

Ag and Conservation Partner Forum III

“Increasing the Adoption of the Management of Ag Drainage Water for Conservation Benefits”

February 14, 2012

10:00 to 12:00 am

NRCS Chief's Conference Room

USDA South Building

Washington, D.C.

Summary Notes from meeting:

Follow-up Strategy to National Summit – Tom Christensen, Regional Conservationist, Central, NRCS:

Tom and Alex Echols discussed the effort and the target audiences.

Perspective on the Ag. Drainage Water Management/Wetland Conservation Dialogue in ND and MN – Brad Redlin, Director Ag Programs, Izaak Walton League:

ND and MN ag and conservation groups interacted in the field and during a meeting in Morehead, MN. Had a good dialogue; the climate seemed right for some consensus on drainage water management and drainage tile (contour tiling and bioreactors). Some misconceptions exist concerning the extent of nutrient leeching (thinking that soil purifies water). The field trip and meeting was well attended by legislative staffs. The feeling was that it was not an us 'vs' them situation. The Chief's attendance and comments made a good impression for others attending and his explanation of issues/challenges/solutions helped frame perceptions. Examples of impacts from recent increased drainage of cropland included wetlands being flooded and storage/retention capacity being exceeded. A misconception was expressed that NRCS was not interested or able to assist with improving storage capacity in wetlands. Some opportunities to take a group approach. There were concerns about timeliness of NRCS certified wetland determinations to facilitate tile installation. This issue ended up dominating second day of conversations.

Ag. Drainage Water Systems Task Force Report – Jane Frankenberger, Professor, Purdue University:

Jane talked about the history of the Task Force; people involve; NRCS participation; MN Focus Groups; publications online; Canadian involvement; 2012 Ag Census with a question on drainage; the 5 state CIG; the next meeting is in Dundee, MI and will focus on 'P'. Pat Murphy requested that the meeting be available by VTC or teleconference for those that could not travel.

Perspective on Drainage Water Management Practices - Jane Frankenberger, Professor, Purdue University:

Higher crop prices are driving increased drainage work. She talked about an example where reduced nutrient use, crop rotation, and cover crops resulted in reduced N concentrations. N went from 30ppm to 10ppm. Talked about the impacts of DWM (increased ET, increased runoff, and increased seepage). Talked about the need to examine the outputs and whether it contained N₂ 'vs' N₂O. She talked about the behavior aspects of adoption of new technologies/practices such as bioreactors and two stage ditches. Drainage systems are being installed that are more intensive (closer spacing) and Jane discussed how that impacts the system.

NRCS AGWAM Team Activity Plan and Progress Report - Paul Sweeney, Senior Project Leader, NRCS:

Paul reported on the AGWAM Action Plan progress; answered questions on saturated buffers (Chief White indicates ICPS is coming; there was a question on group projects – Mark Rose mentioned that group projects, aka pooling agreements are underused in EQIP, and that this might be a good opportunity to encourage this type of approach; there was a question on EQIP ranking tools and funding pools that Paul discussed and noted that they vary by state. He mentioned that 747 - Denitrifying Bioreactor is being used in Iowa, Indiana and Minnesota.

Summary of State AG Water Mgt Plans - Paul Sweeney, Senior Project Leader, NRCS:

Paul gave a brief summary of the State Ag Water Management Plans and how they have been used.

DWM Potential State Maps and Tables – Chris Smith, Nat'l Leader, Technical Soil Services, NRCS:

Chris discussed the maps, development process and criteria. 38.1 million acres are potentially suitable for DWM in 9 focus states in the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes. The maps and tables are available on the NRCS website under "Water Management". There was a question on when the interactive map might be available and Chris said in two weeks or less on the NRCS website.

Issues, Opportunities, and Feedback All:

Alex Echols asked why there were not acre target goals for DWM. Tom Christensen responded that NRCS does not set performance targets by individual practice, rather performance targets are set based on impacts to the natural resource concern(s). There was discussion about efforts outside the 9 state focus area - no specific funding in the area or outside at this point. Rather DWM efforts are supported by ongoing funded initiatives, such as the Mississippi River Basin (MRBI).

Closing Comments Dave White, Chief NRCS