

# **DRAFT**

## **NRCS Fish, Wildlife and Wetlands Issues and Technology Needs**

*Summary report from a Planning Meeting, December 15–17, 2003,  
in Washington, D.C.*





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## ***Executive Summary: Fish, Wildlife, and Wetlands Technology Needs***

**Participants:** Forty-two NRCS fish, wildlife, and wetlands technology and program leaders, as well as invited conservation partners. See page 7 for list.

**Goal:** Develop prioritized lists of program, research and technology/training needs for fish, wildlife, and wetlands work of NRCS.

**Priorities:** More than 180 needs were identified by the group. Two broad treatment categories and associated goals are described. The 31 highest needs identified by the group are listed below, by topic or program, including whether they fall within technology or management treatment categories.

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### **Background**

In December 2003, the Chief charged a team of agency biologists, program managers, and partners to review the fish, wildlife, and wetlands oriented technology needs of the agency and to develop a list of priority actions that can be taken in the near term to maximize the effectiveness of the agency in meeting wildlife and wetlands objectives.

While the primary charge to the team was to address technology and training needs of the agency, the team recognized and identified a broader array of issues, including management, that directly impact the effectiveness of NRCS fish, wildlife, and wetlands activities. Similar concerns were identified and recommendations were made by a comparable group of people in 1996 and documented in a November 1996 report entitled *Framework for the Future of Wildlife*. That report identified goals and recommended numerous actions to enable the agency to elevate fish and wildlife resource concerns in conservation planning and program implementation. A number of actions recommended by the 1996 report have been implemented and many others are still relevant.

### **Summary of Findings**

The group identified primary fish, wildlife, and wetlands oriented needs for the relevant USDA conservation programs, general conservation planning training and tools (e.g., FOTG), needs articulated by agency partners, and needs related to broader policy and management issues. The issues and needs identified follow several unifying themes which can be grouped into two broad treatment categories. These categories and themes are as follows:

#### **1. Technology Development and Transfer**

- a. Increase understanding of fish and wildlife response to farm bill programs and conservation practices, and adjust accordingly.
- b. Increase training throughout the agency to improve the understanding that all land management actions affect fish and wildlife, and to improve the ability of planners in providing wildlife assistance.

## 2. Policy and Program Management

- a. Consider fish and wildlife in all aspects of program implementation and conservation planning.
- b. Recognize the importance of biology technical assistance and biologists in delivering effective conservation programs.
- c. Work closely with partners, particularly State agencies and NGOs on fish and wildlife issues.
- d. Solve the critical need for NHQ and State-level NRCS leadership to fully embrace fish and wildlife conservation as a priority throughout the agency.
- e. Develop policy and manage programs to enable the agency to realize its vast potential to improve fish and wildlife resources on private lands.

The group identified 178 specific needs and issues. Thirty-one of these needs were identified as high-priority through a facilitated prioritization process. Table 1 provides a general distribution of these needs among program areas/areas of concern and broad category as defined above.

**Table 1. Number of needs identified by program area and broad topic category. Number of designated high-priority needs appears in parentheses.**

Program/Area of concern	Total needs identified	Technology development and transfer needs*	Policy and program management needs
WHIP	21 (3)	8	13 (3)
CRP	12 (3)	2 (1)	10 (2)
WRP	29 (4)	4 (2)	25 (2)
EQIP	6 (3)	3 (1)	3 (2)
GRP	13 (4)	1	12 (4)
FOTG	10 (3)	1	9 (3)
Training	22 (4)	14 (4 <sup>a</sup> )	8
Research/Technology	34 (3)	26 (3)	4 (1)
Partner concerns	7 (3)	2	5 (3)
General wildlife issues	24	6	16
Total	178 (31)	77 (11)**	115 (20)

\* Includes training needs.

\*\* Ongoing or proposed Wildlife Habitat Management Institute projects are addressing 46 of these identified needs and 7 of the 11 priority needs.

<sup>a</sup> Ongoing projects with the Ecological Sciences Division, the National Water Management Center, and the National Employee Development Center are addressing 1 of the 4 training priorities.

The majority of needs identified are related to agency policy and program management (65%), with the remainder related to technology development and transfer needs (35%). These data illustrate that while developing and maintaining state-of-the-art technology is critical to effectively address fish and wildlife and wetlands issues, this technology is of limited value without the policy and management support to move the treatment of these natural resource concerns forward.

Following is a listing of the 31 highest priority needs organized by general program area with general treatment category in parentheses.

#### **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) Needs**

1. Develop State-level strategic plans for program operation and ranking process development to focus the program on highest priorities. (Management)
2. Provide more biologist input for WHIP planning. (Management)
3. Increase involvement with partners or supplement limited funding by partnering with outside agencies and organizations. (Management)

#### **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Needs**

1. Conduct a CRP Summit between FSA & NRCS leadership to facilitate improvement of CRP delivery at the field level. (Management)
2. Measure the effectiveness of CRP in terms of wildlife response. (Technology)
3. Provide flexibility for managing plant communities to maximize wildlife habitat quality, including necessary treatments during the nesting season. (Management)

#### **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) Needs**

1. Develop and implement WRP easement management infrastructure. (Management)
2. Continue to develop and evaluate wetland restoration technology to maximize wetland benefits from the program. (Technology)
3. Develop training on native plant community restoration and management. (Technology)
4. Continue emphasis on wetland hydrology restoration. (Management)

#### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Needs**

1. Evaluate the effects of EQIP practices on fish and wildlife species, especially at risk species. (Technology)
2. Provide strong national leadership to ensure EQIP addresses fish and wildlife resource concerns. (Management)
3. Consider wildlife effects at all levels of EQIP management and implementation. (Management)

#### **Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) Needs**

1. Develop management structure and guidelines to emphasize biodiversity. (Management)
2. Develop and implement wildlife-friendly prescribed grazing guidelines. (Management)
3. Develop national guidance to states for focusing on priority habitat types. (Management)

4. Include potholes and other depressional wetlands in GRP plans. ([Management](#))

#### **Field Office Tech Guide (FOTG) Needs**

1. Provide wildlife quality criteria consistency between the General Manual and the National Biology Manual. ([Management](#))
2. Require biology job approval authority for biology related conservation practices. ([Management](#))
3. Revise and update national biology standards and specifications. ([Management](#))

#### **General Training Needs**

1. Institutionalize a wildlife habitat restoration and management course in National Employee Development Center (NEDC). ([Technology](#))
2. Develop training on integrating fish and wildlife practices into conservation programs and technical assistance, with emphasis on biodiversity. ([Technology](#))
3. Develop training on native plant community restoration and management. ([Technology](#))
4. Develop Endangered Species Act (ESA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) training for all programs. ([Technology](#))

#### **General Technology Development Needs**

1. Assess the overall impact of all practices supported by conservation programs on fish and wildlife. ([Technology](#))
2. Develop locally adapted native genetic populations of standard conservation plants. ([Management](#))
3. Continue to research and evaluate restoration and management practices, including restoration of microtopography, and the resulting wildlife response. ([Technology](#))
4. Evaluate how managed haying and grazing impact grassland nesting birds and other wildlife populations. ([Technology](#))

