

GLCI Steering Committee Meeting
Monday, February 22nd, 2010
Omni Shoreham Hotel, Washington, D.C.

Attendees: Bob Drake, J.K. "Rooter" Brite, Pat Pfeil, Gerald Jaeger, Reggie Blackwell, Jeff Repp, Tom Sommer, Kristie Maczko, Chuck Stanley, Steve Woodruff, Dick McElhaney, Duane Hertzler, Dave Forgey, Astor Boozer, Ed Burton, Don Gohmert, Gene Fults, Every Byington, Kimberli Stine, Steven Shafer, Kevin Ogles, Dennis Thompson, Dustin Van Liew, Jill Davidsaver, Rebecca LaGrandeur, Leonard Jolley, Ralph Otto, Janette Kaiser, Bob Bolton, and Monti Golla.

Bob Drake opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Bob introduced Dana York, Director of Conservation Planning Technical Assistance, who was speaking in place of the Chief of NRCS, David White.

Natural Resources Conservation Service Report - Dana York

Dana York spoke about the EPA opening the Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) rule on the Chesapeake Bay. This rule would apply the strict Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL's) to all dairy, beef and poultry producers who are located in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Dana expressed concern about the application of this rule in the Chesapeake may foreshadow what is to come for the rest of the country. A question was raised about the EPA looking at all sources of pollution, not just agricultural. In other words, is the EPA considering residential sources? Dana said that yes, apparently other sources of TMDL's are being focused on, but that doesn't mean that EPA will be putting any less pressure on animal agriculture. She said if anything expect the EPA to continue to push hard against animal ag.

Dana told the group that this year marks the 75th Anniversary for the Natural Resources Conservation Service and it will be commemorated on Earth Day.

Regarding the President's 2011 Budget, Dana said that overall NRCS has fared well. A big focus in the President's budget for NRCS is watersheds and nutrient load management. The primary focus is on three watersheds: the Upper Mississippi Basin, the Chesapeake Bay and the Great Lakes. Dana said that "swat" teams will be deployed to these areas to meet with producers to better help them manage their nutrient loads and reduce the baseline TMDL's for their areas.

Another development is the Conservation Streamlining and Delivery System. This is a 5 year effort to help streamline financial accountability and reduce administrative workload. There is \$5 million in the NRCS budget for this effort.

Dana also said that the budget includes some increases for programs such as EQIP and some decreases such as GRP and WRP (Grassland Reserve Program and Wetland Reserve Program, respectively).

State Conservationist's Advisory Committee Report - Don Gohmert, Chair

Don said that he has heard some really good comments about the 4th National Conference on Grazing Lands and commends the committee for a job well done. He said that in today's "green" environment we should be showcasing how we are really ecologically friendly, and conservation minded and how grazing is the the "real" green. He also mentioned that we need to educate other people outside of our circle of influence about conservation practices and how beneficial it is to the rest of the country.

4th National Conference on Grazing Lands Report- Written by John Peterson (see attachment).

A teleconference will be held in May to discuss the wrap up of the 4NCGL.

Agriculture Research Service (ARS) - Steve Shafer

Steve outlined Secretary Vilsack's priorities:

1. Rural communities need to be self sustaining.
2. Natural forests and private working lands.
3. USDA Sustainable Agriculture
4. American children need to have access to safe and nutritious meals (ie: a safe and healthy food supply)

He mentioned that ARS has 5 research priorities:

5. Climate change
6. Biofuels
7. Food safety

8. Nutrition
9. Global food security

Steve said that the 2008 Farm Bill created a new position within USDA called the Chief Scientist. The Chief Scientist and the Undersecretary should be the same person, but they are not at the moment. Dr. Roger Beachy, who is also the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) director, is currently the Chief Scientist. He has dual rolls for the time being.

As far as the President's 2011 budget, the ARS is fortunate. There is a 2% program increase proposed and some minor shifts in priorities. \$42 Million in earmarks have been removed, but since these were not proposed originally by the Administration as a matter of policy they were taken out. Some program increases include \$6 million for livestock genetics, \$10 million for bio-energy, \$1 million for research into climate change resulting from ruminants, and \$7 1/2 million for sustainable agriculture (managing microorganisms in the rumen to reduce methane).

Steve also talked about the Great Basin Rangelands (see handout for further details). Essentially, there are 5 locations around the Great Basin area that include upland and riparian areas that will be studied. It would be a collaboration of ARS and other agencies that would research invasive weeds, wildlife and other ecological disturbances. This proposal would include 18 new research positions and would be located in Reno, Nevada; Burns, Oregon; Logan, UT; Boise, ID; and Dubois, ID.

Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) - Dr. Leonard Jolley

Leonard said that CEAP was started in 2003 and was an effort to help explain the benefits of conservation practices. The primary mission of CEAP is to ask and answer the following question, "What are the effects of our conservation practices on croplands, wetlands, grazinglands, and rangelands?" In 2006 the CEAP project began working with teams of scientists to write a book on the subject. They studied 100's of research papers and now have developed a draft version of the book. In doing so they have identified research gaps that can now be addressed. CEAP will also co-publish two books with SRM and AFGC this year. These books will be published on the internet and available for free. There will also be synopses of each chapter for those who want a shortened version.

Leonard also talked about the National Rangeland Inventory (NRI). Using the NRI, maps have been developed showing invasive species. They also map out other vegetative composition, vegetative health and soil stability. The Rangeland Hydrology Erosion Model (RHEM) will also utilize NRI data to show water erosion.

Sustainable Rangelands Roundtable Report - Kristie Maczko

Kristie reported that the SRR presented a workshop on the Ranch Assessment effort at the 4th National Conference on Grazing Lands. The workshop is essentially a tool for ranchers and land managers to better assess their current situation and plan for the future. Kristie also reported that her position is moving from Colorado State University to the University of Wyoming.

Natural Resources Conservation Service - Dennis Thompson

Dennis said that the Conservation Streamline and Delivery System (CDSI) is a tool that will help NRCS better identify areas where they are struggling to efficiently deliver technical assistance. There is a grazing lands component to this system and it will be one of the first to be tested.

The Forage Suitability Group Descriptions (FSGD's) and the Ecological Site Description (ESD's) programs are moving forward. The Soils division has a budget to deliver ESD's nationwide and the Chief has committed to get them developed in a rapid manner. In the last 10 years that they have been working on the ESD project only 10% of grazing lands has been cataloged.

Finally, Dennis talked about the Ecological Site Information System (ESIS) that can be accessed through the NRCS website. It accesses web soil surveys (if they are complete - not all are) and can tell you how to take your land to the next level if you implement certain conservation practices.

GLCI Specialists Reports

West: Jeff Repp and Gene Fults reported that Jim Guilliford is the new director of the Soil Conservation Service. They also said that they have a new GLCI display entitled "Grazing Gone Wild." The west region also reported very good feedback on the 4th National Conference on Grazing Lands.

Central: Chuck Stanley, Reggie Blackwell and Chad Ellis reporting

Chuck introduced Chad Ellis who is filling Dan Caudle's position. He reported that Minnesota has four grazing specialists. Arkansas is still holding many demonstration projects and Nebraska has a new coordinator and a new monitoring program. North Dakota presented a symposium at the 4NCGL about cover crop innovations which they are still promoting. North Dakota and Nebraska also have a mentoring program which helps ranchers share information. This peer to peer network is apparently very successful. Iowa has held its first grazing conference. Reggie will be attending Pheasant Fest and will be staffing the GLCI booth. He said roughly 25,000 people attend this conference so it will be good exposure for the GLCI. Chad Ellis said he was very happy to be a new regional GLCI Specialist and he will be starting his position at the end of March. One area of large concern is the dwindling of the number of range programs at Universities across the country.

East: Kevin Ogles

Kevin said that three states in the east have requested assistance from Kim Stine and Kevin to get coalitions started. Tennessee and Georgia have added two full time grazing specialists and a lot of traditional dairies have been requesting information on how to convert to grazing dairies. Kevin said that Michael Hall is in Afghanistan and should be back in October. Steve Woodruff is now at the East National Technology Center for now and has been a great assistance since Michael has been gone.

