

Agriculture Workgroup (AgWG)

Meeting Minutes

April 20, 2023

10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

[Meeting Materials](#)

Summary of Actions and Decisions

Decision: Approval of [minutes](#) from the March AgWG call.

Action: The AgWG did not reach consensus on the extension of credit durations of *RI-9: Forest Buffer Exclusion Area on Watercourse* and *RI-10: Forest Buffer on Watercourse* practices from 10 to 15 years. Jeff Sweeney, EPA, will draft a modification to the proposal to bring back to the AgWG for additional discussion and vote.

Action: More information about an AgWG in-person meeting is forthcoming.

Minutes

10:00 **Welcome, introductions, roll-call, review meeting minutes** – Jeremy Daubert, AgWG Chair.

- Roll-call of the governance body
- Roll-call of the meeting participants- *Please enter name and affiliation under “Participants” or in “Chat” box*
- **Decision:** Approval of [minutes](#) from the March AgWG call.

Accounting & Reporting

10:05 **Forestry [Resource Improvement Practices](#): Extension of Select Credit Durations (55 min)** – Vanessa Van Note, EPA.

Last month, Vanessa Van Note presented on the Forestry Workgroup’s recommendation to extend the credit durations of *RI-9: Forest Buffer Exclusion Area on Watercourse* and *RI-10: Forest Buffer on Watercourse* practices from 10 to 15 years on the basis that they are functionally equivalent to Forest Buffer practices with credit durations of 15 years, as previously approved by the partnership. The AgWG was asked to approve the FWG recommendation and amend the original RI practice report (linked below) to reflect the changes.

Please note that **the “nutrient exclusion area” is the buffer itself**, not the exclusion from the stream (meaning it is not referring to fencing). For more clarification, see the post-meeting note on page 5 of the March minutes linked below.

Reference Materials:

- [RI Practice Definition and Verification Visual Indicators report](#)
- [March presentation to AgWG](#)
- [March AgWG minutes](#)

Discussion

Ken Staver: Seems like the practices are the same except one is cost-shared and one is not?

Vanessa Van Note: Yes, they are not part of public cost share and they must follow the visual indicators checklist when they are verified.

Ken Staver: I participate in CREP for forested buffer areas and there's a contract that requires you to keep it there. Makes sense to me that you would check a practice more often that doesn't have a contract like that and you can remove it whenever. One is contractually bound and one is not. So it makes sense that they weren't the same credit duration before.

Vanessa Van Note: They were the same credit duration before, both ten years, but I see your point.

Ken Staver: Also, on the CREP buffers, the landowner can choose 10 or 15 years, so it would make sense to have a credit duration of 10 years.

Vanessa Van Note: In 2021 when the FWG made the decision to extend, they looked at what percentage of the practices were 10 years versus 15 years, and that was part of the conversation. I don't remember the exact percentage.

Ken Staver: It would make sense that more people choose 15 years because it's longer term. Another question - are people finding these RI practices or are they specific things that people know of or create as new practices?

Vanessa Van Note: I would have to check how much is newly implemented by the states. Depends who is involved in installing them and finding them and what their processes are.

Jeremy Daubert: In some cases, the landowner would do this practice and not want cost-share money but want technical assistance, so they wouldn't necessarily know about it.

Vanessa Van Note: In some states like PA, when they do a whole farm inspection, they may find various practices that they hadn't known about or found in the past.

Marel King: Are there cost-shared buffers that aren't necessarily in the CREP program? If they are in the EQUIP program, like 3 years - that would already be eligible for the 15 years right?

Vanessa Van Note: Yes.

Marel King: So there are cases where shorter contracts are still given the 15 year credit duration.

Vanessa Van Note: Yes, those would be reported as riparian forest buffers.

Mark Dubin: There were a couple aspects considered for RI BMPs other than contract. They have a functional equivalency on an annual basis. So they may not be following the same establishment protocols or standards as cost-shared practices. So that's why they have a shorter credit duration.

Vanessa Van Note: Can you explain what you mean by functionally equivalent on an annual basis? These are not annual practices, they were given a 10 year credit duration.

