

NACD Report – Greg Baneck

The NACD National Convention was held in Nashville, TN this year January 30th- February 2nd. Unfortunately, due to the storm that gripped the Midwest that week, I was stuck there until Friday the 4th! Below is a summary of the meetings that I was able to attend followed with a general wrap-up report.

North Central Region Board Meeting 12/30 – Jerry Snodgrass of IL was re-elected to the Executive Board to represent the region (a good choice and he represents us well). He reported - The summer Legislative Conference is scheduled for July 16-19 at the Plaza Hotel in Washington DC. Jeff Eisenberg's contract was not renewed in 2011 and the search for a new CEO is underway for NACD. Rather than going through the normal broad search process as they done with the previous two individuals hired to the position, the association will be looking within for leads on a person who already has a good understanding of Conservation Districts. The goal is to have someone selected by June 1st.

A resolution was proposed to take forward to the National board to tie conservation to direct USDA title 1 and 2 payments which would require basic conservation practices to be followed in order to receive benefits. (unfortunately this didn't move forward due more to the way it was promulgated and dropped on the group w/out the chance for the reps to convene with their constituents. While I believe it's a no-brainer approach for NACD to be pushing, there is reluctance to butt heads with the large commodity lobby who will certainly oppose this during the drafting of the next farm bill. It is an issue we should still urge NACD to push for however).

2011 Appropriations through USDA Programs (which trickle down to us). – the current proposal is to cut back to 2008 levels (which would also whack defense spending). The president currently proposes level funding for the next 5 years.

2012 Farm Bill – There are 20 new members on the Ag Board which will be ultimately responsible for drafting the next Farm Bill. 2011-2012 will likely be an orientation year just to get new members up to speed on Farm Bill Programs before they start analyzing the previous farm bill in early 2012. Long story short – don't expect a new Farm Bill before the end of 2012.

A proposal was suggested and approved of providing a \$400 scholarship to states in the region to send a new face to a major NACD Event (Washington Legislative Conference or NACD National Convention). This will likely be available through WLWCA (I'm guessing a board member will go if they can swing the balance).

The president elect of the National Board is Gene Schmidt of Indiana (and also our North Central Region). Gene is a strong leader and I've known him since I started serving as the NACD Rep for WALCE. Hopefully we can use this relationship to help keep our North Central Issues at the forefront for NACD.

Breakout Sessions –

TSP & TA Program - The New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts serves as a TSP sponsor through an agreement between NRCS and the NM DATCP. Through the program, staff were hired to

work at the District level as technicians and also money went towards their intern program (similar to our now defunct COLIP grant). For FY2011 there was a Federal match of \$2.50 for every \$1 of state match.

Influencing Lawmakers –

- Utilize network of other LCD's and other constituents to contact legislators with a consistent message on given issues. The more voices heard on a topic the better.
- Push message on how we can cost-effectively administer state programs (County based delivery efficiency versus state)
- Push a consistent message
- Utilize partner events with legislators to be able to keep issues in front of them.
- Identify key committee members and staffers who can have the greatest impact on your issues.
- Map out \$\$\$ and other benefits to each of your County Board members on how your programs are being utilized within their districts to help generate local support.
- Check out website www.grassroots-advocacy.com for other lobbying assistance and ideas.

National Conservation District Employees Association (NCDEA) Board Meeting – 1/31/11 I was able to sit in on the board of directors meeting for an hour or so to get an update on their activities.

- NCDEA Website Committee – they have been working on updating the site. Currently the person who was contracted to perform updates has left their employ with the District they worked for, but have agreed to continue to do updates.
- Strategic Plan – the current strategic plan covered 2009-2012. Work continues on the 2012-2015 plan. Any issues from the Regions or states should be brought forward in the coming months to be included in the plan. (any ideas for WI can be sent to Greg Baneck and he will move them forward to the National Board)
- New Mexico and Massachusetts both have TA's w/NRCS for staffing grants with NRCS at a 75%/25% match.
- The Don Aaron Scholarship is still alive and well. Don Aaron was one of the founders of the NCDEA organization. For those who don't know, Don was a County Conservationist from WI. The scholarship in his name is there for any District (or LCD in our case) employees children to apply for in pursuing a conservation related education. For more info, check out the NCDEA website.

General Session – 1/31/11

Representative Frank Lucas reported to the group by phone. Rep. Lucas serves as the House Ag Committee Chair. Below are the main points of his discussion –

- There will likely be some effort to rein in the EPA as there is a general opinion that they have overstepped their bounds in states such as FL.

- Farm Bill 2012 – likely not to begin work until 2012 – many new legislators that need to be brought up to speed on Farm Bill issues.
- Best case scenario is that what is in the current Farm Bill would be kept in the next, but this probably isn't likely with a \$8-9 Billion dollar shortfall in funding. (39 programs don't have baseline funding which means that new money will need to be infused into the Farm Bill in order for them to continue. This includes the WRP)
- In the words of the Chair of the House Ag Committee... "NACD's role in this next Farm Bill cannot be understated... it is critical."
- Districts can help by contacting their legislators and help to educate them (particularly the new members) on the importance of some of the Farm Bill Programs.
- Oversight hearings will start this summer and fall on the 2008-2011 Farm Bill. Likely won't get an overall budget until next Spring after which the process of laying out the 2012-2015 Farm Bill will begin.

What can Districts do? – Reach out to new members to educate. Get a good relationship established and be ready to act.

NRCS Chief Dave White addressed the convention –

- NRI 1982-2007 revealed that 1/3rd of all land developed nationwide in the history of the US occurred during this time frame. The threats to productive ag land are more real than ever.
- Carbon Market – NRCS is currently establishing base resident carbon levels in primary soil types nationwide and comparing it to capacity for the same soils in an effort to establish a potential market for sequestration.
- Hypoxia Zone - \$43 Million has been put towards nutrient management in the Mississippi Basin in select watersheds including several in SW WI.

NACD Board of Director Meeting –

Chief White reporting during NACD BOD Meeting

- The Budget outlook for NRCS is rugged. If they are directed to fall back to 2008 discretionary funding levels, things should be fine. If they are directed to meet 2008 mandatory funding levels, money may need to be pulled back from programs.
- Fate of RC&D's – not known at this time.
- Great Lakes Funding - \$30 Million has been funneled through NRCS to the Districts (and LCD's) through the 2010 GLRI.
- RC&D Report – RC&D's brought in \$351 million in external grant funds. Created over 5,000 jobs and maintained an additional 6,000. Generated \$6.93 for every \$1 appropriated.

Farm Bill Task Force Report –

Principles guiding NACD's 2012 Farm Bill Work - See the attached task force principles handout that I've scanned in below for a complete description of the principles.

1. Resource driven and locally led.
2. Fully fund technical assistance needs.
3. Continue 2008 Farm Bill Conservation Program Funding at a minimum
4. Easily accessed by cooperators.
5. Education and outreach.
6. Commitment to working lands.
7. Support sustainable and renewable energy from agriculture and forestry.
8. Support forestry title.
9. Develop new approaches to deliver conservation.
10. Support new conservation technologies.

Oh yeah... resolutions, I almost forgot!

The resolution on stopping the spread of Asian Carp from getting into the Great Lakes passed after some watering down by the committee that handled that group of resolutions. The chair of the committee was from IL and fought any language that in effect promoted the closing of the shipping canal. The resolution was modified to basically support any method but closing the shipping canal. I as well as several others testified and stressed the importance of separating the continuity of the canal to the Great Lakes, but unfortunately it was watered down before it passed. I've included a .pdf of all of the resolutions that came before the various committees that were considered.

General NACD Report Comments and Wrap-up –

Now more than ever, it's important to support NACD and their efforts in promoting the programs we all utilize here in WI to do our jobs and get conservation on the ground. NACD is our voice on the Hill in Washington as the next Farm Bill is being put together, which will ultimately reflect some of the programs and funding we will have available to us from the Federal level moving forward into the future. It's important that we stay involved with NACD to let them know what is important to us in Wisconsin. If we don't, nobody will for us, and in the end we will all lose. It's easy to sit back and snipe and ask "what have they done for us?" which I can answer, if they don't know what we want, it's awfully hard to satisfy our needs!

Attachments –

2012 Farm Bill Task Force Principles
February 1, 2011

NACD's mission is to serve conservation districts by providing national leadership and a unified voice for natural resource conservation. To that end, the NACD 2012 Farm Bill Task Force has developed the following principles to guide our 2012 Farm Bill work.

Principle 1 – Resource - driven and locally-led

NACD believes agriculture operations must be economically viable. The installation of conservation practices depend on that viability. We support a strong agriculture base across the country, U.S. territories, and insular areas. All landowners and operators should apply conservation practices appropriate for their operations and resource needs.

Farm Bill conservation programs should be resource-driven and locally-led with sufficient flexibility to direct funding to local priorities and concerns. Program delivery must be tailored to the natural resource needs in the states and local areas. State Technical Committees and Local Work Groups must help identify local needs, apply limited financial assistance, and maximize conservation benefits.

Principle 2 – Fully fund technical assistance needs

The demand for technical assistance continues to increase from all constituencies. Farmers, ranchers, producers who manage rangelands and grasslands, forest landowners, small acreage owners, and new landowners are requesting technical assistance. Technical assistance funding must be provided to generate a wide range of soil, water, air, and habitat benefits. The Conservation Technical Assistance Program and each of the Farm Bill conservation programs are necessary to implement conservation practices that effect proper land and water management.

