

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
REPORT TO THE  
LOWER PLATTE SOUTH NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT  
November 20, 2019**

**PERSONNEL:**

- Fred Stevens, Resource Conservationist in Weeping Water, has left the staff for another opportunity within NRCS. Fred began his new duties as the Resource Conservationist in Hebron on October 28<sup>th</sup>. We wish Fred the best of luck.
- Tom Cowan, Soil Conservationist in Lincoln, will be leaving staff for a promotion. Tom began his duties as the Resource Conservationist in David City on November 12<sup>th</sup>. Tom will continue to assist the Lincoln Field Office for a couple days a week through mid-December.

**LAND TREATMENT:**

- The Conservation Technicians are busy with fall layout and construction. A stretch of good weather has allowed them to stay in front of most contractors with layout. We hope the good weather continues!

**PROGRAMS:**

- EQIP – All contracting for FY19 has been completed. The original EQIP obligation for the LPSNRD was approximately \$219,000. An additional \$269,339 was secured through state initiatives and “slippage” from other districts.
  - Lancaster – 10 contracts – 1,845.3 acres - \$281,029 obligated
  - Cass – 8 contracts – 1,114.1 acres - \$207,310 obligated
- CRP – A General CRP Sign-up is tentatively planned to begin in December. There have been several changes to the program in the 2018 Farm Bill. There is a state-level training for staff being held in Kearney the week of November 18<sup>th</sup>.
- CStP – Staff is starting to meet with producers to make annual Conservation Stewardship Payment (CStP) payments.
  - Cass – 19 contracts – 11,469 acres
  - Lancaster – 63 contracts – 56,884 acres

**CONSERVATION UPDATE:**

- Craig Derickson, State Conservationist, presented a Conservation Update Report to the NRD Managers in Ord on October 29<sup>th</sup>. Please see the attached report for a summary of NRCS statewide activities.

**UPCOMING EVENTS:**

- November 28<sup>th</sup> – Thanksgiving Day Holiday

***Cory Schmidt - District Conservationist***

# Conservation Update

Report to NRD Managers



## Disaster Recovery Progress

Nebraska NRCS continues to work with landowners recovering from this spring's severe weather. Nebraska NRCS' response has consisted of three main programs: the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP), and the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP).

### Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)

While ECP is a Farm Service Agency program, NRCS is providing technical assistance on three of the five emergency practices available under the ECP program:

- grading and shaping of land damaged by the flood,
- repair to structural practices, and
- repairs to field windbreaks.

NRCS is also reviewing applications on culturally vulnerable sites to determine the presence of cultural resources. A total of 590 applications have been reviewed by NRCS since March 2019. The total number of ECP applications is 912, with 75 sites still inaccessible.

### EQIP Cover Crops for Disaster Assistance Initiative

Nebraska NRCS received over 600 EQIP applications for the Cover Crops for Disaster Assistance Initiative; the estimated total requests for funds is over \$2.5 million to plant cover crops on flood damaged cropland. All eligible, high and medium priority applications have been preapproved on over 120,000 acres.

### EQIP Livestock Mortality Initiative

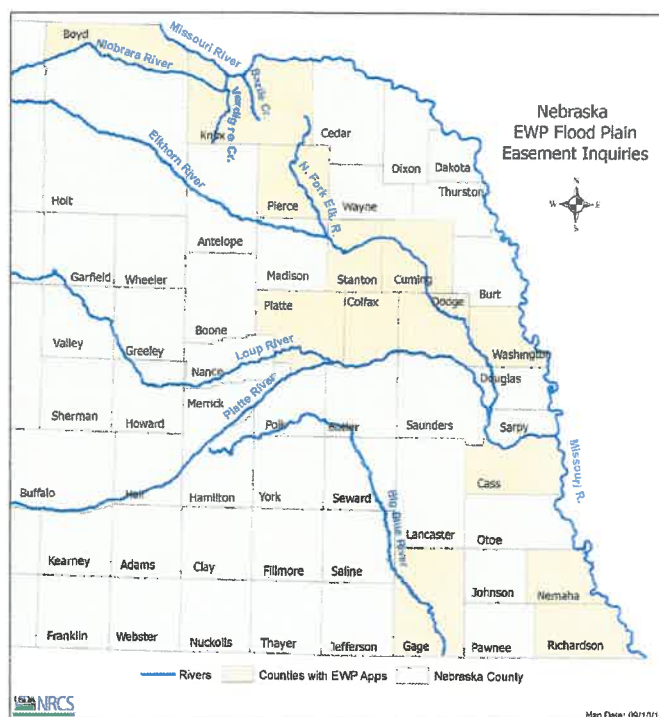
Through EQIP, funding was made available to help producers properly dispose of dead livestock. This effort resulted in 28 EQIP applications for animal carcass handling involving nearly 1,400 head. All applications received have been obligated into contracts totaling over \$85,000.

## Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP)

Nebraska has received letters of request for EWP assistance from over 60 eligible sponsors. The total numbers of sites associated with letters of request is over 360. The current projected need of EWP funding remains at about \$20 million.

### EWP Flood Plain Easement

Nebraska NRCS has received nearly 50 inquiries about the EWP-FPE Program. Out of these inquiries, 23 landowners have signed applications. The cost for land purchases, restorations and administrative costs associated with these easements is estimated to be over \$20 million. Nebraska NRCS has had inquiries for land on the Missouri River, Bazile Creek, Verdigre Creek, Niobrara River, Loup River, Elkhorn River, Big Blue River and Platte River. Nebraska is currently having an EWP-FPE sign-up with an application deadline of October 31, 2019.



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## Accomplishing More Together

Nebraska NRCS has had another successful year "Helping People Help the Land." Through our two flagship programs, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) - NRCS has made a big impact in Nebraska:

- Through EQIP in fiscal year 2019, Nebraska NRCS has approved over 1,550 contracts on over 475,000 acres.
- Through CSP in fiscal year 2019, Nebraska NRCS has approved over 470 contracts on over 500,000 acres.

The NRDs and NRCS have been very active in working together through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and the National Water Quality Initiative. There are 13 NRDs that are lead and/or participating partners in 8 RCPP projects in Nebraska. Nearly \$12 million in Federal funds were committed to these projects with matching contributions from the partners. As a result, over \$24 million was committed to help Nebraska agriculture producers apply priority conservation practices in these 13 NRDs.

## National Recognition of the Power of Partnership

During the recent National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) annual meeting held September 30 - October 2, in Lexington, KY, Nebraska was recognized as a leader in the nation for signing the first Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between NRCS and a conservation district.

Kent Zimmerman with the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources serves at the Vice President of NASCA. Kent reported that during the meeting Astor Boozer from NRCS national leadership congratulated Nebraska for being the first state to sign a new MOA.

On September 12, 2019 the Twin Platte NRD signed a Memorandum of Agreement with NRCS. This agreement renews a long-standing commitment between the NRD and NRCS that reaches back to the Dust Bowl days, and ensures this conservation partnership will continue well into the future.



## NRCS Staffing Update

NRCS has been successful in getting our current national staffing ceiling increased. NRCS submitted data and progress reports with our request to increase our cap by 1,100 employees.

At this time, we have been approved for half of that requested increase or about 566 employees nationwide. This national increase should result in Nebraska NRCS seeing some increase in our current state staffing cap of 326 employees.

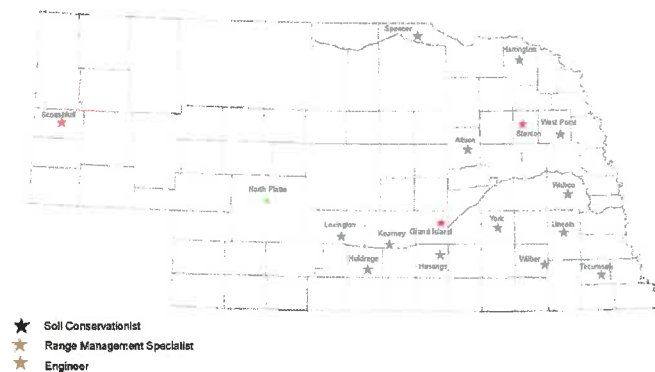
There are few really important points about the good news of this staffing ceiling increase:

- Focus on the field and direct contact with farmers and ranchers – NRCS will ensure that 94% of all the staff are employed at a customer-facing position and positions that directly support field office activities.
- The new Farm Bill with expanded program provisions presents a great opportunity to continue and even increase the volume of conservation planning with producers and the number of requests to participate in Farm Bill and state-level conservation programs.

## Pathways Internship Positions

Nebraska recently advertised the fiscal year 2020 Pathways Internship positions across the state. These positions provide an excellent opportunity to recruit and train potential new, full-time employees. Position were offered in the locations shown in the map below:

## Nebraska 2020 Pathway Locations



The Pathways Internship vacancy announcement closed on October 21, 2019. Nebraska NRCS hopes to hear soon how many successful applicants were received.



Helping People Help the Land.