Mark Dubin: There are 18 practices in the RI report, both multi-year and annual practices. When developing the credit durations for those, they typically chose half the credit duration as NRCS practices because they did not meet NRCS standards. So we wanted to check those more often because we didn't have the same confidence in the lifespan as we would with a cost-shared practice.

Vanessa Van Note: At the time the RI report was published, both RI9 and 10 practices were given the same credit duration as cost-shared practices, which was 10 years. So for these practices, they chose not to give half the credit duration.

Mark Dubin: 10 years was a more conservative value. RI practices were created to expand the world of BMPs beyond NRCS practices. So if there is no difference between these practices and cost-shared practices, then there really isn't a need to have RI practices at all.

Jim Riddell: I put in non cost-shared practices and their lifespans are definitely way past 15 years. I don't see why we would have an issue approving this if they are functionally equivalent to the other buffers.

Ken Staver: We aren't given any less credit for these practices and it's not saying they won't last past 15 years, I think we are just trying to determine how many years from implementation should we wait to check on the practice again to make sure it's functioning properly.

Vanessa Van Note: Yes.

Jim Riddell: I know sometimes if it doesn't get reverified we take points off the board. Forest buffers do a lot of good and it's a sound practice. In VA, verification isn't the priority by any means - it's implementation of practices. How are these initially reported in the system and who is putting those forest buffers that aren't cost-shared?

Elizabeth Hoffman: For our verification program, verifiers walking around farms are noting that these RIs are in place. Also have a conservation buffer initiative program in MD to incentivize cooperators to install buffers that are reported as RIs because they aren't NRCS standard in how they are managed. Often these are reported through our verification program or soil conservation district staff.

Kate Bresaw: It's similar in PA. We have an ag inspection program and practices are sometimes verified during that. BMP verification effort underway to catalog BMPs that we don't have record of and have gone previously unreported, including RI practices. In our case these are largely existing practices that have been there for years and functionally equivalent. The reason why they are reported as RI practices is because we are coming in after the fact and can't say for a fact that NRCS standards were met when it was implemented.

Vanessa Van Note: Also- the reason this came up is because PA noticed that these RI practices had the same credit duration as cost-shared practices - both 10 years. So the question was if the cost-shared practices increased to 15 years, then shouldn't these RI practices increase as well, especially if they are functionally equivalent?

Mark Dubin: RI practices are also part of the producer surveys that I work on where we interview producers and do ground truthing. If we are holding everything to an NRCS practice standard, then we probably wouldn't be able to count some of those RI practices because they don't meet the standards.

Vanessa Van Note: I will also add that the reason the BMPVAHAT started and are coming to you now is to try and find ways to alleviate the burden that is put on states to verify these practices. Similar to what Jim said, states are trying to focus on implementation, not necessarily reverification.

Jeremy Daubert: Does anyone vote stop or hold to approving this decision item?

Ruth Cassilly (in chat): Reminder - Jeff Sweeney, EPA rep is not here.

Jackie Pickford: We will consider this tentatively approved by the AgWG contingent upon if any of the absent voting members want to vote hold/stop. I will follow up with them after the meeting to confirm.

Dave Graybill (in chat): What is the nutrient reduction difference given to forest buffers vs RI practices in the model.

Elizabeth Hoffman (in chat): None, they have the same lb N/ac reduction.

Post-meeting note:

The AgWG leadership followed up with absent voting members who provided the following votes and rationale following the April meeting.

Leon Tillman, NRCS: Endorsement. The decision item will establish consistency across the forest buffer definition types with consideration to widths, vegetation types, and management regardless of the use of public cost-share.

RO Britt, Smithfield Foods: Endorsement.

Jeff Hill, York County Conservation District: Endorsement.

Jeff Sweeney, EPA: EPA is voting a “hold” on the request to the AgWG at their last meeting about an extension of credit durations for two Resource Improvement BMPs related to Riparian Forest Buffers. EPA can stand aside on a future vote if the decision statement is simplified to the heart of the matter. We will propose a modification of the proposal for the group to discuss and vote on a future meeting.

Action: The AgWG did not reach consensus on the extension of credit durations of *RI-9: Forest Buffer Exclusion Area on Watercourse* and *RI-10: Forest Buffer on Watercourse* practices from 10 to 15 years. Jeff Sweeney, EPA, will draft a modification to the proposal to bring back to the AgWG for additional discussion and vote.

