FULL STAC BREIEFING
March 26, 2025
SUMMATION

March 26th, 2025

Wednesday 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Moderator: Brandon King

Opening Remarks: STC Timothy Beard

Topic: Updates

Decision: N/A.

Actions: N/A; info only.

- Mr. Beard welcomed and thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. He also provided general agency updates and a brief synopsis of what NC-NRCS has accomplished and what's to come.

Subcommittee Updates: Brandon King

Topic: Updates

Decision: N/A.

Actions: N/A; info only.

EWP Updates: Jim Kjelgaard

Topic: Updates

Decision: N/A.

Actions: N/A; info only

WFPO Updates: Currently there are two agreements in place for planning with Robeson. (Drainage Districts 1, 2, & 4) and Town of Oriental Public Scoping Meetings may occur within the next few months. Funding for BIL is currently frozen. Jim stated that the town of Roxboro PIFR is reactivated & plans to finish FY25.

Rehab: Wake County is currently planning to have 5 dams developing Rehab EA 1 at NWMC for first review. Yadkin will be applying for Design phase funds for 2 dams in FY26 but currently plan to defer requests to FY27 or FY28. Jim stated that there is a chance that NRCS will be able to accept Bear Creek to request rehab planning for FY27 or FY28. Town of Eastover (Flea Hill) has expressed an interest in planning. Do to Lack of ENG Staff to Guide & Review Watershed Projects any new funding requests will be delayed.

EWP: Final Report for Florence may be completed in FY25. TS Fred Sponsors plan to finish work in FY25. Haywood & Buncombe payments & closeouts to process, Transylvania closed out. The following

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Counties are waiting for the city of Fayetteville DSR to be submitted in EWP tool. Scottland, Brunswick and Cumberland counties.

FOTG: Jim stated that he plans to have the FY25 CPSs updated soon. He is working with 1217 committee on CPS 359 and CPS 360 issues.

Soils Updates: Mike Jones

Topic: Updates

Decision: N/A.

Actions: N/A; info only

Introduction:

Mike introduced his soils teams and talked about the compliance workload (See attached).

FPPA update:

- **FY 2025** there were 35 requests.
    - 5 are solar panel requests
    - approximately 443 acres of prime and important farmland
- **FY2024** there were 104 requests
    - 49 of which converted acres totaling 323 acres
    - 231 Prime Farmland

Outreach: Mik**e** talked about what all that are doing in outreach**.**

- Assisting landowners with Web Soil Survey and understanding soil interpretations
- Helping train teams for Envirothon
- Provide training to staff both in state and as part of class cadres to teach to a national audience.
- FFA Contests
- Working with NC State
    - Hydric soils that do not meet any indicator
    - A new faster way to determine soil texture, specific surface, and water capacity.

Long Leaf Pine: Mike presented two documents; he explained the areas of the longleaf pines.**" See Attached"**

Silvopasture Technical Update: Bill Moss

Topic: Updates

Decision: N/A.

Actions: N/A; info only.

Bill discussed "Considering in planning CSP-381" that was created to help get feedback from the participants **"See Attached** "

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Easement Updates: Braian Loadholt

Topic: Updates

Decision: N/A.

Actions: N/A; info only

- **Funding Opportunities:** Below is the following list of NRCS funding opportunities.

  - General ALE/WRE
  - ACEP-IRA-ALE (Paused)
  - ACEP-IRA-WRE (Paused)
  - RCPP-Forever Farms
  - RCPP-Upper Cape Fear
  - RCPP-Upper Neuse
  - RCCPP-Sentinel Landscape
  - RCPP-Triangle Working Lands Initiative

- **IRA FY 25:** There are currently 7 IRA-ALE contracts with a total of $4,835,223.00 and 3IRA-WRE contract with a total of $3,006,000.00. In the near future Brain is hopeful that these will be closed soon. Below is Easement update status.

  - 18 submitted RCPP -EHE applications. (several more to go)
  - 2 ACEP-ALE Applications FY25
  - 7 Active ACEP-WRE
  - 22 Active ACEP-ALE
  - Several WRE/WRPs in restoration
  - Stewardship easements
    (Collecting monitoring reports, responding to potential violations, Amendments, etc.)

- **General ALE Ranking Changes:** Brain stated that in the next fiscal year the goal is to make sure that ranking is fully captured, to protect some of our best soils in some of the most threatening areas. Gavin stated that the data we use come from American Foreign Land Trust. Gavin screen shared CD Cart presentation. (Please refer to Gavin for details.)

