

Full STAC Meeting Minutes

Date: March 11th 2026

Time: 9:00am-12:00pm

Facilitator: Brandon King, State Resource Conservationist (SRC)

Location: 4405 Bland Rd, Raleigh NC

Meeting Overview:

The Spring 2026 STAC meeting convened NRCS leadership, agency partners, and conservation stakeholders to review program updates, technical guidance, funding allocations, and implementation priorities for Fiscal Year 2026. The meeting centered Impact (IMPAC) changes, the new area-based EQIP and CSP ranking structure, and the Regenerative Agriculture Pilot Program (RPP).

Subcommittees (Grazing, Urban, Easements, Livestock) presented detailed updates, including new and interim practices, FOTG revisions, and payment scenario adjustments.

1. Welcome & Purpose: Brandon King

- Brandon King opened with follow-up from 2025 Fall STAC Meeting:
 - Expanded Source-Water Priority Practices following DEQ suggestion to include more livestock exclusion practices
 - Forestry-related ranking modifications paused due to IMPAC

2. Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP) & Whole Farm- Assessment: Brandon King

- Outlined the RPP structure and responded to partner questions:
 - Requirements:
 - Whole Farm Assessment
 - Primary Practices
 - Soil Health Testing
 - Minimum 5-year contract
 - Whole-Farm Assessment: A complete assessment of all resource concerns will be assessed across all farm bill programs
 - Producers may include all or only portions of their farming operations.
 - Soil health testing is mandatory under RPP.
 - One field/PLU meeting soil and water resource concerns qualifies participation.
 - Whole farm assessments will utilize CART alongside traditional planning tools including
 - Testing Logistics: NC currently lacks qualified labs; producers may use labs in Nebraska or Texas.
 - Approx. \$110/sample, three samples per unit, repeated twice
 - Qualified Individuals (QIs): Brandon informed partners that they can self-certify with the appropriate education/experience to assist producers with conducting soil health testing requirements.

3. Conservation Practice Standard Updates: Brandon King

- Updated Practice Standards:
 - Cover Crop
 - Deep Tillage
 - Conservation Cover
 - Fuel Breaks
 - Herbaceous Weed Treatment
 - Prescribed Burning
 - Forest Stand Improvement
 - Tree/Shrub Establishment
 - Woody Residue Treatment
 - Fire Breaks
 - Soil Amendments
- Guidance Recommendations:
 - Always utilize current practice standards
 - Download updated job sheets and implementation requirements when working with producers
 - Avoid using outdated standards for planning

4. IMPACT Program Delivery Changes: Jeb Minerick

Overview: Simplify conservation delivery, reduce administrative complexity, streamline applications and funding, Improve efficiency of program management

- EQIP reduced the state ranking pools from 100+ down to 3 area based ranking system
 - Categories still exist within ranking pools
 - Local priorities remain partially incorporated
 - Resource-specific questions still exist
 - Quality assurance reviews will prevent category misuse
- CSP reduced to 2 ranking pools
 - Agricultural Land
 - Non-Industrial Private Forestland (NIPF)

Stakeholders concern regarding changes:

- Loss of local workgroup influence
- Potential manipulation of ranking categories
- Resource concern prioritization
- Competition between unrelated conservation projects
- Maintaining equitable distribution of funding

FY26 Funding Allocation:

- EQIP:33.9M
 - Funding initiatives
 - Landscape Conservation Initiatives
 - Joint Chiefs Projects
 - Longleaf Pine Initiative
 - National Water Quality Initiatives
 - Golden-winged Warbler Initiative
 - Regenerative Pilot Program Set-Aside

- Statewide Applications: 3,000
- RPP Allocation: 8.5M
- CSP : 20M
 - Statewide Applications: 1,400

5. Subcommittee Follow up

- **Easement: Brain Loadholt**
 - Brian reported a strong year for the easement program, supported by increased staffing, including the addition of Jonathan Hardy.
 - There are 30 active applications requesting approximately \$24 million in funding.
 - The team aims to close 22 easements this year, an increase from previous years.
 - North Carolina is the first state to obligate a FY26 General L easement, with efforts underway to close additional easements quickly.
 - The easement subcommittee is working to improve the ranking system to better prioritize high-value parcels and support underserved areas.
 - The Western WRE project is being revitalized, with plans to invite new participants to a focused sub-subcommittee.
 - Brian emphasized continued efforts to increase easement completions and maintain a fair, effective program.
- **Grazing & Livestock: Bill Moss**
 - CPS 822 (Non-ruminant Outdoor Management) to be adapted for NC 2027.
 - Virtual Fencing available in FY26; requires boundary or secondary containment. Must meet 528 Grazing Management in follow-up years.
 - CPS 827 (Bale Grazing) being adapted for NC 2027.
 - Prescribed Grazing changed to Grazing Management (528) updated standard

Deliverables:

- Virtual Fence guidance packet
- Draft NC specifications for 822/827

- **Urban: James Rodriguez**
 - Raised Beds (CPS 812) and Low Tunnels (CPS 821) recommended for adoption in FY27.
 - Pollinator species list update underway.
 - Expanded engagement for small-acre and urban producers

Deliverables:

- Finalize state guidance for 812/821
- Publish draft pollinator list.

6. Soil Science Update: James Lewis

- Staffing: There are only two Resource Soil Scientist statewide due to retirements
 - Daniell Spencer
 - Location: Spindale, NC
 - Coverage Area: Mountain and 80% of Piedmont region
 - Matthew Westcott
 - Location: Greenville, NC
 - Coverage Area: Coastal Plain, Eastern Piedmont, Sandhills
- Farmland Conversion Trends:
 - NC ranked 4th nationally for conversion of prime and important farmland
 - Approximately 2,700ac converted from agricultural in 2025

7. Stakeholder Concerns:

- Concerns over ranking simplification impacts
- Uncertainty around new funding methodologies
- Staffing shortages
- Technical implementation complexity
- Need for stronger communication to local workgroups
- Need for better post-allocation reporting

Deliverables and Follow-up actions:

Deliverable	Responsible Party	Status/Timeline
Finalize NC-specific payment schedule guidance	Programs/ECS/Engineering	FY 26 Implementation
Provide updated ranking category transparency	Programs Division	Post-allocation review
Develop post-funding analysis meeting	NRCS Leadership	Post-allocation review
Continue subcommittee engagement	ECS/Programs	Ongoing
Advance Virtual Fence guidance	Grazing Subcommittee	FY27 implementation target
Advance Non-Ruminant Livestock Practice 822	Grazing Specialist	FY27 target
Develop Raised Bed and Low Tunnel standards	Agronomist	Likely FY27
Continue Whole Farm Assessment rollout	Statewide NRCS	FY26 implementation
Conduct Wetland Phase II Training	Soil Science Staff	April 2026

Deliverable	Responsible Party	Status/Timeline
Improve practice standard notification process	ECS Leadership	Ongoing
Expand partner training coordination	ECS/Training Leads	FY26–FY27