

Draft - Open Pine RCPP KIITF Team Notes

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Agenda – Reviewed the agenda, then opened discussion to identify items that attendees want covered today. All were encouraged to suggest topics for discussion – now, throughout the ZOOM call, or even later if something comes to mind.

RCCP Sign-up – Slide #3 shows 8 counties and the number of applications; the focus of this slide is to identify the discrepancy between counties, and how to improve applications in terms of sign-up by certain counties in Arkansas. We really exceeded our expectations in terms of the number of applications in all 8 counties – 60+ Sign-ups (NOTE: all are KIITF counties).

Note: Higher application numbers were in the 4 MFFI counties. The pre-work through MFFI supported the sign-up in those eastern counties, where more than two-thirds of all applications were recorded. The western counties had fewer applications, and that's one of the main reasons we planned this call today. We also want to find out how we can be more effective at procuring the best quality applications, versus quantity; we especially want to hear your thoughts on improving the turnout in those Western counties.

Slide #4 provides a review of all AR total HU applications. Note that of 60 applications in Arkansas, only 9 landowners identified as underserved; this is just 15%, a number that we should work to improve. In contrast – Louisiana sign-up had 24% HU, or 7 of 29 applications.

When looking at the pre-approved landowners (successful applicants who became active for 2022 contracts), 3 identified as HU, and all 3 were listed as beginning farmers and ranchers (BFR). In LA, for instance, 6 were selected/pre-approved landowners, with 4 identifying as HU (67%); (one SDFR/BFR, three BFR).

QUESTION – Is the HU category's inability to get funding due to the size of the property or the acreage in the project?

ANSWER – "Not necessarily." Some of the highest scoring projects were small properties (under 100 acres). The score or ranking process does give more weight to the total practices; in other words, if a landowner engages all five practices within their plan, they will get a high score. We will go back into the data and see how well landowners were ranked by acreage. In general, while acreage and practices do have an impact, acres alone do not make up the score. One suggestion is to list the acres for all pre-approved applications and all HU applicants; look at the size of a tract, and see if there is a relationship by HU, or type of HU, etc.

That being said, there's a great deal of interest in securing funds for smaller landowners in order for them to compete on a level playing field with larger landowners. Though some

landowners who scored very high were HU applicants, they did not receive funding because they were outside the priority area.

Some very important questions discussed here involve a learning process – how can we use this initial sign-up to inform and improve future enrollments? Is there perhaps a better way to usher in those HU applicants who scored very high, are very close to the priority area, but just did not make the cut. What have we learned that could improve outcomes in Round Two? Would a closer look at the ranking process provide an indication of areas to modify? Roger Cousins explained that there are many other factors working in the system, and it takes more time than we have remaining (about 30-45 minutes) to clearly define the specific elements that affect scores. When working through that process with multiple partners in Little Rock on July 18-20, 2022, we were at the table on the 20th, just discussing ranking, for almost 3 hours.

QUESTION – Can we (or even should we) enable some of the smaller landowners to compete better? ANSWER – First, we need to determine if this is a real issue, or just a perception. Do we identify a baseline (set an arbitrary number: 100 acres, or 60 acres, or 50 acres)? If we determine that small acreages have not competed well – and won't in the future – should we set up a separate pool?

QUESTION – Do we intend to seek smaller landowners? ANSWER – Yes, to some degree. Probably now all over each of the 8 counties, but perhaps in targeted, very high priority conservation areas. We may consider a pilot in Clark/Nevada counties in a 10-mile radius - Poison Springs. Maps were displayed that indicated values of in-holdings among the Poison Springs state lands.

This process would allow us to attract those smaller landowners especially in areas where we have high value conservation needs and numerous inholdings. The example described in the Poison Springs area shows why we would want to identify high-value projects, even though they are small ownerships.

Slides #6-#8 depict applicants, priority areas, and location of the Poison Springs state lands, which are scattered and have numerous in-holdings. In Clark County, the vicinity around DeGray Lake could be another potential pilot area for small acreages. Using the priority setting-ranking, is this possible? Timing is critical here for a 2023 sign-up – any changes must be approved and put into the system (must be completed) by October. In summary, need to consider several options. A pilot area may be advisable rather than trying to do this in all 8 counties and 8 parishes; include considerations for size (ownership acreage or locations – or both?) rather than just location or acres. Another option would be to include a separate pool for all HU groups.

How the ranking process works was described in more detail; be aware that the ranking process allows for a maximum of 200 points. Sixty (60) of those points, or 30%, can be derived from the HU category. Conservation-related scoring accounts for the remaining 140 points. Example: for those projects that we reviewed in Slides #4 and #5, the total was 158 to 134, so almost 50% of

their scores came from the HU category. This already shows a very significant benefit, and may be sufficient.

