

# NEBRASKA STAC MEETING MINUTES

September 4, 2025

1:00 - 3:30 p.m.

**ATTENDEES** - Conor Ward, Fred Stevens, Amy Miller, Allen Gehring, Jeremiah Schutz, Roger Yerdon, Jami Thoene, Katie Hickle, Anni Poetzel, Shelly Kelly, Burdette Peining, Tim Kalkowski, Jana Ingwerson-Laws, Pat Lechner, Carlos Villarreal, Jenny Prenosil, Elbert Traylor, Andrew Tonnies, Nick Arneson, Kalee Olsen, Kent Zimmerman, David Schroeter, Larkin Powel, Jennifer Swanson, Dean Edson,

**VIA TEAMS & PHONE:** Andrew Little, Aaron French, Annette Sudbeck, Beth Arens, Andy Bishop, Debbie Borg, Bruce McIntosh, Chandler Schmidt, Curt Becker, Dan Ruterbories, Dave Potter, Jacob Frinton, Jan Janak, Mallory Jaymes, Kelsie Wehrman, Kyle Hauschild, Joshua Lefers, Matt Smith, Mike Crosley, Cathie Mills, Rachael Herpel, Mary Reece, Kirk Schroeder, Doug Wagner, 308-367-7160, 402-310-6628; Bryce Puck, Mark Brohman, Crystal Powers

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**FUTURE Meetings: 1121 Lincoln Mall – Rm 352**

❖ DECEMBER 5, 2025

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 **WELCOME & OPENING COMMENTS:** *Conor Ward - NRCS Acting ASTC-Programs*

- **Workload Activities Across the State**

- Wrapping up program obligations while maintaining current contracts
  - Waiting for national guidance for the coming fiscal year
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## **FSA UPDATES:** *Jana Ingwerson-Laws – Programs Specialist – FSA*

### **HIGHLIGHTED Points:**

- **Continuous CRP Signup 63 Results**
  - Batching not to exceed 27M acreage National cap
  - 2 batching periods with all eligible offers accepted
  - Can take continuous offers after 7/18/25 up to 9/20/25 but no guarantee of acceptance
  - Enrollment types: Continuous, CLEAR30, FWP, HELI, Platte-Republican CREP, SAFE
- **General CRP Signup 64**
  - Signup: May 12 – June 6, 2025
  - National accepted 203,283 of 255,994 acres
  - Nebraska Numbers:
    - Total Offers = 299 (24,100 acres)
    - Accepted Offers = 233 (18,114 acres)
    - 75% Acreage Acceptance Rate
- **Grassland CRP Signup 207**
  - Signup dates: July 14 – August 8, 2025
  - Nationwide accepted acreage = 810,422 of 1,635,276 acres
  - Nebraska was second highest state acceptance acreage = 151,039 acres accepted (594 offers)
    - 424,296 acres offered (1,114 offers)
    - 36% of acres accepted
- **All Signup Types Deadlines**
  - Interim plans must be signed by 9/19/2025
  - No ground-disturbing activities can occur until a final conservation plan is approved and environmental compliance is complete.
  - FSA must approve contracts by 9/30/2025
    - No CRP authority after 9/30/25
  - Final conservation plans must be completed by 12/31/2025
  - If participant does not want to proceed after final plan, can terminate the contract without liquidated damages
- **Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)**
  - FY25 Counties Approved
    - Keya Paha (June 2024 flooding)
    - Custer (Dec 2024 fires & February 2025 fires)
    - Lincoln County (October 2024 & March 2025 fires)
    - Brown County (April 2025 fire)
    - Hooker County (February & March 2025 fires)
    - Cherry County (March 2025 fire)

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Q: Have you heard anything about grasshoppers in northern Nebraska?

A: We have received a call from Holt County office, and we are currently working with our national office and are waiting for a response.

Q: Can you give us a few bullet points about the Big Beautify Bill and how that is going to affect FSA?

A: From a national perspective, FSA has not weighed in on the policy yet. We don't have anything concrete on how FSA will implement changes. What you read about regarding the One Big Beautiful Bill is the same information that we have right now.

Q: Is there any information on how far the USDA has been taken out of Washington, DC and brought into the four different districts.

A: There has been nothing provided as far as the reorganization plan.

