

NCERA-3 Minutes
May 21, 2011
Foxfire Room – Crowne Plaza Resort
Asheville, NC

Meeting called to order – Acting Chair – Ken Olson at 1 pm. Members present were introduced. Minutes of the 2010 meeting were approved as posted on NIMSS web site. State reports will be distributed with the minutes of this meeting.

Members attending – Mickey Ransom (KS), Gerald Miller (Administrative Advisor), Lee Burras (IA), Larry West (USDA-NRCS representative), Maxine Levin (USDA-NRCS NCSS liaison), Ken Olson (IL), Nancy Cavallaro (USDA NIFA representative), Phillip Owens (IN), and Doug Malo (SD)

The committee was reminded that committee meeting minutes are due within 60 days of this meeting (July 21, 2011). NCERA-3 is an integrated committee with research, extension/outreach/ and teaching activities. NCERA-3 can add people to our committee from ARS and USDA. Universities can be added to our committee when proper forms are completed (e.g., Appendix E is completed for the faculty member desiring to be on our committee).

Introductions and Agency Reports

Administrative Advisor's Report (Gerald Miller) – Current posting on NIMSS website for Email and telephone contact information was checked by all members present. Miller will be retiring on June 30 and he currently is the interim VP for Extension Outreach as ISU. He reminded us that we need to make sure that our NIMSS contact information is correct. Also, he announced that at the end of this meeting that Ken Olson would become the administrative advisor for NCERA-3. We were reminded that our mid-term review is to be completed by Dec 15. Appendix K will need to be completed by Ken Olson. The minutes from our meeting and form SAES-422 form will need to be completed on the NIMSS website before the Appendix K can be completed. Minutes are to be sent in by 60 days of the meeting.

Miller indicated that we needed to identify our officers for the coming year and since we have a rotation that is followed in the committee our officers for 2010-2111 are:

Chair – Phillip Owens
Vice-Chair – Lee Burras
Secretary – Doug Malo
Secretary-elect – Brian Slater

Review of past federal budgets relating to Hatch and AFRI funds was discussed and since no formal decisions had been made (other than earmarks have been removed) the discussion centered on possible scenarios. House and Senate will start the markup process for the programs in June. There is widespread concern about the toxic conversations regarding the federal budget and these concerns may spill over into funding the USDA, AFRI, Hatch, McIntyre-Stennis, and Smith-Lever.

Program	2011 Budget Amount (\$)	2012 Budget Advisory Comm. (\$)	2012 President (\$)
AFRI	264 M	324 M	325 M
Hatch	236 M	236 M	204 M
McIntyre-Stennis	33 M	NA	28 M
Smith Lever	297 M	293 M	283 M

We were reminded that 25% of the Hatch and Smith Lever funds must be spent on multistate projects (which include NCERA-3). Also, the Smith Lever rules also mandate a 25% expenditure of funds on multistate projects and integrated work. NCERA-3 cannot remove people from the committee who do not attend – only their administrators can do that. We can add guests to our committee at any time. Our committee is an integrated committee with members who work on teaching, research, and extension/outreach programs/projects.

NIFA/AFRI Report (Nancy Cavallaro) - President has recommended an increase in the AFRI budget for FY 2012 but part of the increase is due to the elimination of the Water Quality program which is being rolled into AFRI as a new water quality program. The recommended increase is about \$50 M for FY 2012. There have been some difficulties due to budgeting delays but those are being addressed. New RFAs for FY 2011 are in the following areas and there will be minimal funding available:

1. Childhood Obesity Prevention
2. Climate Change
3. Global Food Security
4. Food Safety
5. Sustainable Bioenergy

Agronomy related areas are expected to have a slight increase in FY2012. The director (Dr. Beachy) of AFRI retired and so changes in leadership have caused some delays in RFAs and reassessment of important foundational programs. Some of the big new areas deal with specialty crops and biomass/bioenergy. The trend is putting more dollars into biomass/bioenergy and less into climate. There is a big focus on food security. There is diminished focus on ethanol and more interest on drop-in fuel.

Some AFRI grants may see a 5% drop in the second year due to budget constraints. Hatch funds for FY 2011 were not increased from FY 2010 and in fact the level of support for Hatch has been flat for the last 10-15 years. If Hatch funds are reduced there will be significant impacts for the states. No earmarks were approved in FY2011 and none are recommended for FY2012.

National Soils Lab/Research (Larry West) – Funding for FY2011 for the National Soils Lab is ok but the proposal for FY 2012 shows a significant reduction (up to 26%) in funds, especially in the area of travel. There is a report that shows that the NRCS has more vehicles than employees and that is causing problems. On a positive note there are new energetic staff and all leadership positions are filled. A new effort in Ecological Site Inventory has been started. There will be a RFP for small grants for targeted soil survey work. These mini grants will require university cooperation with MLRA project leaders for projects needed to help the NCSS program. The Soil Science Institute (SSI) for about 16 staff will be held at Kansas State University on June 7-24 and led by Mickey Ransom. There will be an RFP for a similar Soil Geomorphic Institute (GI) for FY 2013. The concept is that SSI will be held every other year and the GI will be the alternate year. There is effort on a new universal soil classification system.

