



Nebraska State Technical Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

June 4, 2026 — 1:00 – 4:00 pm

Hybrid meeting on Teams and 1121 Lincoln Mall - Tundra Room 3rd Floor – Lincoln, NE

ATTENDEES – Rob Lawson, Conor Ward, Fred Stevens, Amy Miller, Jeremiah Schutz, Jami Thoene, Carlos Villarreal, Melissa Baier, Ryan Kroemer, Elizabeth Gray, Jimmy Emmons, Jana Ingwerson-Laws, Burdette Piening, Elbert Traylor, Nathan Mueller, Jim Olson, Jacob Frinton, Andy Pedley, Dan Ruterbories, Tim Kalkowski, Jenny Prenosil, Kristine Jameson, Dean Edson, Josh Jelden

VIA TEAMS & PHONE: Aaron French, Alex Boyce, Andy Bishop, Heidi Borg, Chad Christiansen, Crystal Powers, Curt Becker, Dave Potter, Alexa Davis, Debbie Borg, Deborah Solie, Dustin Wilcox, Ele Nugent, Andrew Houser, Jennifer Swanson, John Hansen, Kalee Olson, Kelsi Wehrman, Larkin Powell, Lyndon Vogt, Mark Brohman, Matt Smith, Mike Fritz, Mike Crosley, Mark Porath, Rachael Herpel, Mary Reece, Rich Walters, Brett Roberg, Jessica Tapp, Sherry Vinton, Doug Wagner, Rachael Whitehair, Tim Hughes, 402-649-0275

FUTURE MEETINGS:

- **SEPTEMBER 3, 2026**
- **DECEMBER 3, 2026**

Welcome & Opening Comments: *Rob Lawson – NRCS State Conservationist*

- Leadership update: Conor Ward has transitioned to Assistant State Conservationist – Programs
- EQIP Emergency Wildfire signup extended to July 31, 2026
- Conservation Innovation Grants funding open through July 27, 2026
- Encourage producer and stakeholders participation in Local Working Groups in June & July

FSA Program Updates: *Jana Ingwerson-Laws, Agricultural Programs Specialist – FSA*

- **National CRP Acreage**
 - Statutory cap: 27 million acres (set by 2018 farm bill)
 - Current national CRP acreage: 25.9 million acres
 - National expiring 9/30/2026: 1.5 million acres
 - Nebraska CRP acreage: 2,468,538 acres

- Nebraska acres expiring 9/30/2026: 72,014 acres
- **Continuous CRP Signup 65**
 - Signup opened: February 12, 2026
 - Offers processed first-come, first-served
 - Two Batching Periods
 - March 20 – 1421 offers totaling 39,724.62ac accepted
 - May 1 – 79 offers totaling 1,292.83ac accepted
 - All contracts start 10/1/2026
 - Optional deferral up to 6 months from COC approval
 - Conservation plans due: September 18, 2026
- **General CRP Signup 66**
 - Signup window: March 9 – April 17, 2026
 - Nationwide accepted acreage = 325,244 out of 361,303
 - Nebraska Numbers:
 - Total Offers = 320 (20,143 acres)
 - Accepted Offers = 289 (18,641 acres)
 - 90% Acreage Acceptance Rate
 - Contracts start 10/1/2026
 - Conservation plans due August 14, 2026
- **Grassland CRP Signup 208**
 - Announced April 30th
 - Signup May 4-29, 2026
- **CRP: Emergency Hay and Graze**
 - USDA authorized emergency use of CRP acres in these states:
 - Nebraska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa Nebraska, Arizona, Arkansas
Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South
Dakota, Texas, Wyoming
 - In order to make more forage available to producers impacted by wildfires
 - Acres can be used up to primary nesting season (PNS) in each state; **NE primary nesting season is May 1-July 15**; varies by state
 - Emergency GRAZING can continue during PNS, with a 50% reduction in stocking rate, if a county triggers for Livestock Forage Disaster Program
 - CRP contract holders donate acres and do not forfeit annual rental payment
 - FSA approval needed prior to actions
 - Contact County FSA Office before taking any action on CRP acres; those providing acres and those using the acres must both notify the County FSA Office; do not begin hay or graze until FSA issues approval
 - NRCS will work with contract holders to update CRP conservation plan
 - FSA cannot share information on who has CRP to donate due to privacy rules; can list it at <https://nebraskagrazingexchange.com/>; may be other sites to share this information