#### **Partner Concerns**

1. Increase communications/cooperation among agencies in Washington, D.C. ([Management](#))
2. Improve/invest resources in aquatic plant restoration emphasis. ([Management](#))
3. Develop list of species at risk in all States – State fish and game agencies. ([Management](#))

**Participants in NRCS Fish, Wildlife and Wetlands Technology Planning Meeting for 2004  
Washington, DC – December 15–17, 2003  
Ag South Bldg. Sub-basement Conf. Room SB-7a**

**Regions:**

West	Terrell Erickson, State Biologist Hawaii, terrell.erickson@hi.usda.gov
Northern Plains	Dave Dewald, State Biologist North Dakota, dave.dewald@nd.usda.gov
South Central	John Pitre, State Biologist Louisiana, john.pitre@la.usda.gov
Midwest	Gene Barickman, State Biologist Illinois, gene.barickman@il.usda.gov
	Lynn Sampson, State Biologist Michigan, lynn.sampson@mi.usda.gov
Southeast	Mason Howell, State Biologist Kentucky, mhowell@ky.usda.gov
East	Julie Hawkins, Biologist Mid-Atlantic IRT, julie.hawkins@de.usda.gov
Wetland Team Biol.	Karen Fullen, Elk Grove, CA, karen.fullen@ca.usda.gov
District Conserv.	Larry Golden, DC, Jackson, MS, larry.golden@ms.usda.gov
WRP (Field)	Jeff Combs, Wetlands Bio, Bozeman, MT, jeffrey.combs@mt.usda.gov
Fisheries Biologist	Mitch Cummings, Tillamook, OR, mitch.cummings@or.usda.gov
STC	Steve Chick, Lincoln, NE, steve.chick@ne.usda.gov

**NHQ: Field**

O&E (Field)	Randy Gray, W Region, CA, randy.gray@ca.usda.gov
WHMI	Pete Heard, Director, Madison, MS, pete.heard@ms.usda.gov
WHMI	Ed Hackett, Wildlife Biologist, Madison, MS, ed.hackett@ms.usda.gov
WHMI	Nancy Magee, Admin. Assist., nancy.magee@ms.usda.gov
WHMI	Charlie Rewa, Wildlife Biologist, MD, charlie_rewa@usgs.gov
WSI	Billy Teels, Director, MD, billy_teels@usgs.gov
WSI	Norman Melvin, Plant Ecologist, PA, norman_melvin@usgs.gov
WSI	Robert Misso, Wildlife Biologist, MD, bob.misso@usgs.gov
WSSI	Hank Henry, Raleigh, NC, hank.henry@ftw.nrcs.usda.gov

**NHQ: DC**

OOC	Dave Gagner, Special Assistant to the Chief, dave.gagner@usda.gov
ESD	Mike Anderson, National Wildlife Biologist, mike.anderson@usda.gov
ESD	Howard Hankin, National Aquatic Ecologist, howard.hankin@usda.gov
ESD	Andrée DuVarney, Nat'l Evt. Coordinator, andree.duvarney@usda.gov
ESD	Doug Holy, Nat'l Invasive Species Coordinator, doug.holy@usda.gov
WWD	Martha Joseph, WHIP Program Leader, martha.joseph@usda.gov
WWD	Leslie Deavers, WRP Program Leader, leslie.deavers@usda.gov
COD	Malcolm Henning, CRP Program Manager, malcolm.henning@usda.gov
RAD	S. Diane Eckles, Biologist, diane.eckles@usda.gov
NRM	Harry Slawter, harry.slawter@usda.gov
MS	Ed Biggers, edward.biggers@usda.gov
MS	Shelia Leonard, shelia.leonard@usda.gov

**Partners:**

IAF&WA	Dave Walker (NHQ) & Ray Evans (MO), dwalker@sso.org
MDC	William McGuire, Missouri Dept. of Cons., bill.mcquire@mdc.mo.gov
FWS	Myra Hyde, Arlington, VA, myra.hyde@fws.gov
WMI	Don McKenzie, Ark., wmidm@ipa.net
WHC	Bill Howard, MD, & Maureen Ryan, mryan@wildlifehc.org
NFWF	Jody Olson, DC, jody.olson@nfwf.org
PF	Dave Nomsen, MN, pfnomsen@rea-alp.com

**Facilitators:**

Karen Scanlon, CTIC, W. Lafayette, IN, scanlon@ctic.purdue.edu
Jill Reinhart, NRCS/CTIC, W. Lafayette, IN, reinhart@ctic.purdue.edu

## **Prioritized Needs: Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program**

### **1. States need strategic plan for program operation and ranking process and focus the program on highest priorities (Martha/Terrell) —19 points**

WHIP emphasis is placed upon wildlife and fisheries habitats of National and State significance, habitats of fish and wildlife species experiencing declining or significantly reduced populations, and practices beneficial to fish and wildlife that may not otherwise be funded. State WHIP plans can be effective tools to manage program implementation, maximize fish and wildlife habitat gains, and reduce costs associated with the program. A focused State WHIP plan could narrow priorities and decrease the workload for offices not within priority areas. Very specific priorities could be used to screen applicants and thus reduce the workload associated with ranking and developing a wildlife habitat development plan. Effective and strategic State WHIP plans would improve habitat gains, decrease workload, ensure compliance with budget allocations for technical assistance, and provide measurable outcomes, potentially at a landscape scale. State WHIP plans are also the venue for developing ranking criteria that sort out priorities and then select the best applicants.

### **2. More biologist input for WHIP planning (Randy) —19 points**

More biologist input for WHIP planning: WHIP's focus is the restoration and enhancement of wildlife habitat. To be successful knowledge of wildlife and habitat needs is essential to the planning process. A recent National evaluation indicated that many WHIP plans are deficient in ensuring the appropriate practices are in place to achieve program goals. However, where the conservation plan indicated that a biologist had assisted with the project, the quality of the plan was greatly improved.

### **3. Expand more with partners or supplement limited funding by partnering (Mason) —15 points**

We need to expand WHIP partnerships to help NRCS effectively manage the increased program workloads and ensure continued WHIP success. Partnerships need to be built first at the state level by developing WHIP Subcommittees of the State Technical Committees (STC). STC members that volunteer to be Subcommittee members will be groups that have wildlife interest and knowledge about statewide wildlife priorities. Working with these partners to develop statewide WHIP priorities will result in buy in from the partnership as well as an effectively aimed program. Obtaining assistance from partners is facilitated when they believe the program can impact their species or ecosystem of concern (SEOC). We need to demonstrate how the program can benefit their SEOC through TA, FA, and the sheer number of our landowner contacts.

Once the partners see how a program can impact their SEOC, we can begin developing partnerships that we need to implement WHIP on the ground. Partners are more willing to commit resources when they believe that their priorities are being addressed by the program. Several partnership mechanisms could be used to assist with WHIP implementation at the field level. First, an MOU could be developed to utilize partner personnel without exchanging funding. If a partner sees the benefits of the program but does not want to become a TSP for whatever reason, an MOU could be used to identify activities where the partner could assist with program implementation. These activities could include assistance in planning, ranking, implementation, and/or evaluation.

TSP contribution and cooperative agreements will be the most likely method of obtaining assistance from partners in the future. For WHIP, TSPs may only provide assistance in the implementation and evaluation phase of the program. A detailed "Scope of Services" should be developed to ensure partner activities are consistent with TSP planning policy. How the agreement outputs will be measured will also need to be considered up front during the development of the agreement.

