



IDAHO SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING NOTICE & AGENDA

Idaho Soil & Water Conservation Commission

April 4, 2024, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. MT

Location: Idaho Water Center, 322 E Front St, Suite 560, Conference Room, Boise

Zoom Call In # 1-253-205-0468

[ZOOM Meeting Link](#)

Zoom Meeting ID: 602 455 0781 Zoom Passcode: 5KtNGY

Members of the public may address any item on the agenda during consideration of that item. Copies of agenda items, staff reports and/or written documentation relating to items of business on the agenda are on file in the office of the Idaho Soil & Water Conservation Commission in Boise. Upon request, copies can be emailed and will also be available for review at the meeting.

The Commission will occasionally convene in Executive Session, pursuant to Idaho Code § 74-206(1). Executive Session is closed to the public.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT COMPLIANCE

The meeting will be held in facilities that meet the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you require special accommodations to attend, participate in, or understand the meeting, please contact the Idaho Soil & Water Conservation Commission at (208) 332-1790 or Info@swc.idaho.gov so advance arrangements can be made.

# 1.	WELCOME, SELF-INTRODUCTIONS, AND ROLL CALL	Chairman Olson
# 2.	AGENDA REVIEW (potential action item) The agenda may be amended by formal Board action, if necessary, at the meeting. To amend the agenda, a motion that states the reason for the amendment and the good faith reason the item was not included in the original agenda will be made and approved by the Board.	Chairman Olson
NON-ACTION ITEMS		
# 3.	PARTNER REPORTS *For information only	Chairman Olson
# 4.	REPORTS <i>Commissioners and staff only</i> *For information only	Commissioners Staff
# 5.	AQUIFER QUANTITY PROTECTION AND WATER QUALITY PRIORITIES *For information only	Trefz, Rob Witney (IDWR)
# 6.	FISCAL REPORT *For information only	Ziegler

# 7.	ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT *For information only.	Trefz
# 8.	CREP REPORT *For information only.	Sharpnack
# 9.	PAYMENT FOR CONSERVATION PRACTICES IMPLEMENTED BY CREP PARTICIPANTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of relevant history. *For information only.	Trefz, Sharpnack, Dave Perkins (DAG)
ACTION ITEMS		
# 10.	EXECUTIVE SESSION <i>Executive Session is closed to the public. Under the relevant Idaho Code Section(s) noted below, any Board action will be taken publicly in open session directly following Executive Session.</i> <u>ACTION:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move to enter Executive Session pursuant to Idaho Code § 74-206(1)(d) for the purpose of discussing with legal counsel for the public agency the legal ramifications of and legal options for pending litigation, or controversies not yet being litigated but imminently likely to be litigated. 	Chairman Olson
# 11.	RECONVENE <u>ACTION:</u> Take any action resulting from Executive Session	Chairman Olson
# 12.	MINUTES <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. January 16,2024 2. February 20, 2024 <u>ACTION:</u> Approve/disapprove meeting minutes.	Chairman Olson
# 13.	WQPA UPDATE AND RECOMMENDED POLICY REVISIONS <u>ACTION:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve/disapprove WQPA BMP project limit of \$75,000; or recommend and approve new limit. • Approve/disapprove WQPA BMP cost share rate of 65%; or recommend and approve new rate. • Approve/disapprove other revisions as presented by the board. 	Strickland
ADJOURN <i>The next Regular Commission Meeting will be 10:00 AM Thursday, May 23, 2024, in Boise, Idaho, location to be determined.</i>		



**TO: CHAIRMAN OLSON AND COMMISSIONERS CLOONAN,
HOLLINGSWORTH, PRATT, SAVAGE, SHARPNACK, and SILVERS**
FROM: DELWYNE TREFZ, ADMINISTRATOR
DATE: APRIL 4, 2024
RE: AQUIFER QUANTITY PROTECTION AND WATER QUALITY PRIORITIES

**SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION
COMMISSION**

Erik Olson
Chair

Wendy Pratt
Vice Chair

Karen Sharpnack
Secretary

Blake Hollingsworth
Treasurer

Joan Cloonan
Commissioner

Richard Savage
Commissioner

Mitch Silvers
Commissioner

Delwyne Trefz
Administrator

ISWCC Responsibilities Relative to Water Conservation

Delwyne Trefz, Administrator

The basis for our agencies emphasis on protecting water quality lies in federal and state law, including the Clean Water Act of 1972 (CWA) and Idaho's Water Quality statutes, §39-3601, et seq. Idaho Code. Over time, implementation of these laws has been informed and facilitated through several developments, including the outcome of lawsuits and the adoption of plans such as the State Water Quality Management Plan, some of which I'll review during your April board meeting.

While it is true that Idaho Code defines specific roles and responsibilities of our agency in as related to addressing water quality and declares that it is the policy of the state to provide financial and technical assistance to conservation districts in the control of water pollution, this should not be taken to mean that water quality is the only resource concern we are authorized to address. To the contrary, Idaho policy as stated in §22-2716 IC is that conservation districts and our commission are to lead nonregulatory efforts to conserve, sustain, improve, and enhance all of Idaho's soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources.

Following my review of relevant federal and state law, Rob Whitney from the Idaho Department of Water Quality will speak about his agencies water quantity-related responsibilities and authorities. My hope is that the information Rob and I share will clarify our agencies respective priorities as related to the conservation of water quality and water quantity, and at the same time perhaps lead to further discussions of how we can collaborate to maximize the effectiveness of our conservation efforts.

Idaho Dept of Water Quality (IDWR) Responsibilities Relative to Water Conservation

Rob Whitney, Water Distribution Section Manager, IDWR

RECOMMENDED ACTION: For information only



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**TO: CHAIRMAN OLSON AND COMMISSIONERS CLOONAN,
HOLLINGSWORTH, PRATT, SAVAGE, SHARPNACK, and SILVERS**
FROM: DELWYNE TREFZ, ADMINISTRATOR
DATE: APRIL 4, 2024
RE: ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

February 26, 2024

Governor Little signed Senate Bill 1270, the FY 2025 Maintenance Appropriation for all Economic Development agencies, including our Commission. This appropriation includes standard adjustments for benefit costs, inflationary adjustments, statewide cost allocation, and change in employee compensation (CEC) and is intended to enable us to maintain operations through FY 2025 at the same level as during the current year.

Thank you to Senator Grow for sponsoring our maintenance appropriation in JFAC.

March 18, 2024

Governor Little signed Senate Bill 1373, appropriating additional moneys to ISWCC for FY 2025. Included in this appropriation are \$24,300 to fully fund the 3% CEC recommended by the Legislature's CEC Committee, \$1,000,000 for the Water Quality Program for Agriculture (WQPA), and \$75,400 for distribution to Conservation Districts. In accordance with statute and rule, the additional money for Districts will be proportionately allocated as match for local funds and services received by each Conservation District. Importantly, the \$75,400 increase in money for Districts is ongoing, meaning these moneys will benefit Districts not only in FY 2025, but each year thereafter.