  Ranking Changes:

. The proposed easement is in an area with a threat of conversion (NRCS ONLY) (Maximum points = 50) • 0 points if NO DATA • 10 points if Low • 15 points if Moderately Low • 30 points if Moderately High • 50 points if High	0

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FY2025 Program Updates: Julius George

Topic: Updates

Decision: N/A.

Actions: N/A; info only

FY2025 Funding: Due to the recent freeze on Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding, NC NRCS has to make some major adjustments which may lead to a significant reduction in the number of applications that will be funded.

- $93,758,313.00 in total financial assistance provided for FY2025. This allocation includes both IRA funds and regular farm bill (classic) funds.
    - EQIP Classic - $23,880,271.00
    - EQIP IRA - $40,622,042.00
    - CSP Classic - $14,340,000
    - CSP IRA - $14,943,000
- Due to the freeze of IRA funds, only classic funding is available to support applications received for FY2025.
    - Only 37% of EQIP funds are available to support FY2025 applications.
    - Only 49% of CSP funds are available to support FY2025 applications.
    - Over 3000 applications were received in FY2025, but due to lack of funding NC NRCS will not be able to provide as much assistance as initially planned.
    - Additional funds have been requested in order to be able to fund more applications.
- **FY2026-1 CSP Renewal:**
    - NC NRCS is accepting applications to offer a renewal sign-up for 2021 CSP contracts that are set to expire. CSP renewals are offered to participants with expiring contracts to allow them to address additional resource concerns by implementing additional conservation activities on their operation. Applications deadline is June 20, 2025.
- **Farm Bill (FB) Update:**
    - NRCS continues to operate under the rules of the 2018 FB until a new FB is approved.
    - We anticipate a new FB in the near future but no guarantee as to when it will be released and or what changes may be a part of the new FB.

Meeting Adjourned: 12:00 pm

Full STAC Meeting Minutes

Date: August 12, 2025
Time: 9:00am-11:15am
Facilitator: Brandon King, State Resource Conservationist (SRC)
Location: Virtual (Teams)

1. Welcome & Purpose: Tim Beard

- Timothy Beard opened with emphasis on:
    - Full participation is vital to improve statewide conservation delivery.
    - Input from this body directly informs state-level policy, priorities, and program design.

2. STAC Mission, Membership & Responsibilities: Brandon King

- Mission: Serve as an advisory body to:
    - Provide technical guidance for NC NRCS.
    - Evaluate and recommend changes to funding criteria.
    - Recommend adoption of new conservation practices.
    - Identify emerging natural resource concerns.
    - Set state resource concern priorities and state priority practices.
    - Recommend program policy adjustments for upcoming fiscal years.
- Membership:
    - Open to NRCS, FSA, Soil & Water, Extension, state agencies, and other partners.
    - New member nominations to be sent to Brandon King or Timothy Beard.
    - Subcommittee participation encouraged
- NRCS Action Items:
    1. Send members an updated STAC and subcommittee email contact list for review and correction.

3. Review of Current State Priority Resource Concerns: Brandon King

(Current until revised for FY26)

- Water quality degradation
- Degraded plant condition
- Inadequate habitat for fish/wildlife
- Soil erosion
- Soil quality degradation
- Inefficient energy use
- Livestock production limitation
- Air quality & sensitive water
- Insufficient water

State Priority Practices
(eligible for higher EQIP cost share)

- Animal mortality facility
- Conservation crop rotation

- Residue tillage management
- Cover crops
- Waste facility closure
- Fencing
- Wildlife habitat
- Prescribed grazing
- Nutrient management
- Forest stand improvement

Source Water Protection Priority Counties
Gaston, Lincoln, Burke, Caldwell, Surry, Stokes, Yadkin, Forsyth

- Current priority practices for these areas: Waste storage facility, residue tillage management, riparian forest buffer, access control, pest management.

Member Requests:

- Keith Larick: Add "livestock exclusion systems" to source water protection practices (especially for counties in the High Rock Lake watershed due to upcoming DEQ rules).
- Danny Edwards: Requested process clarity and ability to resubmit additional recommended practices for source water protection.
- John Isenhour discussed adding deferred acreage practice for wildlife and low-yield farmland habitat benefits.

NRCS Actions:

1. Review and determine eligibility for "livestock exclusion systems" within source water protection priority practices. Coordinate with DEQ for justification.
   Lead: ECS & Programs Division. Due: Before FY26 priority list finalization.
2. Request updated source water protection priority practice list from Public Water Supply Section (Danny Edwards) for cross-check with national eligibility.
   Lead: Julius George. Due: Within 2 weeks.
3. Distribute final approved source water protection practices list to STAC members.
   Due: Before FY26 rollout.
4. Send reminder email mid-September for Oct 6 Forestry ranking feedback deadline.
   Lead: Brandon King.
5. Evaluate feasibility of adding deferred acreage practice for FY26; prepare pro/con analysis including wildlife benefits, cost impacts, and national guidance constraints.
   Lead: ECS. Due: Before FY26 practice finalization.

