraints.
    - RCPP: 323 proposals for $5.3 billion, half for classic half for AFA projects.
      * Proposals are still being reviewed.
    - A total of 17K new NRCS customers.
    - $112 million used for the quantification of greenhouse gas reductions.
    - FY25 will see expanded hiring for a host of positions.
    - **NRCS will be accepting input requests for climate smart practices.**
      * **Call is for additional considerations on what the practices should include. Provide supporting science.**
      * **EQIP & CSP WG will be working on this.**

FSA Updates: Alan Lange

* Upland and wetland management comment standards will be updated as well, comments will open soon.
* CRP: 25 million acres enrolled, 2.2 accepted this year, very close to cap.
  + Most of program interest is for grasslands CRP
  + $22 million available for MAE projects; have received 46 proposals for $88 million.
* Will there be a 40 years of CRP celebration?
  + Forthcoming plans (hopefully). AFWA would like to be involved!

Working Group Reports

* CRP, Easements, EQIP/CSP, Forestry, RCPP, Public Access, Private Lands
  + Each working group reported out on the business conducted in their meetings. See WG meeting notes for their respective activities.

Government Affairs Update Kurt Theide

* Kurt updates the committee on legislation AFWA is watching and/or engaging with.

Adjourn