National GLCI Financial Report - Tom Sommer

Tom talked about the GLCI funding formula and how accountability has been added into the formula. About 5 years ago performance considerations were added in to help determine the amount of funding a state receives for GLCI activities. Pat Pfeil said she would like to see a further break down of how the money is spent state by state. She said she would like to see what monies went to technical assistance and what monies went to grants. Tom mentioned that the Chief is wanting more transparency and financial accountability across all programs.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Report- Bob Bolton

Bob reported that the President and the Secretary want to focus heavily on energy and that there is a big push right now on wind and solar energy which is impacting grazing permits. According to regulations a grazing permittee must be given two years notification of any change or cancellation of a grazing permit. The problem lies in the fact that energy permits typically pose a problem with the grazing permits. Solar panels lie fairly low to the ground so are incompatible with grazing for that reason. The wind turbines are less of an issue but they do disrupt the land to get them installed. Now graziers are being accused of holding up the energy progress. Bob also said that the BLM is constantly involved in litigation which eats up a lot of their staff time. He said the major problem lies with the "Equal Access for Justice Act." This law allows special interest groups to sue and if they win all of their attorney's fees and settlement is paid for by the Federal government. They are using is law to their advantage. They charge exorbitant attorney's fees to the point they are abusive.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) -Ralph Otto, Interim Dep. Director, NIFA

On October 1st, 2009 CSREES became NIFA. The change is official in name right now, but not in structure. Dr. Beachy is the current director of NIFA. Ralph said the biggest difference between CSREES and NIFA is that NIFA contains 4 distinct institutes: 1) Institute of Food Safety and Nutrition, 2) Institute of Youth, Family and Community, 3) Institute of Food Production and Sustainability, 4) Institute of Bioenergy, Climate and Environment, and 5) Center for International Programs

Forest Service - Janette Kaiser

Janette said that the Forest Service's budget for 2011 got a 1% increase but that it is allocated differently from past budgets. The focus is on integrated resource restoration. She said it will be hard to find something specific on grazing lands or rangelands, but that they are integrated into other areas so they are still there. In the State of Utah they are putting an emphasis on shoring up livestock markets and using livestock as a tool for rangeland restoration to restore and repair watersheds. Another priority area is "open space" which is a focus on rural wealth by keeping lands working. This is a priority for the Secretary.

Member Organization Reports

Dave Forgey gave the AFGC report and said that the next president of the AFGC will be our own Howard Straub. They are also looking to hire a new executive director, and their convention will be held in June in St. Louis, Missouri.

Duane Hertzler gave the Dairy report and said that this past year was a really hard year for the Dairy Industry as a whole. The east has created a Dairy Policy Action Coalition in an effort to get better pricing for milk.

Dick McElhaney reported that AFBF's membership continues to grow.

Gerald Jaeger said that the NFU staff has officially moved to Washington, D.C. from Wisconsin. Their convention will be held March 12th-15th, 2010 in Rapid City, South Dakota.

Pat Pfeil said SRM's new executive VP is Jessie Peterson. He was a lobbyist here in Washington, D.C.

Rooter Brite reported that Jeff Eisenberg is the new president of NACD. He comes from NCBA.

Bob Drake said that NCBA has a new governance but that is it not yet final. That will be completed in July.

Strategic Plan - Pat Pfeil

Pat said that the GLCI's Strategic Plan was revamped recently and that new goals and outcomes have been set. She said at this point we need committee input on how to reach these goals so she would like to put together an action committee chaired by Howard Straub to complete this task. So far the committee will consist of Howard Straub, Chair, Pat Pfeil, Rod Baumberger, Dennis Thompson, Gene Fults and Chad Ellis. Any other committee members can request to be on the action committee. Monti will send out the notification. March 20th will be the deadline to commit to participate in the action committee. The first teleconference will be held in April.

Executive Session

Feedback on the 4NCGL will be completed in a couple of weeks. All decisions regarding holding a 5th National Conference on Grazing Lands will be tabled until our September meeting. Bob said he would like to see the GLCI continue to hold Conferences but that the concern is having enough committee members present to complete the work. Gretchen's health is an issue and she may take emeritus status soon. The conferences gives us a goal to reach for and the committee needs a purpose beyond our original mandate.

Weather was a factor for us in Reno. The snowstorm kept many from attending and impacted our on-site registrations. Several have requested at least a partial refund considering the weather prevented them from attending. After all the financial books are closed we might consider doing some refunds. Preliminary reports show that the conference was profitable so this may be possible.

The committee then discussed possible locations for a 5NCGL in 2012. There was some talk of Louisville, KY, Ft. Worth, TX, Florida. These will be further discussed in Billing, MT at the Fall GLCI meeting September 9th-12th, 2010. In the meantime, we will get some preliminary bids on conference locations and hotels from Conference Direct.

Meeting Adjourned.