We have lots of folks to thank for our FY 2025 appropriation, beginning with Governor Little for his support of natural resources conservation and for including \$1M for WQPA in his executive budget.

Thanks to Representative Miller and Senator Burtenshaw for sponsoring S1373 in their respective chambers.

Thank you also to IASCD President Darren Devon, his entire Board of Directors, and their Executive Director Travis Jones for working the phones and the halls of the capitol to secure support for our budget.

Special thanks to the Conservation Districts who work to keep their local legislators aware of the value their conservation work provides Idaho and to Steve Stuebner, who does a very effective job of telling our stories through his newsletter articles and videos.

SPRING DIVISION MEETINGS

Staff have enjoyed participating in each of the Division meetings held so far this Spring and appreciate the participation of your board members. The diverse nature of the resource issues being addressed by Idaho’s Conservation Districts is always fascinating and staff count it a privilege to meet with the Districts in each IASCD Division.

The remaining meetings along with the Commissioners and staff expecting to participate are shown in the following table.

SPRING 2024 DIVISION MEETINGS -- Updated 3/26/2024							
DIV	DATE	TIME	LOCATION	COST	ISWCC ATTENDEES	RSVP DUE DATE	RSVP TO
1	18-Apr	9:00am - 3:30pm	UI Organic Ag Center, 10881 Boyer Rd, Sandpoint	\$25/person	E. Olson, J. Ditzel, B. Lillibridge, D. Trefz		Sarah 208.255.9911 Sarah.Garcia@id.nacdnet.net
2					M. Silvers, B. Lillibridge, E. Rowan, and either Loretta or Delwyne		
6	11-Apr	9:30am - 3:00pm	American Legion Hall, 211 Main St, Challis	\$15/person	R. Savage, B. Reed, J. Connelley, D. Trefz	4/5/2024	Karma Bragg 208.879.4428 cswcd@custertel.net

COMMISSION MEETING SCHEDULE

Please note that all meetings listed as Regular Meetings will be held in person and/or via video conference and teleconference. If necessary, additional Special Meetings can be added within the proper public meeting noticing requirements.

Also note that although the table shows a Board meeting scheduled for October 17th, 2024, your Board typically doesn’t meet in October as Commissioners and staff are busy participating in IASCD Fall Division meetings that month.

2024 SWCC Meeting Schedule

Date & Time	Location	Meeting Type
May 23, 2024, 10-3 MT	322 E. Front Street, Suite 560, Boise	Regular
Jun 20, 2024, 10-3 MT	322 E. Front Street, Suite 560, Boise	Regular
Jul 18, 2024, 10-3 MT	322 E. Front Street, Suite 560, Boise	Regular
Aug 22, 2024, 10-3 MT	322 E. Front Street, Suite 560, Boise	Regular
Sep 19, 2024, 10-3 MT	322 E. Front Street, Suite 560, Boise	Regular
Oct 17, 2024, 10-3 MT	322 E. Front Street, Suite 560, Boise	Regular
Nov 21, 2024, 10-3 MT	322 E. Front Street, Suite 560, Boise	Regular
Dec 19, 2024, 10-3 MT	322 E. Front Street, Suite 560, Boise	Regular

RECOMMENDED ACTION: For information only

Memorandum

Date: 4/4/2024

To: Delwyne Trefz – Administrator, Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission

From: Rob Sharpnack – CREP Program Manager, Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission

RE: Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Overview 2024

General Provisions

The general provisions of the CREP program are as follows:

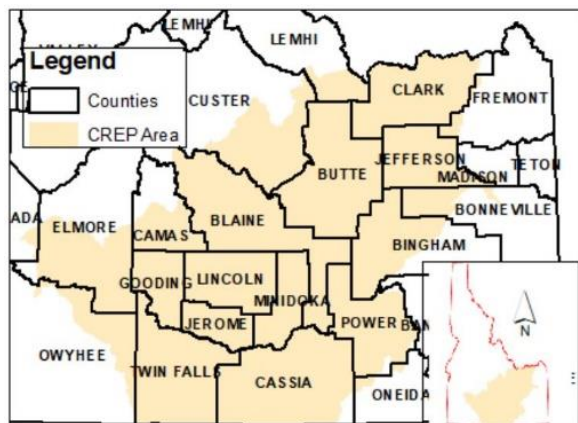
This CREP contemplates the enrollment of up to 50,000 acres of cropland and is designed to reduce the amount of irrigation water consumptive use, conserve energy, and reduce the amount of agricultural chemicals and sediment entering waters of the State from agricultural lands. In addition, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife habitat, including for upland birds, will be enhanced through establishment of permanent vegetative cover.

The primary goals of this CREP are, when full enrollment is reached:

- 1. Enroll up to 50,000 acres of eligible cropland.*
- 2. Cease the application of water on up to 50,000 acres of irrigated cropland and thereby reduce the consumptive use of water from the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer by an estimated two (2) acre-feet annually per enrolled acre up to a total of 100,000 acre-feet annually.*
- 3. Provide up to 50,000 additional acres of native grassland habitat for wildlife in the Idaho CREP project area, improving habitat for grassland-nesting birds such as sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse.*

CREP is a partnership with the state and federal government to promote ground water savings and wildlife habitat while controlling water and wind born erosion on contract fields in Idaho.

Figure 1: CREP Boundaries



Our Partners

The Program is a partnership between the Soil and Water Conservation Commission, the USDA Farm Service Agency, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Idaho Department of Water Resources, the Idaho Department of Fish & Game, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, and other entities such as the Idaho Ground Water Appropriators Inc., local irrigation districts, Conservation Districts, the Idaho Association of Conservation Districts and Pheasants Forever.

Coverage

Presently, this is the third year of the second agreement period, and the current contracts will extend for 10 years. There are 10,363 acres enrolled in CREP with a ground water savings of 20,726 acre-ft annually.

There are a total of 133 contracts presently enrolled in CREP that include 604 fields in 9 counties. The program has reduced by 1,079 acres in the last year. The reason for this large reduction in acreage was two very large contract revisions (reductions) on two of our largest existing contracts. The most common reasons for the reductions in program enrollment are: high commodity prices, agricultural land rental rates have increased, increase in demand for high value crops supporting dairies, the threat of ground water curtailments have decreased, drought conditions, obligations to enroll in a lengthy permit with no adjustments for inflation, the dislike for the costs and feasibility of having to plant native only grasses and death of the participant. Currently the extremes in contract size range from 1.6 acres to 599.8 acres. See Table 1.

Table 1: CREP Area by County

County	Contracts	Acres	Fields
Bingham	26	3,175	65
Blaine	1	85	8
Cassia	24	1,719	126
Jefferson	7	102	21
Jerome	6	337	29
Lincoln	14	1,186	56
Minidoka	46	2,412	269
Power	8	1,304	29
Twin Falls	1	43	1
	133	10,363	604

The Old Agreement Contracts vs the New Agreement Contracts

The first CREP agreement began in October 2006 with nearly continuous open enrollment until the second agreement began in October 2021. Not all the existing CREP contracts have transitioned into the new agreement yet. Since the initial program had a rolling start with open enrollments for CREP taking place right up until the new agreement was signed (15 years). It will take quite a while for all the contracts under the initial agreement to be completed and ready to re-enroll into the second agreement CREP contract. The last original agreement contract will expire on 9/30/2034. That is three years after the first of the second agreement CREP contracts will have expired on 9/30/2031. This means that some of the contracts that were late signing up for the first agreement will jump the second CREP agreement and into a potential third agreement in the future. See Tables 2 & 3.

Table 2: CREP Active Old Contracts by Year of Termination

Contract Expiration Date	Expiring Contracts	Acres	Fields
9/30/2024	3	117.7	6
9/30/2025	4	77.9	12
9/30/2031 *	12	762.4	59
9/30/2032	13	1,053.6	76
9/30/2033	5	215.5	20
9/30/2034	3	40.5	4
	40	2,267.5	177

In 2031 the first of the contracts enrolled under the second CREP will come to term. This will leave 23 first agreement contracts potentially overlapping with a possible third CREP agreement in the future.

Table 3: CREP Active Old Contracts by Location

County	Contracts	Acres	Fields
Bingham	7	213.2	13
Cassia	20	1,224.4	103
Jefferson	2	29.1	6
Jerome	1	14.8	3
Lincoln	2	118.0	10
Minidoka	5	151.4	28
Power	3	516.5	14
	40	2,267.5	177

Barring additional new contract enrollments, the cost of the program for the Idaho match will be limited and spaced out over the next 7 years for re-enrollments.

There are 3 contracts ready to expire this fall and potentially re-enroll.

The New Contracts in the New Agreement

There has been a total of 22 new contracts enrolled in the CREP program since the beginning of the second (new) agreement. A total of 1,621.5 new acres have joined the program in the last 3 years. See Tables 4 & 5.

Picture 1: A CREP Field in Twin Falls County



Table 4: New CREP Contracts Added by Year

Year Enrolled	Contracts	Acres	Fields
Enrolled in 2021	13	370.3	49
Enrolled in 2022	8	987.3	32
Enrolled in 2023	3	263.9	5
	24	1,621.5	86

There is only one new contract pending for enrollment in 2024 that I have heard of for this year.

Table 5: New CREP Contracts Added by Location

County	Contracts	Acres	Fields
Bingham	1	151.4	1
Cassia	2	149.9	2
Lincoln	4	57.1	11
Jerome	2	137.7	9
Minidoka	10	337.8	48
Power	5	787.6	15
	24	1,621.5	86

Re-enrolled Contracts in the New Agreement

Contracts that have successfully completed their contract term under the first CREP agreement have the option of re-enrolling in the CREP program again. The second CREP contract period, under the revised CREP agreement, is for a 10-year period. This was done in response to input from landowners who felt a 15-year contract term was too long.

Re-enrollment from 2021 – 2023 has included 69 contracts covering 6,474.2 acres and 345 fields. See Table 6 & 7.

Table 6: CREP Re-enrolled Contracts by Year

Year Enrolled	Contracts	Acres	Fields
2021	38	4,391.5	167
2022	29	2,033.9	153
2023	2	48.8	25
	69	6,474.2	345

Table 7: CREP Re-enrolled Contracts by Location

County	Contracts	Acres	Fields
Bingham	17	2,713.3	46
Blaine	1	84.8	8
Cassia	2	345.1	21
Jefferson	6	170.1	17
Jerome	3	184.2	17
Lincoln	8	1,011.4	35
Minidoka	31	1,922.4	200
Twin Falls	1	43.0	1
	69	6,474.2	345

There are 3 contracts consisting of 6 fields and 117.7 acres eligible for re-enrollment during the fall of 2024. These 3 contracts re-enrolled contract will increase the direct payment required in the fall of 2024 (FY 2025 budget).

Federal CRP/CREP Rental Rates for Irrigated Land

The CREP rental rate paid by the USDA-FSA to enrolled landowners has always varied a little bit from area to area. When the program began, the initial sign-ups had an average payment rate of \$130/ac/yr. As time went by this proved to be not competitive with the: rising cost of living, rising commodity prices, and rising agricultural land rental rates. The FSA responded to this by increasing the rental rates on irrigated ground. Presently only 4 counties pay a annual rental rate less than the original program average payment. See Table 8.

Federal rates for CREP can and do vary quite a bit from year to year.

The Match Requirement

In the Revised CREP agreement there are two types of match requirements defined. An in-kind match and direct payment to eligible participants.

Revised Agreement Between the United States Department of Agriculture Commodity Credit Corporation and the State of Idaho Concerning the Implementation of the Idaho Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

Section VI

1. The State, through ISWCC and IDWR, agrees to the following:

A. *Except as specified in Section VI.1.B, contribute not less than 20 percent of the overall annual program costs of this CREP through direct payments to eligible participants, and through in-kind contributions. At least 10 percent of the overall cost (one-half of the 20 percent) must be in the form of direct payments to participants. See Table 9.*

Table 8: Federal CRP/CREP Approved Irrigated County Rate

County	2021 Approved County Rate	2022 Approved County Rate	2023 Approved County Rate	2024 Approved County Rate
Ada	\$154	\$155	\$185	\$227
Bannock	\$135	\$154	\$144	\$145
Bingham	\$222	\$260	\$266	\$297
Blaine	\$120	\$106	\$125	\$128
Bonneville	\$125	\$140	\$130	\$130
Butte	\$95	\$127	\$136	\$150
Camas	\$120	\$110	\$125	\$250
Cassia	\$277	\$318	\$356	\$345
Clark	\$113	\$110	\$125	\$250
Custer	\$113	\$100	\$115	\$105
Elmore	\$277	\$307	\$335	\$364
Gooding	\$269	\$340	\$390	\$385
Jefferson	\$126	\$159	\$162	\$163
Jerome	\$264	\$300	\$311	\$398
Lemhi	\$63	\$60	\$125	\$91
Lincoln	\$198	\$243	\$229	\$229
Madison	\$134	\$166	\$157	\$169
Minidoka	\$288	\$286	\$331	\$345
Owyhee	\$197	\$180	\$235	\$279
Power	\$224	\$274	\$255	\$254
Twin Falls	\$235	\$269	\$302	\$300

Table 9: Idaho CREP Program Financial Commitment Requirement

Percent of Program Costs	Type of Match
10%	In-Kind
10%	Direct Payment
20%	Total Match

Picture 2: Idaho CREP Field Minidoka County



The inclusion of direct payments to landowners enrolled in CREP is a new element to the CREP from the Revised Agreement. The first agreement did not have any direct landowner payments from Idaho to participants in the program.

In-Kind Match

The CREP program annually makes in-kind contributions to support the CREP program and the goal of ground water savings in southern Idaho. The ISWCC is not alone in contributing to this in-kind match for CREP. Other entities that also contribute are the: Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ), the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR), Expenses for Local Water District Water Masters and the Idaho Ground Water Appropriators (IGWA).

