

Illinois State Technical Committee Meeting

March 6, 2024 - 9:30 a.m.

USDA NRCS State Office
2118 W. Park Ct.
Champaign, IL 61821

Welcome and Introductions- Tammy Willis

- Tammy welcomed guests and discussed the recent visit from the Chief and Regional Conservationist Curtis Elke. We discussed Urban Agriculture with Chief and Regional Conservationist.
- Discussed meeting of program goals.
- Still on CR- budget has not been passed yet.
- NRCS is in the process of hiring- “strategic staffing plan.”
- Alert State Tech Committee when positions come out.

State Conservationist Comments- Tammy Willis

- ACTNOW is not a program, it's a process.
- We received approximately twenty-four million in IRA eqp. We want to get the money out to the customers on the land.
- Urban Conservationist position at the area level has been listed.
- Grazing Specialist position at the area level has been listed.
- Business Tool Specialists position at the area level coming soon.
- Archaeologist position coming soon.
- Program Support specialist position coming soon.
- Will need assistance from IL State Tech Comm to fill these positions.
- Water resources Engineer position soon.
- Compliance- building team for workload- positions coming soon!

Financial Assistance Programs- Jamie Alderks

- Jamie provided a handout which describes the Conservation Stewardship Program Renewal balance amounts, EQIP -IRA Management ACT NOW diagnostics including Practices, Ranking Scores, and Obligation Amounts. The attachment also includes information regarding EQIP Randing Pools, Landscape Conservation Initiatives, AND RCPP18. A discussion was held regarding where we are in the fy-**HANDOUT ATTACHED**
- RCPP18- new proposal should be out very soon.

Easement Programs- Paula Hingson

- Cindy Johnston gave brief update where we are with allocations.
- 2nd application cutoff ends March 22nd.
- 30% Easements need to be monitored by March 30th.

NRCS Partnerships- Eric Gerth

- Chief charged State Conservationists to get out and make new partners.
- This fy, IRA is a priority- It must be tied to climate-smart ag practices.
- Urban Agriculture is a priority, we need to expand outside of Chicago.
- Equity in program delivery is another priority.
- New partners are a priority.
- CRP is a large part of our agreements.
- We will not be doing a NOFO this year.
- We are always looking for ways to improve processes, communicate with our partners, and how to use taxpayers' dollars efficiently.
- We are requesting ideas to help with our mission- reach out to Eric Gerth.

FSA Updates- Jamie Diebal

- Farm bill ext. FSA is up and running.

- General sign up- only 13 contracts state-wide.
- Continuous sign up began 1/12/24, last day to submit is July 31st.
- Working on re enrolls 9 months before they expire (now).
 - They will need to be approved 6 within months of submitting the offer.
- Processing batching for continuous signup- first due date is March 15th.
- General sign up (62) runs through March 29th.
- National office is mailing letters to begin process- open now.
- Soil Rental Rates are based on NASS data. Counties can submit alternative rates.
- Grasslands sign up 4/29-5/21.
- IL and MO. are involved in CRP Menu Tool Pilot Program the tool provides information to producers.
- Held several virtual workshops in IL. Targeting producers & looking for conservation professionals. March 19th.

NLRS Update - Trevor Sample

- The 2023 Biennial Report was released December 1, 2023
 - The report, appendices, executive summary, and press release are available on the Illinois EPA website.
- The 2024 NLRS Partnership Conference was held January 25, 2024, at Illinois Department of Agriculture in Springfield and on Zoom.
 - Tammy Willis introduced keynote speaker, NRCS Chief Cosby
 - 2023 Biennial Report sectors and chapter overview
 - Ag Science Team update
 - Nutrient Research and Education Council update
 - Policy Working Group meeting in afternoon.
 - Dashboards, 2025 report, working group structure.
 - Watershed Coordinator update
- Policy Working Group Poll was emailed to members March 1. Questions ask for feedback regarding moving to dashboard reporting, 2025 report, and working group structure. Results will be discussed at the next Policy Working Group meeting.
- Policy Working Group meeting Tuesday April 2 9:00 am- 12:00 pm
 - Illinois Department of Agriculture. In-person only.
- Ag Water Quality Partnership Forum meeting follows from 1:30-4:00 pm
- Urban Stormwater virtual meeting was held February 21
 - Kane County discussed their stormwater infrastructure mapping and tools.
 - Review of green stormwater infrastructure resources repository

Other Items- Open to Group

- Winnie Chen, ASTC, Compliance gave an update: positions are moving along.
 - She is hoping to update in draft form within a couple weeks.
- George Henshaw, State Resource Conservationist asks if you have questions regarding The Endangered Species Act, send them to him at: George.henshaw@usda.gov

Closing Comments- Tammy Willis

- A website is coming to give information on IRA NRCS statewide.
 - It will show funds (what is obligated and what remains to be obligated).
- Next meeting will be July 17th 9:30a-12:00 at the IL Soybean Association in Springfield, IL.
- Participants are requesting virtual link to attend this meeting.