- **ECP in Nebraska**

- Counties approved

County	Disaster	Signup Date
Grant	Ashby-Minor Fires	April 27-June 26, 2026
Garden	Ashby Fire	April 27-June 26, 2026
Custer	Pressey Fire	May 18-July 17, 2026
Arthur	Vasa Mell Fires	TBD

- Examples of main applicable wildfire uses:

- EC1: Removing debris, including burned fences
 - EC3: Repairing/replacing fences (cross and boundary fencing; cattle gates)
 - EC4: Restoring conservation structures such as livestock water facilities; irrigation pivots
 - EC8: Field Windbreaks and Farmstead Shelterbelts

- **Waivers Granted by DAFP for Current Signups**

- Waiver of onsite inspections except for engineering practices like pipelines, dams, etc.
 - Waiver of policy to submit a request to begin work prior to applying or prior to approval of application for non-ground disturbing practices
 - Amending current duplicate benefit policy
 - ECP may be received if work is performed on practice that may be under lifespan of another Federal program, provided participant is not receiving assistance from another Federal program for the same activity on same acreage for same disaster
 - i.e. fence installed under EQIP funds. Even if fence is still under EQIP lifespan, fence is eligible for ECP cost share if determined needed
 - Important to note that any ground disturbing activities require onsite environmental screening
 - Ripping up trees, moving fence to new location, bulldozing beneath plow zone
 - EC4 (Conservation Structures)
 - Allowance to allow for repair when determined needed instead of full replacement
 - FSA will be the technical service provider if only repairs
 - Onsite inspection waived if a repair

Introduction of Jimmy Emmons – NRCS Assistant Chief for the Central Region – Rob Lawson – NRCS State Conservationist

- Farm & ranch in northwest Oklahoma full time
 - Work closely with Rob and James on the wildfires. See both sides of the situation from personal producer experience of a burnout and the office side.
 - A lot going on in our 11 states in the central region
 - RPP numbers are going very well
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NRCS Conservation Programs Updates: *Conor Ward* – NRCS ASTC-Programs

- **Environmental Quality Incentive Program - EQIP**
 - EQIP Fund Pools – National required we could only have 5 pools
 - Soil Erosion/Soil Health
 - Water Quality/Water Quantity
 - Livestock Production Limitation
 - Pest Pressure
 - Wildlife/Forestry
 - Each fund pool has numerous categories which applications can be considered for funding.
 - Categories include national and state initiatives as well as NRD level options.
- **EQIP Obligations**
 - Pool Allocations
 - Soil Erosion/Soil Health 30%
 - Water Quality/Water Quantity 30%
 - Livestock Production Limitation 27%
 - Pest Pressure 8%
 - Wildlife/Forestry 5%
- **EQIP Funding**
 - 98% of Funding in Preapproved Status
 - Indicates an offer has been made to an applicant, we are waiting for confirmation of acceptance.
 - 83% of Funding in Approved Status
 - Indicates an applicant has accepted the preapproval and staff is actively working on contract development
 - 60% of Funding Obligated
 - Indicates contracts have been obligated and producers can implement conservation practices
- **EQIP Initiatives**
 - NWQI
 - 103% approved of original allocation
 - URNRD WaterSMART
 - Obligated and approved 444% of original allocation
 - Regen Pilot Program
 - 141% obligated of original allocation (25%)
 - Wildlife 10%
 - 12.8% preapproved in Wildlife 10% - WIN, GPGI, JCLRP, NOBO and Sandhills WLFW
 - WIN
 - 171% approved of original allocation
 - GPGI
 - 98% approved of original allocation
 - Joint Chief's Landscape Restoration
 - 143% approved of original allocation

- Northern Bobwhite Quail Initiative
 - 112% approved of original allocation

- **EQIP Top 20 Obligated Practices**

Practice	% of Current Obligation
Cover Crop	18%
Conservation Crop Rotation	14%
Grazing Management	11%
Nutrient Management	11%
Pest Management Conservation System	6%
Sprinkler System	5%
Brush Management	5%
Water Well	4%
Irrigation System, Microirrigation	2%
Pumping Plant	2%
Fence	2%
Watering Facility	2%
Irrigation Water Management	2%
Prescribed Burning	2%
Livestock Pipeline	2%
Terrace	1%
Annual Forages for Grazing Systems	1%
Pasture and Hay Planting	1%
Range Planting	1%
Forest Stand Improvement	1%

