

Urban Ag Outreach Agreement
Tribal Summary Report
May 2023

The following report is a summation of meetings and personal interviews that were conducted with various representatives of the Tribal Nations of NE Kansas. The purpose of these interactions was to identify Tribal resource needs and concerns associated with information and education, outreach, resource conservation, and technical assistance.

Tribal representatives from each of the four NE Kansas Tribal Nations (Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas, Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, and Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri) participated and provided valuable focus group input. Tribal representatives included: Tribal Council Members; Administrative staff (Executive Directors, Chief of Staffs, Youth Directors); Tribal Resource Staff (Environmental Directors, Water Quality Specialists, Wetland Specialists, Cultural Resource Specialists); Tribal Farm/Ranch Staff (Farm Managers); BIA representatives; and individual Native American landowners/operators.

Each meeting/interview was treated as a confidential discussion with an understanding that participant names would not be shared or included in this report. Participants understood a summary report would be developed and subsequently provided to NRCS leadership in an effort to better address Tribal needs and improve Tribal assistance.

The needs and concerns identified by the NE Kansas Tribal Nations were generally consistent, with a few unique needs or concerns identified that were specific to an individual Tribe. Considering that, the following narrative can be assumed to apply to the four Tribal Nations as a whole, unless specifically attributed to an individual Tribe.

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Resource Concerns:

- Soil Health** – There is a perception for a need to expand soil health practices (primarily cover crops) across Tribal lands. There is an awareness of the benefits of soil health practices...increased biological activity of soil, increased OM, increased soil infiltration rates, reductions in field sedimentation loss, reductions in nutrient loss, weed suppression, and supplemental grazing sources. Cover crop adoption on Tribal lands has been initiated, but there is a desire to move forward not only increasing cover crop acres, but the diversity of cover crops utilized. There is also an understanding diversified crop rotations are needed to fully support a diversified soil health program...a challenge in a primarily corn/soybean production region. The Iowa Tribe was recently approved for a grant through USDA (Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities) to establish the Iowa Tribe Center for Excellence in Regenerative Native Agriculture (CERNA) Innovation Pilot Program. Through this program the Iowa Tribe plans to educate Native American participants on climate-smart practices, provide long lasting benefits to soil and water health through climate-smart practices, and expand markets for climate-smart commodities.
- Ephemeral/Classic Gully Erosion** - Active erosion is a concern on all Tribal land uses...but especially on cropland. The primary erosion concerns are with ephemeral gully erosion (worked shut every year, but reform annually) and classic gully erosion (erosion areas that can't be farmed across). Additionally, there is the view that if left untreated active ephemeral gully erosion areas in cropland can worsen to the point they transition to classic gully erosion. The soil characteristics and annual rainfall amounts of NE Kansas are conducive to forming these types of erosion, presenting challenges in addressing this resource concern. While the benefits of soil health management practices (no-till, cover crops) are known, there is a realization that gully erosion can't adequately be treated with management practices alone...it takes a combination of management and structural conservation practices to successfully treat gully erosion. This type of erosion is not only present in "non treated" cropland (with not structural practices), but also in cropland that has been previously "treated" with structural conservation practices (i.e., terraces, waterways, etc.) that have outlived their lifespan and are failing. Repairing/replacing structural conservation practices that have outlived their lifespan and are failing (and the treating the associated gully erosion) is a primary concern in cropland. The type of structural conservation practices needed to address active gully erosion are generally expensive and require significant financial resources to address. The concern with ephemeral and classic gully erosion is particularly magnified on the Tribal lands of the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska due to the light loess soils and steep land slopes that are common on their reservation...the resources required

to address erosion concerns in this area are proportionally higher than on any other Tribal lands in NE Kansas.

