



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

January 2006

# Report to Congress on the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program





**Cover Photos**

**Background, Wetland/Pond Filtration Project, Wood River RC&D, Idaho**

**1. Apprentices in Shadehouses (small photo, left)**

**2. Bio Silo at Ottumwa Generating Station (small photo, 2nd from left)**

**3. Feedstock Handling (small photo, 2nd from right)**

**4. School Lunch Program, West Florida RC&D (small photo, right)**

**Facing Page Photos**

**Liz, Potter (left)**

**Downtown Revitalization, Headwaters RC&D, DuBois, PA (center)**

**Mobile Conservation Classroom, South Coast RC&D, CA (right)**

# Preface

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**S**ection 1534 of the Food Security Act of 1985 as added by Section 2504 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 provides for the evaluation of the Resource Conservation and Development Program, as follows:

- (a) **IN GENERAL.** – The Secretary of Agriculture, in consultation with councils, shall evaluate the program established under this subtitle to determine whether the program is effectively meeting the needs of, and purposes identified by, States, units of governments, Indian tribes, non-profit organizations, and councils participating in, or served by, the program.
  
- (b) **REPORT.** – Not later than June 30, 2005, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report describing the results of the evaluation, together with any recommendations of the Secretary for continuing, terminating, or modifying the program.



**Facing Page Photos**  
**Wheelchair-Accessible Lake, Columbia-Pacific RC&D, WA (left)**  
**Wheels to Work, Golden Triangle RC&D, GA (center)**  
**Feedstock Handling (right)**



# Acknowledgements

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The gathering and analysis of information and the development of this report could not have been accomplished without the invaluable help of many partners. Those agencies and organizations are recognized below.

**Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Policy Advisory Board (PAB)** - The PAB provided policy guidance and advice to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the design, implementation, and completion of the RC&D program evaluation and resultant recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture.

## NRCS:

- Reviewed previous evaluation reports;
- Reviewed program goals, operating instructions, area plans for defining possible evaluative criteria;
- Defined evaluation focus, methodology and review process, including the team membership and evaluation criteria;
- Oversaw the day-to-day activities of the review and report generation; and
- Developed and managed the evaluation timeline.

## PAB Agencies (AMS, ARS, CSREES, ERS, FNS, FSA, FS, NRCS, RD):

- Defined what RC&D means to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and future direction of the program;
- Provided suggestions for how the evaluation could be conducted, evaluation criteria, and provided comments on the report; and
- Participated in listening sessions and site visits.

## National Association of Resource Conservation & Development Councils (NARC&DC):

- Helped to design the methodology and timeline for the evaluation;
- Conducted relevant components of the evaluation and recommendation, such as a member survey using their own funds and composed qualitative statements about the current program and direction for the future; and
- Participated in all phases of the evaluation.

## RC&D Councils:

- Provided evaluation data and results concerning the development of area plans and implementation of related projects;
- Reported other requested information; and
- Offered recommendations for improving the program.

## PUBLIC or Other, (including States, units of Government, Indian tribes, non-profit organizations):

- Provided input on the program meeting their needs via listening sessions and responses to the *Federal Register*.







# Table of Contents

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<b>Preface</b>	
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>i-ii</b>
<b>Program History and Background</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Report Findings</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Program Benefits Analysis .....	4
Listening Session Results .....	8
Federal Register Comments .....	10
National Association of RC&D Councils Federal Register Comments .....	10
Results of RC&D Area Plan Review .....	11
Results of On-Site Field Reviews .....	12
Results from NARC&DC Council Questionnaire .....	13
Results from Federal Employee Questionnaire .....	14
<b>Summary Findings</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Results from the Administration’s Program</b>	
<b>Assessment Rating Tool</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Report Recommendations</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Appendix:</b>	
A – Final Report Listening Sessions .....	25
B – NARC&DC Letter Responding to Federal Register .....	32
C – OMB PART Results for RC&D Program .....	36
D – Historical Tables .....	49
<b>List of Acronyms and Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>List of Figures and Tables</b> .....	<b>62</b>





Drainage for ballfield in the  
Penns Corner, RC&D area,  
Wilkesburg, PA



## Executive Summary

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As required by Section 2504 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, the Secretary of Agriculture, acting through Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Department - level Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Policy Advisory Board has conducted this evaluation in consultation with the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils (NARC&DC) and participation from all 375 councils served by the program. This report submitted to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate describes the results of the evaluation and provides recommendations.

The evaluation used eight professionally facilitated listening sessions and the *Federal Register* to capture public comments regarding the effectiveness of the program meeting the needs of and purposes identified by States, units of government, Indian tribes, non-profit organizations, and councils. The evaluation used site visits to three States, detailed RC&D area plan reviews, a Federal employee questionnaire, and a NARC&DC funded member questionnaire to obtain a qualitative and quantitative understanding of the operation and effectiveness of the RC&D program nationwide. In addition, the evaluation summarized the cumulative benefits of the 12,985 projects reported completed by councils from fiscal year 2002 through 2004.

However, the consultative report did not assess several important considerations, including whether permanent Federal support for local councils is a Federal priority, the extent to which the program is duplicative of other Federal, State, local, and private efforts; and how should local councils be held accountable for performance and cost efficiency.

Results of the qualitative review indicate that the RC&D program meets the needs of, and purposes identified by, States, units of government, non-profit organizations, and councils participating in, or served by the program. However, there is opportunity to increase participation with Indian tribes through the RC&D program. Findings from field reviews, listening sessions, and review of RC&D area plans indicate that the RC&D program is producing mixed results in meeting the needs of the 562 Federally-recognized Indian Tribes and Alaska Natives. While relationship building in Indian country is complex, RC&D councils as non-profit representatives of local government, could provide a structure for tribal governments to address their concerns.

Program participants believe that the RC&D program effectively links conservation and economic development through an effective public-private partnership delivery system. Other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and philanthropic foundations, all partner in the implementation of projects designed to meet the specific needs of the communities served by the RC&D councils. RC&D area plans are linked to local and State comprehensive planning efforts and projects undertaken by RC&D councils are meeting local community needs. All 375 RC&D areas are compliant with the law, which requires that at least one of the four statutory elements is addressed. However, only three-quarters of the RC&D areas meet NRCS policy requiring that all four elements be addressed.

Overall, the program has been successful in establishing locally led conservation and economic development efforts and developing effective community leadership. Participants in the evaluation expressed that the program's major assets are the establishment of area



plans and the Federal non-profits status of councils and perceive the Federal coordinator, public participation and program flexibility as key factors to the success of the program.

A Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) evaluation of the RC&D program was conducted by the Administration in 2004 before this evaluation was completed. The PART found that while the program is adequately managed, it suffers from shortfalls in strategic planning, measuring program results and accountability. An important difference is the PART finding that the RC&D program has not demonstrated how it is distinct and unique from other programs being offered versus this report's conclusion that RC&D is unique.

In addition, NRCS does need to: develop easily understood long-term outcome measures; establish ambitious performance goals; and more effectively target funding resources to meet the highest priority needs in order to address PART concerns.

## **Recommendations**

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Recognizing the contributions that RC&D councils provide in facilitating public-private partnerships and assisting local communities with identifying and addressing their own priorities, the Administration recommends continuing Federal support to councils that remain interested in maintaining RC&D designation from USDA. However, also recognizing the findings from the PART assessment and in order to focus limited conservation funding on other priority natural resource concerns, the Administration proposes reducing and consolidating federal support for the RC&D program. Under this new approach, all 375 authorized RC&D areas will still receive administrative and technical assistance but at a reduced level. NRCS will review the performance of each RC&D area to determine the appropriate level of support but in general, RC&D coordinators will be responsible for multiple RC&D areas. Councils are encouraged to continue to provide their services, but will need to use state, local, and private sources of administrative assistance to augment federal support.

There is also the expectation that the program will continue to incorporate emerging concerns such as cooperative conservation, ecosystem services, biomass energy production, and innovative conservation technology into local council area plans and projects.

More will need to be done to increase program participation with Indian tribes and address the OMB PART identified operational deficiencies. Internal policy and administrative process changes have been recommended to: increase participation with Indian tribes; develop and implement meaningful annual and long-term performance goals and measures; implement a new performance reporting system that supports the President's management initiatives; and streamline the program. ■





## Program History and Background

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The Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program was developed under the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, (16 U.S.C. 590a-590f), the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, (16 U.S.C. 1010 and 1011), and the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962, and is authorized under subtitle H, title XV of the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981, (16 U.S.C. 3451-3461), as amended. Section 2504 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 permanently authorized the program.

The Secretary of Agriculture has responsibility for the RC&D Program to provide assistance to councils to develop and carry out area plans and projects in designated areas to:

- Conserve and improve the use of land, develop natural resources, and improve and enhance social, economic, and environmental conditions in primarily rural areas of the United States.
- Encourage and improve the capability of State, units of government, Indian tribes, non-profit organizations, and councils to carry out the purposes described.

In carrying out this responsibility, the Secretary may:

- Provide technical and financial assistance to any council to assist in developing and implementing an approved area plan for a designated area.
- Cooperate with other departments and agencies of the Federal Government, State, and local units of government, local Indian tribes, and with local non-profit organizations in conducting surveys and inventories, disseminating information, and developing area plans.

- Enter into agreements with councils.

NRCS has the delegated responsibility to administer the RC&D Program. Assistance is provided to geographically designated RC&D areas, as authorized by the Secretary of Agriculture, in partnership with non-profit RC&D councils. Eight other USDA agencies that manage conservation or development activities are involved with overall RC&D program policy and guidance as members of the USDA RC&D Policy Advisory Board (PAB) and Working Group. The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Cooperative State, Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES), Economic Research Service (ERS), Farm Service Agency, (FSA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), Forest Service (FS), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Rural Development, Office of Community Development and Rural Utilities Services (RD) have developed a formal Memorandum of Understanding to recognize designated RC&D areas and councils as important to implementing their missions.

The Chief of the NRCS establishes program participation parameters and manages implementation of the program within legislative authority and other applicable rules and regulations. NRCS State Conservationists are assigned Federal responsibility to follow national program guidelines for the RC&D program in each State. The State Conservationist has overall USDA coordination responsibility within a State to ensure cooperation among the USDA services sought by the RC&D councils to implement local projects. RC&D program guidance is prescribed in the NRCS Conservation Programs Manual, Part 513, the NRCS General Manual, and other guidance documents within the Department.

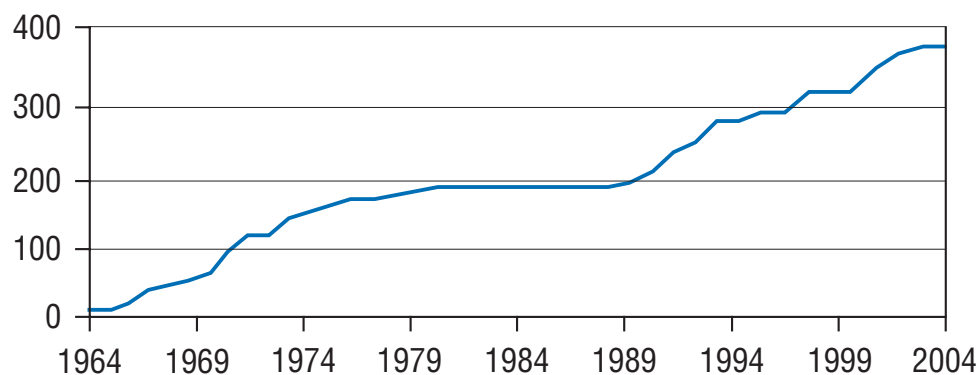
USDA assistance to the RC&D councils consists of providing a technical coordinator and administrative support. Technical assistance from the various USDA agencies is provided to help develop and implement the RC&D area plan. NRCS employs coordinators to provide technical day-to-day coordination of resources sought by RC&D councils, or in a few cases, provide coordination assistance through special interagency arrangements with other USDA agencies. RC&D coordinators assist local program participants to develop and implement RC&D area plans that direct local action to improve environmental, social, and economic conditions within the designated RC&D area. Coordinators must understand programs that fit local needs and build working relationships with USDA, and other Federal, State, and local agencies. Coordinators match those resources with local RC&D council volunteers to implement the RC&D area plan. NRCS State Conservationists monitor and evaluate RC&D program activities and provide supervision of the coordinator. Other USDA agencies assist the program within their existing authorities and mission.

Local leadership and decision making for local activities is provided by a council that is established as a non-profit corporation with Internal

Revenue Service IRS 501(c) tax exempt status. Currently, there are 375 designated RC&D areas, and 32 applicant areas that are waiting designation by the Secretary of Agriculture.

RC&D councils are composed of local citizenry who are local government officials, farmers, ranchers, civic leaders, business leaders or others who are interested in contributing to the overall well-being of the region. All designated RC&D areas except one in northern California include several counties. The local RC&D council sets local policy, direction, and priorities for the operation of their non-profit within RC&D legislative authority and national guidelines. The council is required by law to prepare and implement an area plan. The development of an area plan encourages the RC&D volunteers to seek input from various interests and identify what services are strong or weak in the geographic area they have chosen to serve. This planning process documents the progress of the RC&D efforts and identifies the shift and change challenging the people, natural resources, and the economy of the area. RC&D area plans are strategic plans that address RC&D area needs and opportunities over a five-year planning horizon and serve as the agreement between the RC&D council and NRCS for program

**Figure 1. Number of RC&D Areas by Year**



technical assistance during that time frame. In addition, the council and RC&D coordinator prepare an annual plan of work and individual project plans to document specific activities to be undertaken to achieve the goals and objectives of their area plan. These actions are recorded locally and linked nationally to measure the benefits of USDA assistance and council effectiveness in leveraging public and private resources for local purposes.

A unique quality of the council, as a non-profit corporation, is the ability to obtain technical and financial assistance from a broad range of sources including the Federal, State, and local

levels of government, other public organizations, private sources and individual contributions, to plan and implement projects. RC&D program assistance provides professional project planning and management through the RC&D coordinator. This capacity and flexibility allows for the council to adapt to change quickly and help new leaders be more effective in making or managing local change to improve the economy or environment of the RC&D area.

The following map shows the near nationwide coverage of the RC&D program. ■

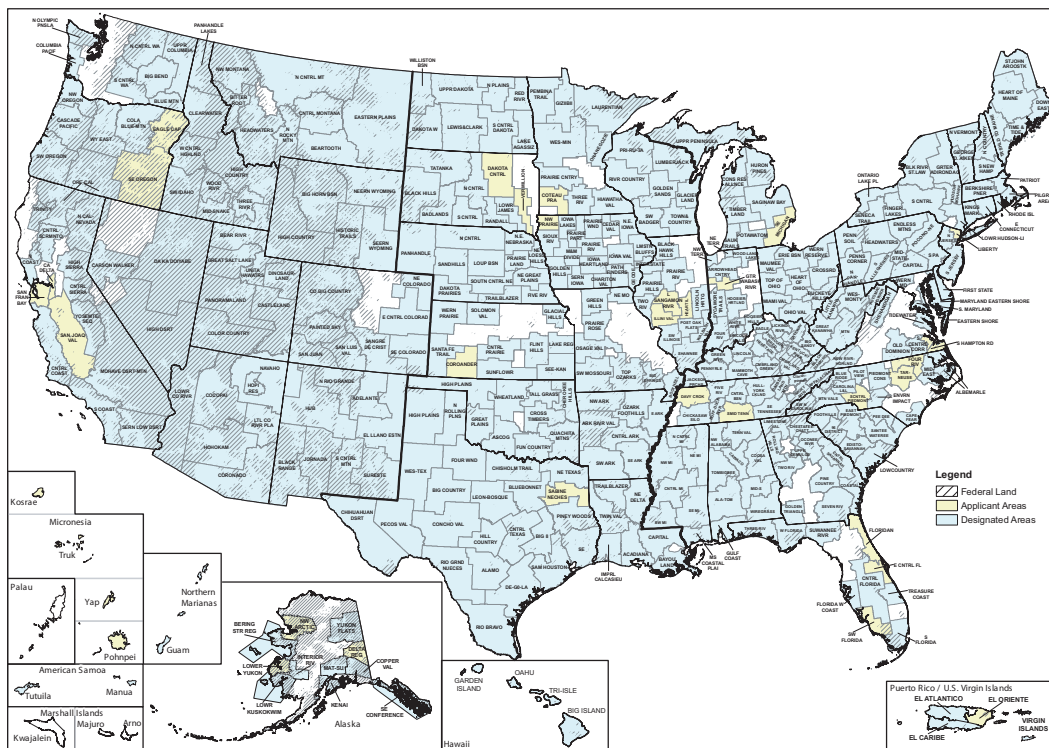


Figure 2. Resource Conservation and Development Areas



# Report Findings

## Program Benefits Analysis

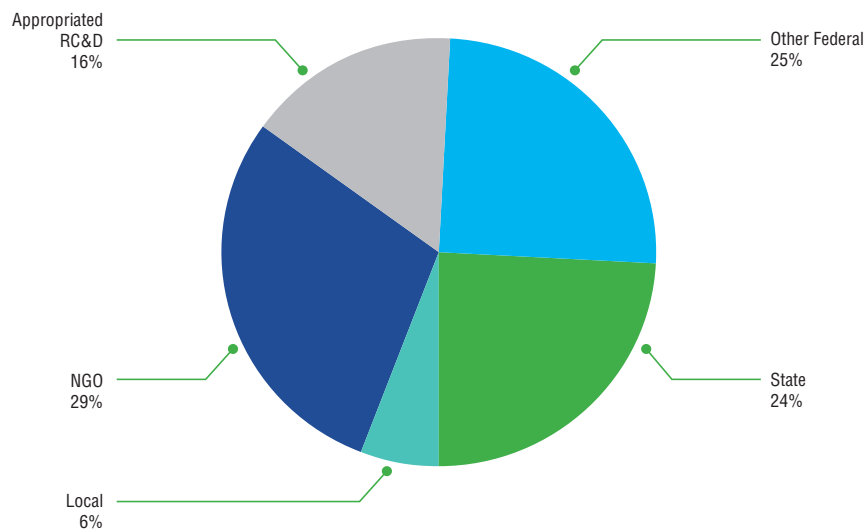
The RC&D program coordinators regularly report contributions obtained and benefits gained from project implementation using a web-based database system. This section summarizes FY 2002 through 2004 reported activity.

The 375 RC&D councils use RC&D appropriated technical assistance, other Federal assistance, grants, contracts, and donations of time, services and goods to complete an average of 4,330 projects each year. A total of 407,288 volunteers contributed time to install RC&D conservation projects as recorded through the NRCS Earth Team volunteer effort.

From FY 2002 through 2004, RC&D councils applied for and helped to coordinate grants to deliver projects in their communities. Of the financial and administrative assistance funding received:

- Only 16 percent (\$150.3 million) of the total RC&D funding comes from direct appropriation, the remaining 84 percent (\$791.8 million) comes from other sources.
- Of the \$791.8 million, other Federal programs accounted for 25 percent or \$227.5 million, and States and local units of government provided 24 percent and 6 percent, respectively. Non government assistance reflected 29 percent. Indian tribes contributed \$3.179 million to complete projects benefiting tribal members. This number is included in the local government contributions shown below.

**Figure 3. FY 02-04 Total RC&D Contributions: \$942.176 Million (Includes Appropriated and Leveraged Funds)**



Contributions include cash, fair market value of donated materials, professional services and volunteer time.

**Table 1. Total RC&D Contributions**

<i>Funding Source</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>Total 02-04</i>
Other Federal	\$ 73,796,000	\$ 89,545,000	\$ 64,132,000	\$227,473,000
State	\$ 71,566,000	\$ 56,103,000	\$ 45,450,000	\$173,119,000
Local	\$ 18,292,000	\$ 28,778,000	\$ 13,802,000	\$ 60,872,000
NGO	\$ 88,670,000	\$158,309,000	\$ 83,376,000	\$330,355,000
Appropriated RC&D	\$ 48,048,000	\$ 50,668,000	\$ 51,641,000	\$150,357,000
Grand Totals	\$300,372,000	\$383,403,000	\$258,401,000	\$942,176,000

The NRCS database used to develop this report contains 141 potential benefits within 11 different project purpose categories. For this report, these 11 categories were correlated to the four legislated RC&D Program elements in the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act. The elements are:

**Land Conservation:** The purpose is to control erosion and sedimentation.

**Water Management:** Provides one or more clear environmental or conservation benefits, the purpose of which is to provide for the conservation, use, and quality of water, including irrigation and rural water supplies; the mitigation of floods and high water tables; the repair and improvement of reservoirs; the improvement of agricultural water management; and the improvement of water quality.

**Community Development:** The purpose of which is to improve the development of resources-based industries; the protection of

rural industries from natural resource hazards; the development of adequate rural water and waste disposal systems; the improvement of recreation facilities; the improvement in the quality of rural housing; the provision of adequate health and education facilities; the satisfaction essential transportation and communication needs; and the promotion of food security, economic development, and education.

**Land Management:** The purpose of which is energy conservation, including the production of energy crops; the protection of agricultural land, as appropriate, from conversion to other uses; farmland protection; and the protection of fish and wildlife habitat.

The following tables show the funding source by program element for the three year period reviewed.

**Table 2. Funding Source Percentage by Program Element**

<i>Funding Sources</i>	<i>Community Development</i>	<i>Land Conservation</i>	<i>Land Management</i>	<i>Water Management</i>
<i>USDA</i>	17.66%	14.73%	14.30%	13.46%
<i>Other Federal</i>	10.73%	27.50%	19.96%	24.14%
<i>RC&amp;D Councils</i>	1.41%	1.34%	1.15%	0.34%
<i>State government</i>	19.97%	36.84%	20.81%	30.21%
<i>Local government</i>	4.70%	4.69%	7.41%	5.47%
<i>Tribal government</i>	0.10%	0.03%	0.22%	2.12%
<i>Non-government</i>	45.44%	14.87%	36.16%	24.25%
<i>Total</i>	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

**Table 3. Percentage of Total Funds Supporting Program Elements**

<i>All Funding Sources</i>	<i>Community Development</i>	<i>Land Conservation</i>	<i>Land Management</i>	<i>Water Management</i>
	67.02%	9.96%	11.20%	11.82%

Benefit data reported by RC&D coordinators show that an average of 15.5 million rural citizens, including 1.277 million economically or socially disadvantaged people, are impacted each year as a direct result of the RC&D projects implemented locally. RC&D councils completed 12,985 projects during the 3 year period evaluated (FY 2002 – 2004) and had the following benefits by Statute element:



**Table 4. Benefits by Program Element  
FY 2002 - 2004**

<b>Land Conservation</b>			
<i>Benefit</i>	<i>Total Number</i>	<i>Mean Per Year</i>	<i>Mean Per Area</i>
<i>Tons of Soil Saved</i>	9,675,355	3,225,118	26,363
<i>Acres of Grazing Land Improved</i>	1,600,498	533,499	4,361
<b>Water Management</b>			
<i>Benefit</i>	<i>Total Number</i>	<i>Mean Per Year</i>	<i>Mean Per Area</i>
<i>Acres of Watersheds Improved or Protected</i>	30,325,943	10,108,647	82,632
<i>Tons of Animal Waste Reduced</i>	146,942	48,981	400
<i>Acres of Lakes Improved</i>	401,900	133,967	1,095
<i>Water Bodies Improved or Created</i>	3,613	1,204	9
<i>Number of Flood control Systems Constructed or Rehabilitated</i>	302	101	<1
<i>Gallons of Drinking Water Improved</i>	945,609,611	315,203,204	2,576,593
<b>Community Development</b>			
<i>Benefit</i>	<i>Total Number</i>	<i>Mean Per Year</i>	<i>Mean Per Area</i>
<i>New Businesses Established</i>	1,181	394	3
<i>Businesses Expanded</i>	4,854	1,618	13
<i>Jobs Created</i>	17,692	5,897	48
<i>Businesses Financially Assisted</i>	4,405	1,468	12
<i>Workshops and Training Sessions Held</i>	11,514	3,838	31
<i>People Developing New Skills</i>	1,827,856	609,285	4,980
<i>Public Facilities Constructed: Community Buildings</i>	338	113	<1
<i>Public Facilities Constructed: Subsidized Housing</i>	242	81	<1
<i>Public Facilities Improved or Repaired: Community Buildings</i>	879	293	2
<i>Public facilities Improved or Repaired: Subsidized Housing</i>	699	233	2
<i>Number of Tourist Attractions Established</i>	486	162	1
<i>Tons of Material Recycled</i>	122,047	40,682	333
<i>Tons of Solid Waste Reduced</i>	409,939	136,646	1,117
<i>Number of Museums Developed/Built</i>	33	11	<1

**Table 4. Benefits by Program Element (cont')  
FY 2002 - 2004**

<b>Community Development</b>			
<i>Benefit</i>	<i>Total Number</i>	<i>Mean Per Year</i>	<i>Mean Per Area</i>
<i>Number of Historic Sites Identified</i>	1,788	596	5
<i>Number of Cooperatives or Associations Formed</i>	211	70	<1
<b>Land Management</b>			
<i>Benefit</i>	<i>Total Number</i>	<i>Mean Per Year</i>	<i>Mean Per Area</i>
<i>Acres of Wildlife Habitat Improved</i>	5,946,078	1,982,026	16,202
<i>Acres of Ag Land Preserved or Restored</i>	639,469	213,156	1,742

Footnote: The Mean per Year is the total of all three years of benefits divided by three. The Mean per Area 02-04 is the total of all three years of benefits divided by 367. The 367 represents the average number of authorized RC&D's between the 2002 - 2004 fiscal years. The number of authorized RC&D's by fiscal year: 2002 - 348; 2003 - 368; 2004 - 375.

## **Listening Session Results**

NRCS conducted eight listening sessions to gain public input from RC&D council members, interested public, public officials, and Federal government employees on perceptions of the RC&D program. Listening sessions were conducted at each of the regional RC&D Association meetings held from October, 2003 through October, 2004 and at the Tribal Districts and Conservation Advisory Council's Conference, held in December, 2004. The listening sessions were professionally facilitated by T&T Management Incorporated of Washington, D.C., with support from NRCS. A total of 821 people participated in the listening sessions providing 3,488 comments. Participants at the regional RC&D Associations' meetings were divided into small groups of 20 or less where they were given the opportunity to comment.

**Table 5.**

<i>Listening Session Participant Affiliation</i>	<i>Number Attending</i>
<i>RC&amp;D Councils</i>	443
<i>Non-Government Organizations</i>	91
<i>Indian Tribes</i>	34
<i>Local Government</i>	96
<i>State Government</i>	16
<i>Federal Government</i>	255
<i>Total</i>	935

Footnote: Participants may have multiple affiliations

The following topic areas were developed by USDA interagency staff with the approval of the PAB to gather information from the public on the effectiveness of the RC&D program. The findings for each topic area are:

- 1. RC&D program effectiveness in meeting the needs of States, units of government, Indian tribes, non-profit organizations and RC&D councils served by the program.** Overall, the participants believe that the Federal RC&D Program is effective in meeting the needs of the States, units of Government, Indian tribes, Non-profit Organizations and RC&D councils served by the program. They indicated that the following aspects of the Federal program are most effective: the number of educational programs available, effectiveness of the program delivery, and networking opportunities. They also appreciate that the program addresses local issues and has the flexibility to allow local knowledge and leadership to be the primary driver of cooperative conservation efforts; unlike most Federal programs that focus on delivery of Federal dollars.
- 2. RC&D program effectiveness in developing community leadership.** Overall, the participants were surprised that this is a goal of the program. Many of the attendees indicated that developing community leadership is not a goal of RC&D and should not become one. Instead, they indicated that the council's role is to work with community leaders on projects and to solve local problems; but not to develop local leadership. However, despite this observation, the attendees stated that the program helps to develop community leadership through implementing local projects and discovering new and innovative ways to use public and private assistance programs.
- 3. RC&D program elements that best serve regional conservation and development needs.** Participants indicated that the area plan and the process of developing that plan were an effective way to focus and prioritize efforts. They also indicated that having IRS 501(c) non-profit status was key to leveraging resources. Other elements that the participants indicated worked well included the public private partnership and the annual plan of work. The public-private partnerships encourage contributions to projects other than cash. It serves as a marketing tool, provides access to specialties that NRCS does not have, it is project-directed not program-directed and it provides access to additional sources of volunteers and funding.
- 4. RC&D program elements that can be strengthened to better serve regional conservation and development needs.** Participants noted a desire for additional funding and consistency in how funding is allocated to the councils. They would like to have a sustainable, fully funded RC&D program to support the day-to-day operations. One recommendation is to make funds more readily available from the Federal Government to address RC&D area plan concerns. The attendees expressed the need for flexibility when it comes to staffing their offices based on their needs. However, they were also unified in their request that NRCS administrative support for the RC&D Program be consistent from State-to-State, with minimum funding, for no less than 1-1/2 staff for the local council. The attendees expressed a need for greater marketing of the RC&D Program and the council's activities.

For more detailed information from the Listening Session please refer to **Appendix A**.



## Federal Register Comments

NRCS issued several *Federal Register* notices throughout the year in conjunction with listening session announcements, with the final notice on December 13, 2004, specifically soliciting comments on the program to correspond with the listening session topics. NRCS received 42 responses from Soil & Water Conservation Districts, local governments, State government agencies, Federal Government agencies, Tribal government, non-profit organizations, private businesses, RC&D council members, and private individuals.

Few respondents replied directly to the four topics listed in the *Federal Register* notices. The remainder replied to one or more of the topics or provided views on the RC&D program as it is implemented in their local region.

There is strong support for the RC&D program among all respondents. The primary theme from the respondents emphasized the collaboration and cooperation fostered by the RC&D program through the councils. The following are key points:

- On the whole, the respondents stated that the RC&D program is effective in meeting the needs of States, units of Government, Indian tribes, non-profit organizations, and RC&D councils.
- The majority of the respondents consider that the RC&D program is effective in developing community leadership.
- Respondents stated that the flexibility of the program is valuable for affording the opportunity to creatively meet the needs of citizens and best serve regional conservation and development needs.

- Responses suggested clarifications to the RC&D program Statute elements that include work currently being performed as well as the addition of a human element for nutrition and life skills enhancement.
- Respondents wanted additional funds and improved communication, outreach, and administrative support to make the program more effective.

## National Association of RC&D Councils Federal Register Comments

NRCS also received a written response from the NARC&DC which replied directly to the four topics listed in the *Federal Register* notices. The full letter can be found in **Appendix B**. The national association strongly believes the RC&D program is an effective public private partnership that improves the quality of life in communities across the nation by effectively using volunteers to solve local problems and find solutions to unmet needs. The association further stated councils provide a focal point of local leadership and bring together private citizens and local, State and Federal agencies to improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of their area.

## Results of RC&D Area Plan Review

An area plan check list was developed by NRCS, in conjunction with the PAB Working Group, to review pertinent elements and attributes of the RC&D area plans. A team of NRCS field and national headquarters staff members familiar with the program and its goals reviewed 246 area plans. The review included examining both qualitative and quantitative required factors including: vision, mission, the four elements, goals and objectives, strategies, and partnerships. NARC&DC also reviewed area plans and submitted comments for this report.

RC&D area planning represents a significant component of RC&D program implementation in each of the nation’s 375 designated RC&D areas. Team members found that the required RC&D program elements (land conservation, water management, community development, and land management) were being addressed and actively worked on by local RC&D councils. The majority of the area plans reviewed were reflective of the purpose of the program.

Public participation in the planning process is recognized as a key to success in the local RC&D areas. It was evident that councils and coordinators understand that a strong area planning process that includes public participation develops a strong sense of public ownership which ensures program success. Area plans reviewed documented formal relationships with 22 different Federal agencies, 10 within the USDA.

However, only 30 percent of the councils reported USDA partnerships and only 23 percent had identified timeframes to achieve the area plan goals. The table (below) highlights the findings for each component of the area plan compared to agency policy and instructions.

Table 6.

### Number and Percentage Area Plans Meeting Policy Requirements

Component	Number	Percentage
Mission Statement	220	89.40%
Vision Statement	184	74.80%
Needs and Opportunities	206	84.70%
Element – Land Conservation	185	74.20%
Element – Water Management	207	84.10%
Element – Community Development	207	84.10%
Element – Land Management	206	84.10%
Goal Statements	222	90.20%
Objective Statements	192	78%
Strategy Statements	112	45.50%
USDA Partnerships	75	30.50%
Timeframes	57	23.20%
Less than 5 years old	283	75.50%
Compliance Statements	200	81.30%
Chairperson signature	203	82.50%
Council Secretary Attest	173	70.30%
NRCS State Conservationist	178	72.40%

Emerging trends contained in the area plans include a vast array of sustainable farming practices that are demonstrated by pilot projects providing a good “look & see” opportunity for landowners, ranchers and farmers resulting in farmland and ranchland preservation and protection, wildlife habitat restoration, noxious weed control and waste management.

Councils are also building strong communities through projects such as wheels-to-work, venison and food donation, financial literacy, and alternative housing programs.

Overall, RC&D area plans partially comply with NRCS policy. Mission, vision, goals and objectives are based on identified needs and opportunities. Goal statements in the majority of the plans were vague and it was difficult to determine what changes would be made in the 5 year planning period from those statements. The review team recommended, and NARC&DC concurred, that NRCS should develop procedures and processes for improving the utility of RC&D area plans; including implementing additional training of RC&D coordinators and council members, adopting a more business oriented planning model and stronger enforcement of current agency planning policy. NRCS has begun to address this recommendation through an improved plan management system that includes training of RC&D Coordinators on RC&D area planning and implementation of an effective plan review process at State and national levels.

## Results of On-Site Field Reviews

Sites for field review of the RC&D program were selected by stratified random sample process to ensure geographical representation from a State in each of the three NRCS regions. The three States selected for on-site evaluation were California, Florida, and Indiana. Within each State, two RC&D areas were randomly chosen for on site reviews as follows:

- California – High Sierra RC&D, South Coast RC&D

- Florida – Florida West Coast RC&D, South Florida RC&D
- Indiana – Historic Hoosier Hills RC&D, Lincoln Hills RC&D

Teams led by NRCS, and composed of representatives from NARC&DC, Forest Service, and the Farm Service Agency, utilized a guide approved by the PAB to conduct an evaluation of the program at the State and local RC&D level. Evaluators found strong local support for the RC&D program among local RC&D council members and project participants. Each of the RC&D areas evaluated has effective RC&D councils governing the operations of the non-profit entity. Council members and other program participants perceive RC&D coordinators as neutral and supportive individuals who provide assistance directed toward effectively implementing RC&D area plans.

General conclusions were the:

- RC&D coordinator role is important to the success of implementing each RC&D area plan;
- RC&D area plan provisions of the program make local RC&D councils focus efforts to increase their impact on the resources of the RC&D area;
- Federal partnership with the non-profit RC&D councils allowed them to assess and address local needs; and,
- Statewide program planning and coordination was increased through the ability of local RC&D councils to implement their RC&D area plans.

## Results from NARC&DC Council Questionnaire

Using their own funds, the NARC&DC conducted a survey of RC&D council members to collect information on council budgets, employees, issues and priorities, services and communication, and general information. Questionnaires were mailed to all RC&D councils and 217 RC&D councils responded to the survey.

Funding for projects and staff is a great concern for council members regardless of local funding levels. Thirty-six percent of councils responding indicated that they did not have any council employees. Thirty-four percent had one employee, 24 percent employ 2-5 persons, and only 4 percent have 6 or more employees.

Ninety-seven percent of councils responding to the survey have a coordinator. Of those 211 coordinators, 181 (83 percent) have completed the NRCS sponsored basic RC&D concepts

training course. Seventy-six percent answered that the NRCS State Program Manager is actively involved with their RC&D council. Eighty-one percent of the councils have program assistants (or someone to fill the role as an administrative assistant or secretary). Of these, 28 percent are full time, 54 percent are part time, 59 percent (or 103) are Federal employees, and 45 percent are council employees (7 percent are both a Federal and council employee).

Community development is seen as a main program priority of councils (45 percent responding), followed by conservation (29 percent), both (conservation and community development) (15 percent) and the remainder (11 percent) marked other. Several of the responses included other priorities such as flooding, watershed projects, water quality, energy issues, economic development, tourism, farmland protection and fire protection.



## Results from Federal Employee Questionnaire

The national review included a web-based questionnaire for RC&D coordinators, NRCS State program managers, and Federal program partners to gather quantitative data on the status of local RC&D programs. The questionnaire was developed by the NRCS RC&D national headquarters staff in collaboration with the NRCS Social Sciences Institute (SSI), and the PAB Working Group. It was approved for use by the PAB. The questionnaire was available to Federal staff to complete and submit on-line for approximately 60-days. Three-hundred and eight responses to the questionnaire indicated that all of the RC&D areas used one or more of the four program elements to address the community's needs. Over 85 percent of respondents indicated that Land Conservation projects were used to address community needs, 93 percent used water management projects, 79 percent used land management projects, and 100 percent used community development projects to meet community needs. The high percentage rates reported indicate that RC&D areas are following guidance on program purposes as set forth

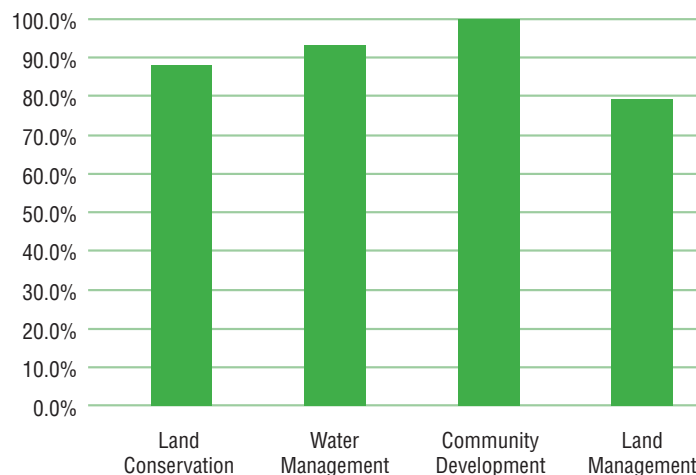
in the NRCS RC&D program policy manual. It also indicates that these elements are effective in addressing the needs of the community.

Over 95 percent of the respondents indicated that funding, partners, and leadership were important or very important to achieving the goals of the area plan, with three quarters indicating that these factors were very important. Over 90 percent indicated that volunteers, Federal technical assistance, and in-kind services were important or very important, with about half of the respondents indicating that these factors were very important. Responses indicate that multiple resources influence the success of an RC&D area, and that each factor has a relatively high importance. Absence of any of the resources listed may adversely affect the area's success.

Responses indicate that:

- Rural communities, and civic and community groups are participating in RC&D area planning at high rates, with approximately three fourths of the RC&Ds having indicated a medium high to very high participation rate.

**Figure 4. Percentage of RC&D Areas Addressing the Four Elements**



- Agricultural operators participate at the medium to very high levels in over half of the RC&Ds.
- Urban communities, suburban communities, and conservation partners participate at the higher levels in about one fourth of the RC&D areas.

The high participation rates indicate that the program is addressing the need of those communities. The rate of participation from urban and suburban communities indicates that the conservation issues are increasing as a result of land conversion and an increased awareness and need to address conservation related issues in built-up areas. ■



RC&D assisted wetland project,  
Barnsville Recreation Center  
and outdoor classroom, GA.





## Summary Findings

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The national evaluation was performed to assess the program's effectiveness. The following statements highlight the evaluation conclusions and supporting documentation.

### **The RC&D program is generally meeting the needs of State, units of local government, Indian tribes, non-profits organizations, and councils.**

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Constituent responses in the listening sessions, field reviews, and *Federal Register* Notices point out that the program is meeting the needs of units of government, non-profit organizations, and councils. Questionnaire responses indicate that the program is working for a diverse cross-section of community interests and is addressing resource concerns. Responses also indicate that area plans are generally linked to local comprehensive planning efforts. Site visits revealed that the types of projects undertaken were meeting the local community needs.