4. Local Workgroup Feedback

- Streambank erosion in Teams 3 & 4 (western NC) is a growing issue.
    - Loss of productive land, safety hazards, water quality degradation.
    - Not EWP-eligible; it requires partner collaboration for funding solutions.

NRCS Actions:

1. Initiate partner meeting (NRCS, NCDA&CS, DEQ, local SWCDs) to discuss funding and technical approaches for streambank erosion in western NC.
2. Report back to STAC with identified funding options and possible practice solutions. Due: Next STAC meeting.

5. Additional Member Suggestions

- Loss of farmland/forestland as a priority resource concern – Dewitt Hardee & Alton Perry.
- Integration of forestry practices (381, 391, 380, 311, 379) for multi-resource concern addressing – Ms. Warren.

NRCS Actions:

1. Analyze feasibility of adding "loss of farmland/forestland to other uses" as a state priority resource concern.
   Due: Before FY26 priorities list finalization.
2. Evaluate integration opportunities for forestry practices and develop example practice bundles.
   Due: Next STAC meeting.

6. Programs & Funding Update: Julius George & Jeb Minarik

- Anticipated reduced FY26 funding; payment caps and workload prioritization may be reintroduced.
- FY25 progress:
  - ~$29M obligated to date (~75% allocation).
  - EQIP: ~$20M obligated; livestock mandate met.
  - CSP: ~$8M obligated; ~$7M remaining and expected to be obligated by Sept 30.
  - Wildlife & underserved farmer mandates exceeded.

Member Request:

- Aaron Johnson: Provide breakdown of top 10 practices funded under livestock allocation, including total obligation per practice and average cost.

NRCS Action:

1. Prepare detailed livestock allocation practice report after FY25 closeout (mid–late Oct 2025).
   Lead: Programs. Due: By Oct 31, 2025.

7. Pasture Subcommittee Formation: Bill Moss

- Focus areas:
  - Virtual fencing technology.
  - Interim standard for non-ruminant grazing.
  - New "grazing management" standard.
- Goal: Meet before end of August, report at next STAC.

NRCS Action:

1. Send Pasture Subcommittee meeting invite and background materials.

8. Biochar / Soil Carbon Amendment: Brandon King

- Emergency EQIP signup in Team 2 after Hurricane Helene.
- Training completed; JA granted to attendees.
- Limitation: IBI-certified lab testing availability (4 labs nationwide).
- Pilot project to potentially expand statewide FY26.

NRCS Actions:

1. Track and share results from pilot project (application success, soil improvement outcomes).
   Due: Annual STAC report.

9. Soil Science Update: Barry Ward

- Annual soils refresh Aug 25–Sept 12.
- Staffing changes: Barry retiring Dec 2025.

NRCS Action:

1. Plan transition coverage for soil scientist duties post-retirement.
   Due: Next STAC meeting

10. Engineering Update: Jim Kjelgaard

- WFPO, Dam Rehab, EWP updates; multiple projects in motion.
- Updating multiple conservation practice standards (animal mortality mgmt., waste storage facility, etc.).

NRCS Action:

1. Provide STAC with updated practice standard drafts for review when ready.

Due: As standards enter review stage.

14. Closing Remarks: Tim Beard

- Tim Beard: Emphasized improving communications, ensuring correct subcommittee contact lists, and acting on member requests.

Summary of Key NRCS Deliverables to STAC Members

Deliverable	Due Date	Lead
Updated STAC & subcommittee contact list	With minutes	Brandon King
Livestock exclusion practice eligibility review	Pre-FY26 list	ECS/Programs
Updated source water practice list	Pre-FY26 list	Julius George
Forestry/Wildlife template reminder & summary	Oct 6 deadline	SRC
Deferred acreage feasibility analysis	Pre-FY26 list	ECS
Streambank erosion funding options report	Next STAC meeting	SRC/Partners
Farmland/forestland loss concern analysis	Pre-FY26 list	ECS, Programs, Easements
Livestock allocation practice report	Oct 31, 2025	Programs
Critical vacancy list	Next STAC meeting	State Conservationist Office
Pasture Subcommittee meeting scheduling	Ongoing	Bill Moss
Biochar pilot results summary	Next STAC meeting	ECS
Soil scientist transition plan	Nov 2025	Soils
Draft practice standards to STAC	As ready	Engineering