- **NRCS Wildfire Recovery Assistance**

- NRCS is offering critical assistance to Nebraska farmers and ranchers affected by the recent FY26 wildfires. Financial assistance through the voluntary emergency Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) can assist producers to develop a conservation plan to assist with wildfire recovery on their operation.
- Eligible producers may receive support for a variety of conservation practices including:
 - Restoring and/or replacing valuable forage resources essential for livestock needs.
 - Repairing or replacing damaged livestock grazing system infrastructure.
- **Signup period began March 25, 2026**
- **Application Cutoff May 31, 2026 - extended to July 29, 2026**
- This Signup is applicable to Wildfires Statewide
- Contact the local field office
- Sign an Application (NRCS-CPA-1200)
- Early Start Waivers are Available
 - Letter will be needed from applicant to request an early start waiver

- **CSP – FY26 Program Updates**

- This year with the limited pool structure CSP was moved into 2 ranking pools
 - Classic Ag Land
 - NIPF (Non-Industrial Private Forest)
 - Both pools contain RPP categories
- No renewals in FY26; those applications compete with Classic applications
- Ranking deadline is June 26th
- Obligation deadline is July 31st
- 299 applications
- 137 Ranked (5-29-2026)
- CSP RPP ranked apps account for 64% of goal (5-29-2026)

- **RCPP – Regional Conservation Partnership Program Updates**
 - Notice of funding opportunities is expected soon.
- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**
 - CIG On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials - Focuses on widespread adoption and evaluation of innovative conservation approaches with agricultural producers, providing incentives.
 - CIG Classic - Develops new tools, technologies, and strategies for next-generation conservation and market-based solutions.
 - CIG Key Priorities – FY26
 - CIG On-Farm Trials
 - Irrigation water management technologies
 - Nutrient management
 - Grazing lands
 - Soil health demonstration trials
 - CIG Classic
 - Soil
 - Water management
 - Conserving ecosystems by managing pest pressure
 - Habitat improvement
 - Farmer-focused conservation outcomes
 - CIG Funding FY26
 - \$50 million for CIG On-Farm Trials
 - \$15 million for CIG Classic
 - Notices of funding are available on [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)
 - Applications accepted through **July 27, 2026**
- **Local Working Groups**
 - Meetings held in June & July throughout the state
 - See <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/state-offices/nebraska/technical-committee> for the complete list
- **Subcommittees**
 - Soil Health, Grasslands, Water, Wetlands, Wildlife & Forestry
 - Requests granted for first subcommittee pick
 - NRCS leadership advisor to reach out to subcommittee members
 - Meet before August 31

Wetland Restoration Update: *Missy Baier – NRCS ASTC-Water Resources & Easements*

- Working again on our wetlands restoration criteria and guidelines document that provides guidance on our eligibility, ranking restoration activities, enhancements and management for our ACEP program
 - Work began in 2024
 - Received partner input and moving forward and will present to STAC when completed

Nebraska Soils Update: Carlos Villareal – NRCS State Soil Scientist

- **Soil Health & Regenerative Pilot Program**
 - Soil Health and Sustainability for Field Staff training
 - Back to Our Roots 2.0 – In-field Soil Health Assessment training
 - Qualified Individual training/UNL
 - Strengthen to network of Qis
 - Increase effectiveness of soil health testing and RPP
 - Regenerative Agriculture Learning Hub
 - Summer cohort begins June 15, 2026
 - <https://go.unl.edu/regenaghub>
- **Technology**
 - What geospatial resources do our conservation partners use?
 - Where do we overlap and where can NRCS fill the gap?
 - In-field Resource Inventory training (mobile tools)
 - Introduction to ArcGIS Pro (modernized technology)
- **What is Farmland Classification?**
 - Farmland classification is a national system used to identify soils that are best suited for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops.
 - Prime Farmland
 - Farmland of Statewide Importance
 - Farmland of Local Importance
 - Unique Farmland
 - Not Prime Farmland crops
- **Farmland Classes Defined**
 - Prime Farmland
 - Land with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for agricultural production.
 - Important characteristics include:
 - Adequate moisture (precipitation or irrigation)
 - Favorable temperature and growing season
 - Acceptable acidity, salinity and sodium levels
 - Few rock fragments, etc.
 - Farmland of Statewide Importance
 - Soils that do not meet Prime criteria but still significantly contribute to agricultural production, as identified by the State Conservationist and appropriate state agencies.
 - Application of Farmland Classification
 - Completion of Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) reviews as part of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process for projects that receive federal funding
 - As part of the Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) review process

