

***Locally Led Conservation
And
Local Workgroups***

NRCS Policy

Title 440- Conservation Programs Manual Part 500
Locally Led Conservation.

- Locally led conservation begins with the community itself, working through the local conservation district. It is based on the principle that community stakeholders are best suited to deal with local resource problems.
- (4) Basic Phases or Activities in the Locally Led Process

Phase I: Public Involvement / Conservation Needs Assessment

- The conservation district(s) lead the effort together public input from a broad range of agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals in the local area who have an interest in natural resource conditions and needs. These community stakeholders evaluate natural resource conditions in a conservation needs assessment and establish broad conservation goals to meet those needs.

Phase II: Conservation Action Plan

- The conservation district involves community stakeholders developing and agreeing on a conservation action plan that documents decisions and time schedules, identifies priorities, sets goals, and identifies Government and nongovernment programs to meet those needs. Community stakeholders, under conservation district leadership, identify which Government and nongovernment programs are needed to address specific natural resource concerns.

Phase II: Conservation Action Plan

- Key points:
 1. Identifies Priorities.
 2. Sets Goals.
 3. Identifies Government and nongovernment programs to meet needs.
- USDA conservation programs are just some of the many programs that can be used to satisfy the community's goals and needs.

Phase III: Implementation of the Conservation Action Plan

Community stakeholders, under conservation district leadership, obtain Government and nongovernment program resources and assist in implementing the programs that can satisfy the community's goals and needs, as identified in the action plan.

Phase IV: Evaluation of the Conservation Action Plan

- The effectiveness of plan implementation should be evaluated to ensure that the community stakeholders' planned goals and objectives are achieved. An evaluation should be made to determine where the actual results differ from those anticipated. The difference may result in retracing one or more of the steps in the locally led conservation effort.

What is “local”

- Can mean a county, a portion of a county, a watershed, a multicounty region, or whatever geographic area is best suited to address the resource conservation needs identified.
- Local may also include specific sectors of a county, watershed, region, or community with common resource concerns.

Primary Focus: Resource Concerns

- Locally led conservation must be driven by natural resource conservation needs rather than by programs.
- To accomplish this requires an updated resource assessment and maps showing the location of the resource concerns. GIS data is the best way to exhibit the information.

Program Delivery Process

Title 440- Conservation Programs Manual
Part 501

USDA

Conservation

Program Delivery

Subpart A

Background

- USDA seeks input from State Technical Committees and local working groups on State and local conservation program delivery.
- State Technical Committees and local working groups are advisory in nature and have no implementation or enforcement authority, USDA gives strong consideration.

STAC and LWG may provide

- Information, analysis, and recommendations for the following activities and programs.
 1. FA Programs – AMA, EQIP, WHIP, (etc)
 2. Easement Programs – GRP, WRP, FRPP
 3. Conservation Compliance (HEL)
 4. CRP, CIG, AWEF, TSP, GLCI (etc)
- According to 16 U.S.C. Section 3862(d), State Technical Committees and local working group are exempt from the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App. 2).

Recommendations

Recommendations for local program delivery should be submitted to the local designated conservationist. The local designated conservationist considers the recommendations from the local working group, along with technical expertise and national and State program policies, to develop the local NRCS conservation program available in the assigned geographic area.

Recommendations

- Recommendation for State program delivery should be submitted to the State Technical Committee. The State Technical Committee considers the recommendations from the local working group to develop State conservation priorities and program delivery recommendations to the State Conservationist.

STAC Recommendations

- The State Conservationist considers the recommendations from the State Technical Committee, along with technical expertise and national program policies, to develop the NRCS conservation program available in the State.

Local Workgroups

Title 440- Conservation Programs Manual
Part 501-Subpart B

Local Workgroup Responsibilities

- (1) Ensure that a conservation needs assessment is developed using community stakeholder input.
- (2) Utilize the conservation needs assessment to help identify program funding needs and conservation practices.
- (3) Identify priority resource concerns and identify, as appropriate, high-priority areas needing assistance

LWG Responsibilities

- (4) Recommend USDA conservation program application and funding criteria, eligible practices (including limits on practice payments or units), and payment rates.
- (5) Participate in multicounty coordination where program funding and priority area proposals cross county boundaries.
- (6) Assist NRCS and the conservation district with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers' training needs.

