**Conewago Project Advisory Team Meeting**

**November 18, 2010, 1:00 to 3:30 pm**

**DEP Southcentral Regional Office**

**MINUTES**

1. **Welcome and introductions**
2. **Visioning Process Update**

Matt provided update. A Vision for the Conewago Conference held 10/23/10. Approximately 45 attended. Video was well received and set the stage. Vision Team members presented the “vision,” and this was very well done, authentic way to present the vision to fellow community members. Breakout sessions were lively and many action items were suggested for moving vision forward. The community’s vision is for clean water, productive and viable farms, and healthy, well planned communities with outdoor recreation and education opportunities for generations to come. This vision and goal align well with Initiative’s goals. Vision Team will work with Janie French to finalize a vision report. Report and video can be used in watershed as an outreach and recruiting tool. A final post-conference meeting of the Vision Team will be held in December to review draft report and provide final feedback. Matt will also work with Susan to integrate vision with NFWF deliverables, Conewago WIP etc. into a work plan for the Initiative.

1. **Conewago Wet Soils Survey (Ed White, NRCS)**

Ed White, NRCS, presented. NRCS interest began when Denise Coleman saw ARS presentation by Tony Buda on wet soils. Excess rainfall and soil saturation can result in increase surface loading from wet soil areas. Tony’s research is on the effects of hydrology on soil runoff and phosphorus loading. Concentration is on surface runoff of phosphorus. Goal of research is to have more detailed information so we get the right conservation in the right place.

Current project: contractor will be hired through RC&D to do some field work and mapping of saturated areas. Monitoring wells will also be placed in 6 difference areas (preferably in impaired watersheds in crop and pasture). Researchers will look at wetness index and validate it with field tests. Outcomes will include:

* Wet soil layer for use in planning
* Rank and prioritize areas
* Test LIDAR data through groundtruthing

Result will be a wet landscape data layer by next year what can be used by NRCS in its program ranking and by Districts for conservation planning and decisions on BMP types and locations.

Currently looking for farmers willing to participate in sampling, monitoring wells. Discuss with NRCS field staff in Dauphin, Lebanon Counties.

Some of this work could be done by high school or college students.

This work fits into a bigger picture of precision ag and innovative practices as opposed to basic compliance conservation and manure management planning.

1. **Lebanon County Crop Management Record Keeping Service Project (Del Voight, Penn State Cooperative Extension)**

Del Voight, Lebanon County Cooperative Extension, presented. No till work began in 2001 with looking at cover crop rye and work with “No Till Sluggers.” Farmer feedback was they wanted Extension’s help in developing a system of whole farm compliance with all info in one place. Sluggers were married with RC&D into No Till Mentoring Program. A Crop Management System was developed by Extension to keep all the necessary records for participation in that program, used annual verification forms. Record keeping done by Norma Wagner—meets with farmer 3-4 times a year and updates records. For soil health surveys, hired and trained a high school student. Transect surveys were initially done by Del and Mark Chegwidden of the District, but later hired students to do this too.

1997-1 field out of 500 in no till in Lebanon Co. Today, 40% no till.

Feedback from farmers was they wanted more info on cover crops, so Extension developed cover crop field days with Sluggers.

After RC&D grant was up, farmers wanted to continue with crop management record keeping, so Extension continues service for a fee. John Bray, certified crop specialist, was brought on board to manage program. Farmers also interested in GIS-based system, so Brian McAffey brought in to develop.

How might this fit into an NRCS CCPI? (provides extra funding in small watersheds).

A lot of farmers have GIS on their new equipment, but their old PCs are not upgraded, are slow, etc, and therefore the GIS technology can’t be taken advantage of. Extension’s program allows the GIS information to be used.

1. **BMP Challenge Program (Jim Baird, American Farmland Trust)**

Jim Baird, AFT, presented during partner update. AFT interested in becoming more involved within the Initiative partnership. Presented and distributed slides on BMP Challenge program. Risk has been shown to be a very real barrier to adoption of practices. This program takes away that risk by offering payments to compensate for yield loss. Focus is on BMPs that reduce nitrogen runoff, and payments can apply to a variety of practices. This might be a good tool to get late adopters to adopt, at least those that are concerned about risk. AFT is looking to recruit farmers in the Conewago, and will be in touch with Districts and local Extension offices in near future.

1. **Partner Updates**

Kelly O’Neill, CBF: Offering Buffer Bonus program to plain sect in Lancaster County. Would be interested in developing similar model in Conewago.

Carl Rohr, DEP: Have noticed an increasing demand in Dauphin County for practices and there is a lot getting done on the ground. Section 319 will keep funding as long as demand is there.

Jeremy Zidek, ZedX: A lot of behind the scenes work being done. ZedX working on pulling in models, RUSL 2 (have several models being pulled into the system).

Mark Chegwidden, Lebanon CCD: Completed surveys in October. Surveys yielded some EQIP/CBWI sign ups. Have not yet moved forward on TSP Planning money. There are fewer plans that need to be written than originally thought. Andrea has suggested perhaps using the TSP money in another way if it is not needed for TSP planning. Farm properties surveyed were 10 ac or more.

Don McNutt, Lancaster CCD: Surveyed approximately 60 parcels, 40 operators in Lancaster County. Tammy Vieth of ARS recently emailed Don and copied Matt and Kristen with a proposal to do some BMP modeling work in the watershed. How should we handle these kinds of requests, which will continue to come in? Kristen and Matt suggested we use a template to evaluate innovative practices/opportunities, and vet through BMP Team. Kristen has developed a template, and put together a description of AFT’s BMP Challenge to demonstrate. Matt and Kristen to follow up with Tammy and her team to get more information on this particular opportunity.

Kathy Brasier, Penn State: Funds outside of the Initiative and NFWF have been found to allow landowner survey to go forward. Schedule is for survey to be mailed in January 2011. Survey will be reviewed at December 8 Stewardship Development Team meeting.

Jennifer Fetter, Penn State: Riparian buffer maintenance curriculum has been completed and is now posted online.

Kristen Saacke Blunk, Penn State: Penn State is interested in convening a modeling symposium/workshop in winter 2011 to have all the models and the modelers present their models and have a discussion on how they do or do not communicate with one another, so that the best suite of models can be used within the monitoring framework and decision making tools in the Conewago. Also in winter 2011, a PSU graduate student will be conducting an experiment of farmer decision making and choices in the payment of ecosystem services. Farmer focus groups will meet with researchers in a number of different counties, including Dauphin, Lebanon, and Lancaster.

Susan Marquart, NRCS: $500,000 has been allocated for the current fiscal year in the Conewago. Meeting held on 11/15/10 involving NRCS and Districts was to discuss a plan for getting this money on the ground.

Rugh Henderson, South Londonderry Township: Looking forward to “nonag” meeting on 11/23/10. There is a need to start getting out to the nonfarmers in the community.

Sarah Dinh, Penn State: Dairy Discussion Group continues to meet and have good conversations, but group is still quite small. Perhaps we should try some door knocking on dairy farms in the watershed to recruit more attendees.

1. **Upcoming Meetings:**

Non-Ag Discussion: 11/23 (9:45 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. @ Hershey Public Library)

Monitoring Team: 12/8 (a.m. @ Etown College)

Stewardship Development Team: (12/8 (p.m., location TBA)

BMP Team: 12/15 (time, location TBA)

PAT will reconvene in January—doodle survey to be distributed