- We support full funding for NRCS to meet the growing need for technical assistance to deliver Farm Bill conservation programs, acting in concert with conservation districts, technical service providers (TSPs), and other partners.
- An increased investment in conservation programs has not generated a corresponding increase in staff needed to deliver sufficient assistance to utilize all Farm Bill funds awarded to NRCS. The full return on our conservation investment will be achieved only with additional technical assistance resources.
- Currently, Conservation Technical Assistance funding is used for pre-contract work, while program dollars for technical assistance are available only after a contract is signed. We support the allocation of Farm Bill program technical assistance and financial assistance funding to more accurately reflect the true cost of implementing Farm Bill conservation programs.
- Technical service providers are a key component of the conservation delivery system and an important tool to implement conservation programs. The TSP program should be expanded to help meet the significant workload needed to implement Farm Bill programs. Expanding the use of TSPs in states lacking sufficient NRCS personnel to fully apply the conservation program resources available to them is particularly important.
- The program should provide expanded opportunities for TSPs to do conservation planning. Currently, TSPs only provide post-contract, implementation assistance.

- An increase in conservation delivery system capacity can be realized if NRCS expands the use of grants, cooperative and contribution agreements, and contracts.

Principle 3 – Continue 2008 Farm Bill conservation program funding

The 2008 Farm Bill funding commitment to conservation programs must be continued. Regional equity should be maintained. Opportunities to streamline and improve efficiency within the program options should be identified.

- NACD supports consolidating conservation programs to improve efficiency, simplify the application process, and better utilize available program funding.
- NACD supports reauthorizing and continued funding of the Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program.

Principle 4 – Easily accessed by cooperators

The conservation program delivery system must be easily accessed by conservation program customers. The signup process must be simple, easy to understand, completed with reasonable effort, and reach a broad customer audience.

- Conservation programs should be sufficiently flexible so they can be tailored to meet local resource needs and concerns.
- NACD supports continuous signup for USDA conservation programs.

Principle 5 – Education and outreach

Successful delivery of the Conservation Title of the 2012 Farm Bill requires educating and reaching out to landowners, producers, and the general public. Landmark legislation in the 1930s assigned local conservation districts responsibility to lead the nation's conservation education, outreach, and demonstration processes. Farm Bill Conservation Title funds should supplement these important district efforts.

Principle 6 – Commitment to working lands

Conservation programs address resource needs on various landscapes. They must provide a balance of support for both those that set land aside for conservation priorities and those that provide incentives and cost share for working lands. Given the projected increase in world population, programs must provide assistance to implement or maintain conservation practices on working lands that produce much-needed food, feed, fuel, and fiber.

Principle 7 – Support sustainable and renewable energy from agriculture and forestry

Support developing sustainable and renewable energy from woody biomass, forest byproducts, new and traditional crops, and agriculture byproducts. Such development must simultaneously protect natural resources and provide conservation and wildlife benefits on land enrolled in conservation programs. Incentives to encourage participation in renewable energy programs, assist with project start-up costs, and facilitate increased research and development should be available to landowners.

Farm Bill energy programs should help landowners conserve energy.

- Energy conservation strategies should be included in conservation programs cost share and ranking processes.
- Continued research and incentives to assist landowners to implement the most energy-saving methods for their use should be supported.

Principle 8 – Support Forestry Title

Continue to support a Forestry Title to address the unique complexities of forestry on non-industrial, private forest land.

- Expand capacity to provide technical assistance and outreach to non-industrial private forest owners, especially landowners not currently engaged in conservation or managing their lands. Government entities, non-government organizations, and TSPs should be utilized to deliver program assistance to underserved forest landowners.
- Maximize program capabilities to address forest issues, especially those identified by state forest resource assessments and strategies and state wildlife action plans. Continued support for regular updates to these state-level efforts should be given.
- Increased participation by forest owners in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) should be allowed.

Principle 9 – Develop new approaches to deliver conservation

Congress should promote and facilitate developing new and alternative approaches, such as ecosystems services, to deliver conservation practices and programs on privately – owned land and municipalities through the next Farm Bill.

Principle 10 – Support new conservation technologies

NACD supports both new and proven technologies in all conservation programs. NACD supports research to develop new technologies.

