



**Steering Committee Meeting Notes**

**May 6, 2022**

**Arkansas Department of Agriculture**

**10:00 – 11:00 am**

**Vision:** Healthy Managed Forests and Clean Water

**Mission:** The mission of the Forest and Drinking Water Steering Committee is to facilitate conservation and better management of forested watersheds within Arkansas to protect sources of public water supply through improved understanding and communication between the forest and water sectors.

**Participants:**

Chandler Barton, Ar. Dept of Ag – Forestry Division – Division Forester

Joy Wasson, Ar. Forests and Drinking Water Collaborative – Coordinator

Doug Akin, USDA NRCS - State Forester

Roy Richards, Arkansas Rural Water Association – Source Water Protection Technician

James McCarty, Beaver Water District – Environmental Quality Manager

Becky Roark, Beaver Watershed Alliance – Executive Director

Tate Wentz, Ar. Dept of Ag. – Natural Resources Division – Water Quality Section Manager

Canton Ford, USDA-NRCS – State Water Quality Specialist

Ben Thesing, Central Arkansas Water – Natural Resource Specialist

Scott Meek, Green Bay Packaging – Safety & Environmental Manager

Darcia Routh, Ar. Dept of Health – Source Water Protection – Geologist Supervisor

Kathy Hawes, Southeastern Partnership for Forests and Water – Coordinator

Edgar Mersiovsky, USDA-NRCS - MLRA Leader/State Soil Scientist

**Agenda:**

**Introduction:**

**Chandler Barton**

- Agenda/Approval of December Minutes
- Arkansas Water Resources Conference Planning

**Spring Updates:**

**Joy Wasson/Chandler Barton**

- Southeastern Partnership Update
- Arkansas Water Resources Conference/Forests and Drinking Water Forum, 2022
  - Sessions/Speakers
  - Open Sessions

- Feedback

**Upcoming Events/other news/ Opportunities:**

- |                                     |            |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| - AR CommuniTree Project Update     | Joy Wasson |
| - Other opportunities               | All        |
| - Reports of Significant Activities | All        |

**Arkansas Water Resources Conference**

- **Day One**
  - **Morning sessions:** hosted by AR Water Resource Center focused on Harmful Algal Bloom research
  - **Afternoon - Panel Discussion:** Send questions that will spark good discussion for the Source Water Protection Discussion Panel
    - What feedback would BWD/CAW/Conway Corp have that has worked well/not worked well?
    - ARWA input: utilities need assistance understanding PSOC's (potential sources of contamination) due to high Operator/Mayor turnover.
    - How do smaller systems set up fee structures – would there be value in multiple small systems collaborating to fund a SWP program?
  - **Conservation That Pays – AR Dept of AG – Nat Resource Division and AR Watershed Stewards Program (Community involvement in SWP).** Use example projects and recap of cost share program, unpaved road program, interview county judges, cons districts, and landowners.
  - **Greers Ferry Lake RCPP (TNC, Dist. Conservationists, Clinton Water Utility/Mayor)**
  - **Prescribed Fire/Water Quality (TNC) tentative/unconfirmed – what would be a good alternative if TNC unavailable?**
    - **Forest programs in NWAR – what can be done in Ozark (cash crop) for hardwoods, a look at Southern Missouri projects?**
    - **Farmers/silviculture/grazing with functional riparian buffers. White Oak Initiative?** to conserve and produce more white oak.
    - **Central AR Water – prescribed fire?**
    - **319 funded BMP survey update – John Beasley**
- **Day Two:** hosted by Beaver Watershed Alliance
  - **Watershed success metrics**
  - **Urban ag and forestry initiatives**
  - **Low water crossings/dam removals**
  - **USDA/NRCS programs for stream restoration**
  - **Field tours of restoration sites (Low impact development, river restoration)**

**Introduction of Kathy Hawes – new coordinator for the Southeast Partnership for Forests and Water.**

**Project Idea Discussion - AR CommuniTree Project:** Helping landowners re-establish forested buffers.

- This project is similar/modeled after Forest Releaf of Missouri, a non-profit organization that grows/provides trees for communities to plant. They've been in operation for 20 years. Joy participated in Forest Releaf's volunteer potting day in April, gathered advice/input.
- Developing a master proposal now in order to apply for various funding sources.
- Project Overview:
  - o Bare root seedlings potted and grown for riparian landowners in drinking water watersheds.
  - o Initial Partners: Beaver Water Dist, Conway Corp, and Central Arkansas Water – (host sites); Beaver Watershed Alliance; 3 Master Naturalist groups. Becky –POC NWAR lead, Joy/Chandler lead the Central Arkansas effort.
  - o 5,000 trees grown and planted between 3 watersheds, 6 landowners statewide.
  - o A “CommuniTree committee” will be established with members (from this group) to help with identifying ideal landowners/sites, communicating about the program, assisting with volunteer events, and providing technical assistance to landowners.
  - o Contract assistance to a sub-set of landowners will be made available through this project.
  - o This is designed to help/supplement/assist with existing cost-share programs implementation.
  - o Looking for more partners willing to provide financial support (compost, pots), or in-kind match of time (ex: visiting with landowners, advising on site prep, planting, drought condition preparation). Would be good to have forestry representatives involved.

#### Feedback:

- Canton – Lake Brewer ongoing MRBI project still in implem. Phase, ending in FY23 would be a good fit. Landowners would want to apply before thanksgiving this year to couple with tree planting. High chance of being funded for this practice.
- Landowners with issues in past planting projects with high mortality would be a good fit.
- This would rank high for NPS program funding, but next funding cycle won't be until FY 24.
- NRCS has RCPP program where you could set up easements along riparian areas in SWP places. It would be neat if an RCPP could be statewide with funding for utilities to work with landowners to set up easements like CRP program where landowners will get paid as an incentive.
- Question for Doug Akin: good presentation yesterday on the Forestry subcommittee, wondering if you would share with this group about the “Local Led Initiative”.
  - o Canton: each cons district gets locally led funding (\$200k).
  - o That money is through NRCS used in EQIP program, any applicant that applies can fall into that category.
  - o The locally led working group for each county decide what land use/practice/or area of the county (aka 12 digit HUC) to focus this funding on for that year. Ex: Faulkner: choose pasture.

- POC: Conservation District. Meetings are in the spring to determine this. Need to get on this working group list for identified counties. Something to think about for spring, 2023.
- NRCS: \$7M statewide funding obligated in 2021 for forestry practices, \$1.9M was in locally led pools. Very small amount was in state wide portion (\$200k for statewide ranking pool for all practices, very competitive).
- The real solution to get contracts approved and get implem. Done for hardwood mgmt. is through an RCPP project. MRBI and NWQI have provisions for forestry practices but only with riparian buffers.
- RCPP projs can do landscape scale hardwood mgmt.
- When CSP came out in 2016 lots of success, but now that program has been changed hardwood established mgmt..

Please provide any additional feedback/information you may have on any of these topics to Joy Wasson ([arforestsandwater@gmail.com](mailto:arforestsandwater@gmail.com)) or Chandler Barton ([Chandler.Barton@agriculture.arkansas.gov](mailto:Chandler.Barton@agriculture.arkansas.gov)).

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 am.