

2009 Clean Ohio AEPP Technical Meeting Notes

Bromfield Building, Auditorium A
Ohio Department of Agriculture
Reynoldsburg, Ohio

August 5, 2009, 1 – 4 p.m.
Notes taken by Cindy Shy

Note: Many individual opinions are captured by the recorder but do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the entire group.

Attendees: Rob Krain, Kevin Joyce, Ryan Edwards, Jonathan Ferbrache, Maryanna Biggio, Paul Hunter, Julia Musson, Andy McDowell, Pat Deering, Larry Frimerman, Renee Winner, Mark Watkins, and Gloria Swick-Brown

ODA Staff Members: Mark A. Forni, Kristen Jensen, Jody Fife, and Cindy Shy

Information Disbursed to Attendees: Agenda, Sign-In Sheet, 2009 Clean Ohio AEPP online application printout, and draft minutes from the June 17, 2009 Advisory Board meeting

Mark Forni thanked everyone for attending. He informed the group that his responsibilities within the department will be changing as will Kristen Jensen's in the near future. His duties will focus in a broader capacity on rural development and the department's grant programs, non-regulatory. He also announced that the Office of Farmland Preservation would move to the first floor of the Bromfield Building, and that John Armentano and Barb Baker are our new NRCS contacts for the FRPP program.

Overview of 2009 Clean Ohio AEPP

After introductions of attendees, Kristen Jensen stated the purpose of the meeting, which is to get feedback on how to improve and clarify the technical aspects of the application process. She began with an overview of the application process, including landowner meetings held in four different quadrants of the state, the new local sponsor/landowner handbook, and local sponsor training.

The online application contained some logistical problems, several of which Rob Krain helped identify. Although the upgrade and upkeep of the application was outsourced in the past, this task may be internally handled this upcoming year.

The 2009 application brought in 205 applications from 40 counties. Several common mistakes in these applications were noted, including

- Missing signatures; and
- Missing or incomplete attachments

It was asked if ODA would ask for corrections when these common issues were encountered. Kristen responded that lack of signature could disqualify an application; however, the local sponsor would be contacted if the application is disqualified, thereby providing a feedback loop. She emphasized that the local sponsor should ensure that the application is filled out completely. According to the application itself, “Any inaccuracies or incompleteness regarding the application is grounds for the ODA to invalidate the application.”

Other major points:

- Adding a cover sheet helps with identification/clarification of attachments, even if no attachment is needed;
- Labeled attachments (with landowner name or ID number) work best. These attachments will not go to the Advisory Board;
- Names would be removed if the Board needs to review an application(s); and
- Refrain from using names in the essays. This request will be added to the online instructions.

After applications were received and logged in, office staff separated the applications to be read by the advisory board using the median score of Tier 1 (62.5) as a benchmark. Initially, Tier 2 essay questions for 116 applications were scored using these parameters:

- At least one for each county submitting an application, with a minimum of 3 per county; and
- Tier 1 score of at least 62; and
- If more than 3 applications per county, included at least 6 applications, and included all additional applications that were within 1 point of Tier 1 score of application #6.

After this initial scoring, the board also scored an additional 14 applications for the NW quadrant. A map of the quadrants chosen by the Board and final rankings were posted online.

The quadrant map used this year is from the County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO). As identified online, the number of applications does show a slight variance between quads. Funding was divided equally among the quads. The map and funding were decisions of the Board, recommended to Director Boggs and approved by him.

The question was raised about whether the funding allocation would change in the future. Mark Forni explained that the administrative code allows for regional balance. As the Board is autonomous, staff can't predict what will happen in future funding rounds.

Kristen has been making offers to applicants. Two quads are finalized with accepted offers, and two quads are still in the offering phase. The current status of offers, by quadrant, was available for viewing at the meeting, and this information is also available via phone. Every attempt is made to finalize offers as soon as possible, but staff operates under time constraints created by waiting periods between offer and acceptance.

A new concept this year is a conference call with local sponsors of the 2009 AEPP participants to discuss the AEPP process. The goal is to inform local sponsors by sharing information on what can be expected in this process. This phone conference will be set once all offers are accepted.

Kristen then walked everyone, step-by-step, through the AEPP online application. Suggestions and comments were made by attendees on these steps:

- Step 1 It is difficult to distinguish from O and 0, I and 1.
- The Main Contact shows up on the local sponsor list instead of the landowner. Landowner names should be listed first or base the local sponsor list on a different step.
- Step 3F We are looking into the issue of reporting contiguous land based in 2 or more counties.
- Step 5A Issues in the past include reporting a trust as joint owners.
- Step 8 The Ohio Revised Code (ORC) states that the land must be in CAUV. An internal rule states that all contiguous land owned by the same legal entity must be enrolled. A conflict arose this year when an applicant with a contiguous 9-acre parcel reported that these acres were never in CAUV. The local sponsor was informed that they could apply without including the 9-acre parcel.
- Step 10B Current mortgage information is requested along with civil judgment and environmental findings. There is a need for consistence between the question and fill-in blanks.
- Step 11A The way the utility easement is sandwiched between other easements that are permanent, confuses could confuse people on acreage deduction.
- Step 12 Can the options be listed in a key for reference ease? If so, will this mislead the landowner due to weighted calculations? Would the handbook be a more appropriate location for the list of options?
- Step 12B Should/Can non-easement protected lands score higher?
- Step 13B Should this be removed, because some water goes to farms, some to subdivisions? How does it affect development pressure? It is one more tool for development. Another topic to be taken into consideration.
- Steps 13C,D Landowner may be losing points when using a map with county and township roads outlined. Use the preferred ODOT map instead.