However, findings from field reviews, listening sessions, and review of RC&D area plans indicate that the RC&D program is producing mixed results in meeting the needs of the 562 Federally-recognized Indian tribes. Nationwide, the Navajo RC&D area is the only designated RC&D area dedicated to working with an Indian tribe. Other Tribes, however, are active with their local RC&D councils and have participated in the implementation of several projects that benefit Indian country. According to data reported in the NRCS database, 33 RC&D councils in 22 States have Indian tribes participating in RC&D project implementation. Twenty-three percent of the comments received at the Indian tribe listening session expressed positive experiences of working with local RC&D councils. Field evaluation

teams documented successful projects underway in California in partnership with a Tribe.

Relationship building in Indian country is complex and complicated by both historical and current events. Federally recognized Indian tribes receive status of domestic independent nations and adhere to the principles of government-to-government relations. This designation complicates the relationships between Tribes and State and local governments. Since the RC&D organizational structure is usually constructed around local government and private organizations, Tribes are not always actively involved in RC&D activities. However, RC&D by design is meant to increase communication among government levels, private local organizations and USDA, and the program should be able to more effectively incorporate needs of Tribes into its service system. RC&D councils, as a non-profit representative of local interests, could provide a structure for tribal governments to discuss their priorities and cultural concerns without jeopardizing issues of sovereignty.

### **The RC&D program provides a linkage of conservation and economic development coupled with a public-private partnership delivery system.**

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The program merges public and private interests, operates across governmental territories, includes the needs of urban and rural communities, and provides a mechanism to deliver an amalgam of Federal, State and local programs to solve local problems. Through the program, RC&D councils in partnership with the RC&D coordinator, bring natural resources and community issues together by networking with Soil and Water Conservation Districts or Resource Conservation Districts, county and city governments, Tribal governments,

unincorporated communities, and local and regional organizations to address sub-state regional needs. They respond to and anticipate the needs of their local communities, both for conservation issues and for economic development, by identifying problems and formulating solutions using multiple funding and program sources. The RC&D program has provided the technical knowledge to focus on positive solutions for RC&D areas. Other funding sources, such as other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and philanthropic foundations, have all been enlisted to implement projects designed to meet the specific needs.

Through the four elements in the statute, the RC&D Councils can work on a wide variety of issues, some of which may be specific to the individual area. In the arena of renewable energy, RC&D Councils have brought together partners and funds for projects such as:

- The Chariton Valley Biomass Project, coordinated by the Chariton Valley RC&D in Centerville, Iowa, has been evaluating the potential of growing switchgrass on marginal land as an alternative energy crop to replace a portion of the coal burned for electricity. To date the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has provided \$11,584,268 in cash dollars along with \$12,910,204 in cost-share contributed by project partners. Sixty-three (63) jobs (biomass coordinator, engineers, harvesters, etc.) have been created through the project to date. Twenty-five (25) additional jobs are anticipated to complete the upcoming long term burn scheduled for 2005/2006, which will be a 90-day, 24/7 burn.
- The Blackhawk Hills RC&D in Rock Falls, Illinois, assisted Hunter Haven and Scheidairy Farms secure funding for a feasibility study and installation of anaerobic digesters for the two dairy farm operations sufficient to generate electricity to power 240 homes. Funding obtained for the farmers included \$10,000 from the State Department of Agriculture, \$225,000 from the State Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, \$246,000 from USDA RD section 9006 grant, and \$546,000 from USDA NRCS EQIP. Farmers provided \$785,000 as local cost share.
- The Blue Ridge Resource Conservation & Development Council in North Carolina began the Blue Ridge Landfill Methane Initiative in 1997 to utilize methane gas generated by the decomposing garbage in the region's seven landfills to meet local energy needs. To date, over \$2.3 million of grant money has been raised for this project. Four landfill gas systems have been completed or are under construction. Each of these methane recovery systems will provide gas for fueling an "Energy Park" located adjacent to the landfill. The first landfill project resulted in the EnergyXchange Renewable Energy Center, which includes a business incubator for limited resource potters and glass blowers and a complex of greenhouses where native shrubbery seedlings are grown for local nurserymen. The kilns, furnaces, and boilers for this site are all fueled by landfill methane gas.
- Seven Pennsylvania RC&D Councils, along with NRCS and local Conservation Districts, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and 27 landowners collaborated with solar component suppliers to demonstrate the use of photovoltaic (PV) solar technology on livestock farms. Twenty-seven solar pump systems were installed on a variety of livestock operations. The primary objective was to advance the concept of intensive rotational grazing and reduce the need for mechanical harvesting and its inherent consumption of fossil fuels. Solar arrays proved to be very durable and



dependable for production of power to pump water.

Furthermore, RC&D's have taken advantage of new grants offered through USDA to develop biomass energy and implement innovative approaches to conservation. Specific examples include the following:

- Using a \$398,000 Biomass Utilization Grant from USDA--the WesMin RC&D area (MN) has partnered with the University of Minnesota and Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College to establish a market for pre-commercial thinning and brush harvest outputs from fields producing hybrid poplar.
- Using a \$462,000 EQIP Conservation Innovation Grant--the Alabama Mountains, Rivers and Valley RC&D is demonstrating low-cost alternatives from on-farm storage of poultry litter.
- Using a \$303,000 EQIP Conservation Innovation Grant--the Wy'East RC&D area (OR) is demonstrating the use of innovative irrigation scheduling technology that conserves irrigation water and allows the transfer of conserved water to in-stream use through market-based incentives in the arid West.

RC&D councils, comprised of volunteer representation, serve as neutral organizations without a partisan agenda except to help the community in places where there is a critical need that is not being met by other entities. These unique program qualities are expressed by a recent program constituent letter.

**Quote from a letter from John Scott Kudrna, Vice President, Carson National Bank, Auburn, Nebraska:**

".., the RC&D is the only vehicle that has consistently brought City, County, State and Federal groups together to achieve a common goal.

There is no other organization:

1. That can promote a project without appearing to have a vested interest.
2. That has a volunteer board of community and county leaders that bring so many resources to the table.
3. That promotes and accomplishes regional synergy on various projects, many that fill niches and act like the missing pieces to the puzzle.
4. That can work with small communities and organizations that would not be able to afford a fee for service provider.
5. That has a multi-county comprehensive plan to address area needs and opportunities."

No other program exists where regional leaders develop and implement programs to fit the needs and resources of our local area."

**Biomass silo at Ottumwa Generating Station.**



## **RC&D areas generally have current area plans that reflect the four authorized elements (Land Conservation, Land Management, Water Management, and Community Development) of the program.**

The area plan reviews and the Federal questionnaire indicate that all RC&D areas are compliant with the law, which requires that at least one of the four elements is addressed. Seventy-five percent of the RC&D areas meet the NRCS policy requirement that all four elements are addressed. Site visits showed that projects undertaken addressed the elements and analysis of RC&D progress reporting data indicates that there is a direct correlation between the four required elements and the 11 project purposes categories in the current reporting system. However, the RC&D areas need to improve their plans to be more compliant with NRCS policy.

## **RC&D projects have been planned and implemented consistent with area plans and NRCS and USDA Strategic plans.**

Analysis of area plans, RC&D progress reporting data, and field review results demonstrates that projects planned and implemented as a result of RC&D program assistance are consistent with approved area plans, NRCS and USDA Strategic plans, as well as being linked to local, and State comprehensive plans. Questionnaire responses indicate that approximately 50 percent of the RC&D area plans were linked to city/township, county, regional, and State comprehensive plans. A slightly larger percentage, approximately 65 percent indicate that the RC&D area plan was linked to the NRCS strategic plan. The responses point out that many of the RC&D

## **NRCS Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives Addressed by RC&D Program and Projects.**

**“Goal 2-Reduce unintended adverse effects of natural resource development and use to ensure a high quality environment.**

*2.2-Promote sound urban and rural community development.*

*2.3-Protect water and air resources from agricultural non-point sources of impairment.*

*2.5-Maintain, restore, or enhance wetland ecosystems and fish and wildlife habitat.*

**Goal 3-Reduce risks from drought and flooding to protect individual and community health and safety.**

*3.1-Protect upstream watersheds from flood risks.”*

councils have a comprehensive view of their planning process. By linking the RC&D area plan to other plans for the area and region, councils are seeking to increase the success rate of the RC&D plans and avoid duplication of other programs. The slightly higher number of RC&D plans linked to the NRCS strategic plan indicates that the RC&Ds are able to establish missions and priorities that are consistent with NRCS.

## **Program participants believe RC&D helps to deliver other USDA programs.**

The RC&D program coordination facilitates access to USDA programs. Since the RC&D coordinator is familiar with the local community and USDA programs and representatives,

the RC&D area can take advantage of more of the services offered by USDA.

Results from the questionnaire indicate that RC&D's help to coordinate the delivery of numerous USDA programs including: Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Rural Business Enterprise Grants, Conservation Reserve Program, Community Facilities Grants, Economic Action Program, Nation Fire Plan, Rural Community Assistance, Rural Business Opportunity Grants, Wetland Reserve Program, child feeding programs from the Food and Nutrition Service, and outreach activities for the Farm Services Agency.

#### USDA Strategic Plan, Objective 5.2 Actionable Strategies Addressed by RC&D Program and Projects

"In addition to continuing to provide effective technical assistance, technology development, and maintain a resource inventory, future actions will:

*Work with State agencies and local sponsors to develop watershed-level plans to enhance water supplies, protect water quality, mitigate drought and flood hazards, and enhance wildlife habitat.*

#### Key External Factors for Strategic Goal 5

Agricultural lands are co-mingled with urban and developing land as part of watersheds and ecosystems. Activities taking place in parts of forests, lands or watersheds outside USDA influence can offset the effects of improved management on agricultural land, so that the state of the whole watershed may fail to improve as much as expected."

#### **The non-profit status of the councils, RC&D area planning process and the support of the RC&D coordinator are widely seen as the three most valuable elements of the program by the participants.**

The listening session comments revealed that the area planning process and the Federal/non-profit partnership are an important strength of the program. It was believed that the non-profit status of RC&D councils enabled strong leveraging of funds. In the field review portion of the evaluation, area plans were also recognized as key. State level participants also pointed out the value of partnerships created through the RC&D program. Each of the six RC&D councils visited involved more than 20 partnering organizations including other Federal agencies, State agencies, private organizations, local government and local citizen organizations. These partners are all working with the local RC&D councils to both develop and implement RC&D area plans. The RC&D coordinator was seen as the key person necessary to keep these partnerships working by providing unbiased, high quality information and the council was seen as essential to implementing projects to meet community needs. ■



## Results from the Administration's Program Assessment Rating Tool

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**T**he Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) was developed to assess the effectiveness of Federal programs and to help form management actions, budget requests, and legislative proposals directed at achieving results. The PART examines a program's purpose and design, strategic planning, management, and performance results. The PART requires that conclusions be explained and substantiated with evidence. The PART assesses if and how program evaluation is used to inform program planning and to corroborate program results.

A PART assessment of the RC&D program was conducted in 2004. The PART evaluation found that while the program is adequately managed, it suffers from a number of shortfalls that pertain to program purpose and design, strategic planning, and measuring program results and accountability. Specific PART findings include the following:

- **The RC&D program is duplicative of other Federal, State, and local assistance.** The program does not clearly document how it addresses specific and existing needs or problems that cannot be addressed through other USDA, Federal, State or local assistance. The national needs identified by NRCS for the RC&D program are broad needs that may exist in many places at any given time and NRCS has not clearly documented what the Federal role should be in facilitating local community planning.
- **The RC&D program's purpose is broad and has not clearly documented what the Federal role should be.** It is not clear how the purposes and services provided by the RC&D program are unique from similar resource conservation planning, rural economic development, and community facilities development services provided by other USDA agencies and other Federal departments. For that matter, the program has not demonstrated how it is distinct and unique from many of those programs already being offered by NRCS. Even outside the RC&D program, NRCS has significant interactions and collaborative working relationships with State and local government resource agencies through the State Technical Committees at the State level down to Local Work Groups at the community levels.
- **The program does not target funds at priority needs.** The RC&D program has not documented that the local areas with the greatest need are prioritized and targeted. At the national level, NRCS does not identify programmatic priorities and allocate dollars according to these priorities. Instead, the appropriated dollars are divided among the 375 RC&D areas to fund staff support.
- **The program does not adequately measure or report its performance.** The program does not have an adequate number of easily understood long-term outcome measures that meaningfully reflect the activities of the program. The program's current long-term measures are output oriented and do not assess the program's contribution to the improvement in local capabilities to develop and implement conservation and development programs. The ability to develop meaningful performance measures is hampered considerably by the program's ambiguous and broad purpose.
- **The program does not have systems in place to improve or measure improvements in cost efficiency.** The program does not currently have a system or adequate efficiency measures in place to measure and achieve improvements in



cost-effectiveness. The program also does not have in place a system for measuring program efficiency, though a new system is under development.

- **The program does not evaluate how it performs relative to other similar programs.** There has been little analysis done on how the RC&D program compares with other similar programs. Nor have there been any recent, sufficiently independent evaluations of the program. This report may help to allay this concern

A copy of the full PART results can be found in **Appendix C**.

An important PART finding is that the RC&D program has not demonstrated how it is distinct and unique from other programs being offered. Through the national evaluation, program participants reported that they believe the program to be a unique delivery system with a unique linkage of conservation and community development concerns. NRCS does need to: develop easily understood long-term outcomes measures; establish ambitious performance goals; and more effectively target funding resources to meet the highest priority needs. ■



## Report Recommendations

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The following recommendations are consistent with the FY 2007 President's budget that proposes to continue support for the RC&D program at a reduced level by reducing and consolidating Federal coordinator and administrative support to all RC&D councils. The recommendations support the findings from this summary report and the Administration's PART and take into consideration the President's management initiatives to streamline programs, link performance to budget requests, and increase the use of e-government.

Based on the strong RC&D program support from States, units of local government, Indian tribes, non-profit organizations, and councils, the general recommendation is to continue the unique RC&D program linkage of natural resource conservation and community economic development. This will be done by enabling greater RC&D area plan integration with USDA and NRCS program and strategic plans.

There is also the expectation that the program will continue to incorporate emerging concerns such as cooperative conservation, ecosystem services, biomass energy production, and innovative conservation technology into local council area plans and projects. However, NRCS will need to improve internal policies and administrative processes to properly incorporate improvements needed to address the concerns addressed in the PART and revealed through this evaluation report. They include taking proactive steps to:

- 1. Increase RC&D participation with Indian tribes.** This will be done by: providing specialized training to RC&D councils on working effectively with Indian tribes; assisting RC&D councils in understanding the importance of the tribal consultation process; initiating RC&D council listening sessions with respective Tribes; having RC&D councils adopt the Administrative Procedure Act processes in their RC&D area plan development; and initiating a grant process for use in future years, depending upon the availability of funds, to provide financial assistance to RC&D councils for projects that address priority natural resource, economic development and leadership development needs of American Indians, Alaska Natives and the residents of the Pacific Basin Islands served by the RC&D areas. It is expected that the adopted projects would provide incentive for activities to accelerate assistance in areas of decline in natural resources or economic conditions.
- 2. Implement a new performance reporting system for the RC&D program as soon as possible in FY 2006.** The new system supports the President's e-government and other management initiatives. It will produce products needed for accountability and allow agency management to maintain and report progress on RC&D program benefits and goals at the local, State, and national level. It will also enable the agency to measure program efficiency and more closely integrate performance with budget requests.
- 3. Develop and implement specific RC&D annual and long-term program performance goals** that take into consideration the cumulative effects of small projects implemented nationwide and encourages the undertaking of larger projects tied to national goals. Embodied in the new guidelines will be the establishment of criteria to identify and improve non-performing councils and coordinators, including ranking leveraging activity, assessing of the quality of projects

planned and implemented, and evaluating the diversity of partnerships used in and people served by the projects. Outside research studies may be conducted to measure program efficiency and cost-savings achieved through the RC&D public-private projects. In addition, NRCS will revise procedures and conduct training to incorporate these changes into area plans.

4. **Streamline the program.** Streamlining efforts will include: revising the allocation methodology to target high priority needs and reward performance, identifying ways to increase local leadership capabilities and the scope of the coordinator position and responsibilities so that more than one high-performing RC&D area can be served by a coordinator, and eliminating costs such as those for clerical and office support that can be incurred by councils.
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# Appendix A:

## Final Report Listening Sessions

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### Background

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Section 2504 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-171) requires that the Secretary of Agriculture, in consultation with the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils (NAR&DC), evaluate the RC&D Program. The evaluation is to determine whether the RC&D Program is effectively meeting the needs of, and purposes identified by, States, units of Government, Indian Tribes, non-profit organizations, and councils participating in or served by the program. The Secretary of Agriculture, acting through NRCS, must provide a report, to the House and Senate Agriculture Committees by June 30, 2005, that reflects the results of the listening session feedback and any recommendations for continuing, terminating or modifying the program.

To conduct successful evaluations, USDA teamed with the Regional Associations of the RC&D Councils, who had established plans for regional meetings beginning in October 2003 and concluding in September 2004. Due to low participation from the Indian Tribes, USDA hosted an additional meeting in December of 2004 that captured feedback from the Indian Tribes. The listening sessions schedule conducted by USDA is listed below:

The RC&D regional meetings served as a platform for USDA to conduct two-to-three-hour professionally facilitated listening sessions to gather as much feedback as possible from program participants and recipients who were knowledgeable about the program, its impacts and how it works. The listening sessions were advertised in the Federal Register. They were open to the public and attracted RC&D Council Members, RC&D Coordinators, Assistants, Program Managers, NRCS State Conservationists and others. The objective was for the attendees to focus **solely** on the Federal RC&D Program, respond to four fundamental areas of interest and provide specific examples, where possible. The four areas of interest presented for feedback are listed below:

- 1. RC&D Program effectiveness in meeting the needs of the States, units of Government, Indian Tribes, Non-profit organizations and RC&D Councils served by the program.**
- 2. RC&D Program effectiveness in developing community leadership.**
- 3. RC&D Program elements that best serve regional conservation and development needs.**
- 4. RC&D Program elements that can be strengthened to better serve regional conservation and development needs.**

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Listening Session Location	Date	# of Attendees
1. Plymouth, Massachusetts	October 25, 2003	54
2. Bismarck, North Dakota	January 28, 2004	155
3. Angola, Indiana	March 22, 2004	130
4. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	March 23, 2004	126
5. Wheeling, West Virginia	September 2, 2004	80
6. Savannah, Georgia	September 22, 2004	120
7. Chelan, Washington	September 28, 2004	100
8. Las Vegas, Nevada	December 10, 2004	56



## The Process

The attendees first came together in a general session format to review the process, discuss the meeting outcomes and clarify the meeting purpose. At the conclusion of the general session, the participants were instructed to breakout into their subgroups.

The attendees were divided into subgroups, with a maximum of 20 attendees in each group. Each group had a facilitator and/or recorder who captured their comments to the four areas of interest onto a flipchart.

While in their subgroups, the attendees were given 20 to 30 minutes to provide comments to **each** area of interest. Since the goal of the sessions was to obtain feedback from every attendee, a round-robin facilitation process was used to ensure that each attendee was given an opportunity to provide at least one verbal comment on each of the four areas of interest. If the attendees had additional comments to any of the four areas and/or if they have other areas of concern not covered by the four areas, they were given the opportunity to address them silently via the use of index cards.

When the attendees concluded their responses to all four areas of interest, the facilitators gathered all index cards, flipcharts, and forms, placed all documents in assigned envelopes, and returned them to the lead facilitator. The subgroup sessions then concluded and the subgroup facilitators instructed the attendees to gather for a closing session.

During the closing session, each subgroup facilitator presented to the entire group, a one-to-two-minute summary of over-arching themes from their subgroup. The listening session hosts thanked the attendees for their participation and offered instructions on how to provide additional comments after the session had concluded. The attendees also received information regarding when the sum-

mary report would be available and how to access it.

## Results of the Listening Sessions' Feedback

### Area of Interest #1 – RC&D Program effectiveness in meeting the needs of the States, Units of Government, Indian Tribes, Non-Profit Organizations and RC&D Councils, served by the program.

Overall, the participants believe that the Federal RC&D Program is effective in meeting the needs of the States, Units of Government, Indian Tribes, Non-profit Organizations, and RC&D Councils served by the program. Across the board, they feel that the following areas of the Federal program are most effective.

1. Area Plan (AP)
  - a. The attendees like the Area Plan, as it focuses on local priority issues. The program provides freedom to and control by the local council. It allows the Coordinator to serve the local council.
2. Community Focus
  - a. The program is effective because of its focus on the needs of the community. The grassroots input offers a lot of leveraging potential. The locals have an opportunity to come together and identify concerns in a manner that is not from the top down. The program provides a strong infrastructure that allows the councils to choose their project priorities from the grassroots level.
3. Technical Assistance
  - a. They overwhelmingly seem to appreciate having technical assistance in the areas of meeting facilitation,

accounting, grant administration, and leadership forums.

4. NRCS Coordinators

- a. The support of the Coordinators helps to reduce the financial burden on the council.

5. Public/Private Partnerships

- a. The program is effective in its ability to develop partnerships. It allows people to come together.

6. Diversity

- a. The attendees agree that the program actively promotes diversity by making outreach to the underserved a requirement. The program improves relations between diverse groups of people by getting them to exchange information and to find areas of agreement and develop workable relationships.

7. General Comments Regarding the Program’s Effectiveness

- a. The attendees like the number of educational programs that are available, the effectiveness of the program delivery and networking opportunities. They also appreciate that the program addresses local issues more than most Federal programs and that it is more flexible than other USDA programs.

**Area of Interest #2 – RC&D Program effectiveness in developing community leadership**

Overall, the participants were surprised that this is a goal of the program and cited some of the following reasons why the program is ineffective at developing community leadership.

- 1. The regulations do not clearly state that developing community leadership is a goal of the council.

- 2. Guidelines for developing community leadership do not exist; nor is there a national leadership development program designed to teach leadership at the local level.

A respectable number of attendees feel that developing community leadership is not a goal of RC&D and should not become one. Instead, they feel that the council’s role is to work with community leaders on projects and to solve local problems; but not to develop local leadership.

However, despite this observation, the attendees went on to provide very positive feedback about the program and how it automatically develops community leadership.

- 1. The program provides an excellent opportunity for people to acquire, develop, and share leadership skills just by participating in the program. When people get involved, the community recognizes them as leaders.
- 2. The program gives councils the tools to work effectively with local leaders (politicians, businesses, institutions, associations, etc.) to solve local issues. They cite some of the following success stories:
  - a. The Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP).
  - b. Agriculture in the classrooms – Youth have been brought into the decision-making process, thereby learning about leadership at early stages.
  - c. Women in Agriculture Network (WAGN)
  - d. Fannie CLAC which provides financial assistance for low-income people to purchase automobiles.

3. The Regional RC&D Community Development Teams and the Leadership Development Program are effective and that RC&D is the only program that provides training that develops the skills of community leaders.

In order to be successful at developing community leadership, they recommend the following:

1. Leadership development should be a requirement in the Area, State, and National Plans.
2. Develop a better way to share leadership models that could be used nationally.
3. Conduct the appropriate outreach to involve more young people in the program and market the program to generate greater program awareness.
4. Identify leadership training opportunities for the council and their staff.

**Area of Interest #3 – RC&D Program elements that best serve regional conservation and development needs.**

1. Area Plans (AP)
  - a. The attendees feel that the Area Plan is a very effective way to focus and prioritize efforts. The AP provides a road map for the councils to accomplish their project goals and the research involved in updating the Area Plan is important as it keeps the council aware of what other counties are doing. Maintaining the Area Plan is a strength because it identifies conservation needs and it provides a frame work from which to work.
2. 501(C)(3)/Not-for-Profit Status
  - a. The attendees state that having a 501(c)(3) status is a key requirement for funding and leveraging opportunities. They feel that it is

invaluable in bringing other groups that can make a greater contribution to the area under the RC&D umbrella. Having the non-profit status really benefits the councils because the overhead and administrative expenses are absorbed by USDA, which in turn allows them to appropriate their funds for conservation of the land.

3. Diversity of the Council
  - a. The attendees feel that the diversity of the council membership is a real plus because it allows the council to address a variety of views and interests within the community.
4. Public/Private Partnerships
  - a. The attendees feel that the strength of the program comes from the conservation partners working towards the same goals and obtaining funding for local efforts. They feel that it is highly beneficial to be able to bring together, partners with different perspectives, and obtain buy-in on how together; they can address the needs of their communities. The public/private partnerships encourage contributions to projects other than cash. It serves as a marketing tool, provides access to specialties that NRCS does not have, it is project-directed not program directed and it provides access to additional sources of volunteers and funding.
5. Annual Plan of Work (APOW)
  - a. The attendees were very positive about the APOW when it comes to planning, budget preparation, and the outreach to non-traditional partners to obtain their input. They state that the APOW keeps them legal and honest.

**Area of Interest #4 – RC&D Program elements that can be strengthened to better serve regional conservation and development needs.**

Although the attendees primarily agree that the program is effective in meeting their needs, they also overwhelmingly agree that the following areas of the program could be more effective.

1. Funding

- a. There is an overwhelming request for additional funding and consistency in how funding is allocated to the councils. Attendees wonder why some States receive funding for office support staff (Secretary) and not others. They would like to have a sustainable, fully funded RC&D program to support the day-to-day operations. They would like to see the local seed dollars tied to the Annual Plan of Work, in addition to current staff and space at locations. They want project funding through RC&D. A key recommendation is to rework funds within the Federal government, so that RC&D staff does not have to spend so much time writing grants to get Federal funds. Move part of 319, Community Urban Forestry, other forestry, Fish and Wildlife funds to a source that is allocated to RC&D councils based on a business plan, thereby, saving many dollars spent in competing for dollars.

2. Staffing

- a. The attendees all expressed the need for flexibility when it comes to staffing their offices based on their unique needs. However, they were also unified in their request that the NRCS administrative support for the RC&D Program is consistent state-to-state, without a minimum funding, for any less than 1-1/2 staff for the local

council. They feel that adequate resources for other personnel are essential, because the Coordinators cannot handle everything. The Councils want full-time Program Assistants, Secretaries, and recommend seeking Coordinators outside of NRCS.

- b. In addition to the request for additional staff, the attendees would like to have input in the selection and evaluation of Coordinators. There is a need to empower Federal employees to be eligible for higher GS-level positions and reduce their restrictions in assisting the councils. They feel that an effective RC&D program has a supportive State Conservationist that provides consistent management and equal funding.

3. Training

- a. The attendees want more training opportunities at the regional and State meetings. They feel that the training needs more organization and standardization, particularly for council members. They are requesting a well-developed staff-training program for Program Assistants, Secretaries, and Coordinator Assistants. They want more engineering technical assistance and training in non-profit management. They would like to see the Coordinators cross-train in other positions to keep them fresh and not stagnate. They highly recommend the Pilot Board Training Program in Arizona as a model training program.

