

ND State Technical Committee Meeting – September 02, 2026 – Notes

Today's meeting was held at the North Dakota Heritage Center and Museum. The Facilitator for today's meeting was Mark Hayek, Assistant State Conservationist - (Partnerships Coordinator), USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Mark thanked everyone for coming and started with introductions around the room.

Dan Hovland, State Conservationist, USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), welcomed everyone to today's meeting. Dan gave a brief update on the amount of dollars that was spent to get conservation on the ground in North Dakota this year. Dan discussed that we have 920 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) applications pending and 214 Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications pending from FY26 and that applications for FY27 are due September 18, 2026. Dan mentioned that ND NRCS' workforce remains stable and staffing numbers are down to 200, but ND NRCS will be able to stay around 230 staff. Dan also mentioned NRCS' Chief Colton L. Buckley's priorities and his goals center on protecting and sustaining working lands, modernizing NRCS's tools and services, ensuring strong technical support for farmers, and fostering partnerships that benefit both agriculture and the environment.

Brad Thykeson, State Executive Director, USDA – Farm Service Agency (FSA), was unable to attend this meeting but emailed Mark his updates for FSA. Mark gave an update on the staffing, mentioning that FSA has 5 County Executive Director (CED) openings and 15 total vacancies within ND. Mark mentioned that the new program that ND piloted called Geospatially Enhanced Acreage Reporting (GEAR) system will be sent out nationwide at the end of September 2026. It was also mentioned that FSA will conduct two face-2-face statewide trainings, west river will be held in Bismarck, and east river will be held in Fargo, dates to be determined.

Richard Webb, State Resource Conservationist, NRCS, and Jarvis Keney, Assistant State Conservationist (Programs), NRCS, presented on the Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP) and its requirements. RPP is a farmer-first, outcomes-based approach to conservation designed to return the agency to its core mission, by addressing whole-farm resource concerns through support for voluntary regenerative agriculture conservation plans. RPP requirements include whole farm assessment, primary practices, soil health testing, and a minimum 5-year contract. Jarvis mentioned that the State Technical Advisory Committees Role in the FY27 RPP is to Identify the land use(s) that have the greatest need based on critical soil and water resource concerns for North Dakota. The current four land uses available in RPP are Cropland, Pastureland, Rangeland, and Forest. There are two other land use types, Associated Ag Land and Farmstead. It was agreed upon to keep all four land uses. The next task was to refine the list of soil and water resource concerns and the corresponding resource concern components to those that are of critical need for conservation planning and program delivery efforts for North Dakota.

Each resource concern for each of the four land uses was discussed and reviewed. There was discussion regarding concentrated nutrient and pathogen surface loss from storage and handling of manure, compost, biosolids or non-ag food waste for cropland resource concerns and the stacking of manure and how it could be tied to a phosphorus issue. There was also discussion on where pathogen loss would be addressed in planning? Possibly pasture?

The RPP primary practices were the next discussion. The discussion was if the State Technical Advisory Committee wanted to add any additional primary practices to the list that was provided by National Headquarters. Additional practices were added (list in attachment).

Mark Hayek went on to present how the NRCS announced the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Migratory Big Game Framework on June 2, 2026, and that only 17 states have chosen to participate. Mark discussed that there were two options to help guide the delivery of the Migratory Big Game Framework. The first option is that ND develops a state action plan for FY27 or option two is to not submit an action plan. There are two options in lieu of an action plan, option one is provide extra ranking points for wildlife friendly fencing, this targets the map submitted by ND G&F that identifies the Migratory Big Game area of the state and option two would be to have the partnership draft an RCPP proposal that targets dollars to address Migratory Big Game Framework. It was decided that an action plan would not be submitted for FY27 and instead provide extra ranking points for wildlife friendly fencing with the SW Wildlife Ranking Pool. Kevin Kading will locate and send the defined Pronghorn geospatial to Mark.

Dan Hovland and Mark Hayek thanked everyone for attending the State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting and for providing feedback.

Questions asked/Concerns:

Would stacking manure, whether short term or long term, be considered a cropland resource concern for concentrated nutrient and pathogen surface loss from storage and handling of manure, compost, biosolids or non-ag food waste?

Action Items:

Kevin Kading will locate and send the defined Pronghorn geospatial to Mark Hayek.

Jarvis Keney will send the wildlife ranking questions to the ND State Technical Advisory Committee for review and comments.

Richard Webb will further review concentrated nutrient and pathogen surface loss from storage and handling of manure, compost, biosolids or non-ag food waste for cropland resource concerns and the stacking of manure.

Next Meeting: TBD.