Q: ECP process question. A few listed at the end were approved, but are you still taking applications?

A: Yes, applications can be taken within the signup dates. You can apply within 30 days after the signup dates. Mostly for fires it will be debris removal and then cost to put up a new fence. Once we do that, the county does a needs determination to agree with what is asked for, then any environmental reviews for work above the plow zone. Next, we ask for funding. Work cannot start until funding is approved. Right now, it's taking weeks to get funding. From what we are hearing, funds may flow better once we get into the new fiscal year.

Q: Grassland CRP opened the day it was announced and not open very long. Is that normal?

A: Nothing in CRP was normal this year. With administrative changes, we had to wait. When Grassland was announced there was a very short turn around.

Q: What would be the process to submit comments to ask for more time to be able to sign up for a program?

A: Contract your representative. It's a federal decision that is out of our hands.

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## **NRCS PROGRAMS UPDATE:** *Conor Ward – NRCS Acting ASTC-Programs*

### **HIGHLIGHTED Points:**

#### ○ **Applying for Programs in FY26**

- Nov 1, 2025 = deadline for EQIP, CSP & RCPP Classic
- RCPP AFA application dates to be advertised by the partners

#### ○ **CSP FY25 Recap**

- FY25 Allocations
  - CSP Classic    \$23.4M    188 contracts    427,405 acres

- CSP Renewal \$8.3M 71 contracts 125,785 acres
- CSP Active \$140M 1329 contracts 3.2M acres
- Top CSP Activities
- **EQIP FY25 Recap**
  - FY25 Allocations
    - EQIP General \$35.89M 567 contracts 243,331 acres
    - Breakout of initiatives
    - Top 25 EQIP Practices
    - Total Active EQIP Contracts – September 2025
      - Total Active Contracts = 2,629
      - Total Contract Acres = 1,056,229
      - Obligated funds = \$132,407,923
    - 2025 Mandatory Distribution
      - Source Water Protection = 10%
      - Wildlife Initiative = 10%
      - Historically Underserved = 10%
      - EQIP-CIC = 5%
      - Livestock = 50%
- **FY25 Source Water Protection**
- **NWQI (National Water Quality Initiative)**
  - Bazille: 6 contracts \$709,114 funded 10,651 acres
  - Turkey: 2 contracts \$241,533 funded 430 acres
  - Big Sandy: 10 contracts \$532,715 funded 13,589 acres
  - Wahoo: 3 contracts \$33,034 funded 513 acres
  - Bow: Planning phase
  - **FY25 Local Work Group Meetings**
    - Completed Feb/March 2025
    - Agenda Items:
      - Priority Resource Concerns
      - Fund Pools - Ranking Tools – Screening Tools
      - Practice Payment Schedule
      - Local issues
- **RCPP**
  - 3 Active RCPP Classic Projects
    - 30 contracts \$1,295,416 obligations 4,535 acres
  - Cropland Cover for Soil Health & Wildlife – NGPC
    - Ending FY25
    - Totals: 35 contracts \$557,507 7,649 acres

- Resilient Futures for Nebraska Soils – The Nature Conservancy
  - FY25: 8 Contracts \$494,092 4,535 acres
- Ogallala Aquifer & Platte River Recovery - CPNRD
  - FY25: 10 contracts \$572,730 444 acres
- AFA – Growing & Expanding Nebraska’s Grassland Cores – NCF
  - Goal to conserve mixed-grass prairies by targeting woody encroachment
- Notice of Funding Opportunity – Anticipated in early FY26

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Q: Was there any IRA funding in FY25?

A: We received funding, but we couldn’t obligate any of it.

Q: In the RCPP AFA, do they have deadline for the signup period or is it continual?

A: We align it with our EQIP deadline, but the partner has the leverage of additional sign-up dates if needed.