Contribution Agreements – This is possibly the best mechanism for NRCS to develop since the partner must contribute 50% to the total cost of the agreement. Also, a Request for Proposals (RFP) is not required for a contributory agreement. Of course, for these agreements to occur, partners must have available funding as well as see how the program will help address their priorities.

Cooperative Agreements – With many state agencies and NGOs having currently limited budgets, it may be difficult to develop contribution agreements which require the 50% match. Therefore, Cooperative Agreements may be the next best mechanism for gaining assistance for WHIP. One concern with utilizing a Cooperative Agreement is that an RFP is required. The RFP process does not ensure that the partner will end up with the agreement. It was noted during the meeting that the RFP and selection process should incorporate more than just cost, it should incorporate qualifications, historical performance, etc. to ensure the best qualified wins the agreement.

#### **Other needs identified for WHIP:**

- State office take larger role in meeting program objectives — 13 points
  - Program rules for practices
- Target program geographically — 2 points
- National leadership to get priorities at state level — 0 points
- Include strategic plan on national Web site — 0 points
- Directive for States to update wildlife plans — 0 points
- NRCS and partners work together — 0 points
- Time and staff to do evaluation at field level (NRCS or partners) — 0 points
- Bonus award for States doing good job — 0 points
- Success stories to promote for scientists — 0 points
- Less cumbersome evaluation process — 0 points
- State-specific evaluations — 0 points
  
- Job sheets for each practice (Training, Research and Technology) — 2 points
- Site-specific, hands-on training (Training) — 6 points
  - Best State for habitat evaluation – Missouri
  - Best State for geographical hands on training - Utah
  
- Tools for measuring success of practices in field (Research and Technology) — 6 points
- Marry priority needs (establish and set) with research evaluation (Research and Technology) — 6 points
- Technical standards focused on wildlife (Training, Research and Technology) — 5 points
- Research for Performance Measures (Research and Technology) — 1 point
  - Response on wildlife
- Focus the program on highest priorities (Research and Technology) — 18 points

## **Prioritized Needs: Conservation Reserve Program**

### **1. Meeting between FSA & NRCS leadership – CRP Summit (Karen and Billy) —32 points**

CRP implementation is not working well at the Service Center level in many states. NRCS staff has noted reluctance on the part of FSA staff to learn about the program and to accept applications for the Continuous CRP. NRCS field staffs have been told by their State Office not to work on CRP any more than the minimum required, because the amount FSA reimburses NRCS for technical assistance related to CRP does not begin to cover NRCS' actual costs. Landowners who would like to enroll in CRP, or even just learn more about it so they can decide if it is right for them, suffer from the lack of clear direction to Service Center staff. Lands important to addressing wildlife (and water quality) resource concerns continue to be farmed because landowners cannot get good information on options available under CRP. In addition, there is a lack of communication between FSA, NRCS and partner organizations at the National level, resulting in CRP policy decisions that are not well understood by the conservation stakeholders and therefore not jointly supported or communicated to the field.

### **2. Measure CRP effectiveness based on wildlife response (Billy) —30 points**

The purpose of this action is to provide the farming community, the general public, the Office of Management and Budget, Congress, and others involved with environmental policy issues an accounting of the environmental benefits obtained from USDA conservation program expenditures based on fish and wildlife response. This involves working closely with ARS and other agencies to obtain and share fish and wildlife data, information, and expertise to support the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP). The action also involves working with the fish and wildlife partners to develop biological indicators or performance measures for documenting the effects of conservation. The conservation community will then use these fish and wildlife response measures to monitor, evaluate, and document the effects of conservation practices.

### **3. Management of plant community and flexibility allowed during nesting season (Dave Dewald) —17 points**

FSA current guidelines for required management of various CRP conservation practices state that "The practices shall have periodic management activities performed, according to the conservation plan, during the life of the CRP-1, as determined by the COC." Further requirements state, "Management activities must not be performed during the primary nesting or brood rearing season." This requirement does not allow for management of the habitat on timely basis needed to manipulate the targeted plant species. Management for the targeted plant species periodically needs to happen during the same part of the growing season as the primary nesting season.

#### **Other needs identified for CRP:**

- Buffer practices need wildlife purpose — 6 points
- Halt conversion of grassland to cropland — 5 points (Topic for NRCS/FSA meeting)
- Managed haying and grazing allowed as mid-contract management — 3 points
- Require wildlife-friendly plant species on continuous CRP — 1 point
- Clarify roles between FSA & NRCS —1 point (Topic for NRCS/FSA mtg.)
- Address economic unevenness between crop and grazing — 0 points
- NRCS use CRP to address water problems — 0 points
- Shift CRP from general signup to CREP — 0 points
- Increase agency investment and TA dollars — 0 points (Topic for NRCS/FSA mtg.)

## **Prioritized Needs: Wetlands Reserve Program**

### **1. Easement management after restoration (Jeff) —40 points**

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is responsible for the management of perpetual and 30-year conservation easements held through the USDA/Wetlands Reserve Program. The agency's management responsibilities include: the evaluation and management of wetland restoration practices, evaluation and assessment of restored plant communities, subsequent management of those plant communities (i.e., bottomland hardwoods), authorizing compatible use permits, and violations (i.e., dumping, unauthorized water manipulations, and harvesting timber, etc.), while also recognizing, through the evaluation process, that additional restoration and/or management actions may also be necessary for project success. These actions may need to be applied years following a project's completion.

To meet these statutory responsibilities the agency will need to develop agency infrastructure, staff, and secure the necessary funding to manage these conservation easements for the continued benefit of wetland functions and wildlife use.

### **2. Continue to research and evaluate restoration practices (Julie) —19 points**

The science of restoration is young and we are still learning how it should be applied. Part of this learning curve includes research and evaluation of existing efforts. A growing literature is showing that restoration projects do not consistently replace lost wetland structure and function. In addition, some wetland attributes of natural and restored wetlands may be similar, while others may be different and these attributes develop at different rates. We need to invest in developing performance standards or success criteria to measure the success of restorations. This should include long-term monitoring at multiple time and spatial scales to determine what agricultural wetlands are doing both as an individual wetland and a component of the landscape or watershed. This information should be used to then remedy individual wetlands and tweak restoration methods. We need to move beyond the "delineation" approach to restoration and include functional success. Most importantly we need to use targeting methods that incorporate information on historic losses, restoration potential, landowner expectations and adaptive management. Lastly, we need to ensure that taxpayers are getting a return on their investment: identify where on the landscape, what is the wetland(s) doing, relate this back to condition and translate in meaningful terms back to society or stakeholders.

### **3. Training on native plant community restoration and management (Norman) —17 points**

In the past, conservation efforts by NRCS have favored agronomic systems and the establishment of vegetation for haying, grazing, sediment & erosion control, field borders, buffers, etc., by using established plant varieties best suited for those purposes. The vegetative specifications for our conservation practices were based on production agriculture. The vegetation established was the commonly used, non-native, tame species, many of which were developed by NRCS (Plant Materials Centers).