- Grazing Lands Health/Vigor/Brush Control** – Grazing land improvement is a priority on Tribal lands (3 of the Tribes have active cow/calf operations). There is a concern with the overall plant health and vigor of Tribal grasslands (both range and pasture) and the associated adoption of prescribed grazing practices. Along with plant vigor and health there is a concern with the continued encroachment of trees/brush (primarily cedar, locust, hedge) onto Tribal grasslands. Significant efforts have been made to address brush control, but a perceived continuous effort is needed stay ahead of invasive woody species. There is also a concern with the perceived general complacency towards tree/brush control...we'll get to it when we can...and by then the tree growth has almost become unmanageable. This is a concern on Tribal lands, BIA allotted tracts, and private lands within Tribal reservations. The herbaceous invasive species of sericea lespedeza and old-world bluestem is seen as a threat to the Tribal grasslands, with increased efforts needed to slow the spread of these invaders. This herbaceous invader concern is also present on all grassland ownerships within Tribal reservation boundaries. Although prescribed is utilized on some Tribal lands...in many instances with assistance of BIA prescribed burn services...the perception exists that there is a need for further adoption of prescribed burning within reservation boundaries to help control invasive species...not only on Tribal lands, but also on private lands. It was also shared that in some instances an aging grazing lands infrastructure (fences, ponds, etc.) that supports proper grassland management was a concern. Additionally, there were comments specific to the need for additional technical assistance in the inventory/evaluation of grasslands and the development of comprehensive grazing management plans.
- Nutrient Management** – There is a concern on Tribal lands with overall general application of nutrient management practices. The perception that additional/comprehensive soil testing is needed to support efficient/proper use of fertilizers amounts on cropland and other agricultural land uses. Further there is a concern that improvements in fertilizer placement and application timing are needed. The primary nutrient impairment concerns are phosphorous transfer to surface waters and excess nitrogen leaching to ground waters. Each of the Tribes realize that partnering efforts with non-Tribal producers/entities will be required to address this concern on a watershed basis...areas within and outside Tribal lands.
- Streambank Erosion/Riparian Area Integrity** – There is generally a concern with the active streambank erosion. Stream channels are increasing in width/depth and incising/advancing up smaller tributaries and eventually into adjacent land uses forming advancing classic gully erosion. Streambank erosion is having an

increasingly detrimental effect on associated riparian areas and infrastructure stability (roads, culverts, bridges). Also associated with streambank erosion is the delivery of excessive amounts of sediment to surface waters. While it is viewed streambank armoring practices are generally successful when applied, these practices are considered too expensive to apply on extended/multiple reaches of streams, and that alternative affordable means of streambank erosion control should be considered/explored...such as focusing on total watershed management...retaining the rain where it falls. Riparian area integrity is also of environmental importance on Tribal lands, focusing on the preservation of existing riparian areas, reducing livestock access, reducing encroachment of invasive woody/vegetative species, and expanding application of riparian enhancing practices (buffer strips, etc.)

- **Surface Water Quality/Stream Health** – The overall quality of surface water is a high priority. Water monitoring and subsequent identification of impairments is integral to maintaining and improving Tribal surface waters. Along with water monitoring, stream assessments are completed by each of the Tribes on an ongoing basis. An understanding exists of the surface water issues/concerns, but addressing these issues/concerns on a watershed basis is challenging considering the “checkerboard” ownership within each Tribal reservation, and the amount of contributing watershed area outside Tribal reservations. It’s viewed that partnering with nontribal landowner/producers/entities will be critical to address and treat water quality concerns on Tribal lands and the associated agricultural “community” as a whole. The primary surface water impairments are associated with excessive nutrients (phosphate), sediments, fecal coliform bacteria (animal waste) and algae blooms.
- **Surface Water Quantity/Watershed Assessment** – Over all watershed health (stream health, riparian area protection, landscape diversity, responsible land use, etc.) is recognize as being critically important. Each of the Tribal entities understand the importance of watershed management/planning, but realize the limitations and challenges associated with the need to partner with outside landowners/producers/entities to realize watershed management goals and objectives. The Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation Environmental Office has been actively working with environmental entities on comprehensive watershed health assessments, but a desire was voiced by the PBPN to participate with NRCS in the completion of a watershed feasibility study evaluating potential flood control measures (i.e., PL-566 program).
- **Ground Water Quality** –The primary issue voiced with ground water quality was associated with nitrate impairments. This concern was more prevalent with the Iowa Tribe and the Sac and Fox Nation...assumed this is in relation to their locations within the high corn yielding areas of NE Kansas. A secondary concern