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## **FORESTRY SUBCOMMITTEE RECAP:** *Beth Arens – Eastern Area Forester, NE Forest Service*

**HIGHLIGHTED Points:** Meet June 18th

### **Forestry Practices**

#### **666 Forest Stand Improvement**

FY24: 385 acres/\$281,760

FY25: 201 acres/\$124,176

#### **391 Riparian Forest Buffer**

FY24: None

FY25: None

#### **612 Tree/Shrub Establishment**

FY24: 71 acres/\$53,577

FY25: 10 acres/\$32,929



#### **Local Forestry Pools**

Upper Loup

Upper Niobrara White (Windbreak)

Lewis & Clark (Grassland/Forestry)

#### **380 Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment**

FY24: 436,954 ft/\$304,229

FY25: 114,348 ft/\$76,535

- **Slivopasture and Ally Cropping**
  - Offered nationally
  - Wanting feedback on whether to adopt these practices in the state
- **Oak Woodland Pests/Issues**
  - Bur Oak Mortality in Northeast Nebraska Ponca State Park
    - Hypoxylon cancer due to severe drought affecting red and white oaks
    - 2022 drought monitor in: Cedar, Cuming, Dakota, Dixon, Thurston, Wayne
    - Other pests & issues also involved in oak mortality

- Oak Initiative up and coming
- **NRD updates**
  - Tree Round Table Workshop in Scottsbluff next week.
  - Ord Forestry workshop – Sept 11

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Q: No questions

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### **WILDLIFE SUBCOMMITTEE RECAP:** *Jenny Prenosil – Ag Program Specialist – NE Game & Parks Commission*

- **Met June 18<sup>th</sup> in conjunction with the Forestry Subcommittee**
- **Wildlife Initiative Nebraska**
  - 8 contracts, 2378 acres
- **Great Plains Grassland Initiative**
  - 20 contracts, \$1.2M allocated, 13,000 acres
- **Sandhills Working Lands for Wildlife**
  - 3 contracts, \$173,000 allocated, 2100 acres
- **Bobwhite Quail Working Lands for Wildlife**
  - 7 contracts, \$186,000 allocated, 538 acres
- **Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration**
  - Focus on Pine Ridge
- **Conservation Practice Standards**
  - Potentially adopting 422 – hedgerow plantings to use as beetle banks
    - More discussion needed
- **WIN Updates**
  - Added counties to the Bobwhite Initiative in Southeast Nebraska
  - Emphasis on landscape initiatives
- **Westland and Woodland Opportunities** – Roger will present
- **Endangered Species Programmatic**

- NRCS nearing finalization of programmatic agreement with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Nebraska Game & Parks Commission
- **Southeast Quail WFLW**
  - Added more counties to match Pheasants Forever and NE Game & Parks focused efforts
- **Nebraska Natural Legacy Update**
  - Almost to the finish line of updating the state wildlife action plan
- **Partner Updates**
  - Dirac Tidwell – UNL
  - Seeking input on CREP
  - Call out for partnering on future projects (RCPP)

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Q: How did you select the priority watersheds?

A: We relied on input from DWEE, NRDs and our fisheries staff since we are charged with fish & wildlife resources, we focused on those areas for the boundaries to line up similarly to other water quality type initiatives.

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## **EASEMENTS UPDATE:** *Roger Yerdon, Easement Program Supervisor – NRCS*

- **ACEP Ranking Priorities**
  - WRE & WREP - Easements
    - Percentage of Wetlands in the Offered Parcel
      - Goal of 1:1 ratio of wetlands/outlands
    - Proximity to Other Protected Lands
    - Permanent vs. 30-year Easements
      - Take applications for both
      - Permanent rank higher than 30-year easements
    - Cost of Restoration
    - Cost per Acre
    - Wetland Hydrology Present
    - Wetland Vegetation Present
  - ALE & ALE-GSS – (Working Lands Easements)
    - Percent of Prime, Unique, and Important Soils
    - Percent of Cropland, Pastureland, Grassland, and Rangeland
    - Ratio to Average Farm Size (County)
    - Average Farm/Ranch Size (County)
    - Population Growth/Decline (County)
    - Proximity to Other Protected Lands

