

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE NEBRASKA CREP STEERING COMMITTEE

OCTOBER 5, 2007

A meeting of the CREP Steering Committee was held on October 5, 2007, in the Board Room of NETV in Lincoln. A list of attendees is attached to this document.

Bob Bettger presided at the meeting.

The first item on the agenda was brought forward by Mike Clements, manager of the Lower Republican Natural Resources District. Mike stated that although he did not believe his board was currently interested in putting up additional monies to enhance the program, would there be any impediments if an NRD wanted to do so. Greg Reisdorff, FSA, stated that usually FSA has no problem with "piggy back" funds. An addendum might be required, but requesting an addendum should not be a painful process. Greg said FSA needed to be kept in the loop, and any changes cannot change the program. Jasper Fanning, Upper Republican Natural Resources District, discussed possibility of including a permanent conservation easement if NRDs put in additional incentives. Greg responded that the FSA handbook now allows for permanent reductions in water rights where they didn't before, but again, would probably need an addendum. Tim McCoy, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, discussed possibility of getting an easement at end of CREP contract.

Tim also brought up a letter that the group had worked on previously to be sent to the congressional delegation. It was said that the letter made several suggestions that should be incorporated in the upcoming farm bill. Bobbie Kriz-Wickham, Department of Agriculture, also discussed letter. Dayle Williamson, Senator Nelson's office, said that if a letter were to be sent, it should get there by Friday, the 12th to be read prior to actions being taken. Bob Bettger will find the letter and forward for review to the proper individuals.

Discussion was had that the current farm bill may allow CREP to apply to acres planted to alfalfa. Everyone agreed this would be a big help.

Glen Bowers, Twin Platte Natural Resources District, brought up possibility of expanding area to include lands in South Platte area. He felt they could get a lot of sign up. Greg said that they might want to consider a discussion in the letter that conservation priority areas do not apply to CREP acres. He said currently if you expand areas you have to take it away from other areas. Other attendees thought this subject was already in the letter.

Ann Bleed, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), asked if rental rates were still an issue. Everyone agreed they were. Greg said that they are hard coded in the agreement and it would take an addendum to change them. It would also take a study. He said now the state pays approximately three percent of the costs of the program. Currently the going rate is ten percent of the costs. Ann replied that we may just want to add incentives. Bob

Bettger said they would look at letter and may want to say something regarding rental rates.

John Thorburn asked whether the NRDs are to put in the acres that are certified for irrigation or whether they are only to put in the acres that are requested as part of the contract. Jasper stated it should be the contract acres. John asked that DNR provide the NRDs of a listing at least once a year of the contracts for lands located within the NRD. Susan France, DNR, stated they would do so.

Susan asked whether the NRDs would be willing to provide information on the reason for water use for any wells that they reported had used water when doing the yearly report. The NRDs agreed they were willing to do that.

Bobbie asked what should be done with the \$7,000 that remains from the CREP forum that the State put on. She said that it was in an account and they were willing to maintain the money. A discussion was had on whether it should be used for advertising. People believed that right now advertising would probably not bring in new contracts, but if the alfalfa provision is in the new farm bill, or if new incentives are brought forward, at that time advertising might be helpful. The money will remain in the account at this time.

Jasper brought up a question about the requirement for 115 percent of the allocation being in effect and said that he felt that this requirement kept out the large water users and let in the small users and that is exactly the opposite of what is wanted. DNR and the NRDs will discuss this requirement and see if modifications are needed.