LWG Responsibilities

- (7) Recommend State and national program policy to the State Technical Committee based on resource data.
- (8) Utilize the conservation needs assessment to identify priority resource concerns that can be addressed by USDA programs.
- (9) Forward recommendations to the NRCS designated conservationist or Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Executive Director, as appropriate.
- (10) Adhere to standard operating procedures identified in Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 501, Subpart B, Section 501.14.

Examples of Recommendations to the FO DC

- Locally identified natural resource concerns, priorities, and opportunities
- Local conservation program priorities
- Local program application screening and ranking criteria.

Examples of Recommendations to the FO DC

- Local conservation practices offered in specific programs to address locally identified resource concerns. (conservation practices must be included in the Field Office Technical Guide)
- Program payment percentages documented in practice payment schedules and/or maximum payment on conservation practices

Examples of Recommendations to the STAC

- State or regional identified natural resource concerns, priorities, and opportunities.
- State or regional conservation program Priorities.
- State and national program policy changes

Examples of Recommendations to the STAC

- Revision or new interim conservation practices in the Field Office Technical Guide
- Program payment percentages documented in practice payment schedules and maximum payment on conservation practices.

Examples of Recommendations to the STAC

- Levels of financial and technical support from available programs needed to address identified resource concerns.
- Need for special initiatives focusing on priority resource concerns or areas

Membership of LWG's

- Should be diverse and focus on agricultural interests and natural resource issues existing in the local community.
- Should include agricultural producers representing the variety of crops, livestock, and poultry raised within the local area; owners of nonindustrial private forest land, as appropriate.

Membership of LWG's

- Representatives of agricultural and environmental organizations.
- Representatives of governmental agencies carrying out agricultural and natural resource conservation programs and activities.

Membership

➤ Membership of the USDA local working group may include but is not limited to Federal, State, county, Tribal, or local government representatives. Examples of potential members include—

- (1) NRCS designated conservationist.
- (2) Members of conservation district boards or equivalent.
- (3) Members of the county FSA committee.
- (4) FSA county executive director or designee.
- (5) Cooperative extension (board members or manager).
- (6) State or local elected or appointed officials.
- (7) Other Federal and State government representatives.
- (8) Representatives of American Indian and Alaskan Native governments.

Membership

To ensure that recommendations of the local working group take into account the needs of diverse groups served by USDA, membership must include, to the extent practicable, individuals with demonstrated ability to represent the conservation and related technical concerns of particular historically underserved groups and individuals including but not limited to women, persons with disabilities, socially disadvantaged and limited resource groups.

Membership

Individuals or groups wanting to become members of a local working group may submit a request that explains their interest and outlines their credentials for becoming a member of the local working group to the local working group chairperson and the NRCS district conservationist (or designated conservationist). The district conservationist (or designated conservationist) will assist the soil and water conservation district in making decisions concerning membership of the group.

Conservation District Responsibilities

- (i) Develop the conservation needs assessment as outlined in 440-CPM, Part 500, Subpart A.
- (ii) Assemble the USDA local working group.
- (iii) Set the agenda.
- (iv) Conduct the USDA local working group meetings.
- (v) Transmit the USDA local working group's priority area and funding requests to the NRCS designated conservationist or the State Technical Committee, as appropriate.

District Conservationist Responsibilities

- (i) Encourage and assist other USDA agencies to participate in the locally led conservation and working group efforts, as feasible.
- (ii) Assist with identifying members for the local working group.
- (iii) Help identify program priorities and resources available.
- (iv) Assist in the development of program priority area proposals.
- (v) Comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, nondiscrimination statement, and other environmental, civil rights, and cultural resource requirements.

District Conservationist Responsibilities

(vi) Support and advise the local working group concerning technical issues, program policies and procedures, and other matters relating to conservation program delivery.

(vii) Ensure that populations are—

- Provided the opportunity to comment before decisions are rendered.
- Allowed to share the benefits of, not excluded from, and not affected in a disproportionately high and adverse manner by Government programs and activities affecting human health or the environment.