Resolutions Hearing A
Legislative
Earl Garber, Chair

STATES/TERRITORIES PRESENT:

Connecticut
Hawaii
Iowa
Kentucky
Maryland
Oregon
South Dakota
Texas
Virginia
Wyoming

STATES/TERRITORIES ABSENT:

American Samoa

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**A-1
Equal Access to Justice Amendment
(Colorado)**

HEARING ACTION: PASSED 9-0 AS AMENDED

NACD feels that ~~the~~ The Equal Access to Justice Act should be amended to disallow reimbursement of legal expenses to any party that does not have permanent residence in the immediate affected area ~~and/or~~ is not personally impacted.

*Current policy is in Section 1-Basic Policies as follows:
1.B.11 The Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA) was created to establish reimbursement from the federal government for the attorney's fees related to cases brought against the government. There is apparent abuse of EAJA by certain organizations, and a lack of accountability and transparency in the operation and distribution of funds. There is a lack of government oversight of EAJA that has allowed groups to circumvent Congressional intent with respect to the law. The agencies expenditures of funds for reimbursement under EAJA result in less resources being available for on-the-ground natural resource improvements. NACD shall ask Congress to provide the general public full access to data giving accurate representation of the Administration of EAJA, allowing tracking of EAJA disbursements, with information regarding plaintiff organizations, attorney's fees and monetary awards distributed as a result of actions undertaken on EAJA and fully fund and staff the Administrative Conference of the U.S. (10)*

**A-2
End Row Allowance for Continuous CRP
(Iowa, Minnesota, North Central Region)**

HEARING ACTION: PASSED 9-0 TO CONSENT CALENDAR

**A-3
Incentive Payment for CRP Living Snow Fence Practice
(Minnesota, North Central Region)**

HEARING ACTION: PASSED 9-0 TO CONSENT CALENDAR

**A-4
CRP and Biomass Usage
(Minnesota)**

HEARING ACTION: FAILED 0-9

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A-5
**Field Windbreak Establishment
(Minnesota, North Central)**

HEARING ACTION: PASSED 9-0 TO CONSENT CALENDAR

A-6
**Local Decision-Making in EQIP/WHIP Programs
(Iowa)**

HEARING ACTION: FAILED 1-8

A-7
**WHIP for Public Lands
(Idaho)**

HEARING ACTION: PASSED 9-1 AS AMENDED

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) is designed to develop or improve high quality habitat that supports fish and wildlife populations of National, State, Tribal, and local significance. WHIP is reauthorized under Section 1240N of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839bb-1) as amended by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill). Through WHIP, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance for the development of upland, wetland, aquatic, and other types of wildlife habitat on privately owned agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, and Tribal land.

Publicly owned lands are currently ineligible for WHIP. Approximately 63% of Idaho lands are Federally owned and 6% are State owned, including the lands below the high water mark of her lakes, rivers and streams. Public lands may include critical habitat designated under Federal and State law, or rare and unique habitat that could support at-risk wildlife species. Habitat on public lands may be degraded during extreme weather events such as flooding and may compromise the habitat on adjacent private lands. The fish and birds and beasts do not know who owns the lands above or below said high water mark anyway.

NACD will encourage ask Congress to include among those lands eligible for WHIP, such portions of publicly-owned lands in riparian areas of lakes, rivers, and streams as are

1 | contiguousimmediately adjacent to privately-owned lands, when beneficial for the enhancement
2 | or protection of habitat on said privately-owned lands.

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4 | *There is no current policy specific to this issue.*

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A-8

**Compliance with Buffer Strips for Government Payments
(Minnesota, North Central)**

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HEARING ACTION: FAILED 10-0

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A-9

**Site Preparation with Sheep & Goats
(Washington)**

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HEARING ACTION: PASSED 10-0 AS AMENDED

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There is evidence that there could be significant economic and environmental benefit to using sheep or goats for site preparation of CREP projects. Pesticides are increasingly expensive due to the increase in the cost of fossil fuel. The US Department of Fish & Wildlife and NOAA Fisheries limit what and where they can be used due to the potential hazard to listed species. Conservation districts are admonished by the US Department of Fish and Wildlife to use the least toxic weed control methods as a first choice. More and more CREP participants also wish to limit the use of chemicals on their projects. This makes it difficult to establish and maintain the projects. Current USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) rules prohibit grazing on CRP except in very, very limited circumstances such as a serious drought. This is because program participants have been compensated to idle the property. It is thought to be double dipping to be able to make use of the fodder on the site. However, there is a rational distinction to be drawn regarding grazing to prepare or maintain a CREP project versus grazing done merely to provide feed (profit) to the program participant. Individuals involved in providing sheep and goats for clearing activities are small business owners comparable to those that are hired to clear vegetation using herbicide and mechanical mowing. There are some potential resource concerns when sheep or goats graze in sensitive areas. These can be adequately addressed through the application of NRCS FOTG practices. There is also a potential biosecurity hazard, i.e., the transmission of worms to wildlife. This can be addressed through good animal husbandry.