There seems to be a general interest in establishing a separate fund pool. The broad consensus is that we should try to find a way to support smaller blocks, though no specific examples have been noted; this would also take more time to evaluate as a pilot. We need to determine if there is a relationship between HU applicants and small ownerships, or if this is just a perception? We must drill into data from the applications to establish the facts.

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There was a concern raised that many of the projects were already pre-planned and that competition would be limited because of those pre-selections. It was explained that CDN partners like Arkansas GFC and QF have been working with landowners in these eight counties for a number of years, and they have cooperative relationships with Forest landowners. The Morehouse Family Forest Initiative (MFFI) has been going on in four counties since 2017, and has developed a large set of landowners interested in these practices. This is why we had over 2/3 of the applicants come from those four counties. We need to do a better job in the western counties where we believe there's an opportunity to incorporate HU landowners in high conservation value areas like Poison Springs.

We also found out that some landowners, who we expected to score high, did not rank well because of their location or the practices they chose to implement. It is important to realize that ranking can be improved if all practices are considered within any given proposal. Projects that only identify one or two practices will not score well.

QUESTION – How are the priority areas determined? ANSWER: Some background was provided on how the priority areas were developed. Priority areas or developed through a 3-step process that has taken over 10 years; (1) 2012-2017 using land cover and conservation priorities to develop the best places in the four states Texas Oklahoma Arkansas and Louisiana within the West Gulf Coastal Plain. (2) 2019-2020 These conservation priorities were then used to look at the eight counties in Arkansas that had the highest potential for farm Bill development, and (3) (2021-22) concentration areas within those counties were reviewed by both science and habitat development team of at least 15 members of AR-LA CDN to adjust lines along clearly defined boundaries. **Task:** Bartush will provide a website link that will help describe how the priority areas were developed.

QUESTION – What can KIITF (Keeping It In The Family) do to be more formally involved? ANSWER & **Task:** Bartush will provide a proposal format to Charlie Williams to consider development for the RCPP.

Suggestion - We should all be “more nimble” – offer options while informing partners and landowners of the other farm bill programs that can be a benefit that are similar to the RCPP.

There may be some additional paperwork like adjusted gross income or AGI; but with 60 applications some can be moved to other programs, or we can review the applications and identify potential areas where they could compete better and rank higher.

It was also clearly spelled out that after Year One, and with some adjustment, some of those projects that were not selected due to ranking would rise to the top and be selected in Year Two. This is especially so if delivery personnel look closely at the applications and make slight adjustments.

In the process of reviewing priority areas, let's make sure we look at not just conservation priorities but where the communities are that we know may have an opportunity for HU connections, and would allow us to incorporate priority communities with priority conservation areas. The example of Poison Springs was again described.

Further involvement KIITF and discussion at our various team meetings and steering committee meetings will be valuable. Not only does the CDN have a steering committee and a science team, the RCPP partners have a delivery group, a human dimensions group, monitoring group etc., and involvement with any of those groups may be valuable for KIITF.

Task: Bartush will send kmz files for the priority areas to Justin Joe and Charley.

All - Please look at the priority areas in Arkansas and see if there are specific core areas that we could identify to reach those landowners who have not generally been active in accessing farm bill Forestry practices - kmz files will be provided.

Suggestions/Next Steps:

- Find a way to allow for smaller acreages. Develop a cluster map of KIITF landowners in Clark, Nevada, and Ouachita (possibly Calhoun and Bradley) Counties.
- Determine how to give more weight to acreages near, but not inside, the prioritization zone.
- Is there leeway for adjusting the way properties are ranked (i.e. HU/socially disadvantaged)?
- Consider setting \$\$\$ aside for HU.
- Obtain the mapped information on “clustered heirs” properties to inform ranking/prioritization zones in Round 2.

In summary

Lessons learned: There is a need for greater transparency in how the RCPP priority decisions are made. With over 19 contributors, who engage at different levels – perhaps there is a need

for regular communication efforts to allow all partners an opportunity to engage. When broad categories are described, at periodic meetings, some understand – but others do not. Details that are maybe glossed over because they may take a long time to explain (again and again), could appear not just complex and having many layers, etc., though people get lost and the issues become confusing – there is still a need to explain consistently so all who are involved from the start, or are just starting, can understand. Transparency may entail more outreach and communication work on the part of both agency and partners within the RCPP. As a learning and a trust-building exercise, an analysis of each property that was not pre-approved (having a score above 130 points) would be helpful – not only for the landowner, but for everyone.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY