

**Virginia Agricultural BMP Technical Advisory Committee
Forestry Committee Meeting
June 25, 2019**

Attendees:

Todd Groh – VDOF, Voting Member
Jim Echols – DCR, Committee Chair
Rachel Winter – Headwaters SWCD, Voting Member
Brian Hoffman – Friends of the Rappahannock, Voting member
Amanda McCullen – Culpeper SWCD, Voting Member
Patti Nylander – VDOF, non-voting member

Members absent:

Carl Garrison – voting
Katie Hellebush – alternate
Dean Cumbia – VDOF, non-voting member

Meeting called to order at 9:09am

Jim reviewed the ground rules for meetings, highlighting some of the changes that have occurred since last year. Other committees still have suggestions that remain unresolved from 2018. Currently the forestry committee does not have any unresolved suggestions from 2018. Items Jim covered with forestry committee members:

- If committee members wish to change to another subcommittee, it should take place prior to full TAC meeting in two weeks.
- Voting members must be present to vote on changes, per FOIA rules.
- All members present received a written copy of TAC Ground Rules.
- If an item is tabled by a committee, if the TAC upholds the table by 80% or more, the item is permanently tabled. If it is less than 80%, the item will go back to the committee for further discussion.
- Sub-committee can still take the opportunity to amend items and resend to the full TAC. If amended item still does not meet 80% at full TAC, the item will be tabled permanently.
- At full TAC meetings, all members are welcome to attend; only voting members can vote. (this is not a rule change)

A full TAC meeting schedule is included in the ground rules.

Other items mentioned:

Chair for Nutrient Management changed to Steph Drzal.

Equine work group currently through other committees, and is not considered its own separate sub-committee; items that are brought by the equine work group are reviewed through the existing six sub-committees.

After reviewing ground rules, the Forestry committee reviewed the two suggestions it has received.

1F – Federal partners asked DCR to consider increasing CREP match to greater than 35% in FY2021 in order to provide a higher overall cost-share rate.

Jim received an e-mail suggesting that CREP cost-share rates match the SL-6W in order to alleviate program competition between state and federal programs.

Brian made a motion that the e-mail is incorporated into 1F. Megan Seconded, motion carried.

Current state rate is \$5/acre

Some concern among committee members with offering 100% cost-share. When the rate is less than 100%, producers have an incentive to watch the cost of project installation the practice because they have a financial investment in the practice. In addition, since the participant helped pay for the practice they are more likely to be motivated to maintain the practice.

Currently, federal rate on CREP is 50% and state cost share is 35% of the eligible costs.

SL-6 has been divided into wide and narrow

Narrow is 10-25'; 10-15 years

Wide is 35'-50'; 10 year and 15 year option; also includes a buffer payment rate (payment rate is made upfront in order to reduce administrative burden to local districts)

State currently pays \$80/acre for the buffer that is greater than 35 feet wide.

State and federal programs will typically be different and in somewhat competition with one another. Some producers prefer the payment system of federal vs. state, others may prefer the payment system of state programs.

Brian expressed concern over where the funds come from. Farm Bill funds can be tied to how much local money is being spent at a local level. In other words, if state programs have higher matching programs, it may be possible for states to bring in more federal dollars. If we can show we are doing work at a local level, it may provide leverage to receive additional funds from a federal source. How do we bring more federal dollars from the VACS program? Jim pointed out that the state has increased state funding to \$1,000,000 in the Chesapeake Bay part of the state and \$1,000,000 in the part of the state that is outside of the Chesapeake Bay drainage (OCB).

There may some strong views about who should have better rental payments.

Consistency can be a nice thing in terms of communicating options to producers. CREP has many details that may not be able to be consolidated in order to better match state buffer programs. Some changes are coming from CREP that will go into effect toward the end of August. Payment schedules will be changing, among other items related to sign-up.

Suggestion was made to table 1F until after changes for CREP are known. When the Forestry Subcommittee knows that the changes to CREP will be we will be able to better address the question of needs for increases in state incentive. Moving now to address a need to increase incentives would probably be a waste of the subcommittee's time since the federal CREP program is expected to have changes soon.

Need clarification on federal changes that are coming related to CREP.

Section 6 of manual discusses goals, program eligibility, rental payments, etc.

General sign-up for CREP started June 3rd and run through Aug. 23rd, with all renewal paperwork completed by September. Cost-share is not available for mid-contract management and is not available for any new sign-ups right now. Continuous CRP has no PiP or SiP, but CREP still does.

CREP may have more funds available to producers to help with mid-contract management. More details about program changes will be available for CREP after August meeting.

State has set aside \$1M in the Bay and outside the Bay. Matching funds helped keep CREP afloat and kept interest in the program.

Consistency in how funds are dispersed can go a long way in terms of program participation.

The Virginia Agricultural Cost Share (VACS) Manual changes need to be completed in order to get manuals printed in time to give to the Districts for the next fiscal cycle. The TAC will finish the work in December so that the VACS Manual will be ready in time.

Some concern over changes in requirements from CREP to Districts. NRCS expressed some concern over changes that were made to planting standards. It is incumbent upon VDOF staff to produce quality planting plans that will be successful in buffer plantings in state projects.

Brian stands by the changes that were made to standards for state buffer projects. He has seen successful projects that are completed according to the local forester's recommendations.

Consensus of the group is that we need to wait until outcomes from CREP are solidified in August. It would be difficult to match state rates with federal rates because the rates are calculated differently; some are matched based on local rental rates, some are based on state rates.

Right now, there are 4 different rates for the SL6W. Does it make it too complicated to try to match the funds with CREP because of these different rates? Is it possible and practical to have the various time and buffer width options available for different payments?

Many producers chose to work with the districts because of ease of sign-up and participation.

Producers knew within one month whether or not their project is approved.

Contract life has been increased to give producers an option of 15 years.

DCR has created forms to help with the transfer of BMPs. Now there are forms to use both after a practice has been completed and the ownership changes and another form to use when the project is not yet to completion and the property ownership changes.

Items Jim will take to the full TAC:

- 1) Hold off on recommendations until new CREP guidelines are released.
- 2) Committee does not object to raising the rate from 35% to 40%, but we would like to hear more details about what federal incentives will be before determining a recommendation.
For example: 40% would be consistent with the 15 year 35' buffer scenario cost share.

Next sub-committee meeting scheduled: Monday, September 16th @ 9am. Back up date of Sept. 23rd @ 1pm. Todd Groh will contact Emily Horsley to see if she can plan to attend or join in on conference call to discuss CREP updates and changes.

Brian made a motion to adjourn, Megan seconded, motion carried.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:28am