District Conservationist Responsibilities

- (viii) Analyze performance indicators and reports.
- (ix) Report the conservation programs' impacts on resources.
- (x) Perform the responsibilities of the conservation district where a conservation district is not present or chooses not to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in 440-CPM, Part 501, Subpart A, Section 501.6A.
- (xi) Give strong consideration to the local Working group's recommendations on NRCS programs, initiatives, and activities.
- (xii) Ensure that recommendations, when adopted, address natural resource concerns.**

Standard Operating Procedures

Local working groups are normally chaired by the appropriate soil and water conservation district (SWCD). In the event the SWCD is unable or unwilling to chair the local working group, NRCS district conservationist (or designated conservationist) is responsible for those duties.

Standard Operating Procedures

The local working group should meet at least once each year at a time and place designated by the chairperson, unless otherwise agreed to by the members of the local working group. Other meetings may be held at the discretion of the chairperson. Meetings will be called by the chairperson whenever there is business that should be brought before the local working group.

Public Notification

- (1) Local working group meetings are open to the public and notification must be published in one or more newspapers, including recommended Tribal publications, to attain the appropriate circulation.
- (2) Public notice of local working group meetings should be provided at least 14 calendar days prior to the meeting. Notification will need to exceed the 14-calendar-day minimum where State open meeting laws require a longer notification period. The minimum 14-calendar-day notice requirement may be waived in the case of exceptional conditions, as determined by the chairperson or NRCS district conservationist (or designated conservationist).
- (3) The public notice of local working group meetings will include the time, place, and agenda items for the meeting.

Meeting Information

Agendas and information must be provided to the local working group members at least 14 calendar days prior to the scheduled meeting. The district conservationist (or designated conservationist) will assist the local working group chairperson, as requested, in preparing meeting agendas and necessary background information for meetings.

Public Participation

Individuals attending the local working group meetings will be given the opportunity to address the local working group. Opportunity to address nonagenda items will be provided if time allows at the end of the meeting. Presenters are encouraged to provide written records of their comments to the chairperson at the time of the presentation, but are not required to do so.

Written comments may be accepted if provided to the chairperson no later than 14 calendar days after a meeting.

Conducting Business

- The meetings will be conducted as an open discussion among members.
- Discussion will focus on identifying local natural resource concerns that can be treated using programs and activities identified in 440-CPM, Part 501, Subpart A, Section 501.0C.

Guidelines

- (i) The chairperson will lead the discussion.
- (ii) Only one person may speak at a time. Every participant should have an opportunity to speak. The chairperson or his or her designee is responsible for recognizing speakers.
- (iii) The chairperson, in consultation with those members present, may establish time limits for discussion on individual agenda items.

Guidelines

- (iv) Local Workgroups are advisory in nature and all recommendations are considered.
- (v) Members may be polled, but voting on issues is not appropriate.
- (vi) The chairperson will defer those agenda items not covered because of time limits to the next meeting.

Meeting Records

Summaries for all local working group meetings will be available within 30 calendar days of the meeting and will be filed at the appropriate local NRCS office.

Input to State Technical Committee

- Local working group recommendations are to be submitted to State Technical Committee chairperson (State Conservationist), the District Conservationist (or designated conservationist), or both (as appropriate) within 14 calendar days after a meeting.

Response to Local Working Group Recommendations

The designated conservationist will inform the local working group as to the decisions made in response to all local working group recommendations within 90 days. This notification will be made in writing to all local working groups members and made available for the public at the appropriate local NRCS office.

State Technical Committee

Title 440- Conservation Programs Manual
Part 501-Subpart C

Summary

Locally led conservation at the Conservation District level is focused on resource assessment, priority of resource concerns and goals for local conservation efforts.

(Resource status [Needs Assessment] and what really needs to happen to treat those concerns [Goals])

Summary

1. Being supportive of CD efforts and LWG's is a key to success. Be a leader but know when to defer the leadership.
2. Local workgroups primary focus is recommendations on; what types of projects to fund with local fund pool allocations (allocations are based on state formula).