Table 10: CREP Program Costs In-Kind by Year
Required In-Kind Program Payments by the State (10%)

2021	2022	2023
\$6,324,071	\$22,316,286	\$9,440,386

Direct Match

Landowners are compensated annually while in the program. Federal and state compensation is made to eligible landowners annually.

Revised Agreement Between the United States Department of Agriculture Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) and the State of Idaho Concerning the Implementation of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

Section VI

2. ISWCC agrees to:

- A. Make a per-acre annual payment to participants in an amount equal to the result of multiplying the USDA CCC per-acre annual rental payment, as determined in accordance with Section V.2, times 0.13 (13 percent). The annual payment will be divided among the eligible participants according to the shares on the approved CRP contract.

Landowners are compensated annually while in the program. Federal and state direct compensation is made to eligible landowners annually according to the Federal rental rate for irrigated land at the time of contract enrollment. The Federal payment is based on the CRP/CREP Approved Irrigated County Rate for that county (aka the rental rate). The State payment is 13% of the defined annual Federal payment.

Payment amounts under the Revised (second) Agreement are listed below. See Table 11.

Table 11: Required Direct Payments to Landowners (10%) by Year

	2020*	2021*	2022	2023
Federal	\$2,082,832	\$2,319,097	\$2,078,623	\$2,168,805
Idaho	\$0	\$0 **	\$190,008	\$250,795

*Pre revised agreement

** In 2022 the State paid its first Direct Payments for the 2021 contract period.

Our Direct Match Payment to landowners has increased from 2021 to 2022 of this new agreement permit by \$60,787. This is due to the addition of 37 new and re-enrolled contracts for 3,021.2 acres.

Program Management

Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission (ISWCC) staff conduct onsite CREP field reviews each year concentrating on improving stand development and verifying no unauthorized activities have occurred. For FY23, a total of 419 fields were inspected on over 102 contracts and over 102 status reviews were prepared and sent to FSA and each contract participant. Geo-Tagged information is used by staff to confirm status summaries.

Discovery and findings varied with each field visit and typically fall into 3 common areas:

ISWCC staff verify:

- That no watering, grazing or other activities have occurred.
- Vegetative stand condition, whether weed or excess pests are present.
- Ensure that non-approved items are not stored on the enrolled CREP ground.

ISWCC staff recheck fields that need additional monitoring and recommendations for:

- Weed Control.
- Inter-seeding to thicken low density areas.
- Verify extraction of equipment, haystack, manure piles or un-authorized grazing.
- Weed control is needed to reduce weed pressures.

A copy of each field review was given to both the local FSA office and the landowner/operator. Correspondence and follow-up had been carried out with participants for any actions that may be needed.

Contract revisions are an ongoing process for the CREP program. Revisions of the old agreement contracts and the new agreement contracts come up frequently. Reasons for these contracts revisions commonly include: a re-designation of the participants in the contract, a change in the participant's payment percentages, sale of some or all the land under the CREP contract, reduction in the amount of land involved in the contract, or death of the sole participant.

Program Limitations

Obstacles to the CREP program are described in detail in the annual report submitted on behalf of the CREP program in Idaho. Limitations affecting CREP enrollment and success include:

1. Initial annual rental rate payment amounts were low and were not updated until 10 years later.
2. Demand for high value crops supporting dairy and ag production has increased since the program began.
3. Agricultural commodity prices have greatly increased in the past years.
4. Threat of mandatory water curtailments have decreased.
5. Drought conditions across southern Idaho have persisted for the last several years and have reduced the ability of farmers entering the program to establish native grasses. Normal precipitation has an annual total of 9-11 inches. In Fiscal Years 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 the annual total precipitation was between 4.7 and 8.95 inches respectively for the three Agrimet reporting stations in our CREP area during those 4 years.
6. Program payment limitations for some operations have limited the number of acres that could be enrolled.
7. Some potential participants do not like obligations to a 10-year term without the ability to adjust for inflation.
8. Many participants and potential participants have expressed dislike of the extra costs and feasibility of having to plant native only grasses which have not been as effective in competing with the non-native weeds from decades of annual irrigated crop production.

Program Actions

Staff will continue to recommend field monitoring and weed control in the spring either by chemical or mechanical means to reduce weed growth, conserve moisture, and reduce weed propagation.

State partners must continue to provide ways to expedite processing required documentation and files in a timely way.

The 1619 policy of USDA restricts the ability of utilizing cloud technology for field documentation and reporting. This limitation prevents the ability to improve timely reporting of field activities to FSA, IDWR and the producer. It also prevents the ability to track status in

real time between the three agencies. The many extra precautions and steps that must be used have been a hindrance to real-time communications.

Increases in rental rates have been introduced by the FSA. The updated rates help reflect current economic conditions and trends that may make the program more feasible for potential participants.

ISWCC staff continues to use merged GIS shape file “road maps” for planning field visits efficiently and selecting areas needing follow up. Staff use Galaxy Android smart pads and phones that utilize Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to tag photos, pinpoint problem areas, and expedite compliance checks. The use of these devices and the Avenza PDF mapping program has allowed staff to do more field checks and expedite fieldwork documentation. The technology provides the ability to locate individual fields faster and provides improved field information & documentation for the producer and FSA. Staff can perform more accurate field measurements and tag areas needed for weed control and seeding and pinning problem areas for the participant. This technology saves at least ½ FTE in savings of field location and problem identification.

Additional data gathering tools exist that can create, share, and analyze data in real time which would expedite the field check process with agencies and improve communications field findings with participants. Until third party protocols can be developed with surety of privacy of data, those tools remain unattainable.

Based on experiences learned from the first 18 years of implementation, there will be more emphasis for weed control efforts on established stands in the month of April or May when the weeds are actively beginning to grow. After certification of establishment, there had been a “lapse” of preventive weed and pest maintenance because of the need to observe nesting dates from April 1 to August 1. Continued annual regeneration of weeds provided the opportunity of overtaking what once were decent stands of grasses. It has been determined that ongoing weed control is needed to minimize those losses of our desired stands. FSA rules provide the ability to spot spray or clip within nesting dates for noxious and nuisance weeds with permission first from FSA in conjunction with SWCC. By clipping off the weeds or use of chemicals, the weeds will not rob as much of the precious soil moisture and helps to eliminate overtaking of the existing grass stands. Weeds will not be able to reproduce and weed development and debris will be minimized which reduces any potential of wind transport of mustards and other weed debris created by the summer’s growth. It also reduces the duff and carcass production of weed matter which creates favorable habitat and cover for rodents, which also prey on the desired plants.

Outreach for CREP

The CREP program has reduced in its enrollment since the beginning of the revised agreement. The goal of the program is to have 50,000 acres enrolled. Advertising is needed to make people aware of CREP. With the assistance of the FSA and our other partners we will undertake the following actions to promote CREP.

Actions to improve awareness of CREP:

- CREP was featured in Conservation the Idaho Way – November 2023
- To update the CREP Handout
- To update the information on the ISWCC website for CREP
- Provide the relevant offices of the FSA, Conservation Districts, IDEQ, IDF&G, and the Idaho Ground Water Appropriators with the new handout.
- Present to the relevant Conservation Districts a report on CREP status in their area annually.
- Ask the relevant Conservation Districts that have a website to place a link to CREP on their website.

Seeding

The FSA provides enrollees in the CREP revised agreement a partial reimbursement for the initial seeding of their contract while following an approved seed plan for the designated seeding practices. The payment from the FSA covers part of the costs of seed and labor. FSA reimburses landowner for up to 50% of the cost of planting not to exceed \$100/acre (CP2) or \$150/acres (CP4D). This partial reimbursement is not part of the federal annual rental rate payment. The revised CREP agreement does not specifically specify what, if anything, should be included in the Direct Match Payments to landowners beyond the 13% match of the FSA rental payments. The ISWCC has currently reached out to the Idaho Attorney General's Office to help clarify the responsibilities of the Commission with regards to Direct Match Payments for seed.

This would potentially affect the 24 new contracts under the revised agreement.

The Governor's FY25 Budget

The FY24 budget for the SWCC did include the \$264,000 to make the required 13% match payment to enrolled landowners. Last year I reported that the proposed State budget for the SWCC CREP program for FY25 did not include monies for this state match payment. This was incorrect. Much to our surprise and that of the Governor's Office Budget Committee it was discovered that \$264,000 was part of the ISWCC base budget for CREP payments. However, due

Picture 2: Conservation the Idaho Way – November 2023



to the growth in the number of contracts enrolled in the Revised CREP Agreement (the New Agreement), \$264,000 for CREP will be inadequate for FY25 payments. See Table 12.

Table 12: Required Direct Payments to Landowners (10%) by Year with FY25 estimate*.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 *
Federal	\$2,082,832	\$2,319,097	\$2,078,623	\$2,168,805	
Idaho	\$0	\$0	\$190,008	\$250,795	\$282,509
* Estimated need for Idaho's 13% Match of the FSA Rental Payment.					

The SFY budget only has \$264,000 appropriated for direct annual match payments.

CREP will need at a minimum, if nothing else changes, and there are no early new enrollments this year an additional **\$18,509** to pay the full federal rental rate direct match of 13% of the federal rental rate payment.

During this legislative session the ISWCC reached out to work with the IGWA and the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts to request an additional \$36,000 in CREP funding for continuing these full direct match payments. We were not successful in obtaining these additional funds. The reason for this was the legislators were confused over why we would need more money for CREP when the overall amount of enrollment had dropped under the new agreement. The reason for the needed increase is the number of new enrollments into the new agreement and the number of re-enrollments from the first agreement into the new agreement (the one with the direct match requirement) each year continues to increase.

Options on How to Proceed:

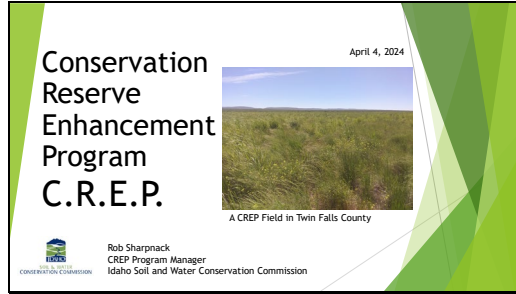
- Seek Extra Funds from Governor’s Office
- Proportion Available Funds Out to Landowner
- Modify Agreement with FSA
- ????

Consequences for failing to secure these landowner payments include: *In the event USDA CCC or the State is subject to a funding limitation, it will notify the other party, in writing, within 30 days and any necessary modifications will be made to this Agreement, including termination of this Agreement.* Section VII.1. of the Revised Agreement.

Conclusion

There are 7 years remaining for enrollment in the revised CREP agreement. Current CREP contract commitments will continue until 2034. Re-enrollment in CREP has been less than expected due to a variety of reasons that include higher than expected commodity prices and agricultural land rental rates. Not all original CREP agreement contracts will be able to enroll in the revised agreement prior to it reaching its term. This will reduce the expected Direct Match burden for the state. FSA continues to adjust federal irrigated land rental rates in counties eligible for CREP to make CREP an attractive competitive option. Outreach with partners will help promote the program.

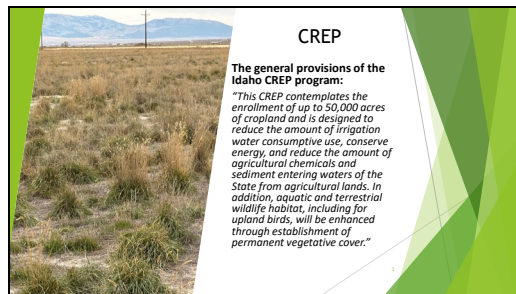
Slide 1



Slide 2



Slide 3



Slide 4

Primary Goals of the Idaho CREP Program

- "Enroll 50,000 acres of eligible cropland"
- "Cease the application of water on up to 50,000 acres of irrigated cropland"
- "Provide up to 50,000 additional acres of native grassland habitat for wildlife in the Idaho CREP project area"

CREP Boundaries

The map shows the following counties with CREP boundaries: Blaine, Cassia, Jefferson, Jerome, Lincoln, and Minidoka.

Slide 5

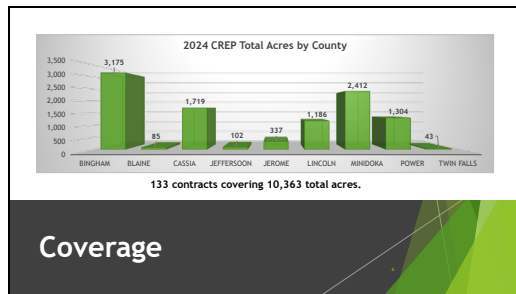
Our Partners in the Idaho CREP Program

- The USDA Farm Service Agency
- The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
- The Idaho Department of Water Resources
- The Idaho Department of Fish & Game
- The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality

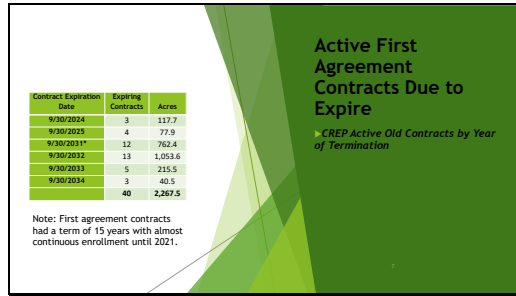
and other entities such as the:

- Idaho Ground Water Appropriators Inc
- Local Irrigation Districts
- Local Conservation Districts
- The Idaho Association of Conservation Districts
- Pheasants Forever

Slide 6



Slide 7



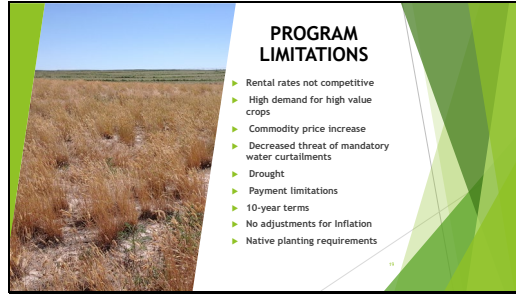
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Slide 9



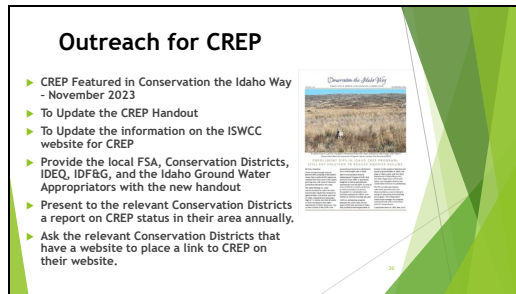
Slide 19



PROGRAM LIMITATIONS

- ▶ Rental rates not competitive
- ▶ High demand for high value crops
- ▶ Commodity price increase
- ▶ Decreased threat of mandatory water curtailments
- ▶ Drought
- ▶ Payment limitations
- ▶ 10-year terms
- ▶ No adjustments for inflation
- ▶ Native planting requirements

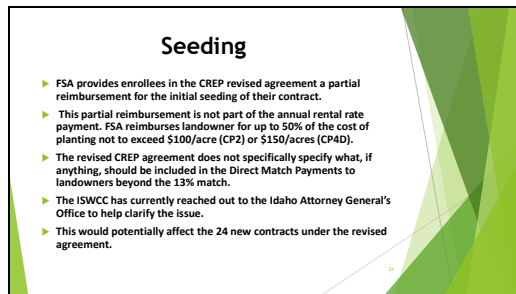
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Outreach for CREP

- ▶ CREP Featured in Conservation the Idaho Way - November 2023
- ▶ To Update the CREP Handout
- ▶ To Update the information on the ISWCC website for CREP
- ▶ Provide the local FSA, Conservation Districts, IDEQ, IDFG, and the Idaho Ground Water Appropriators with the new handout
- ▶ Present to the relevant Conservation Districts a report on CREP status in their area annually.
- ▶ Ask the relevant Conservation Districts that have a website to place a link to CREP on their website.

Slide 21



Seeding

- ▶ FSA provides enrollees in the CREP revised agreement a partial reimbursement for the initial seeding of their contract.
- ▶ This partial reimbursement is not part of the annual rental rate payment. FSA reimburses landowner for up to 50% of the cost of planting not to exceed \$100/acre (CP2) or \$150/acre (CP4D).
- ▶ The revised CREP agreement does not specifically specify what, if anything, should be included in the Direct Match Payments to landowners beyond the 13% match.
- ▶ The ISWCC has currently reached out to the Idaho Attorney General's Office to help clarify the issue.
- ▶ This would potentially affect the 24 new contracts under the revised agreement.



**SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION
COMMISSION**

Erik Olson
Chair

Wendy Pratt
Vice Chair

Karen Sharpnack
Secretary

Blake Hollingsworth
Treasurer

Joan Cloonan
Commissioner

Richard Savage
Commissioner

Mitch Silvers
Commissioner

Delwyne Trefz
Administrator

**TO: CHAIRMAN OLSON AND COMMISSIONERS CLOONAN,
HOLLINGSWORTH, PRATT, SAVAGE, SHARPNACK, and SILVERS**
FROM: DELWYNE TREFZ, ADMINISTRATOR
DATE: APRIL 4, 2024
**RE: PAYMENT FOR CONSERVATION PRACTICES IMPLEMENTED BY CREP
PARTICIPANTS**

Background Information

In May 2006 Idaho entered into an agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture Commodity Credit Corporation (USDA) concerning the implementation of the Idaho Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). This agreement was designed to reduce the amount of irrigation water consumptive use, conserve energy, and reduce the amount of agricultural chemicals and sediment entering waters of the State from agricultural lands. In addition, the program intended to enhance aquatic and terrestrial wildlife habitat through establishment of permanent vegetative cover. Participating landowners enrolled acreage for 15 years and received annual per-acre rental payments from USDA in exchange for them foregoing use of water on the enrolled land. Landowners participating in CREP were required to execute an Agreement Not to Divert (ANTD) water from the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA), and to implement one of two conservation practices, both of which involve establishing vegetative cover on land enrolled in the program.

The 2006 CREP agreement committed Idaho to contribute not less than 20 percent of the overall annual program costs through a combination of cash contributions and in-kind services. The 2006 committed the state to provide a fulltime ESPA CREP coordinator to facilitate and oversee program implementation and technical assistance. Throughout the life of the 2006 CREP the state met its obligation to provide 20% of program costs through in-kind contributions.

Revised CREP Agreement of 2021

The 2006 CREP expired in 2021. June of that year the USDA and Idaho, by and through the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission (ISWCC) and the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR), executed a revised CREP agreement. This agreement again commits the state to contribute not less than 20% of overall program costs through cash and in-kind contributions. However, an important change is that at least 10 percent of the overall costs now must be in direct payments to participants. All parties agreed, and it's stated in the agreement, that the State's direct payment commitment would be satisfied by ISWCC making a per-acre annual payment to participants in an amount equal to the result of multiplying the USDA per-acre annual rental payment time 13 percent.

Following execution of the revised CREP agreement, ISWCC staff began working with producers applying to enroll acreage in the program. Part of this process involves executing ANTDs. Our Deputy Attorney General provided a template for the ANTD's which I reviewed. At the time the ISWCC employee who had served as CREP Coordinator throughout the life of the 2006 program was still on the job and, as in years past, I delegated to him authority to sign the ANTDs. Subsequently, our CREP Coordinator retired, and the position was filled by Rob S., our current Coordinator.

Current Challenge

In early March 2024, I became aware that Rob was submitting invoices for "Seeding Costs" to be paid to CREP participants. Knowing that the Revised Agreement does not commit ISWCC to provide any cash payments other than the 13% of USDA's annual rental payment amount, I dug into it and discovered that after I had reviewed the ANTD provided by the Office of the Attorney General, someone who most certainly was not authorized to do so had added a clause which appears to obligate ISWCC to provide an "Additional One-Time Direct Payment for Seeding" of \$10.00 per acre for conservation practice 2, and \$15.00 per acre for conservation practice 4D. That is, in addition to the annual per-acre rental rate paid by USDA and the annual direct match to be paid by the State, someone had added the one-time payments for seeding.

As Rob explained in his CREP report, we have not been appropriated adequate State money to meet our obligation to make direct payments to participants equal to 13% of the rent paid by USDA, and we've been appropriated no money for paying participants to implement conservation practices. Thus, we are left in a tough position and have a tough decision to make regarding which of our limited options to pursue. I suggest your board consider going into executive session to discuss with Deputy Attorney General David Perkins the options available to you.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: For information only.



Idaho Soil & Water Conservation Commission

322 E Front St, Suite 560 • Boise Idaho 83702
Telephone: 208-332-1790 • Fax: 208-332-1799

IDAHO SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION PUBLIC MEETING & TELECONFERENCE

Date and Time:

Tuesday, January 16, 2024
9:00 am – 1:19 pm MST

Location:

322 E. Front St., Suite 560
Boise, Idaho 83702

MINUTES

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:

Erik Olson (Chair)	Joan Cloonan (Zoom)
Mitch Silvers	Richard Savage
Blake Hollingsworth (Treasurer)	Karen Sharpnack (Secretary)

COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT:

Delwyne Trefz	Brenda Charles
Melonie Ziegler	Meghan Brooksher (Zoom)
Sarah Quidgeon	Bill Lillibridge (Zoom)
Terry Hoebelheinrich	Loretta Strickland

PARTNERS AND GUESTS PRESENT:

Devin Fielding, IASCD	David Perkins, OAG
Braden Jensen, IFB	Bob Flager, Kootenai-Shoshone SWCD
Karla Freeman, Kootenai-Shoshone SWCD	

ITEM #1: WELCOME, SELF-INTRODUCTIONS AND ROLL CALL**PRESENTED BY: CHAIRMAN OLSON**

Chairman Olson called the meeting to order at 9:00 am.

Roll call: Chairman Erik Olson, Commissioners Mitch Silvers, Joan Cloonan, Richard Savage, Karen Sharpnack, and Blake Hollingsworth were present. Commissioner Wendy Pratt was absent.

ITEM #2: AGENDA REVIEW**PRESENTED BY: CHAIRMAN OLSON**

Action: None taken

ITEM #3: PARTNER REPORTS

Action: None taken

ITEM #4: REPORTS

PRESENTED BY: COMMISSIONERS & STAFF

Commissioner Hollingsworth requested to have commissioners placed on district mailing lists for future meetings and events.

ITEM #5: POTENTIAL FARMLAND PRESERVATION LEGISLATION

PRESENTED BY: BRADEN JENSEN

Braden introduced the HB377 going to Legislative session, the State authorizes the use of local governments to receive applications from landowners that are interested in establishing a land designation on their property, otherwise known as an agricultural protected area. The land designation would be in term for 20 years with an opportunity for auto renewal or absolve at term end.

ITEM #6: WATER QUALITY PROGRAM FOR AGRICULTURE UPDATE

PRESENTED BY: LORETTA STRICKLAND

WQPA has paid out 1.75 million in projects, 5 projects came under budget so we could fund two others, totaling 51 projects completed. Commissioners requested to add WQPA summaries to our ISWCC website, and to email project documents out to them directly.

ITEM #7: ENGINEERING REPORT

PRESENTED BY: BILL LILLIBRIDGE

Action: None Taken

ITEM #8: FISCAL AND BUDGET REPORT

PRESENTED BY: MELONIE ZIEGLER

Budget has been finalized and put in for approval, we are working on getting reimbursements out to all Commissioners. Due to the timeline, those reimbursements going out in 2024 for calendar year 2023 will show differently on all staff and Commissioner 1099. CREP manager, Rob Sharpnack, estimating about \$300,000 in match payments for fiscal year 2025. Our base is \$264,000 so we will have projects approved up to that amount and may need to request additional funding.

ITEM #9: ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

PRESENTED BY: DELWYNE TREFZ

Budget hearing is at 8am January 18th, JFAC is now having a representative from LSO speak instead of individuals from each agency, we are required to have a power point presentation to submit during the hearing. The Budget hearing will be available to watch via zoom live or the recording will be available on the JFAC website. Chairman Olson and Commissioner Sharpnack terms are set to expire July 1, 2024, to be considered for reappointment, each member must submit a new application before the expiration of current term. Administrator Trefz presented how the governor would like all state agencies to approach the press if they call asking questions regarding sensitive issues.

ITEM #10: ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

PRESENTED BY: DELWYNE TREFZ

Action: None taken

ITEM #11: REPORT OF MOUs, MOAs, & AGREEMENTS

PRESENTED BY: DELWYNE TREFZ

In accordance with section 67-105 code all state agencies are required to report and submit any memoranda or understanding, memoranda of agreement, and agreements to the controller's office for publishing and record keeping. The code ensures transparency for all agreements outside the normal financial business of the state. legislatures will provide clarity on additional documents needed to be submitted with agreements.

ITEM #12: POTENTIAL AMENDMENTS TO CONSERVATION DISTRICT LAW

PRESENTED BY: DELWYNE TREFZ

Action: None taken

ITEM #13: MINUTES

PRESENTED BY: CHAIRMAN OLSON

Action: Approved August 17th 1st motion approved by Commissioner Hollingsworth, second by Commissioner Silvers, all approved.

August 30th 1st motion approved by Commissioner Savage, second by Hollingsworth, all approved.

September 21st approved with minor changes motion by Commissioner Silvers, second by Commissioner Hollingsworth, all approved.

November 7th approved with minor changes motion by Commissioner Hollingsworth, Commissioner Silvers second approved, all approved.

ITEM #14: RCRDP UPDATE & CONSIDERATION OF POLICY REVISION

PRESENTED BY: TERRY HOEBELHEINRICH

Current fiscal year we have had 22 loans, 12 applications and 4 of those loans have been approved for a total of \$212,000. Currently, have 3 applications in process, two of which will be viewed at this time. As of January, there is 3.5 million dollars for a loan portfolio, currently \$58,000 is ready to be dispersed, there are no delinquent loans. The motion to increase the amount staff is authorized to approve without board action has been postponed.

ITEM #15a: EXECUTIVE SESSION

PRESENTED BY: CHAIRMAN OLSON

Action: Commissioner Silvers made motion to begin executive session pursuant to Idaho Code 74-206(1)(d) for the purpose of discussing a loan.

Motion carried unanimous roll call vote.

Executive session commenced at 12:20pm

Loan A-772: Motion to approve moved by Commissioner Savage, second by Commissioner Silvers, motion passes.

Loan A-773: Motion to approve moved by Commissioner Hollingsworth, second by Commissioner Silvers, motion passes.

**ITEM #15b: RESOURCE CONSERVATION & RANGELAND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
PRESENTED BY: TERRY HOEBELHEINRICH**

Action: None taken.

Executive session concluded at 1:19pm

ADJOURN:

The meeting was adjourned at 1:19 PM. The next Regular Commission Meeting will be on February 20, 2024, at 2:00 PM MT in Boise, Idaho.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Sharpnack, Secretary



Idaho Soil & Water Conservation Commission

322 E Front St, Suite 560 • Boise Idaho 83702
Telephone: 208-332-1790 • Fax: 208-332-1799

IDAHO SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION PUBLIC MEETING & TELECONFERENCE

Date and Time:

Tuesday, February 20, 2024
2:00pm – 3:22pm MST

Location:

322 E. Front St., Suite 560
Boise, Idaho 83702

MINUTES

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:

Erik Olson (Chair)	Joan Cloonan
Mitch Silvers	Richard Savage
Blake Hollingsworth (Treasurer)	Karen Sharpnack (Secretary) (Zoom)
Wendy Pratt	

COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT:

Delwyne Trefz	Brenda Charles
Melonie Ziegler	George Hitz (Zoom)
Sarah Quidgeon	Bill Lillibridge (Zoom)
Terry Hoebelheinrich	Loretta Strickland
Corri Parsley	Jenna Ditzel

PARTNERS AND GUESTS PRESENT:

Shana Day, NASCA (Zoom)	Stefanie Kazyaka, IDEA (Zoom)
Cassie Olson (Zoom)	David Perkins, DAG

ITEM #1: WELCOME, SELF-INTRODUCTIONS AND ROLL CALL**PRESENTED BY: CHAIRMAN OLSON**

Chairman Olson called the meeting to order at 2:00PM.

Roll call: Chairman Erik Olson, Commissioners Mitch Silvers, Wendy Pratt, Joan Cloonan, Richard Savage, Karen Sharpnack, and Blake Hollingsworth were all present.

ITEM #2: AGENDA REVIEW**PRESENTED BY: CHAIRMAN OLSON**

Action: None taken

ITEM #3: PARTNER REPORTS

Action: None taken

ITEM #4: REPORTS

Action: None taken

ITEM #5: NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE CONSERVATION AGENCIES (NASCA)

Action: None taken

Annual meeting October 6th – 9th in Duluth, Minnesota.

ITEM #6: FISCAL REPORT

Action: None taken

ITEM #7: WATER QUALITY PROGRAM FOR AGRICULTURE UPDATE (WQPA)

Action: Commissioner Silvers suggested a meeting to be held sooner than April 18th to get updates on WQPA. A new meeting will be held April 4th, Commissioner silvers is 1st motion, Commissioner Cloonan 2nd motion, all approve for new meeting time.

ITEM #8: ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Action: None taken

ITEM #9: MINUTES

Action: January meeting minutes all Commissioners disapproved; minor changes need to be made via motions of previous minutes. Will reassess at the April 4th meeting.

ITEM #10: CONSIDERATION OF RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND RANGELAND DEVELOPMENT (RCRDP) POLICY REVISION

Action: Motion to increase the loan amount staff are authorized to approve without board action to \$125,000. Commissioner Pratt 1st motion, Commissioner Cloonan 2nd motion, all in favor – motion passes.

ADJOURN:

The meeting was adjourned at 3:22 PM. The next Regular Commission Meeting will be on April 4, 2024, at 10:00 AM MT in Boise, Idaho.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Sharpnack, Secretary



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Joan Cloonan
Commissioner

Richard Savage
Commissioner

Mitch Silvers
Commissioner

Delwyne Trefz
Administrator

**TO: CHAIRMAN OLSON AND COMMISSIONERS CLOONAN,
HOLLINGSWORTH, PRATT, SAVAGE, SHARPNACK, and SILVERS**
FROM: LORETTA STRICKLAND, DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR
DATE: March 28,2024
RE: 2023 and 2024 WQPA Update
2025 WQPA Potential Policy Revisions and Timeline

FY 2023 UPDATE

Complete.

FY 2024 UPDATE

21 of 51 projects are complete and paid for a total of \$2.27 million. The remaining irrigation projects are in full swing to meet their irrigation season deadlines and recent weather seems to be cooperating in all regions. Our FY 2025 appropriations bill includes authority to reappropriate unexpended FY24 WQPA money through the end of FY25, so current projects that are unable to be completed before the end of this year will roll over into FY25.

FY 2025 WQPA POTENTIAL POLICY REVISIONS

As mentioned in the February meeting, the reduced WQPA funding will pose new challenges in finding the most effective and efficient process to implement WQPA throughout the state on a variety of projects reaching the most Districts. I have reached out to all field staff for feedback on two policy areas that impact how many projects we are able to fund, the project limit and cost-share rate.

BMP Project Limit

As you recall, the current project limit was raised from \$50,000 to \$150,000 last year. In analyzing projects funded last year, a majority of the projects requesting up to the \$150,000 WQPA limit were (1) combining funding for larger projects (\$800k-\$4 million total project amount), (2) funding multiple sub-projects, or (3) sprinkler conversions. After looking at last year's projects and reaching out to staff, the recommended new project limit is \$75,000. Staff feel this amount is reasonable to accomplish conservation efforts throughout all areas of the state. Based on the assumption that the projects funding multiple sub-projects last year could have been scaled down and the fact that most sprinkler conversions are eligible for other funding sources, I believe the proposed reduced funding limit would have only impacted 5-6 of the 51 funded projects last year.

Cost-share Rate

The current cost-share rate limit is 75%. I have received feedback from some staff

and Districts, that a lesser cost-share rate is preferable. One reason is to make the program more in line with other funding sources available which range from 50-60%. In essence of the reduced funding, this may be the time to consider reducing the cost-share rate. When I implemented grants for a District early in my career, the supervisors I worked for always wanted to see the landowner have an adequate share of the project costs. The rate that I land on for that share, and staff concur, is for the participant to have at least 1/3 share in the total project costs. Since 66% is an oddball number, I would recommend 65% as the cost-share rate limit for WQPA. This represents only a 10% increase in the costs of the project for the project participant and would allow us to fund at least 3 additional projects, making a broader impact with the \$1,000,000 we have been given this year.

Other Revisions

We will not be asking Districts to rank their submitted projects this year. Therefore, on page 7 of the WQPA Policy, I have amended the policy from “are” to “may” be required to prioritize projects. In light of this change, staff are working to streamline the ranking tool and will include the ranking criteria in the proposal guidelines. The proposal evaluation criteria will include project effectiveness, public benefit, sponsor capacity, technical and engineering needs, and budget feasibility.

In place of the District prioritization this year, I have included a “Conservation District Priority Rating” check box on the proposal form for high, medium, or low priority project designations. As you may recall, requiring Districts to rate how well a proposed project aligns with the priorities in their 5-year and annual plan is also required as part of our RCRDP loan application process. It is my thought that by eliminating the ranking process at the District level and including a priority rating instead, all project participants will be inclined to seek sponsorship through their District or at the very least be reviewed by a District to keep Districts apprised of all soil and water conservation efforts being done in their area.

FY 2025 WQPA Timeline

Due to the timing of wrapping up the prior fiscal year projects and the fact that staff will be rating project proposals this year, I felt it necessary to move the proposal period up to April 15-May 15. An announcement regarding the availability of WQPA funds for FY25 and the dates when proposals will be accepted was sent out via constant contact on March 20th, the day legislation regarding WQPA was signed by the Governor.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

- (1) Approve or disapprove WQPA BMP project limit of \$75,000; or recommend and approve new limit.

- (2) Approve or disapprove WQPA BMP cost-share rate of 65%; or recommend and approve new rate.
- (3) Approve or disapprove of other revisions as presented.