shared was surface pollutants (excess nutrients, herbicides, animal waste) reaching ground water through unplugged and improperly plugged abandoned wells. From a ground water quantity standpoint, the Kickapoo Tribe has explored possible ground water test well sources for increased domestic/industrial use with little success. It was determined that inadequate ground supplies exist within the Tribes footprint to provide needed quantities forcing them to look at additional possibilities for surface water impoundments that would meet their needs. Currently the Kickapoo Tribe is dependent upon the Delaware River as their primary domestic water supply source...which experiences challenges with both water quality and quantity.

- **Wildlife/Pollinator Habitat** – A diversified land use ecosystem incorporating wildlife habitat that benefits are recognized by each Tribe as a need. Comments were shared on the declining populations of ground nesting game birds and non-game birds (quail, pheasant), the degradation and/or loss of brood rearing habitat, inadequate habitat connectivity, loss of native grassland, as well as loss of habitat "edge". Associated with this is the perceived importance of pollinators and protecting/providing pollinator habitat. Several of the Tribes have established pollinator plots on Tribal lands, with the Iowa Tribe being actively involved in honey production. There is a general feeling that pollinator habitat needs to be expanded, incorporating an educational effort that is directed to all landowners/producers/residents within Tribal Reservations.
- **Forestland Health** – Forestland exists on each of the four Tribes...with the Kickapoo Tribe, Iowa Tribe, and Potawatomi Nation having significant acres of forestland resources. Even though there is a recognition of the importance of forestlands from a plant and cultural perspective, there has been relatively little activity to actively inventory and improve Tribal forestlands. The exception to this is the Kickapoo Tribe, who has worked closely with outside entities to inventory and participate in forest improvement projects/contracts. In general, there is a perceived need for additional forestland education, maintenance, and improvement. The main concerns associated with forestlands are lack of proper management and maintenance, decreased plant vigor, density thinning...removal of undesirable trees, control of invasive species, and loss of native hardwoods in forested areas.
- **Wetlands** – Wetlands are an important environmental aspect of Tribal lands in respect to water quality, aquatic wildlife, terrestrial wildlife, vegetative diversity, and a land use of cultural importance. Emphasis has been placed on the inventorying of wetlands on Tribal lands, but a priority of each of the Tribes is to continue to protect, improve, and create wetlands that are beneficial to a healthy landscape.

- **Culturally Significant Plants** – The preservation, cultivation, and possible re-introduction of culturally significant plants is important. The types of culturally significant plants may vary between each of the Tribes, but the desire to maintain the presence of these plants and pass on cultural knowledge associated with these plants exists with each of the Tribes. In association with this concern the Iowa Tribe has established a Tribal National Park, with the objective of preserving culturally important lands and providing an educational resource promoting the importance of ecosystem diversity.
- **Agricultural/Brand Expansion** - Expansion beyond “traditional agriculture” is a priority of some of the tribal entities (in particular the Iowa Tribe and Potawatomi Nation). This includes the incorporation of specialty crops and growing practices (i.e., hoop houses) associated with this production. Specialty crops are being grown to provide fresh produce for Tribal members, along with expansion into additional markets such as industrial hemp and honey production. The Tribes are continually exploring opportunities to promote economic self-sufficiency and expand the diversity of their operations.
- **Sustainability of Resources** - Sustainability of long-term agriculture productivity, resource management, land management, and ecosystem diversity are important on Tribal lands. There is a recognition of remembering and respecting the past, while incorporating cultural knowledge to maintain and improve Tribal resources in a self-sufficient manner in the future.