4. Program Marketing and Outreach

- a. The attendees expressed a need for greater marketing of the RC&D Program and the council's activities. Too many people think that RC&D represents only the Agricultural community and when an activity takes



place that is non-agricultural, others should know about it. They recommend utilizing education professionals in the schools and universities to attract young people and educate them about the RC&D Program. When doing area planning, the councils could do a better job at outreach to non-traditional groups to obtain their input and buy-in. There is an opportunity to explore ways to get urban and metro areas involved in RC&D; perhaps developing programs for urban areas/urban forests. Other ideas include working with State Parks, Hispanic International, and going into the schools to speak with the kids about a variety of topics including drug-use prevention. The attendees recommend using monthly press releases, rather than newsletters, and utilizing radio, television, and print to market the program and projects.

c. They would like to see a system in place that would require their inquiries to be addressed within a certain timeframe. They complain about the length of time it takes for them to obtain responses to their inquiries.

#### 5. Communication

- a. A common theme expressed by a majority of the attendees is that there is too much “top-down” versus the bottoms-up approach to communicating. Instead of being told what they can and cannot do, the councils would like more input by having a voice on the Advisory Board and participating in policy decisions prior to implementation.
- b. The councils would like to have a system in place, perhaps in the form of a website, chat room, or an annual conference, which would allow all councils to better communicate with one another to share information regarding their successes, challenges, creative ideas, and more.

## **The Contractor's Perspective: A View From the Outside**

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The attendees seem to be very appreciative of the benefits they receive from the RC&D Program. However, like any program, there are ways to improve its effectiveness and efficiency; and that appears to be what the attendees wanted to focus on during the listening sessions. The impression was not that they wanted to turn the meetings into gripe sessions, but that finally, they had the appropriate forum to voice their feedback, and they were surely going to have their say. The perspectives outlined in the following paragraphs highlights the overwhelming battle cries that were heard in practically every listening session.

### **Staffing**

Regarding the staffing benefits, they seem to agree that basic baseline parameters should be in place regarding the type and number of staff personnel the program will provide. However, they seem to want to emphasize that the councils do not fit into a one-size fits all template. They feel that due to unique features, such as the size of the area that each council covers, should allow them to receive additional staffing in order to successfully manage these larger areas of coverage. They seem to be willing to justify their unique requirements in the Area Plan (AP) and/or Annual Plan of Work (APW). Since the council relies heavily on the staff provided them; they would like to have a voice in the selection and evaluation process. Oftentimes, they feel that the staff is dealing with too many issues not relating to council work or they may have difficulty adjusting to the area, due to cultural differences, extreme weather conditions or remote living conditions; all which tends to leave the work undone.

### **Funding**

Similar to the concerns surrounding staffing issues; the councils request that unique differences be taken into account when it comes to funding. The attendees seem to express that the councils covering larger areas should receive additional funding to address the additional expenses associated with the larger coverage area. Again, they seem ready, willing, and able to substantiate the need for increased funding in the Area Plan and/or Annual Plan of Work.

### **Program Marketing & Promotion**

The overwhelming theme communicated at practically every listening session was that the RC&D Program is the “best kept secret.” The majority of attendees state that the program is not well known in their areas. Therefore, those who could benefit, such as the underserved communities, are not being served and those who could really contribute to the program are not aware that the program exists. The attendees would like to see the program marketed and promoted at the national level, because due to funding and staffing issues, they are unable to successfully accomplish this at the local level. They feel that there is an endless list of creative ideas to pursue, which could perhaps be funded by area partners, if the councils had the funding, staffing, and time to conduct the appropriate outreach. ■



## *Appendix B: NARC&DC Letter to Federal Register*

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January 31, 2005

Terry D'Addio  
National RC&D Program Manager  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Room 6013 South Building  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Ms. D'Addio:

The National Association of RC&D Councils appreciates the opportunity to comment on the RC&D program.

**RC&D Program effectiveness in developing community leadership.  
RC&D Program elements that best serve regional conservation and development needs.**

We believe this is a very effective public private partnership that improves the quality of life in communities across our nation by effectively using volunteers to solve local problems and find solutions to unmet needs. Its growth over the last 40 years from 10 councils to 375 is testament to its effectiveness.

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Councils play an important role in the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources. RC&D Councils work to improve the general level of economic activity and to enhance the environment and standard of living in all communities. Councils provide a system of rural development to encourage the wise use of natural resources, and improve the quality of life in America.

Congress created this public/private partnership as a way of engaging local leaders to promote their local economy by leveraging limited federal dollars. Councils provide a focal point of local leadership and bring together private citizens and local, state and federal agencies to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area. RC&D Councils have proven ability and strength of leadership to engage and accomplish projects from the local to the national level.

The average RC&D Area covers 7 counties and the average RC&D Council has 14 sponsors. Nearly half of the Councils members are locally elected officials such as mayors, judges, or commissioners. All Council members serve as volunteers. RC&D activates community support for over 180 million people in 2,614 counties in all 50 states, the Caribbean and the Pacific Basin. RC&D Councils successfully leveraged the RC&D appropriation 6 to 1 to directly support conservation and economic development in local communities across the nation.

All RC&D Councils have Area Plans defining their goals and objectives. Councils serve as an effective conduit for USDA Programs that assist in Area Plan implementation.

**RC&D Program effectiveness in meeting the needs of the States, units of Government,  
Indian Tribes, Non-profit organizations and RC&D Councils served by the program.**

**Funding for RC&D councils**

The effectiveness of RC&D councils and the program have greatly benefited from the public investment in a full time coordinator, a part time office assistant and the office equipment. This infrastructure is extremely critical to insure that communities are served and that area plans, the basis of support for the RC&D program, are implemented. In addition, RC&D council volunteers effectively leverage \$6 for every \$1 the federal government invests.

The effectiveness of the RC&D program is imperiled because it is underfunded. Estimates are that it takes over \$179,000 to fully fund an RC&D council and current allocations to RC&D councils nationwide are down from \$131,000 in FY04 to only \$127,000 in FY05. In the past, NRCS committed to providing a full-time coordinator to each designated RC&D council. Due to underfunding that commitment has eroded and coordinators no longer work full-time with councils, but are also asked to carry out other NRCS programs.

**The National Association of RC&D Councils recommends that the President's budget fully fund the RC&D program, and that once again a commitment is made to providing a full time coordinator and part-time office assistant.**

**Ethics**

Ethics interpretations of federal employee activities flow from the USDA NRCS headquarters to be implemented in the states. In recent years, some states have made more restrictive interpretations resulting in confusion in the field and hampering the effectiveness of the program.

RC&D Coordinators provide technical assistance to carry out area plans. They are governed by federal ethics laws which prohibit them from hiring and firing council employees, handling council funds, nor speaking for the council. Councils recognize their responsibilities and take pride and responsibility in their council activities. The recent ethics directive on point of contact is hampering the ability of the RC&D coordinator to provide technical assistance to the RC&D council. Council members accept legal responsibility for grants entered into – and due to the recent ethics ruling coordinators cannot even be listed as a point of contact for the grant which they are supposed to be providing technical assistance to implement.

**The National Association recommends that program management ensure that implementing national ethics directives are done in a consistent manner in every state.**

**The National Association further recommends that legislative authority be provided that allows the coordinator to fully provide technical assistance to carry out area plans.**

**Contribution agreements**

NARC&DC and local councils have been subject to the new matching rules for agreements coming out of NRCS. The rules fail to take into account that “councils” and “associations of councils” were recognized in law for the first time in 2002 Farm bill. This should give NRCS the ability to directly work with councils and associations of councils.

**The NARC&DC recommends that NRCS reexamine this issue and continue to work directly with councils to which they have a legislated relationship.**

**RC&D Program elements that can be strengthened to better serve regional conservation and development needs.**

**Direct Charge**

NRCS has implemented a direct charge for the RC&D program. In order to provide assistance to councils at the level it has been provided in the past, direction was given by NRCS to make sure that appropriate conservation programs were charged when a coordinator is providing that assistance. In the short term, this direction has worked out well for the transition year. The potential long term consequences need to be closely monitored and considered.

RC&D councils implement area plans that include both conservation and economic development. The cornerstone of RC&D is that local volunteers find solutions to local problems. Over the long term, the impact of direct charge needs to be closely monitored as it is implemented in the states. Why? Because councils may be increasingly directed to take on NRCS conservation tasks so that budgets can be adhered to. In addition, since NRCS does not implement community development programs – councils may be unable to have the coordinators assistance when community development is identified as a strong community need.

**Performance goals**

Performance goals have been set for the program which do not coincide with the uniqueness of the program. The RC&D program relies on the area plan and making progress on the implementation of the area plan as the measure of its effectiveness. Area plans address four areas: water quality, land management, land conservation and community development. Local people seeking and implementing local solutions is a hallmark of the program. Councils place varying degrees of emphasis on the 4 areas of emphasis for area plans. Their progress in implementing the area plan is also determined by the ability of the council to find funding to meet their needs. Performance goals without the means/funds to implement them are simply unfunded mandates. Imposing performance goals without financial assistance sets the stage for failure.

**The National Association of RC&D councils recommends that performance goals be set that assess the effectiveness of the council in implementing the area plan and that take into account the unique nature of the local decision making process. We further believe that when goals are set for a specific purpose, financial assistance should be provided to the council to meet those goals. We believe that mandatory funding to implement performance goals should be strongly considered as a USDA recommendation for the next Farm bill.**

**Database**

Effectively measuring outcomes relies on many factors including a database which captures the unique nature of the program; and individuals who report those outcomes. The accomplishments of the RC&D program have declined for the last two years. Evidence suggests that in some areas of the country outcomes are not reported.

**The National Association recommends that NRCS invest in a new user-friendly database to capture the unique nature of the RC&D program so that its effectiveness can truly be measured. We also recommend that program management at the headquarters and state levels require that accomplishments of the program be included in the database and it should be a measure of the headquarters, state and local federal employees performance.**



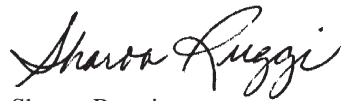
**USDA RC&D PAB**

The RC&D program is designed to bring to bear the resources of USDA agencies. Great strides have been made in recent years to develop stronger relationships with USDA PAB agencies. Councils effectively deliver federal programs from a variety of sources in their local communities.

**The NARC&DC recommends that to strengthen the delivery of services in communities  
USDA should work directly through councils in federal grant and loan application processes.**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this valuable program.

Sincerely,



Sharon Ruggi  
President  
The National Association of Resource  
Conservation & Development Councils

# Appendix C: OMB PART Results for RC&D Program

**Program:** Resource Conservation and Development  
**Agency:** Department of Agriculture  
**Bureau:** Natural Resources Conservation Service  
**Type(s):** Direct Federal

Section Scores				Rating
1	2	3	4	Results Not Demonstrated
60%	50%	86%	13%	

**1.1 Is the program purpose clear?** Answer: YES Question Weight: 20%

**Explanation:** The purpose of the RC&D program is to improve the capability of states, units of government, Indian tribes, nonprofit organizations, and councils to accelerate the conservation, development and utilization of natural resources; improve the general level of economic activity; and enhance the environment and standard of living in designated RC&D Areas. The program purpose is achieved by providing technical assistance to designated RC&D Areas. This technical assistance includes facilitation of regional planning processes and comprehensive knowledge of federal and state assistance available to the designated RC&D Area. RC&D Councils, with public involvement, develop strategic area plans to address their locally identified concerns. This development and implementation of RC&D area plans helps cities and towns, counties, conservation districts, tribes, state government and federal government to work together to achieve common goals strategically focused on regional resource conservation and economic viability.

**Evidence:** Legislation: Food and Agricultural Act of 1962 (P. L. 87-703, Section 102); Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 (P. L. 97-98, Sections 1528-1538); Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P. L. 107-171, Sections 1528-1537) NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. [http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M\\_440\\_513.htm](http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M_440_513.htm) NRCS Documents: FY05 USDA budget request <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2005/pdf/appendix/agr.pdf> and NRCS budget justifications

**1.2 Does the program address a specific and existing problem, interest or need?** Answer: YES Question Weight: 20%

**Explanation:** NRCS identifies three national needs that this program is to address: (1) access to technical and financial assistance, (2) lack of staff or capacity, and (3) leadership development. The technical assistance provided addresses the need for conservation of natural resources and community development planning support, problem-resolution facilitation, and developing public consensus of regional needs. RC&D Councils are required to complete a strategic planning process every 5 years, develop an area plan and implement projects to achieve the goals and objectives outlined in that plan.

**Evidence:** NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. [http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M\\_440\\_513.htm](http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M_440_513.htm) Documents: USDA Strategic Plan, Natural Resources and Conservation Service Strategic Plan 2003 Update [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/spa/documents/2003\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_Update.pdf](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/spa/documents/2003_Strategic_Plan_Update.pdf), RC&D Area Application, from RC&D Manual, Application Checklist, and Application Description & Review Process, Area Plan Examples, RC&D Map PROGRAM ID: 10002028 490

- 1.3**            **Is the program designed so that it is not redundant or duplicative of any other Federal, state, local or private effort?**      Answer: NO      Question Weight: 20%

Explanation: It is not clear how the purposes and services provided by the RC&D program are unique from similar resource conservation planning, rural economic development, and community facilities/amenities development services provided by other USDA agencies (such as the Forest Service and Rural Development) and other federal departments (such as the Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration). Furthermore, the program has not demonstrated how the services it provides is distinct and unique from services already provided by other NRCS programs and field staff. In addition, NRCS has significant interactions and collaborative working relationships with state and local government resource agencies (such as soil conservation districts and departments of fish and game) through the State Technical Committees at the state levels down to Local Work Groups at the community levels.

