Northern Plains Region Board Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday June 12 - Friday June 14, 2019: Gothenburg, Nebraska

The Northern Plains listening session was held prior to the region leaders meeting. Separate notes were recorded.

WEDNESDAY, June 12 Monsanto Learning Center  
Missouri River Team Meeting: Separate notes were recorded.  
Welcome: Senator Matt Williams  
Presentation: Soil Health - Dean Krull

THURSDAY, June 13, 2019

Northern Plains Board Meeting  
The meeting was called to order at 8:05 AM by Chair Gigstad. Welcome to the attendees and thanks for coming.  
Roll call was taken. In attendance: Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Montana.

NACD Updates  
Ian Cunningham, NACD Secretary/Treasurer: Presented on several activities of NACD including partnership projects, ecosystem services, farm bill testimony, pollinator curriculum, conservation consortium, and the summer forum.

Bevin Law, Northern Plains Region Representative on Executive Board: Updates on activities of NACD and S and E committee. Additional partnerships are being developed and the relationships are very worthwhile. A reminder to engage your legislators. Updates were provided on FEED updates, with South Dakota providing additional senate updates.

Sunni Heikes-Knapton, NACD Northern Plains Region Rep: Update on request for Urban Ag webinar topics, marketplace promotion and brochure, awards seeking nominations, NACD Curriculum Hub, Grassroots August, Conservation Careers Workshop, and summer meeting 2020.

State Updates  

Kansas: They have been busy with envirothon, legislative meetings, and conservation day at the capitol. They have purchased virtual sandboxes, and have a RCPP grant for butterfly boxes and playa lakes. They are encouraging conservation districts to be involved more in water
discussions. They have a 2 page document that showcases activity. They will be holding a Bottomline conference August 14 and 15 focusing on soil health.

**Nebraska:** Impacts from natural disasters have been significant this spring, they worked with several partnering entities helped with the recovery. They worked on LB 243 Healthy Soils Task Force, creating an action plan for the state to coordinate efforts to promote healthy soils. Papio Missouri River NRD passed legislation to increase their bonding authority to rebuild and build levees following the flooding. Community planners are being encouraged to work with NRD to have greenspaces along waterways, and landowner buy outs are part of the discussion. There was an attempt at a 3 cent levee authority which was intended to do projects to improve irrigation efficiency, but it did not pass. An update was provided on NCORPE.

**South Dakota:** Fran Fritz serves on the legislative committee and by laws committee and is always available to discuss topics. Angela Ehlers: SD is doing area meetings, non-operating landowner outreach, women specific workshops, mini-grants to districts, education to bankers on the value of conservation practices. They are also focusing on sustainability and economics. A new ag land trust is being done in SD with many partners, for the purpose of handling ACEP easements. Beetle kill project is being completed in the Black Hills with 3 districts. Jeff Zimprich: There has been work on collaborative conservation grant agreements (CCGA). They had 4.8 mil available, with more requests than asks. NRCS SD is going through restructuring, with SDACD and individual CDs helping vet that process. Soil health continues to be a priority. There has been discussion about proper land use (row crop, salinity). Every acre counts campaign: Trying to guide landowners through better understanding of what are appropriate. Bill Smith: CCGA got funds from USFS to assess windbreaks across south Dakota. Staff positions in the state are making realignments. Tami Moore: Employee association is working on long range plan and helping with district funding. Many districts are struggling because enterprise work has been affected by weather. Working on defining the roles of committee members and job descriptions. Working also on health insurance for employees. NCDEA is very energized and has great ideas and is ready to do things. Developing a new concept of how employees are looked at as professionals. Discussion: NACD is looking into offering health insurance for board members and possibly for employees. If states are interested, contact NACD.