Data & Modeling

11:00 **Agricultural Data Inputs (15 min)** - Tom Butler, EPA.

Tom provided an update on the Phase 7 Agricultural Modeling Team (AMT) and their [April](#) meeting. Additionally, he reviewed the recent Fertilizer Expert Group meeting that took place on [April 3rd](#).

Discussion

Chris Brosch: Surprised by the first FEG recommendation. Didn't realize we're not getting information from NY. Since their data has been held constant from 2016, that seems to be at odds with the procedure in Rec 3 to forecast for the future.

Tom Butler: NY did not report 2016. This recommendation was written prior to finding out this information but AAPFCO applies a certain ratio based on the other states they get information from. So AAPFCO did report 2016 information, but it is not constant. They applied some ratio based on the other states that apply the data. So AAPFCO did give us a 2016 number but it is not from NY because they didn't report that.

Chris Brosch: So AAPFCO only gave just one year, but it is not real? And NY is back to reporting like other states?

Tom Butler: AAPFCO gave us 2016 and we are working on processing 2017. There will not be any real data from NY for either 2016 or 2017. NY found an issue with their UFTRS reporting system going to AAPFCO so they haven't reported to them since that happened in 2015. All the info we will get from AAPFCO since 2015 about NY will have a ratio applied to it. They're working on getting a new data sheet but not sure when that will be available.

Chris Brosch: So you're filling gaps for NY where other states have data. Where no states have data, recommendation 3 comes into question. How is NY treated in the projection cases when you're not using the real data?

Tom Butler: We would anticipate 1 or 2 states not having information. Where we can, we will use state data. It will be more current and accurate since it has not been touched by AAPFCO. But in cases where we can't, then we use AAPFCO data.

Chris Brosch: Can you explain Rec 3?

Tom Butler: Rec 3 says we are not changing what we've done. It's keeping the procedure the same for the calculation for our fertilizer stock from the last year we have AAPFCO information.

Chris Brosch: What alternatives did they consider?

Tom Butler: Group looked at agrochemical surveys from NASS, creating a new CBW-specific state survey, getting info from plant nutrition institute and fertilizer institute, getting info straight from fertilizer companies or larger cooperatives. None of these could feasibly be done with the time we had. Also concerned about survey fatigue.

Chris Brosch: What about alternatives to the double exponential smoothing projection method?

Tom Butler: The urban side does the double exponential smoothing projection method. Agricultural side does not. We use a ratio.

Ken Staver: Haven't we already been projecting since 2016?

Tom Butler: It's not necessarily a projection but a holding constant of the ratio from 2016, the last year we had data.

Ken Staver: Our fertilizer bucket has no new information since 2016?

Tom Butler: Right.

Ken Staver: Will there always be a 7-year lag with that information?

Tom Butler: AAPFCO has one person dedicated to doing this for the entire country and he is semi-retired. That is why we have the lag, I don't foresee that changing.

Chris Brosch: Need to investigate alternatives to the projection method.

Nick Hepfl: Reality on the ground is that there was a decrease in fertilizer sales. we need to have that more current data.

Elizabeth Hoffman: So NY is not reporting anymore but they had a problem with their UFTRS? Do you know what problem it was because we are all using the same UFTRS? Don't want to have a similar problem.

Tom Butler: I think they updated their IT systems and lost the ability to talk to the database. Don't think it was UFTRS itself, but an interface issue.

Greg Albrecht: Yes, that's my understanding as well. so probably wouldn't be a risk for other jurisdictions. Jan Marowski (jan.morawski@agriculture.ny.gov) in NY is the point person on this issue if you want to reach out to him.