- Presence of a Succession Plan
- Grassland of Special Environmental Significance
- Cropping History
- Risk of Conversion
- Vegetative Biodiversity
- GARC's for FY 2026
  - Not to Exceed Rates
    - \$12,890 – Irrigated
    - \$9,435 – Non-Irrigated
  - Compensation will be 95% of the FMV
  - ALE
    - 50% Valuation Difference
  - ALE-GSS
    - 75% Valuation Difference
- **Wetland Restoration Criteria Guidelines (WRCG)**
  - Documents the technical consideration and parameters used to support decision-making
  - Document was distributed for comments
  - Comments received
  - Comments need to be evaluated and integrated
    - Used to support our decision making for the restoration of our wetland easements across the state
- Nebraska ACEP-WRE Short Films (with NE Game & Parks and Platte Valley Timelapse)
  - Wetland Legacies – WRE Program Overview
    - Interviews with Agency Personnel and Partners
    - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWa-xh42tkl&t=4s>
  - Wetland Legacies – Nebraska Landowner Stories
    - Four Landowners discuss their easements
    - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Nqxl9LYPag>
  - Considering an Agreement Highlighting
  - ALE & ALE-GSS Easements

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Q: On the ranking for conservation of grasslands, have you ever considered a drought plan and eastern cedar control plan to the ranking criteria?

A: That makes sense. On a recent contract, that is basically why he put it into an easement to use funds to exterminate the red cedar. Great idea.

Q: This group is the sounding board to make recommendations better. What is the procedure to apply recommendation we receive?

A: We would talk to the national program manager to see if it has been done somewhere else and then how points would be applied in ranking. We are waiting for guidance



on next year's ranking. There will be changes that we can have and potentially replace questions that are removed.

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#### **PARTNER UPDATES:**

- **Andy Bishop - Rainwater Basin Joint Venture**
  - Thank you to Roger and his team. You've put in a tone of great easements over the years. You had your highest signup level and secured the most easements we've gotten in the last 5 years. Thank you for your support on WREP as well.
- **Crystal Powers – UNL Water Center & Extension**
  - Hosting the Great Plains Water Conference later this month.
  - Water and Natural Resources Tour is in Arizona – November
- **Dustin Wilcox – NARD**
  - NRD Roundtable Forestry Workshop next week in Scottsbluff
  - Husker Harvest Days next week in booth 39E and giving away trees
  - Sept 28-30: Annual Conference, registration still available. See our website for the agenda
  - October 7, Ord NE: Windbreak Design & Tree Planting Workshop
- **Dan Ruterbories – LLNRD**
  - Finishing up on our second year of tracking nitrate movement and now expanding work into Wheeler and Custer Counties.
  - Working with USGS to do the analysis of that data and some of the data will be presented at the NRD fall conference later this month.
  - Finalizing our Connect App: producers will have access to real time data on water quantity and quality and recommendations. Enrolling producers now. 18 of the 23 districts will actively be using this tool.
- **Matt Smith – USDA Agro Forestry Center**
  - Currently helping update the alley cropping practice standard. We can provide info to help with alley cropping and silvopastures that was mentioned in the Forestry Subcommittee recap.
- **Shelly Kelly – Sandhills Task Force**
  - Wrapped up our Internship Program and the next application period for the 2026 Sandhills Ranch Internship Program begins Nov 1.
  - December 3 – Nebraska Prescribed Fire Council Conference in Kearney

- **Katie Hickle- NWEA**
    - Our organization has a new name with the merger of Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Environment and Energy
    - Nonpoint Source Pollution program will be receiving more resources from the state
  - **Jennifer Swanson – NARD**
    - *Producer Connect*: A new online platform that the NRDs have developed to help submit crop report forms in the phase two and higher areas. Also provides a nitrogen recommendation to producers based on the data that they submit.
    - NRD staff are trained and signing up producers for the 2025 crop reporting season.
  - **Larkin Powell - UNL – School of Natural Resources**
    - Workforce development: Thank you for the feedback that has helped us better align requirements for Fisheries & Wildlife & Environmental majors for those applying for federal jobs.
    - Continuing education: conservation, agriculture, non-thesis master's program classes are available online for those that can't get to classes on campus.
  - **Andrew Tonnies – Center for Rural Affairs**
    - Have held Festival Field Days in Ogallala and Geneva as a part of our Mentorship Network
    - Next one is Oct 11 in Steinaur, NE
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 **WRAP UP – Conor Ward - NRCS Acting ASTC-Programs**

- Thank you to all partners who helped NRCS have another successful year providing conservation to farmers.
- Thank you for responses to our email for the upcoming FY26. Look for a follow up email soliciting for subcommittee membership.
- Also thank you for your attendance at these meetings.

**FUTURE Meetings: 1121 Lincoln Mall – Rm 352**

❖ **DECEMBER 4, 2025**