Outreach/Education/Training Opportunities:

- There is the realization the key to achieving resource goals is a successful outreach program to landowners/producers within and outside reservation boundaries. This is especially true as beneficial practices need to be applied on a watershed basis to appropriately address certain Tribal resource concerns. Tribes and their associated agricultural neighbors would benefit from working together to achieve cumulative results. Considering this, opportunities exist to partner with other entities to provide awareness, education, and training on Tribal resource concerns (which are general the same resource concerns shared by nontribal landowners/producers). Subject matters identified for potential outreach/education/trainings included:
 - Soil Health
 - Grazing Lands Health/Management
 - Prescribed Burning
 - Brush/Invasive Specie Control
 - Nutrient Management
 - Climate Smart Agricultural/Carbon Sequestration
 - Pollinator Habitat Establishment

Because of the general “checkboard” ownership within Tribal reservations the need exists to work simultaneously with nontribal owners/producers to promote practices and activities that address shared resource concerns...we’re all part of the “community”.

- A perception that outreach/education is needed targeting Tribal membership on the resource concerns that exist, the importance of addressing resource concerns, practices used to address resource concerns, and the commitment of Tribal resources that are necessary to do so. Relatively large percentages of Tribal members live off the reservation, and in many cases live out of the area and may not be aware of local resource concerns. There is a perceived need/opportunity to education Tribal members on the resource concerns that exist on Tribal lands. A corollary to this is the perception that this same type of outreach/education may be beneficial for Tribal leadership.
- A realization that “leveraging” environmental partnerships with outside entities (NGO’s, local, state, federal) is needed to aid in successfully addressing identified resource concerns. Leveraging benefits are perceived to be in association with educational/outreach activities and financial assistance programs.
- Comments were provided on the potential need to provide education, training, and technical assistance to Native American “small farmers” within the Tribal lands’ footprint. These are individuals that are not USDA participants but do grow and market local products to derive income. There are increasing numbers of tribal members that grow specialty gardens, participate in local farmer markets, and are exploring smaller scale utilization of local resources. As noted in the “Agricultural Expansion” section previously...not only Tribes, but individual tribal members are “continually exploring opportunities to promote economic self-sufficiency and expand the diversity of their operations”.
- Native American landowners/producers within NE Kansas that own individual “traditional agricultural” operations generally identified resource concerns similar to those of the Tribal entities. These landowners/producers were also generally aware of the programs and resources available to them to address resource concerns. Comments provided by them identified concerns with timeliness of technical assistance, availability of timely financial assistance, and adoption of soil health and climate smart practices. An associated concern was the perceived challenge finding information on **newly introduced** available FA programs through NGO’s, local govt, state govt, and federal govt).
- The education of youth is considered to be essential in the preservation of cultural knowledge and values and the understanding and appreciation of Tribal

natural resources. Comments were shared concerning the need for additional environmental education of Tribal youth, and the need for outreach to local Tribal students through Tribal youth organizations and local schools to improve environmental awareness. There is also a perceived desire to provide Tribal youth increased opportunities for exposure to careers and professions that focus on natural resources through youth mentoring, apprenticeships, and career counselling.

- Several comments were received on the need to increase staff partnering interactions with USDA and the conservation partnership. Similar to NRCS, Tribal support staffs experience loss of institutional knowledge (through attrition, retirements, etc.) and at times struggle with steep learning curves. It was suggested that applicable Tribal staff and local conservation partnership staff include each other in applicable trainings, meetings, and field experiences to enhance the knowledge of both Tribal and nontribal staff and foster a team mentality. It was additionally suggested that informal “mentorship” opportunities be explored to allow Tribal staff, or USDA staff, to utilize the experiences of seasoned employees to gain valuable insight and perspectives working on Tribal lands.
- From a “Tribal Community” education perspective several comments were received concerning the need for interpretive outdoor classrooms for use by youth and adults. The incorporation of interpretive resource information (possible signage) in “green spaces” and/or along walking trails, and the continued promotion and support of community gardens. Also reiterated was the desire to promote the importance of maintaining and establishing “pollinator habitat”...it was viewed there are opportunities to provide education and demonstration activities to Tribal members on establishing pollinator habitat within the footprint of a backyard, green space, or miscellaneous area...establishing numerous small pollinator plots has an overall positive cumulative effect. As mentioned previously, the Iowa Tribe has established a Tribal Nation Park, with one of its main purposes to provide educational interpretive information and experiences to visitors. Considering this, opportunities will exist to provide assistance the Iowa Tribe in the promotion of their Tribal National Park.