**Partner Reports**

**Sal Salinas, Acting NRCS Central Region Conservationist:** Chief Lohr conveys thank you to conservation partnership; success is a result of the work of the many people involved. Kevin Wickey retired May 31st. Sal met with him for updates on central region updates. Sal is in acting capacity for a 120 day detail until the position is filled. Sal is available to help- contact state cons to discuss.
NRCS is working on Farm Bill rules with a target date of October (unconfirmed). $47 million has been allocated to address natural resource disasters with programs like EWP. EWP funding does not exist in reserve account- it needs to be allocated. There were 68k applications for EQIP nationally, CSP: 15k applications, closed on May 10. Under new CSP, dollars will be allocated up front and they are working through renewals. The CIG priorities include: Increasing the pace and scale of conservation adoption, pollinators, water quality, urban agriculture. Some states can use EQIP funds for innovation work. $6.5 mil are available to 27 states. On farm trials have $25 mil available: irrigation, precision ag, soil health (mid July deadline). RCPP has also changed: it’s a stand alone program. $300 mil that can be used to address broad scale efforts (multi county or state). ACEP is underway. National RCPP for Pollinator habitat is still in place and headway is being made.

A work cycle time study is underway. This will ID where work load is, and where priority workload should be at the field, area, and state office level. There are a lot of vacancies with some challenges with hiring. State cons will be working to update MOUs and cooperative working agreements. There is some language in the templates that may not fit every state but they remain important.

Stakeholder meeting with the chief recently included a discussion on the ROI for tax payer dollars being used to support conservation. There is a need to communicate this better. There are many organizations that want to have access to farm bill funding. CDs need to champion to keep the farm bill funding dedicated to district work.

Craig Derickson, Nebraska State Conservationist NRCS: Nebraska partnership accomplishments: 600,000 acres of soil health, 500,000 acres of irrigation efficiencies, 700,000 acres of grazing land benefitted. FSA ECP program has 4k applications for post disaster work. 800 will come to NRCS. The field level demand will be extreme. The NRCS will have 350 sites under their EWP work, which will include multiple partners. Kent Zimmerman is second VP for NASCA.

**Sarah Tunge, NCDEA Northern Plains Region Representative:** Presentation on the mission, focus, and work of the EA. South Dakota, North Dakota, and Kansas recently did focused trainings on professional development. North central and northern plains regional leadership conference to be held August 13-14 in Sioux Falls, SD focused on Leadership. Registration is now open. NCDEA website has been improved.

**Bill Smith: NASCA Northern Plains Region Representative:** There are quite a few discussions taking place about succession planning. Keeping tabs on farm bill. There is a NASCA & NWC Conservation Conference Sept 30, Oct 1 and 2 in Lexington, KY.

**Presentation:** Platte River Recovery program, Lyndon Vogt

**Tour:** Several stops in Gothenburg region
June 14, 2019

**Presentation:** Nebraska Flooding: Steve Wellman and John Winkler

*State updates were continued on the morning of June 14th*

**North Dakota:** They continue to focus on tree planting. Some districts are focused on single practice programs that can’t be done with EQIP. Some are working on no-till potatoes, biochar, and worm juice. The 2020 summer meeting planning is underway. Ramkota is the hotel for the event- there are also several other hotels if the Ramkota fills. There was a reference to an article in Dakota country magazine that illustrates that CDs need to be more visible and vocal.

**Montana:** The Executive Director for Montana will be moving on. The Soil health seminars continue to be very popular. Range schools are also bringing in very reputable experts. Tom Watson as the new state conservationist and he is getting settled. Wildlife continues to be a priority for the state, and associated conflict. American Prairie Foundation has been active in accumulating private lands in north central Montana, bordering BLM and Missouri River Breaks National Park. There are impacts to the community economy and tax base.

**Round Table Topics:** Northern Plains dues summaries were included in the meeting packet. States are encouraged to voice their support for payment of dues and to encourage district participation at the national level. The group discussed the meeting approach for the Northern Plains in Bismarck in 2020. It was proposed that the Missouri river team meeting take place on Friday afternoon and the region meeting be held on Sunday.

**Larry Reynolds- President of Nebraska NRDs:** The work of the Papio Missouri River NRD had significant delays due to some federal requirements and regulations. Attendees were encouraged to talk to their senators and representatives to address this at the federal level. Use specific examples- Nebraska has several.

Attendees were asked to provide feedback on things that would improve the value of their participation at Northern Plains Region meetings.

**Adjournment:** Montana motion, Kansas seconded. Adjourned at 10:03. Tour of Bayer Learning Center commenced following adjournment.