National Liaison to NCSS (Maxine Levin) – Levin indicated that budget and travel will continue to be concerns with the NRCS budget. Two programs have been cut (RC&D and Watershed) and NRCS is trying to find positions (e.g., Cooperative Soil Survey program) for affected staff to avoid RIF. Travel reductions have greatly reduced international exchanges and technical assistance. Meeting attendance is being reduced as well. The Rapid Carbon program is progressing and should be completed this FY before the major travel restrictions hit in FY 2012.

Web Soil Survey has been a huge success story. Other web-based data presentation platforms have been very successful for planning purposes in times of natural disasters (e.g., earthquake and tsunami in Japan, energy response maps, gridded SURGO data). The key in all these images/maps is the data that underpins the maps. We need good, reliable data. NRCS is the go-to agency for disaster information in the USDA. The NRCS has the coordination and data available to prepare the maps needed for planning and recovery relief.

Other ongoing projects include the National Climate Assessment (less focus on climate change more emphasis on climate sustainability), CIG grants, feed the future, and others. The next National Soil Survey Conference will be in the Northeast, probably Maryland. The next regional work planning conferences of the NCSS will be held in Nebraska (North Central Region), California (West Region), Maine (Northeast Region), and Kentucky (South east region). Levin lead discussion on the proposed dropping of the Soil Classifiers category from ARCPACS and just retaining the Soil Scientist category. The issue which triggered concerns is existing state rules, laws, and regulations which require registered/licensed soil classifiers to perform specific duties.

Modern detailed soil surveys of private land are done, and there are some areas of public land that need to be completed. The focus of NCSS is harmonizing concepts, utilization of new technology, and enhancing the interpretations to meet future and present needs. In the next few years there will be many soil scientists (especially, State Soil Scientists) retiring so the NRCS will have many new leaders with limited experience. So far the NRCS has been able to hire great new people to meet the agency's needs. Most of the future soil survey updates will be looking at existing map unit lines and gathering data to help interpret how the soil mapping unit should be used.

Break was taken at 3:40 pm, and the committee reconvened at 3:50 pm.

NCERA -3 Committee Reports

1. **Effects of Soil Management on Soil Erosion** (Olson, Ransom, and Malo). Discussion centered on types of research being done by committee members. There are major issues with the K and T factors. There is limited science behind the T factors values and more is needed. Erosion phases significantly impact C soil levels. Projects dealing with effects of management on soil organic C levels. Olson has a funded proposal with Russian scientists to look at erosion and soil formation.
2. **Soil Taxonomy** (Miles, Malo, and Crum) Most work has been on reviews of MLRA taxonomy and pedon questions on a local basis. On May 6-10 at Purdue University an organizational meeting was held on establishing a Universal Soil Classification System for the world. Problems identified with Soil Taxonomy included use in cold regions and Brazil and climate regimes. The consensus of the group is to try and develop a system based on a hierarchical system. A sixteen member group is working on joining the various soil taxonomic systems into one. Various timelines and tasks were given during this meeting. The goal is to complete the task by 2018. One recommendation receiving considerable attention is to delete the climatic regimes.
3. **High intensity Soil Surveys** – (Owens and Olson) – Local projects but no regional activity. Some research being conducted on soil predictions based on pixel size (e.g., 10 m). Questions on probabilities for taxa and mapping soil properties are being examined.
4. **Education, Extension, and Recruitment Committee** – (Slater, Crum, Kuzila, Crouch, and Malo) – Some examples of the classes related to our NCERA – 3 charge are the Digital Soil Mapping Class I and II at Purdue University (taught online). Undergraduate enrollments in departments of Agronomy and Soils at KSU, ISU, and SDSU are increasing. The key will be to get graduates to consider soil scientist positions in the NRCS.

5. **Advisory Panel to Director of Soil Survey** – (Ransom) – This committee meets quarterly to talk about the operation of the national soils lab and associated research. Soil Taxonomy is too cumbersome to use and teach. The wording is difficult to read and results in different interpretations by soil scientists. Need to consider abbreviated keys to facilitate use and understanding. Soil Taxonomy is a data hungry system. A committee is being formed to develop a simplified set of classification keys
6. **National Data Base** – (Olson)

Officers for 2011-2012

Moved by Ransom and seconded by Burras that the following slate be approved as officers (effective October 1, 2011) for NCERA for 2011-2012. Motion passed.

Chair – Lee Burras

Chair-elect – Doug Malo

Secretary – Brian Slater

Secretary-Elect – Mark Kuzila

Old Business – Discussion about the draft Benchmark soils bulletin. A draft copy of such a bulletin will be sent by Malo to NCERA-3 members for their review and input.

New Business – Next meeting of the committee will be on June 4-8, 2012 in Omaha, NE in association with the North Central Work Planning Conference of the Cooperative Soil Survey. Also it was mentioned that we will be having a mid-project report due this year and that we need to highlight our accomplishments, the multistate nature of our committee, and our research impacts in that report. Ransom has updated the Email address list for the NCERA-3 list serve. Olson suggested that NCERA-3 may want to consider a possible research project concerning soil changes caused by recent flooding along the Mississippi River.

Ransom will send out a reminder to those who have not filed a state report.

Meeting ended at 5:15 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Doug Malo

Secretary