Program Needs/Opportunities:

- Each of the four Tribes (along with BIA allotted tracts) have actively participating in USDA programs on Tribal lands over the previous 30 years. Program participation has included EQIP, CRP, CCRP, ACEP-WRE, RCPP, CRP, CCRP, PL-566, WRAPS, DOC, and CTA. Tribal entities see potential financial assistance programs as avenues to leverage their own resources (labor,

equipment, finances) to address identified resource concerns. Although participation in programs has occurred, and continues to occur, there is a hesitation on the part of Tribes to say they are fully knowledgeable of all potential funding sources and programs available to them. Tribes expressed the desire for additional interactions with local conservation staff to gain an awareness of potential programs and the time lines associated with those programs. As with any landowner/producer, the Tribes are interested in continuing to utilize local, state, and federal programs to their advantage. The Tribes recognize challenges associated with staff change...new staff...loss of institutional knowledge...but the Tribes realize this also presents opportunities for new employees to engage Tribes and assist them in expanding Tribal lands program participation.

- Comments were received pertaining to the cost to apply practices that address Tribal resource concerns and that additional FA is always desired. Also, there is a general thought that program payment rates are not keeping pace with inflation. This concern is especially magnified on the Tribal lands of the Iowa Tribe....due to the erosiveness of the existing loess soils and prevalence of steep slopes, construction costs of structural conservation practices addressing erosion concerns is typically 2-3 times higher than average.
- Tribes have been able to address resource concerns through varying financial assistance programs, but there has been little participation in USDA grants. In general, the Tribes are interested in exploring and pursuing USDA grant opportunities and are interested in receiving personalized assistance pertaining to timely information on available grants, assistance with the grant application process, and potential assistance in the implementation and evaluation of USDA grants. Traditionally USDA grant opportunities have been forwarded to applicable Tribal personnel via email by NRCS staff. Of note...the Iowa Tribe was recently (December 2022) awarded a CERNA (Center of Excellence in Regenerative Native Agriculture) grant.
- Tribes have also expressed interest in exploring federal programs that are tailored to preserving/improving specific resource concern areas...such as wetlands. Each of the four Tribes commented that assistance with evaluation of potential eligible ACEP wetland areas is desired, along with program outreach that provides specific information on the program application process, contractual requirements, and maintenance requirements. It is perceived that general access to agency program specialists (making visits on Tribal lands) would assist the Tribes in determining and evaluating program opportunities. The Potawatomi Nation has previously restored a wetland through the ACEP program, and the Kickapoo Tribe has several areas of potential wetland opportunities they would like to explore.

Technical Assistance Opportunities:

- Although the conservation partnership has worked closely with each of the four Tribes on Tribal lands (primarily through program activities), there is a perception that additional technical assistance would be beneficial to assist the Tribes in advancing and expanding their efforts to address resource concerns on Tribal lands...more assistance and partnering outside program activities is desired. Each of the four Tribe's expressed the desire and need for additional inventory and evaluation assistance on Tribal lands...i.e., comprehensive conservation planning, assistance with long range goal setting, assistance with prioritization of resource concerns...in other words, proactive RMS planning rather than reactive program planning. In reality, considering existing workload requirements, current conservation partnership staffs do not have the available time to service this Tribal need in a meaningful manner. Given the inventory, assessment, and planning needs on Tribal lands, consideration should be given to providing additional technical assistance focusing solely on Tribal lands. With the amount of grassland and cropland (and associated resource concerns) that are present on Tribal lands, it is not unreasonable to predict a position (1) focusing on grassland planning/application, and a position (1) focusing on cropland planning/application, would both be fully engaged in providing additional technical assistance on Tribal lands. This potential additional technical assistance would not only serve to assist Tribe's to more thoroughly address resource concerns, but would foster a closer nation to nation relationship.
- This report would be remiss without a narrative on Bureau of Indian Affairs allotted tracts. BIA allotted tracts are a part of "Tribal lands"...they are lands that are owned by Native Americans, but held in trust by the BIA. BIA allotted tracts exhibit the same resource concerns and challenges that were previously identified for the Tribes. BIA lands are intermingled with those of Tribally held lands within each of the four reservations. Similar to the four Tribes, BIA experiences challenges managing and addressing the resource concerns on allotted tracts, and BIA has worked closely with both the Tribes and NRCS on improving the natural resources on these tracts. A perceived barrier to federal program participation exists on BIA allotted tracts. For the purposes of NRCS programs, BIA is not considered an authorized agent of the land ownership and is not allowed to act as a recognized signatory applicant or contract agent for allotted tract land ownership. At this time, the only person that is authorized to submit a NRCS program application, and potentially received NRCS program funds through an approved contract, on a BIA allotted tract is the lessee of the BIA allotted tract (as long as the lease agreement covers the time period of the NRCS program contract). This situation has hindered the land ownership of BIA allotted tracts to participate in NRCS FA programs...typically they're relying on lessees to participate on their behalf, but lessees are hesitant to participate as

they will be the “federal contract participant” responsible for practice implementation costs without the guarantee that when their current lease has expired it will be extended...potentially the lessee is not able to realize the benefits of a completed NRCS contract that they, as the lessee, implemented on ground they do not own, or control beyond the lease period (typically 3-5 years).

Top Five Recommendations for Implementable and Impactful Actions:

- **Provide *additional* direct technical assistance (through new positions) to Tribes to advance and expand their efforts to address resource concerns on Tribal lands.** Providing more technical assistance and partnering outside program activities is desired and needed. Consideration should be given to providing additional technical assistance focusing solely on Tribal lands. It's recommended that new NRCS positions be established and fully engaged with the assessment, inventory, planning, and application needs on Tribal lands. The positional focus of these positions would be on cropland and grazing lands. If not direct NRCS hires, it would be recommended to explore potential partnering agreement possibilities to expand direct assistance on Tribal lands.
- **Increase staff partnering interactions between Tribal staff and conservation partnership staff.** It was suggested that applicable Tribal staff and local conservation partnership staff include each other in applicable trainings, meetings, and field experiences to enhance the knowledge of both Tribal and nontribal staff and foster a team mentality. It was additionally suggested that informal “mentorship” opportunities be explored to allow Tribal staff and USDA staff, to utilize the experiences of each other's seasoned employees to gain valuable insight and perspectives working on Tribal lands.
- **Provide additional direct assistance and guidance to Tribes on potential USDA grant opportunities (such as RCPP, CIG, etc.).** Tribes have successfully addressed resource concerns through varying financial assistance programs, but there has been little participation in USDA grants. In general, Tribes are interested in exploring and pursuing USDA grant opportunities and are interested in receiving personalized assistance pertaining to timely information on available grants, assistance with the grant application process, and potential assistance in the implementation and evaluation of USDA grants. This may be a potential area for additional outreach through a partnering agreement.
- **Make agency program specialists available (making visits on Tribal lands) that could assist Tribes in determining and evaluating specific program opportunities.** Tribes have expressed interest in exploring federal programs that are tailored to preserving/improving specific resource concern areas...such

as wetlands. Each of the four Tribes commented that assistance with evaluation of potential eligible ACEP wetland areas is desired, along with program outreach that provides specific information on the ACEP program application process, ACEP contractual requirements, and ACEP maintenance requirements.

- **Partner with Tribes to provide additional outreach/education targeting Tribal leadership and general Tribal membership** on the importance of addressing resource concerns, practices used to address resource concerns, and the commitment of Tribal resources that are necessary to do so. Relatively large percentages of tribal members live off the reservation, and in many cases live out of the area and may not be aware of local resource concerns. There is a perceived need/opportunity to education tribal members on the resource concerns that exist on Tribal lands. This may be a potential area for additional outreach through a partnering agreement.