11:15 **New Business & Announcements (5 min)**

- **In person AgWG meeting [poll results](#)**
 - **Chris Brosch (in chat):** In DE travel approval is about 2 weeks with a draft agenda required.
 - **Kate Bresaw (in chat):** PA needs at least 30 days, a bit more lead time is preferred.
- **PA verification pilot project update**
 - New verification methodology proposal will be presented to the AgWG next month.
- **Innovations in Sustainable Agriculture webinar**
 - **Friday, May 12, 2023. 12:00 - 1:15pm.**
 - This exciting event is being held as part of the implementation of [the Potomac Basin Comprehensive Water Resources Plan](#) and will feature speakers from Swift Aeraseed LLC, Franklin County PA Soil and Water Conservation District, Penn State University, and Rosetree Consulting LLC. Panelists will share case studies on innovative sustainable agriculture including nutrient management, cover cropping, energy and water efficiency, and smart sensing. Presentations will be followed by Q&A with participants.
 - [Registration here.](#)
- **Cover crop BMP verification hybrid method**
 - Present AgWG approved [cover crop survey hybrid method](#) to WTWG for update to verification protocols (date pending).
- **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund**
 - [Small Watershed Grants \(SWG\) Program](#), delivered in partnership with EPA and the CBP partnership, NFWF is soliciting proposals for projects within the

Chesapeake Bay watershed that promote voluntary, community-based efforts to protect and restore the diverse and vital habitats of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributary rivers and streams.

- Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense Grants (WILD) Program, delivered in partnership with FWS, NFWF is soliciting proposals for projects that conserve, steward, and enhance fish and wildlife habitats and related conservation values in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- Soliciting proposals until **Thursday, April 20, 2023**.
- **Other Announcements?** - send to Jackie Pickford (Pickford.Jacqueline@epa.gov) for inclusion in “Recap” email.

11:20 **Review of Action and Decision Items (10 min)**

11:30 **Adjourn**

Next Meeting

Thursday, May 18th: 10AM-12PM, Call-in Zoom

Participants

Jackie Pickford, CRC

Tom Butler, EPA-CBPO

Jeremy Daubert, VT

Kathy Braiser, PSU

Chris Brosch, DE

Clint Gill, DE

Elizabeth Hoffman, MD

Greg Albrecht, NY

Frank Schneider, PA

Hunter Landis, VA

Cindy Shreve, WV

Marel King, CBC

Evin Fitzpatrick, Country View Family Farms

Dave Graybill, Farm Bureau

Jenna Schueler, CBF

Jim Riddell, VA Cattleman Association

Emily Dekar, USC

Nick Hepfl, HRG

Matt Monroe, WVDA

Seth Mullins, VA DCR

Olivia Devereux, Devereux Consulting

Auston Smith, EPA-CBPO

Scott Heidel, PA DEP

Ken Staver, UMD

Ruth Cassilly, UMD

Mark Dubin, UMD-CBPO

Vanessa Van Note, EPA

Nicole Christ, MD

Kate Bresaw, PA DEP

Patrick Thompson

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Cassie Davis, NY

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****Common Acronyms**

AgWG- [Agriculture Workgroup](#)

AMT- [Agricultural Modeling Team](#) (Phase 7)

BMP- Best Management Practice

BMPVAHAT- [BMP Verification Ad Hoc Action Team](#)

CAST- [Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool](#) (user interface for the CBP Watershed Model)

CBP- [Chesapeake Bay Program](#)

CBPO- Chesapeake Bay Program Office (houses EPA, federal partners, and various contractors and grantees working towards CBP goals)

CBW- Chesapeake Bay Watershed

CRC- [Chesapeake Research Consortium](#)

DPF – Dairy Precision Feeding
EPA- [United States] Environmental Protection Agency
EPEG – Expert Panel Exploratory Group
FWS – [United States] Fish and Wildlife Service
MUN – Milk Urea Nitrogen
NEIEN- National Environmental Information Exchange Network
NFWF- [National Fish and Wildlife Foundation](#)
PA DEP- Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection
PSC – [Principals’ Advisory Committee](#) (CBP)
PSU- Penn State University
RI – Resource improvement [practices].
STAC- [Scientific & Technical Advisory Committee](#)
SWG – Small Watershed Grants Program
TMDL- Total Maximum Daily Load
WILD - Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense Grants Program
WQGIT- [Water Quality Goal Implementation Team](#)
WTWG- [Watershed Technical Workgroup](#)
UMD- University of Maryland
UFTRS - Uniform Fertilizer Tonnage Reporting System
USDA-ARS- United States Department of Agriculture-*Agricultural Research Service*
USDA-NASS- United States Department of Agriculture-*National Agricultural Statistics Service* USDA-NRCS- United States Department of Agriculture-*Natural Resources Conservation Service*