- Conservation planning resource inventory
- Prime Farmland Criteria-DR 9500-003/7 CFR Section 657.5
 - CFR outlines the criteria for Prime Farmland designations.
 - Criteria should be present for Prime Farmland and Statewide Important Farmland Designations, but it isn't.
 - Although we have Statewide Important Farmland designated in Nebraska, we do not have documented criteria.
- Inconsistent Classification
 - Designation inconsistencies across counties.
 - Same soil mapping units have 2 or 3 different assignments.
 - Map units that do not fully meet the criteria
- Next Steps
 - Confirm that current Prime Farmland designations align with national guidelines.
 - Develop and secure approval for Statewide Important Farmland criteria from the State Conservationist and appropriate state agencies.
 - Perform a comprehensive review of all soils to verify classification.
 - Proposed timeline – October 2027
- **Nebraska Hydrologic Sols Group (HSG) Project**
 - HSG tells you how quickly water can infiltrate into a soil when it is thoroughly wet, affecting how much runoff occurs during rainfall events.
 - Four Hydrologic Soil Groups
 - Group A – High infiltration / Low runoff
 - Group B – Moderate infiltration / Moderate runoff
 - Group C – Slow infiltration / Higher runoff
 - Group D – Very slow infiltration / Highest runoff
 - Dual groups (A/D, B/D, C/D) when artificial drainage lowers water table
 - Applications of HSG
 - Runoff and Curve Number (CN) calculations, direct runoff
 - Evaluating and mitigating agrochemical movement
 - Conservation planning (drainage, irrigation, water movement)
 - Modeling watershed hydrology
 - Soil survey interpretations
 - Next Steps
 - Collect in-field measurements for k_{sat}
 - Relative to soil function
 - Perform a comprehensive review of all soils to verify HSG
 - Proposed timeline – September 2029

Partner Updates:

- **Rob Lawson – NRCS State Conservationist**
 - NRCS Soil Health Education/Demo Trailer with rain simulator is available to come to your community or event
 - Contact Carlos Villareal at carlos.villarreal@usda.gov
- **Jim Olson – Lower Elkhorn NRD**
 - Bazile Management Summer Field Day – July 17
- **Mark Brohman – Wachiska Audubon Society**
 - June 13 - Prairie Tours at Wildcat Prairie
- **Tim Hughes – Commercial Aviation Alternative Fuels Initiative & Midwest Regional Biomass Lead for Idaho National Laboratories**
 - I look forward to being a resource and would appreciate learning more about any projects focused on switchgrass, miscanthus, intermediate oilseeds, short rotation woody crops or other biomass resources. One tool we've developed is a state profile for all 50 states with links to a number of agricultural, energy, industry, and academic resources for each state. The information can be found by clicking on the state of interest via the U.S. map on the following page: [State Initiatives | CAAFI | Commercial Aviation Alternative Fuels Initiative](#)

Tim Hughes
(270) 791-8520
agtim1965@outlook.com
- **Rachael Whitehair – Nebraska Corn Board**
 - Expanding Precision Conservation Management or PCM program in the state
 - New employees:
 - Tyler Ottensmeyer – Beatrice region
tottensmeier@precisionconservation.org
 - Frank Lammers – Norfolk region
- **John Hansen – Nebraska Farmers Union**
 - Seeing a lot of high financial stress in the ag sector
 - Received USDA grant to expand our capacity at the Nebraska Rural Response Hotline
 - Share number with folk that need it: 1-800-464-0258

Wrap Up: Rob Lawson – NRCS State Conservationist

- Thank you for your participation
- Be on the lookout for your local working groups and subcommittee communication
- Next meeting is September 3