Evidence:      Legislation: Food and Agricultural Act of 1962 (P. L. 87-703, Section 102); Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 (P. L. 97-98, Sections 1528-1538); Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P. L. 107-171, Sections 1528-1537). NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. [http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M\\_440\\_513.htm](http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M_440_513.htm), NRCS Documents: Response to comment from Chief's Field Advisory Committee , USDA Departmental Regulation, USDA Policy Advisory Board Memorandum of Understanding, Benefit and fund leveraged data, NRCS budget justifications, Success Stories

- 1.4**            **Is the program design free of major flaws that would limit the program's effectiveness or efficiency?**      Answer: YES      Question Weight: 20%

Explanation: There appears to be no strong evidence or available analysis whether another approach or program design would be more effective. RC&D Councils are required to complete a strategic planning process every 5 years, develop an area plan and implement projects to achieve the goals and objectives outlined in that plan. The planning process, area plan, and project are defined in the statute. RC&D extends impact by leveraging funds from other federal programs, state and local government, and private sources to accomplish its legislated purpose of assisting councils in designated RC&D Areas to develop and implement area plans.

Evidence:      NRCS Documents: NRCS budget justifications, Historical accomplishments, Leveraging ratio, List of Backlog of applications, RC&D Area Plan examples, RC&D Area Annual Report examples, Project success stories

**1.5 Is the program effectively targeted, so that resources will reach intended beneficiaries and/or otherwise address the program’s purpose directly?** Answer: NO Question Weight: 20%

Explanation: The program funds are not targeted. At the national level, NRCS does not identify programmatic priorities and allocate dollars according to these priorities. Instead, the appropriated dollars are divided among the 375 RC&D areas to fund staff support. The program has not documented that the local areas with the greatest need are prioritized and targeted.

Evidence: NRCS Documents: FY05 USDA budget request <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2005/pdf/appendix/agr.pdf>, NRCS budget justifications, Appropriation History Table, success stories, RCD-11 FY 04 allocation breakdown: 94% of budget allocated to States, 6% provided to NRCS National Headquarters for oversight

**2.1 Does the program have a limited number of specific long-term performance measures that focus on outcomes and meaningfully reflect the purpose of the program?** Answer: NO Question Weight: 13%

Explanation: The RC&D program does not yet have an adequate number of easily understood long-term outcome measures that meaningfully reflect the activities of the program. NRCS states that several outcome-oriented, long-term measures are under development. NRCS is working to improve its long-term measures to more meaningfully reflect the primary purpose of the program (to improve the capability of state and local government and local nonprofit organizations to develop and implement conservation and development programs). The current and new measures do not assess program’s contribution to the improvement in local capability to address local needs.

Evidence: NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. [http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M\\_440\\_513.htm](http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M_440_513.htm) NRCS Documents: NRCS budget justifications, FY 05 NRCS Budget Request, Natural Resources and Conservation Service Strategic Plan 2003 Update [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/spa/documents/2003\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_Update.pdf](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/spa/documents/2003_Strategic_Plan_Update.pdf), Benefit and fund leveraged data; New POINTS System

**2.2 Does the program have ambitious targets and timeframes for its long-term measures?** Answer: NO Question Weight: 13%

Explanation: Because the program received a “no” in question 2.1, it must receive a “no” for this question.

Evidence: Documents: NRCS budget justifications, FY 05 NRCS Budget Request, Natural Resources and Conservation Service Strategic Plan 2003 Update, [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/spa/documents/2003\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_Update.pdf](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/spa/documents/2003_Strategic_Plan_Update.pdf), New POINTS system, Benefit and fund leveraged data; RC&D Logic Model.



**2.3 Does the program have a limited number of specific annual performance measures that can demonstrate progress toward achieving the program's long-term goals?** Answer: YES Question Weight: 13%

Explanation: RC&D has annual output measures that measure program activity. RC&D has reported the current annual measures each year since 2002. In addition, NRCS is developing two additional annual performance measurese. Finally, NRCS is developing at least one efficiency measure that will be in place to assess performance beginning October 1, 2004.

Evidence: Legislation: Food and Agricultural Act of 1962 (P. L. 87-703, Section 102); Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 (P. L. 97-98, Sections 1528-1538); Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P. L. 107-171, Sections 1528-1537). NRCS Documents: Examples from Initial Performance Plan 2002, Performance Plan 2003, 2005 RC&D green sheets budget request, NRCS budget justifications, FY 05 NRCS Budget Request, Natural Resources and Conservation Service Strategic Plan 2003 Update

**2.4 Does the program have baselines and ambitious targets for its annual measures?** Answer: YES Question Weight: 13%

Explanation: Baselines are based on historical data. Targets have been established for the annual measures. Implementation of these measures begins October 1, 2004.

Evidence: NRCS Documents: NRCS budget justifications, FY 05 NRCS Budget Request, Natural Resources and Conservation Service Strategic Plan 2003 Update

**2.5 Do all partners (including grantees, sub-grantees, contractors, cost-sharing partners, and other government partners) commit to and work toward the annual and/or long-term goals of the program?** Answer: YES Question Weight: 13%

Explanation: RC&D Councils are required to develop and implement 5-year strategic area plans that address locally identified issues within the national framework of land conservation, water management, community development, and land management. All area plans are reviewed and approved by the respective NRCS State Conservationists and by the national RC&D program staff to ensure that the work undertaken by the Councils support the goals of the program and the goals of the agency's strategic plan. The RC&D program operates successfully due to its unique USDA-non-government organization partnership. USDA policy officials and other agency members of the USDA RC&D Policy Advisory Board provide policy advice for the program, and work to effectively and appropriately integrate the RC&D program into all relevant USDA community development activities.

Evidence: NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. NRCS Documents: Annual report from RC&D program staff to USDA PAB showing dollars leveraged from each agency; Farm Services Agency directives, PAB Memorandum of Understanding.

- 2.6 Are independent evaluations of sufficient scope and quality conducted on a regular basis or as needed to support program improvements and evaluate effectiveness and relevance to the problem, interest, or need?** Answer: YES Question Weight: 13%

**Explanation:** Though NRCS has not conducted a formal program evaluation of the RC&D program for many years, the NRCS Oversight and Evaluation (O&E) Team has scheduled a review of the RC&D program in FY2005. The review will examine how effectively NRCS is implementing the RC&D program and make recommendations on how to improve the program's delivery. Additionally, NRCS began a national program evaluation in FY 2004 designed to meet the requirements of the 2002 Farm Bill. Anticipated evaluation outcomes include a qualitative and quantitative summary of RC&D program benefits and recommendations for a more effective nationwide program. A report will be submitted to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate describing the results of the evaluation, together with any recommendations for continuing, terminating, or modifying the program no later than June 30, 2005. Outside agencies, such as GAO or OIG, have not reviewed the program in many years.

**Evidence:** Legislation: Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P. L. 107-171, Sections 1528-1537), NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. [http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M\\_440\\_513.htm](http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M_440_513.htm), NRCS Documents: National RC&D Task Force Report, 1995, Iowa State Report, 1998 <http://www.ag.iastate.edu/centers/rdev/newsletter/Summer98/RC&Ds.html>.

- 2.7 Are Budget requests explicitly tied to accomplishment of the annual and long-term performance goals, and are the resource needs presented in a complete and transparent manner in the program's budget?** Answer: NO Question Weight: 13%

**Explanation:** The program's budget requests are not explicitly tied to performance goals. The program's resource allocation decisions do not reflect desired performance levels and the effects of funding and other policy changes on results are not clear. However, according to NRCS, the FY 2006 budget will tie to new performance goals to the budget request. In late FY 2004, NHQ will assemble a Design Team to initiate the development of 'Performance Based Budget Allocations' strategy for the states based on the new performance goals.

**Evidence:** NRCS Documents: FY 2005 Budget submission; Responses to House and Senate Budget Hearing sessions; Estimated Cost Model

**2.8 Has the program taken meaningful steps to correct its strategic planning deficiencies?** Answer: NO Question Weight: 13%

Explanation: Because the program has not taken recent steps to meaningfully evaluate its performance, it can not take proactive steps to identify and address strategic planning deficiencies.

Evidence:

**3.1 Does the agency regularly collect timely and credible performance information, including information from key program partners, and use it to manage the program and improve performance?** Answer: YES Question Weight: 14%

Explanation: Program performance data is collected annually from the RC&D Coordinator through the RC&D Information and Management System to record RC&D Council activities and accomplishments. This information will be collected quarterly in the new Program Operations and Tracking System (POINTS) beginning in FY 2005. The information provided by the system is used for national reporting needs, oversight by national and state program managers, RC&D project management for coordinators, and use by RC&D Councils. Performance by Councils is reviewed and state program managers work with individual Councils to ensure that performance is improved when needed.

Evidence: NRCS Policy: GM 330 - Operations Management, Part 400: Functions of Management, GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. NRCS Documents: POINTS database, RC&D Information Management System - <http://rcd.sc.egov.usda.gov/>, RC&D budget documents, NRCS training course descriptions, RC&D success stories

**3.2 Are Federal managers and program partners (including grantees, sub-grantees, contractors, cost-sharing partners, and other government partners) held accountable for cost, schedule and performance results?** Answer: YES Question Weight: 14%

Explanation: The National RC&D Program Manager recommends to NRCS leadership for allocations to the states and is responsible for budget allocation and holding states accountable for the funds allocated to support the program. The State Conservationist (STC) in each state is responsible and accountable for overall program implementation and results, including identifying, monitoring and analyzing performance indicators and financial integrity. The Deputy Chief for Strategic Planning and Accountability provides national oversight. State offices conduct quality assurance reviews in accordance with guidance provided in the National Conservation Program Manual. The agency does enter into cooperative agreements with RC&D Councils and associations of Councils. These cooperative agreements have specific deliverables that are clearly defined. Funds are not dispersed throughout the year without a detailed report on the status of the deliverables.

Evidence: NRCS Policy: GM 360 - Human Resources, Part 404.6: Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Staffs GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. NRCS Documents: Allocation Letters to State Conservationist from the Chief of NRCS, Program Manager's 'fund integrity' document to outline and document to the State Conservationist the appropriate use of program specific funds, Individual Performance Plan example, Cooperative Agreement example

**3.3 Are funds (Federal and partners') Answer: YES Question Weight: 14% obligated in a timely manner and spent for the intended purpose?**

Explanation: RC&D funds are allocated to the states and obligated in a timely manner. Funds are used to provide technical assistance in the form of a USDA RC&D coordinator to the Council. The RC&D coordinator is a facilitator for the local people to build and implement their individualized and locally determined program, as identified in the area plan. Funds are fully used for the intended purpose of supporting the activities of designated RC&D Councils. The FY 2006 budget will tie the new performance goals to the budget request. The budget requests have been explicitly tied to achieving the long-term goals.

Evidence: Legislation: Food and Agricultural Act of 1962 (P. L. 87-703, Section 102); Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 (P. L. 97-98, Sections 1528-1538); Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P. L. 107-171, Sections 1528-1537). NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. [http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M\\_440\\_513.htm](http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M_440_513.htm)., NRCS Documents: NRCS Budget Documents, Responses to budget hearing questions

**3.4 Does the program have procedures Answer: NO Question Weight: 14% (e.g. competitive sourcing/cost comparisons, IT improvements, appropriate incentives) to measure and achieve efficiencies and cost effectiveness in program execution?**

Explanation: The program does not currently have an system in place to measure and achieve improving cost effectiveness. However, the program is developing a new process for allocating funds to support RC&D Council activities. In late FY 2004, NHQ will assemble a Design Team to develop a 'Performance Based Budget Allocations' strategy for the states based on the performance goals. Allocations will rely on RC&D Council performance. Performance evidence will be collected in FY 2004 through the current reporting system and in FY 2005 through the RC&D POINTS system. The answer to this question can change once NRCS implements the new RC&D performance evaluation/allocation system and demonstrates how it measures cost effectiveness in program execution.

Evidence: NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. NRCS Documents: Annual report from RC&D program staff to USDA PAB showing dollars leveraged from each agency; Farm



Services Agency directives, PAB Memorandum of Understanding; Farm Service Agency Memorandums

**3.5 Does the program collaborate and coordinate effectively with related programs?** Answer: YES Question Weight: 14%

**Explanation:** Coordination and collaboration is the basic premise of the RC&D program. RC&D Councils collaborate with many federal and state agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that are involved in conservation and community development activities. At the national level, collaboration and coordination is achieved through the activities with USDA Policy Advisory Board (PAB) agencies, other federal agencies or entities, National Association of RC&D Councils, and other national level NGOs. Similarly at the state level, state program managers work with state level employees of the USDA PAB agencies, other federal agencies, state agencies and NGOs within the state. To effectively implement their area plans RC&D Councils must conduct extensive coordination.

**Evidence:** NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. NRCS Documents: reports on partners & leveraged resources, New POINTS database, NRCS Strategic Plan (goals & objectives), USDA Farm Service Agency appointment of State RC&D liaisons, FY 05 budget submission

**3.6 Does the program use strong financial management practices?** Answer: YES Question Weight: 14%

**Explanation:** The RC&D federal funds are managed by NRCS. The majority of funds are used to pay for the technical assistance provided through federal NRCS employees within a state. NRCS tracks funds through the FFIS system. The Federal Financial Management Improvement Act established a statutory requirement for agency heads to assess, on an annual basis, whether their financial management systems comply with Federal financial management system requirements; applicable Federal accounting standards; and the Standard General Ledger at the transaction level. The agency Financial Management Director certified that the NRCS financial management system is in compliance. RC&D Councils are required to follow Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regulations and reporting requirements as outlined for 501(c) income tax exempt organizations. NRCS policy states that Councils are to operate with efficient fiscal business practices.