- Step 13E Radius method (from center of farm) may be more appropriate when determining number of homes in proximity. There is a history of methods used to determine the number of existing homes; none have proven acceptable over time.r
- Step 13 Would like to see frontage on Lake Erie or scenic rivers as points. There is a different type of development pressure associated with these situations. What is the difference between a scenic river and a high-quality stream? Although farming can sometimes take place close to a scenic river, CREP can help protect tributaries.
- Step 14E Should the wording be changed to: “Has the farm been submitted...” versus “Has the landowner submitted...”, in order to accommodate ownership changes within the same family.
- Step 14F Should wording be re-added (removed in 2009): “wherein land use is non-agricultural?” This change took place due to Advisory Board input. Staff will check to see why this change happened.
- Step 14G Is this question opposed to the mission of the program? It didn’t play a factor in some quads, although it was felt that some regional protection is needed. This question may help point out the need to look at easement donations first. Are economic impacts of a farm more important as previous year’s questions within this section asked?
- Step 15D Does the time invested by SWCDs count? Yes, if there is local government dollars provided to SWCDs toward for farmland preservation, this would count. This also applies for Regional Planning farmland preservation efforts.
- Step 15 Some wasted paper when printing this section. This may be a function of the individual printer.
- Step 16 The online instructions for reading and scoring the essays were felt to be a good tool for the writers. Essays are scored on content, not grammar or writing style. Use the online guidelines for help.

One comment was that the entire screen wouldn’t print for the local sponsor. Office staff did receive all information on all applications, however.

At times, the local sponsor will assist the landowner in completing 16D. It is necessary many times for the local sponsor to provide insight/guidance.

- Step 17 Can the local sponsor view this section? Local sponsor doesn't have access, except as a draft. Once NRCS completes this, it can viewed in draft form. Staff will check to make sure no issues with draft format.
- Step 17C If these numbers are not verified by certain documents, this should be Noted in an attachment letter.
- Step 18 Should local sponsors (non SWCD/NRCS staff) have capability to complete the soils information? Some local sponsors would like access to this; some felt that NRCS/SWCD staff should complete if possible, but other competent staff should have access for completion. This may become more of an issue if SWCD/NRCS staff are unavailable for help. Consultation with Chief David Hanselmann of ODNR was suggested.
- Points were lost due to listing of pond with zero point score. Staff is attempting to come up with procedure for ponds in the soils section.
- After Step 18 is completed the system kicks out the SWCD/NRCS representative of the entire system. Instead could they be redirected to the farm list?
- Step 19 Could we put a donation calculation adjustment tool in this section?
- Step 20 A large number of signatures are sometimes needed. When signature pages need to go to different counties, can multiple pages be used? Staff will consider and respond.
- Can the farm name be added to each page, along with LSID, Farm ID, and acres?
- Attachments Are the submitted plat maps sent on to FRPP? FRPP prefers maps from plat books. The county engineer can also print these.
- Is Attachment D just 1 map? Yes. Staff will get an example of a good map online. Aerials, GIS maps also work.
- Other Can a partial step be saved during the online application process? Staff will try to get this operational, but it has proved problematic in the past.
- Other On the farm list page, staff will attempt to get farms organized by year (first), then by landowner name or application ID.

After the technical discussion, Kristen provided the group with hints to submit a successful application. These hints included:

- Fill out a paper copy with the landowner to ensure all information is ready;
- Check the need for additional documentation needed for points;
- Ensure the contact information is correct;
- Make sure the initial steps of the application are accurate;
- All parcels must be owned by the same legal interest;
- Documentation is required for a trust or corporation;
- Proximity to Protected Land: Check for nearby adjoining counties, parks in city limits, conservation easements, and Clean Ohio Open Space funding;
- Consider donated easements;
- To increase Tier 1 points, consider ASAs, historical designations, increase of local match, repeat applications, no recent land use conversion;
- Talk to local officials about the need for planning techniques that are supportive of farmland preservation;
- Answer the Tier 2 question asked in the prompt;
- Compare answers from previous applications;
- Include a legend with maps;
- Label map distances and type of item you are highlighting;
- Title the map, label the attachment letter;
- Label the attachments;
- Include a blank page for attachments that don't apply; and
- Obtain all signatures needed.

It was also asked, can the Office of Farmland Preservation share information on how to improve individual scores? Staff can do so please make contact staff.