Recent conservation efforts by NRCS, through the implementation of our wildlife-oriented conservation programs (WRP, CRP, WHIP, etc.), have diversified our agency's efforts to include the establishment and/or restoration of non-production-oriented conservation systems. Regularly, NRCS establishes Native Warm Season Grass Prairies, Bottomland Hardwood Forests, Waterfowl Management Areas, Carolina Bays, and a host of other natural plant community types. In the development of these natural communities we encourage the establishment of native plant species as opposed to the non-natives we regularly have used. Also, Executive Order 13112 (Feb. 3, 1999) on Invasive Species mandated that we move to

native species and thus native plant communities. These native plant communities, established with native vegetation, operate differently than the agricultural systems we are accustomed to working with. Currently NRCS staff is in need of training that addresses the processes involved in Native Plant Community Restoration and also in the Management of these Natural Systems once they have been established. The management portions of this training could be similar to what is done for Pasture Management, Rangeland Management, Forest Management, etc., but for the establishment and management of natural plant communities.

**4. Continue emphasis on hydrology restoration (Bob) —13 points**

NRCS awareness of the need for hydrology restoration was not fully understood during the initial years of program delivery. It was thought that most of the wetlands would be “walk away wetland sites” where little more than filling in a small ditch would be required. Based on a series of reviews of program progress, it became apparent that much of the agricultural landscape is altered to the extent that external sources of water have been intercepted and diverted or isolated from the WRP sites. Sites have been mechanically leveled or long periods of agricultural use have eliminated the important undulations in the wetland landscape. Consequently, the task of restoring hydrology in a manner that will result in a productive wetland that has the wildlife value required of the program entails greater attention, effort, and cost to achieve effective wetland design and construction results than was initially envisioned for the program.

**Other Needs identified for the Wetlands Reserve Program**

- Funding for easement management (upland, buffers and wetland) —7 points
- Show WRP accomplishments track wetland gains by acres and function —7 points
- Ecological follow-up and easement compliance—6 points
- Develop and keep a balanced program, active management and compatible use—6 points
- Encourage states to take proactive stance on management needs (include adaptive management) —1 point (Research Technology)
- Strategically target for water problems—1 point (Training)
- Good planning upfront to avoid surprises for landowners—1 point (Training)
- Ensure cooperative agreements w/outside partners work— 0 points
- Demonstrate technologically astute and will work hand and hand with landowner— 0 points
- Grassroot support for state and local programs — 0 points
- Continue compatible use training — 0 points (Training)
- Easement management division in NRCS-states mirror national — 0 points
- Emphasize mechanics and judge response — 0 points (Research Technology)
- Continue training in NEDS, workshops—0 points (Training)
- WRP summit – identify people to help (cooperative agreements) — 0 points
- Guard against eroding what works — 0 points
- Sell program to public —0 points
- Greater flexibility with agreements—don’t eliminate states — 0 points
- RFPs—challenge of losing the best by going for the cheapest — 0 points (Research Technology)
- More contributory agreements to help with easement management-50% requirement workable? —0 points
- Training for line officers—STC, DC, ASTFO — 0 points (Training)
- Develop strategic tools to minimize staff overload — 0 points
- Maintain support for people in program —0 points
- Implement WRP with a big tent philosophy — 0 points

- Hold state allocation unless easement management plan is in place — 0 points

### **Prioritized Needs: Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

#### **1. Evaluate EQIP on fish and wildlife species, especially at risk species (Martha/Charlie) —36 points**

All land management actions have some direct or indirect effect on fish and wildlife resources. Since EQIP has great potential to support a broad array of management activities and conservation practices on working agricultural lands, it also has great potential to affect fish and wildlife. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires that NRCS, as a Federal agency, consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service, if its activities under EQIP may have an effect on ESA-protected species. EQIP also has the potential to be targeted to address the needs of fish and wildlife species that are at risk of population decline. ESA also requires NRCS to utilize its programs in furtherance of ESA goals and objectives. However, little data exist that are useful in predicting comprehensive fish and wildlife response to the various practices supported by EQIP. Additional work is needed to increase our understanding of fish and wildlife response to EQIP practices, especially at risk species, and to develop analytical tools to predict species-specific response to EQIP practices at the landscape scale.

#### **2. Strong national leadership is essential to ensure EQIP addresses fish and wildlife (Charlie) —29 points**

As stated above, EQIP has great potential to address the needs of fish and wildlife resources on working agricultural landscapes. The program's purpose is to address soil, water, and related natural resource issues, including wildlife habitat. Many traditional practices used to address soil and water resource concerns, with the proper planning and consideration of wildlife habitat, have the potential to provide significant fish and wildlife benefits. In addition, practices that are specifically used to address habitat needs can also be supported by EQIP. With strong national leadership, EQIP can realize its full potential as an effective tool to improve fish and wildlife habitat on working lands.

#### **3. Consider wildlife effects with EQIP (Charlie) —23 points**

Just as EQIP can be used to benefit fish and wildlife resources, there may be instances where practice application or management actions may be detrimental to fish and wildlife. With proper consideration during project planning, fish and wildlife benefits can be realized and adverse effects avoided.

#### **Other needs identified for the EQIP:**

- Apply practices to assist in species recovery —17 points (Training)
- Require each State to I.D. at risk species and incorporate into ranking criteria—3 points (Research Technology)
- Capitalize on management intensity as it relates to wildlife with cropland — 0 points (Training)

## **Prioritized Needs: Grasslands Reserve Program**

### **1. Emphasize biodiversity (Randy) —31 points**

Grasslands are the most threatened habitat type in North America. GRP provides an opportunity to help conserve these declining resources and maintain the associated biodiversity. Management guidelines being developed for compatible use on WRP lands should be adapted for GRP. NRCS needs to develop technology to enhance biodiversity on grasslands entered into the program.

### **2. More prescribed grazing guidelines (Mason) —15 points**

Since our meeting a final draft of the GRP Conservation Easement Deed has been completed. In review of this draft, there are several concerns that the required “Conservation Plan” will need to address to ensure the biodiversity program objectives are met.

- a. How do we maintain biodiversity when many non-native grasses (i.e., Fescue, Bermuda, etc.) don’t provide biodiversity no matter how you manage them.
- b. Unlike WRP where uses are “Prohibited” by the deed and only allowed through the Compatible Use process, grazing on GRP is not prohibited by the draft deed. The draft deed states under “Grassland Uses of the Property”, “Grantor reserves the right to graze, hay, hay for seed production, and mow.” The draft deed does limit mowing and hay harvest to dates outside the nesting and brood-rearing seasons however, under “Purpose” the deed indicates that grazing shall be permitted consistent with the conservation purposes to preserve and protect natural habitat, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity.

It seems that the only restrictions for grazing will be those identified in the required Conservation Plan. If the State’s Prescribed Grazing standard is used to develop the Conservation Plan, we may not achieve the biodiversity program objective. Many of the Prescribed Grazing standards in the south east (and possible elsewhere) allow ending grazing heights of 2–3 inches for many of the introduced grasses and between 4–6 inches for native grasses. As you can see, it’s hard to achieve much biodiversity out of 2 inches of fescue or Bermuda or even 4 inches of a native grass. In many Prescribed Grazing standards, ending grazing heights typically apply only during the growing season, so many of the pastures are grazed even lower during the critical winter months.

(Need) – States should be asked to develop additional grazing criteria above the basic requirement in the standard that ensures biodiversity along with grazing rights. Of course, the requirements of these “additional criteria” would be different in each region and even each State. Maybe increased ending grazing heights, grazing restriction during the dormant season, more frequent rotations, decreased stocking rates, etc. could be used during the development of the “Additional Grazing Criteria for GRP”.

### **3. National guidance on focusing on priority habitat types (Jeff) —11 points**

(Concerns were expressed during the meeting that the State NRCS decisions made for the identification of priority areas and subsequent ranking criteria may not have the necessary support to actually conduct the protection and restoration of important grasslands in the U.S.). Recommend that future national guidance be more explicit when providing direction for States identifying eligible grasslands and the development of ranking criteria that target (weight) selected grasslands of the State.

### **4. Include pothole and other depressional wetlands in GRP plans (Bob) —10 points**

Pothole and other depressional wetlands are vital to the environmental health of the agricultural landscape, are critical to the retention of agricultural chemical runoff, play a vital role in maintenance of continental migratory bird populations, and continue to be the source of controversy in terms of wetland regulatory efforts (e.g., swampbuster). Each conservation

program should be structured to provide for the protection and restoration of such sites to the extent that statutory authority will permit such inclusion.

**Other needs identified for the Grassland Reserve Program:**

- National data elements to include in ranking criteria at State level—9 points
  - Biodiversity
  - Conversion
- Clarify objectives and intent of program—8 points
- Easement management third party land trusts hold and enforce easements—6 points
- All wildlife interests at State technical committee when developing program—5 points (Training)
- Make info available from WRP easement management workshop, St. Louis—2 points (Training)
- Slightly favor native grass communities at National level—1 point
- Enrolled lands in tame pasture should have restoration plan — 0 points
- Data elements to support allocation —0 points
  - Biodiversity
  - Conversion
- Utilize current technology — 0 points (Training)

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## Field Office Technical Guide and eFOTG needs:

- 1. Section 5: Need more information on Conservation Practices Effects. Quality Criteria need to be consistent in General Manual and Wildlife Biology Manual (Hank) —42 pts.**

450-GM, Amend. 5, March 1992 (Part 401, Subpart C) set quality criteria for wildlife habitat at 30% of the habitat potential. It stated, “For items (i) through (iii), a minimum of 30% of the habitat potential for the species of concern is achieved regardless of land use, based on an approved evaluation procedure.” Items (i) through (iii) were: (i) Food, (ii) Cover or shelter, (iii) Quality and quantity of drinking water.

450-GM, Amend. 11, May 2002 (Part 401, Subpart C) superseded Amend 5. Amend 11 eliminated the 30% quality criteria for wildlife habitat and gave the State Conservationist the authority to set quality criteria “...for each resource consideration or concern common to the Field Office Technical Guide service area (State, county, service center, etc).”

The NRCS National Biology Manual (190-V-NBM, July 2003) established a minimum numeric value for wildlife habitat quality criteria at 50%. It states, “Resource Management Systems (RMS) will be developed for wildlife (animal's) habitat considering food, cover or shelter, and quantity and quality of drinking water. For these items a minimum of 50 percent of the habitat potential for the species of concern is achieved regardless of land use, based on the approved Habitat Evaluation Procedure for your state.”

On Feb. 3, 2004 Hank Henry met with Diane Gelburd, Director, Ecological Sciences Division, Julie Hawkins, Acting National Biologist, and Howard Hankin, National Aquatic Ecologist. In keeping with the policy established by the 2003 National Biology Manual, it was determined that the minimum quality criteria for wildlife habitat would be 50%. If needed, states can request a variance to this minimum criteria.
- 2. Job approval authority for biology related practices (standards/specs) (Lyn) —26 points**

This priority addresses the need for a Job Approval Authority system for biology practices. This system would be similar to the Job Approval Authority system currently used for engineering practices and the prescribed burning practice.

Field staff would need to demonstrate appropriate knowledge and skills before they are able to plan, design, approve or certify certain biology practices. For example, in order to design instream habitat structures for fish, field staff would have to complete appropriate training and experience.
- 3. Continue revising national standards and specifications (Lyn/Terrell) —23 points**

The National Biologists has proposed a schedule to review many of the National Biology Standards. This effort to review National Biology Standards should continue.

The future schedule should include a systematic approach which would result in all National Biology standards being reviewed (and revised if needed) every 5 years.

### Other eFOTG Needs identified:

- Develop revised or updated wildlife habitat appraisal guides for all habitats within each state (Section 3)— 10 points (Research Technology)
- Conservation Guide sheets need wildlife (Section 5)— 5 points (Research Technology)
- New practice — riparian habitat wildlife management (standards and specifications) — 4 points (Research Technology)
- Institute quality control during planning and implementation with biologist’s oversight—3 points
- Section 3 – quality criteria— Tie in RMS to objectives by ecoregion—2 points
- Incorporate Section 3 and Section 5 in the toolkit — 0 points
- Field borders for wildlife including natural regeneration— 0 points

## **Prioritized Needs: Training**

### **1. Institutionalize wildlife and habitat course in NEDS (Randy) —25 points**

NRCS does not have a formal course on wildlife habitat restoration and management and yet many programs (WHIP, WRP, CRP, EQIP) have significant workloads requiring expertise in wildlife and fisheries. A week-long course is needed that provides students with an overview of wildlife habitat components, conducting habitat appraisals, and designing conservation practices for wildlife. The class should be held regionally so field trips and speakers can relate to the student's priorities.

### **2. Integrating fish and wildlife practices into programs and technical assistance (Karen/Julie) —16 points with emphasis on biodiversity**

Fish and Wildlife are coequal resources with soil and water in the Farm Bill, but not in the day-to-day conservation planning at the Field Office level. Basic biology training is needed for all planners to get more fish and wildlife practices on the ground. States should provide hands-on training in application of fish and wildlife conservation practices. Training should emphasize restoration of native habitats for the maintenance of biodiversity. Development of jobsheets for Fish and Wildlife practices and Wildlife Habitat Assessment Guides should be mandatory for all states, and planners should be given training in how to use these tools.

### **3. Native plant community restoration management (Norman) —14 points**

In the past, conservation efforts by NRCS have favored agronomic systems and established vegetation for haying, grazing, sediment & erosion control, field borders, buffers, etc., by using established plant varieties best suited for those purposes. The vegetation installed for our conservation practices were on production based agronomic. The vegetation established was the commonly used, non-native, tame species, many of which were developed by NRCS (Plant Materials Centers).

Recent conservation efforts by NRCS, through the implementation of our wildlife-oriented conservation programs (WRP, CRP, WHIP, etc.), have diversified our agency's efforts to include the establishment and/or restoration of non-production-oriented conservation systems. Regularly, NRCS establishes Native Warm Season Grass Prairies, Bottomland Hardwood Forests, Waterfowl Management Areas, Carolina Bays, and a host of other natural plant community types. In the development of these natural communities we encourage the establishment of native plant species as opposed to the non-natives we regularly have used. Also, Executive Order 13112 (Feb. 3, 1999) on Invasive Species mandated that we move to native species and thus native plant communities. These native plant communities, established with native vegetation, operate differently than the agricultural systems we are accustomed to working with. Currently NRCS staff is in need of training that addresses the processes involved in Native Plant Community Restoration and also in the Management of these Natural Systems once they have been established. The management portions of this training could be similar to what is done for Pasture Management, Rangeland Management, Forest Management, etc., but for the establishment and management of natural plant communities.

### **4. ESA and NEPA training for all programs (Howard/Andrée/Martha) —13 points**

NRCS risks increased legal challenges to the adequacy of its compliance activities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and other environmental requirements. Inadequate agency compliance efforts could result in court orders to halt the implementation of our projects or programs until NRCS adequately addresses the impacts of its technical and financial assistance activities. The delay could be several years in duration. NRCS can proactively ensure that there is no basis for interruption

of the delivery of our conservation programs by providing the necessary personnel with environmental compliance training. Training is necessary to provide NRCS employees with the information they need regarding their roles and responsibilities for delivering technical and financial assistance with respect to environmental laws. It is also necessary for NRCS to meet effectively its mission with regard to conserving the Nation's natural resources.

**Other training needs identified:**

- Whole farm planning—9 points
- Training enforcement personnel (easements)—8 points
- Develop intro to habitat principles training (CD or train the trainer for state use) —7 points
- Plant identification, wildlife uses—6 points (Research Technology)
- Tours of adjacent States for training opportunities (program specific applied) —5 points
- Technical TSP training (for TSPs) —4 points
- Art and science of conservation planning, including fish and wildlife—4 points
- FOTG, Soils, practices and standards training = the basics—3 points
- Best methods to set back succession in native grass ecosystem (research too) —3 points
- High tech training, GIS, GPS—2 points
- People skills, salesmanship of programs, conservation marketing—1 point
- Stream Restoration—nationally available, NEDS—0 points
- Wetland, Swampbuster, Sodbuster appeals at national appeals level—0 points
- Administrative training for RFPs and TSPs—0 points
- Lead time to train people on programs—0 points
- Strong technical support provided to field level—0 points
- Compatible use training (forestry) —0 points
- Written and Oral Communication—0 points

**Training – WRP**

- Continue workshops and NEDS training —5 points
- Strategically target for water problems —4 points
- Continue Compatible Use Training—3 points
- Training for line officers —0 points
- Good Planning upfront to avoid surprises for landowners — 0 points

**Training – GRP**

- GRP program itself —0 points
- Utilize current technology—0 points
- Make information available from WRP easement management training, St. Louis—0 points

**Training – EQIP**

- Consider wildlife effects with EQIP—5 points
- Apply practices to assist in species recovery—0 points
- Evaluate impact of EQIP on fish and wildlife species, especially at risk species—0 points (Technology)
- Capitalize on management intensity as it relates to wildlife with in cropland—0 points

**Training – WHIP**

- Site-specific, hands on training—7 points
- Job sheets for each practice —0 points (Research Technology)

## **Prioritized Needs: Research and Technology**

### **1. Overall impact of all practices on fish and wildlife (farm bill) (Bob/Charlie) —25 points**

Farm Bill conservation programs have a far-reaching impact on the agricultural landscape and provide environmental benefits to urban and rural areas alike. As the competition for funding of domestic programs becomes more intense, it will be necessary for NRCS to better describe the landscape benefits to society as a whole that are the result of these programs. Documenting the beneficial impacts on fish and wildlife that accrue from such programs is one important way to illustrate the value of such programs.

### **2. Developing native genetic populations of standard conservation plants-local employees (John) —24 points**

Recognizing the wildlife and conservation benefits of establishing and managing diverse native plants, including trees, shrubs, warm-season grasses, forbs, legumes, etc. throughout agricultural and silvicultural settings, it is imperative we have native plant materials that are genetically adapted to local site conditions so they can be successfully established and managed for the long term. In other words, there is a need to develop plant varieties with local genotypes that are commercially available and adapted to their intended location as well as for their intended use. Currently, some native woody plants and grasses are commercially available, but not with a diversity of species needed to establish robust communities. Also, the majority of forbs and legumes are not available at all. To add to these shortcomings, most of the commercially available "native" plants are derived from only a few locations within North America, usually not from many of the areas where we plant them. There is also a need to identify species currently not in the commercial trade but which are better adapted to specific areas and regions than many of the currently available species. For example, in the warm, wet climates of the South many of the "standard" cultivars of plants do not grow very well. Yet, there are many native species in the South that are adapted to these conditions that are not in the commercial trade. It is those species that need to be identified and released commercially. Without the availability of adequately adapted plant materials, and associated establishment and management technology, the effectiveness of these conservation and habitat improvement tools is greatly compromised.

### **3. Continue to research and evaluate restoration practices (Bob/Randy) —22 points**

**Microtopography.**

Over the last four years NRCS has emphasized the inclusion of microtopography in wetland restoration. Research is needed to validate the value of microtopography for wildlife and which practices are the most beneficial.

**All Species.**

Wetland restoration for the benefit of the full array of wetlands-dependent wildlife that occur in a given area is not something that is well understood. For many years wetlands managers would restore wetlands with a specific species or species group in mind. Relatively little attention was given to understanding the relationship of wetlands design and construction techniques to achieving a wetland restoration that would provide the full range of wildlife benefits endemic to the area throughout the entire year. NRCS has been leading the effort, technically and in terms of actual practice installation, for the past 5 years. One of the major initiatives has been to restore the micro highs and lows in degraded wetlands systems in an effort to achieve the fullest and most diverse water, vegetation, and wildlife response. Now that a number of excellent projects are in place, the opportunity exists to document the on-the-ground results of these innovative wetland design and construction efforts. With the

results of such studies, project design could be made even more effective and the tremendous benefits of holistic wetland restoration design would be documented and better understood.

**4. Research how managed haying and grazing impact wildlife populations and grassland nesting birds (David Dewald) —7 points**

New CRP guidelines allow for managed haying and grazing once out of every three years. Wildlife management agencies are concerned that once out of every three years is too often especially in the Northern Great Plains. Research needs to be conducted to determine if managed haying and grazing of CRP once out of every three years fulfills the wildlife habitat objectives of CRP.

**Other research and technology needs identified:**

- Develop/update habitat appraisal guides for all habitats in each State—8 points
- CRP – Research how managed haying and grazing impact wildlife populations, i.e., grassland nesting birds—7 points
- Baseline population surveys for all wildlife species —7 points (Research Needs)
- Field borders for wildlife including regeneration—6 points
- More holistic approach to restoring wetland functions and connections to other parts of the landscape—5 points
- RFPs – challenge of losing best by going for cheapest—5 points
- Germination and growth requirements of many different native species—4 points (Plant Materials)
- New practices—riparian habitat wildlife management—4 points
- Tools for measuring success of practices in field—3 points
- Basic core habitat of amphibian species and connect to practices—3 points
- Develop techniques and strategies to restore vegetation in wetlands by seed—3 points (Plant Materials)
- Best methods to set back succession in native grass ecosystems (research too) —3 points (Training)
- Control noxious and invasive species—not just on lists—2 points (Plant Materials)
- WRP – Evaluate upland habitat around wetlands—2 points
- Make environmental databases available for toolkit layers (GIS) improve access to State threatened and endangered species—2 points (Technology Development)
- Look at how practices under each program may have negative unintended effects on other programs “Do Not Harm” theory—1 point
- Overall view of what causes invasive species to come in—how do we buffer against them—0 points
- Integrate fish and wildlife into NRCSD natural resource models and tools—0 points (Technology Development)
- Coordinate with ARS “Research the Research” —0 points
- WRP emphasizes mechanics and judge response—0 points
- Measure CRP effectiveness based on wildlife response—0 points
- WHIP – Research performance measures and response of wildlife—0 points
- Job sheets for each practice—0 points
- How Restoration of giant cane ecosystems—0 points (Plant Materials)
- Develop techniques to transplant amphibians in wetlands, turtles and herps—0 points
- Plant I.D. (training and FOTG) wildlife uses—0 points
- Evaluate impact EQIP on fish and wildlife, esp. at risk—0 points
- Job sheets for each practice—0 points
- Strategically target for water problems—0 points

- Conservation guide sheets needed for wildlife—0 points (Technology Development)

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### **Prioritized needs identified by partners:**

**1. Communication and cooperation needs to increase at Washington, DC HQ of conservation agencies—NRCS could facilitate (Floyd/Randy) —33 points**

**2. Improve/invest resources in aquatic plant restoration (Howard) —20 points**

Overfishing, habitat loss and habitat degradation are the greatest challenges to sustaining our Nation's shellfish and finfish resources. With 77 percent of the U.S. commercial species relying upon estuaries during some life stage, the enhancement, conservation, and restoration of estuary and coastal habitats will be paramount to sustaining our Nation's fisheries (Chambers, 1991). As a member of the Estuary Habitat Restoration Council, NRCS has adopted the goal of achieving 1,000,000 acres of estuary habitat restoration by the year 2010. The Council, created by the Estuary Restoration Act of 2000 (P.L.106-547), is responsible for ensuring that a comprehensive approach to restoration is undertaken and fostering coordination of the Federal and nonfederal efforts. While significant progress remains in achieving this level of restoration, this milestone will be possible with a dedicated effort by private and public partnerships. NRCS has long known that our conservation successes only happen when land and water stewards—whether they be farmer, rancher or fisher—are actively engaged in the conservation process. As an agency committed to empowering local efforts, we have significant resources to contribute to enhancing and restoring our working waters.

**3. Need list of species at risk (Dave) —9 points**

Many conservation programs (EQIP) have an objective of providing beneficial impacts to species at risk. However, NRCS is not the agency to develop such a list. This responsibility lies with State fish and game agencies. Some States have not developed a list. Cooperation between State fish and game agencies and NRCS needs to occur to obtain this objective.

### **Other needs identified by partners:**

- Emphasize natural regeneration in Farm Bill programs—8 points
- Agency has potential in carbon sequestration discussions (esp. grasslands) —6 points
- Wildlife includes: fish, insects, herps—4 points
- Increase landowner awareness with understanding of programs available—3 points

## Issues facing fish, wildlife, and wetlands conservation

The group did a preliminary brainstorm of issues facing fish, wildlife, and wetlands. After brainstorming, issues were categorized as Policy, Program, Technical and/or Training.

### Issues

- Not implemented Swampbuster as should have and could have (Policy)
- Who will oversee NEPA process w/TSP work? (Policy)
- How will all of this survive reorganization? (Policy)
- Wildlife is co-equal with soil and water in Farm Bill, not FOTG (Policy)
- How do we get support from the Administration? (Policy)
- Conservation System Guides—Integrate wildlife (Policy)
- Need to learn to say “No” to unreasonable requests (Policy)
- Integrate wildlife in non-wildlife standards (Policy)
- Is field getting technical help biologists, TSPs, partners? (Policy)
- Need more wildlife expertise at state level (Policy)
- Inventory is critical SWAPA (Policy)
- Overwhelming impacts at field office workload and responsibilities (Policy and Technical)
- TSP wildlife expertise? (Policy and Technical)
- Monitoring and evaluating are critical (Policy and Technical)
- Wildlife biology is complex (cannot do with just standards) (Technical and Policy)
- Effects of practices and standards? (Technical)
- Need data to support how to change standards, including field data (Technical)
- Integrating microtopography in standards and specifications (Technical)
- Standards and specifications aren’t enough alone (Technical Expertise)
- Biology job approval (Policy)
- Easement management (Program)
- Wildlife habitat development training (Training, Program, and Technical)
- More GPS training – application of GIS (Training)
- TSP Certification (Technical and Training)
  - Training and own people (i.e., bioengineering, over demanding partners, GPS application)
  - Consistency
  - Allow incentive payments (Policy and Program)

## **Abridged comments from presenters:**

**Mike Anderson:** Mike Anderson reported a meeting was held in Laurel, MD in 1995 consisting of 10 team members. The document produced from the meeting was “Barriers to Providing Wildlife Assistance.” Paul Johnson, Chief of NRCS at the time, asked Pete Heard to head up a fish and wildlife habitat scoping team. The Wildlife Habitat Management Institute was created as a result of findings from this meeting. The mission of the Institute is to develop and disseminate technical materials that assist NRCS field staff in working with customers to improve fish and wildlife habitat. One of the many products from the Institute is the Comprehensive Review—a literature review that provides the best judgment of the scientific community on the effects of Farm Bill programs on wildlife. Farm Bill programs are making a significant contribution to wildlife conservation on private land. According to USFWS 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, the following is annually spent: Hunting and fishing expenditures: \$57 billion; Wildlife Watching Expenditures: \$38 billion.

**Billy Teels and Robert Misso:** The Wetland loss rate for the nation has declined about 80 percent from the previous decade. Freshwater wetland systems were the most vulnerable to loss and change. Development was the leading attributable cause of wetland loss to uplands. Wetland restoration and creation are offsetting some losses. Challenges for the future include:

- Complexity of agency mandates and workload will increase the importance of outside participation.
- NRCS personnel training needs remain, especially in the area of wetland restoration and management.
- Non-agency personnel will need program-specific applied training, in addition to biological training.
- Wetland conservation program delivery is not uniform across the Nation and those areas of weakness must be addressed.
- Although much has been done to restore and enhance WRP lands, much more work remains before wetland and wildlife benefits are fully realized.
- As competition for funding domestic programs increases, NRCS will need to carefully evaluate how to achieve the biggest bang for the buck in wetland conservation.
- Wetland conservation should be a priority purpose in all NRCS programs.
- As a recognized leader in wetland conservation, NRCS should not waver. Technical and public support should be continued as a high priority agency effort.

**Andrée DuVarney:** Andrée DuVarney reported that a new National Environmental Compliance Handbook (NECH) was in Directives and would be released in the next two weeks. (The NECH was actually released on December 24, 2003. It is available on the Internet at [http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/H/H\\_190\\_610\\_Content.htm](http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/H/H_190_610_Content.htm).) The handbook contains sections on NRCS compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), other special environmental concerns, and a new version of the form NRCS-CPA-52, which has been renamed from “Environmental Effects for Conservation Plans and Areawide Conservation Plans” to “Environmental Evaluation Worksheet.” In addition to the new handbook, three new training courses on NRCS environmental compliance are being developed. Two of the courses are Web-based and the third will be classroom-based. The first level of Web-based training is targeted toward all field staff and Technical Service Providers (TSPs). It provides an overview of the NRCS environmental evaluation process, how to document the results of that process on the “Environmental Evaluation Worksheet” and how the environmental evaluation is related to the planning process, the NEPA process, the ESA, and other special environmental concerns. The course also provides an overview of the requirements for ESA compliance while planning and implementing conservation practices. The second level of Web-based training is targeted toward State office personnel involved in preparing

Environmental Assessments (EAs) and Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) required under NEPA, and toward State office personnel responsible for ESA compliance. The third course, which is classroom-based, provides the opportunity for individuals who will actually be responsible for carrying out the NEPA process or preparing EAs and EISs to develop their skills in those areas. Ms. DuVarney also reported that final National Programmatic EAs and Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI) had been prepared for the EQIP, AMA, and FRLPP programs, and that a Draft EA and FONSI had been issued for the CSP and was being developed for GRP. Each of these EAs looks at the resource concern(s) the program is intended to address, and examines the effects of the conservation practices most frequently used to address those resource concerns. Network diagrams were developed to illustrate the conditions under which those practices are used and the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of those practices. In the EAs, NRCS also committed to

- consulting with other agencies as required for compliance with ESA, the National Historic Preservation Act and other environmental protection requirements, and
- avoiding, minimizing and mitigating adverse effects according to NRCS policies.

Finally, Ms. DuVarney discussed the need to improve the documentation of the scientific basis for the environmental effects of conservation practices and systems of practices and the need to improve the quantification of those effects. This need results from the Government Performance and Results Act mandate to account for the environmental benefits obtained from the conservation dollars NRCS receives, Office of Management and Budget encouragement to substantiate the basis for the environmental benefits NRCS states it is achieving through its programs, and the need to effectively implement the CSP. Efforts are underway to improve the assessment of conservation program benefits but there is a need for much more information in this area.

**Norman Melvin, Charlie Rewa and Mitch Cummings:**—Invasive species problem is with invasives (not just noxious) where species establish, reduce overall species richness, and exclude native species. These species are not generally on Noxious species lists so there is no Federal or State trigger to control e.g., Reed Canary, Phragmites, Microstegium, Hybrid cattail, Leafy spurge, Tamarisk, etc. Species that impact wetland successes are often an entirely different suite of species than on Noxious weed lists. Understanding is needed on the species biology to focus on control methods that minimize effects to other vegetation. Chemical control, biological control, and other technology is needed to prevent their establishment and spread. Consider use of non-invasive wildlife foods in restorations (Chufa, Echinochloa). NRCS will need to develop long term management strategies to maintain vegetation/habitat. Prairie and forest management may be based on wildlife species needs. For amphibian transplants, determine core habitat areas (upland/wetlands) and habitat requirements for different species of reptiles and amphibians. Also, develop techniques/strategies to transplant species to newly restored wetlands. Suggestions for Plant Materials in response to the need to maintain localized genetic integrity and to minimize the homogenization of our habitat and flora:

- Develop localized/regional strains of standard conservation species, e.g., ones that have a localized genetic composition, that are commercially viable.
- Develop regional species for conservation plantings. Look for local, native species, that fit the niche of more commonly planted species but that are local to a region.
- Develop techniques and strategies to restore wetlands vegetation by seed; herb, shrub, & tree. We can do it for uplands; we need to do it for wetlands.
- Continue research into germination and growth requirements for many native species so that we have a wider variety to use in the reestablishment of habitat.

**Ed Biggers:**—The competitive process was used on only 25 noncompetitive and competitive awards in FY2003. The FY04 competitive process will start with the agency’s priorities, statements of work, solicitation (RFP), evaluation, award and administration. The Web site address is <http://www.fedgrants.gov>. A Catalog of Federal Assistance Number is required for every advertisement. Modifications/amendments to existing agreements will not need to be competed. There was concern regarding “best value vs. cheapest bid.” Concerning congressional earmarks, “we need to read for what they say and not what we think they say.” If the language states a single point, the competitive process is not necessary. If a project proposal is received from a University, the project is competitive. Employees are advised to inform a source that the agency may choose to solicit a project competitively upon receipt. Section 714 allows the purchase of technology at meetings/conferences with 50% of cost sharing. Purchases can be made through the procurement process of \$2,500 or under.

### **Partner perspectives:**

**Jody Olson, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation**—NFWF wants to help and assist with projects that do not fit with farm bill programs. The foundation brings credibility and support to the table for projects and funding for positions.

**Ray Evans, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies:** Concerns include:

1. Compliance issues – all have understanding and can see as broken rules to wildlife at risk species is not a part of ranking process.
2. Continuous practice of native grasses could be used.
3. “Pulling out” of CRP? Self-certification is not good for resources. Wildlife should be coequal with soil and water.
4. Need more opportunity for natural revegetation.
5. It is against guidelines when CRP land is mowed. It is not an effective tool.
6. Need to reverse decision of CP23 (100 year floodplain).

**Bill McGuire, Missouri Department of Conservation:** MDC is a member of IAF&WS. Since 1981 there has been a cooperative effort with NRCS. The biological training and support worked great and in 1985 expanded to all areas (7) of the State. In 1995, NRCS was willing to pay salaries for nine positions in WRP, which provided full staffing for wetland teams in all areas at State level. There are 78 people in the Private Lands Service Division and 40 are collocated with NRCS. Participating with the TSP process is cumbersome. Tech Regs needs attention. Streamline or eliminate MOU to do an agreement: it is difficult to keep staff and cooperators motivated as they may or may not get funded. Minimize time required at signups.

**Dave Walker, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies:** They continue to review whether expectations of Congress are being met on wildlife’s purpose in programs. Conference language should be written “after completion of nesting season.” Discussion of developing standards is worthwhile and should “marry up” progress of program. NRCS/IAF&WS relationship is excellent; cross training and flexibility in programs/practices are beneficial.

**Bill Howard, Wildlife Habitat Council:** WHC works with corporations and their lands to restore and enhance wildlife with certifications and international awards. Projects include wetland restoration, wetland management workshops, biological expertise, and conservation education. Needs are:

1. Cooperation between agencies—big gap in Washington, and
2. More regionwide projects with focus on bigger picture.

**Myra Hyde, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:** FWS concerns are:

1. More opportunities to collaborate with partners are needed,
2. Participation at the State Technical Committee,
3. Wildlife is not coequal with soil and water,
4. There is a disconnect with programs and how they are implemented, and
5. There is a need for more outreach/education on programs.

**Don McKenzie, Wildlife Management Institute:** WMI sees challenges in leadership, culture and policy that continue to overlook wildlife.

**Dave Nomsen, Pheasants Forever:** Challenges are:

1. Liaison position will be readvertised.
2. CRP signup disappointing. There is an erodible support base. Get information to the leadership.

**Mike Anderson, National Wild Turkey Federation:** NWTF concerns include carbon sequestration, and need for cooperation to increase with leadership communication quarterly.

### **Recommendation to Report on Meeting Results**

The group asked if a summary of this meeting could be given at the next leadership meeting. The following were asked to represent the group: David Gagner, Pete Heard, Steve Chick and Dave Walker. The next meeting would be in mid-July 2004.

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