**Evidence:** Legislation: Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P. L. 107-171, Sections 1528-1537), NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program., NRCS Documents: New Area Plan Review checklist

**3.7 Has the program taken meaningful steps to address its management deficiencies?** Answer: YES Question Weight: 14%

Explanation: Over the past 4 years, NRCS has tightened its policy regarding the RC&D program. The policy manual was revised in FY 2000 and in FY 2002 to strengthen the roles and responsibilities of all levels of agency personnel involved in the program and incorporated changes as a result of the 2002 Farm Bill. RC&D program has developed training modules on federal employee conduct and responsibilities for both federal employees and council members. RC&D instituted the compliance requirement of the Council having a current RC&D Area Plan with improved monitoring and controls. The national office conducts state reviews and is currently conducting the legislatively mandated program evaluation. RC&D program developed a new reporting system and that emphasizes the importance of performance and accountability within the program. The national office instituted quarterly conference calls with state program managers to discuss emerging issues, management agendas and reporting requirements.

Evidence: NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. NRCS Documents: Ethics training for all RC&D Coordinators (USDA ethics Website at <http://www.usda.gov/ethics/index.htm> and the NRCS ethics training Website at <http://www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/ethics/>); New RC&D Concepts and Area Planning National Employee Development Center courses, establishment of Continuing Education Credits for training received by RC&D Coordinators, Listening Session format for National Program Evaluation, New POINTS Database

**4.1 Has the program demonstrated adequate progress in achieving its long-term performance goals?** Answer:NO Question Weight: 20%

Explanation: Because the program received a “no” in question 2.1, it must receive a “no” for this question.

Evidence: NRCS Documents: Budget reporting, NRCS performance planning, 2003 Update to NRCS Strategic Plan, PAB Reports, Reports from the existing database

**4.2 Does the program (including program partners) achieve its annual performance goals?** Answer:LARGE EXTENT Question Weight: 20%

Explanation: Performance goals from FY 2000 to FY 2005 have been based on the number of projects completed by RC&D Councils in several categories. The program has achieved or exceeded its annual performance goals from FY 2000 to FY 2003. The program has developed annual measures that reflect the primary purpose of the program and the statutory required elements of a RC&D area plan.

Evidence: NRCS Documents: Budget reporting, NRCS performance planning, PAB Reports

**4.3 Does the program demonstrate improved efficiencies or cost effectiveness in achieving program goals each year?** Answer: NO Question Weight: 20%

Explanation: The RC&D program does not have adequate efficiency measures in place to evaluate the program's cost effectiveness, though the program will have at least one measure for the start of FY 2005. Furthermore, the program does not currently have in place a system for measuring program efficiency, though a new system is under development and should be implemented in FY 2005. Once the new performance reporting system is operating and can demonstrate improved efficiency through its new measures, the RC&D program can receive credit for this question.

Evidence: NRCS Documents: NRCS budget submissions, Historical appropriation table, Responses to House and Senate Hearing questions

**4.4 Does the performance of this program compare favorably to other programs, including government, private, etc., with similar purpose and goals?** Answer: NO Question Weight: 20%

Explanation: No analysis has been conducted of how the RC&D program compares with other similar programs. Therefore, it is currently unknown how effective the program is when compared to other federal, state, local, and private assistance programs.

Evidence: Legislation: Food and Agricultural Act of 1962 (P. L. 87-703, Section 102); Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 (P. L. 97-98, Sections 1528-1538); Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P. L. 107-171, Sections 1528-1537) NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part 513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. [http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M\\_440\\_513.htm](http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M_440_513.htm) NRCS Documents: FY05 USDA budget request. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2005/pdf/appendix/agr.pdf> NRCS budget justifications, Iowa State Report, 1998 <http://www.ag.iastate.edu/centers/rdev/newsletter/Summer98/RC&Ds.html>.

**4.5 Do independent evaluations of sufficient scope and quality indicate that the program is effective and achieving results?** Answer: NO Question Weight: 20%

Explanation: No recent, sufficiently independent evaluations have been conducted of the RC&D program. Outside agencies, such as GAO or OIG, have not reviewed the program in many years. However, NRCS is currently conducting an in-depth evaluation of the program in preparation for a congressionally mandated report; the report will be completed by June 2005. Furthermore, NRCS established policy requires that each designated RC&D area is reviewed by the respective state office at least once every five years. This review includes input from program participants, partners and stakeholders. A report is sent to national headquarters for review and concurrence.

Evidence: Legislation: Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P. L. 107-171, Sections 1528-1537), NRCS Policy: GM 440 - Conservations Program Manual, Part

513: Resource Conservation and Development Program. [http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M\\_440\\_513.htm](http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/M/M_440_513.htm), NRC Documents: NARC&DC 'Circle of Diamonds' program <http://www.rcdnet.org/circle.htm>, National RC&D Task Force Report, 1995, Iowa State Report, 1998 <http://www.ag.iastate.edu/centers/rdev/news-letter/Summer98/RC&Ds.html>.

**Measure:** Number of local businesses created in rural communities through RC&D Assistance.

**Additional Information:** This outcome measure directly relates to the community development element in the authorizing statute.

Year	Target	Actual	Measure Term:
2003	Baseline	264	Annual
2004	300		
2005	315		
2006	337		
2007	367		
2008	400		

**Measure:** Number of local jobs created in rural communities through RC&D assistance.

**Additional Information:** This outcome measure directly relates to the community development element in the authorizing statute.

Year	Target	Actual	Measure Term:
2003	Baseline	4673	Annual
2004	4700		
2005	4750		
2006	4800		
2007	4875		
2008	4900		

**Measure:** Acres of agricultural land treated for which wildlife is the primary or secondary resource concern.

**Additional Information:** This outcome measure directly relates to the land management element in the authorizing statute.

Year	Target	Actual	Measure Term:
2005	Baseline		Annual
2006			
2007			
2008			

**Measure:** Acres of watershed or area-wide conservation plans developed for water or air quality.

**Additional Information:** Water management is a required element of an RC&D area plan. Water quality is included. This will relate to the annual plan of work of a Council with goals for water quality.

Year	Target	Actual	Measure Term:
2005	Baseline		Annual
2006			
2007			
2008			

**Measure:** Percentage of RC&D Area Plans that meet NRCS minimum standards

**Additional Information:** NRCS has established minimum standards and criteria for Area Plans. Areas are in the process of revising their plans. Each Area Plan will be rated using these standards.

Year	Target	Actual	Measure Term:
2003	Baseline		Long-term
2008	100%		

**Measure:** Percentage of RC&D Area Plans that exceed NRCS minimum standards

**Additional Information:** NRCS has established minimum standards and criteria for Area Plans. Areas are in the process of revising their plans. Each Area Plan will be rated using these standards.

Year	Target	Actual	Measure Term:
2003	Baseline		Long-term
2008	50%		

**Measure:** Ratio of RC&D staff positions (measured in Full Time Equivalent positions) to local jobs created in rural communities through RC&D assistance

**Additional Information:** Local jobs created is an annual performance measure. There is the expectation that over time, NRCS FTE involved in RC&D will become more efficient.

Year	Target	Actual	Measure Term:
2005	Baseline		Annual
2006			
2007			
2008			



**Measure:** Ratio of RC&D FTE to Agricultural lands treated for which wildlife habitat is the primary or secondary resource concern, acres

**Additional Information:** Wildlife habitat treated is an annual performance measure. There is the expectation that over time, NRCS FTE involved in RC&D will become more efficient.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Measure Term:</b>
2005	Baseline		Annual
2006			
2007			
2008			



## Appendix D: Historical Tables

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### Resource Conservation and Development Appropriation History 1964-2005

Fiscal Year	Fiscal Year Appropriation	Number of RC&D Areas	Number of New Areas Added in FY
1964	\$1,500,000	10	10
1965	\$1,813,000	10	0
1966	\$4,349,000	20	10
1967	\$4,664,600	40	20
1968	\$6,249,000	49	9
1969	\$6,367,000	53	4
1970	\$10,825,000	66	13
1971	\$14,953,000	96	30
1972	\$20,867,000	119	23
1973	\$26,600,000	119	0
1974	\$17,217,000	143	24
1975	\$20,320,000	153	10
1976	\$29,972,000	163	10
TQ	\$7,493,000		
1977	\$30,679,000	173	10
1978	\$31,979,000	173	0
1979	\$25,441,000	179	6
1980	\$32,000,000	185	6
1981	\$34,046,000	189	4
1982	\$26,500,000	189	0
1983	\$30,744,000	189	0
1984	\$26,000,000	189	0
1985	\$26,320,000	189	0
1986	\$25,037,000	189	0
1987	\$25,020,000	189	0
1988	\$25,120,000	189	0
1989	\$25,120,000	189	0
1990	\$27,255,000	194	5
1991	\$29,899,611	209	15
1992	\$32,516,000	236	27
1993	\$32,516,000	250	14
1994	\$32,945,000	277	27
1995	\$32,845,000	277	0
1996	\$29,000,000	289	12

**Resource Conservation and Development Appropriation History  
1964-2005 (Cont.)**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Fiscal Year Approp- riation</b>	<b>Number of RC&amp;D Areas</b>	<b>Number of New Areas Added in FY</b>
1997	\$29,377,000	290	1
1998	\$34,377,000	315	25
1999	\$35,000,000	315	0
2000	\$35,265,000	315	0
2001 ( i )	\$42,015,000	348	33
2002 ( ii )	\$48,048,000	368	20
2003	\$50,668,000	368	7
2004 ( iii )	\$51,641,000	375	0
2005 ( iv )	\$51,228,000	375	0

( i ) less recission of \$92,000

( ii ) less recission of \$75,000

( iii ) less recission of \$307,000

( iv ) less recission of \$413,000

**Designated Resource Conservation and Development Areas by State**

State	RC&D Name	Year Designated
AK	BERING STRAIT	2001
AK	COPPER VALLEY	2002
AK	INTERIOR RIVERS	1994
AK	KENAI	1994
AK	LOWER KUSKOKWIM	2001
AK	MAT-SU	1990
AK	SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE	1994
AK	YUKON FLATS	1994
AL	ALA-TOM	1981
AL	CAWACO	1979
AL	COOSA VALLEY	1965
AL	GULF COAST	1993
AL	MID-SOUTH	1992
AL	NORTHWEST ALABAMA	1991
AL	TENNESSEE VALLEY	1973
AL	TOMBIGBEE	1972
AL	WIREGRASS	1967
AR	ARKANSAS RIVER VALLEY	1965
AR	CENTRAL ARKANSAS	1991
AR	EAST ARKANSAS	1973
AR	NORTHWEST ARKANSAS	1992
AR	OZARK FOOTHILLS	1968
AR	SOUTHEAST ARKANSAS	1971
AR	SOUTHWEST ARKANSAS	1969
AS	AMERICAN SAMOA	2002
AZ	COCOPAI	1971
AZ	CORONADO	1971
AZ	HOHOKAM	1972
AZ	LITTLE COLORADO RIVER PLATEAU	1970
AZ	LOWER COLORADO RIVER	1980
AZ	NAVAJO NATION	1997
CA	CENTRAL COAST	1972
CA	CENTRAL SACRAMENTO VALLEY	2001
CA	CENTRAL SIERRA	1998
CA	HIGH SIERRA	1976
CA	MOJAVE DESERT-MOUNTAIN	2001

CA	NORTH CAL-NEVA	1967
CA	NORTH COAST	2003
CA	ORE-CAL	1993
CA	SOUTH COAST	1998
CA	SOUTHERN LOW DESERT	2002
CA	TRINITY	1994
CA	YOSEMITE/SEQUOIA	2001
CO	COLORADO BIG COUNTRY	1972
CO	EAST CENTRAL COLORADO	1976
CO	NORTHEAST COLORADO	2003
CO	PAINTED SKY	2001
CO	SAN JUAN	1971
CO	SAN LUIS VALLEY	1971
CO	SANGRE DE CRISTO	1968
CO	SOUTHEAST COLORADO	1992
CT	EASTERN CONNECTICUT	1967
CT	KING'S MARK	1973
DE	FIRST STATE	1971
FL	CENTRAL FLORIDA	1994
FL	FLORIDA WEST COAST	2001
FL	SOUTH FLORIDA	1998
FL	SUWANNEE RIVER	1971
FL	THREE RIVERS	1973
FL	TREASURE COAST	2002
FL	WEST FLORIDA	1969
GA	CENTRAL SAVANNAH RIVER	1992
GA	CHESTATEE-CHATTAHOOCHEE	1970
GA	COASTAL GEORGIA	1971
GA	GOLDEN TRIANGLE	1994
GA	LIMESTONE VALLEY	1973
GA	OCONEE RIVER	1979
GA	PINE COUNTRY	1967
GA	ROLLING HILLS	1998
GA	SEVEN RIVERS	1993
GA	TWO RIVERS	1994
GA	UPPER OCMULGEE	1964
HI	BIG ISLAND	1975
HI	GARDEN ISLAND	1992



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HI	O'AHU	2001
HI	TRI-ISLE	1970
IA	CEDAR VALLEY	2001
IA	CHARITON VALLEY	1969
IA	GEODE RC&D, INC.	1975
IA	GOLDEN HILLS	1981
IA	IOWA HEARTLAND	1994
IA	IOWA LAKES	1996
IA	IOWA VALLEY	1998
IA	LIMESTONE BLUFFS	1994
IA	MISSOURI AND MISSISSIPPI DIVIDE	1992
IA	PATHFINDERS	1979
IA	PRAIRIE PARTNERS	2002
IA	PRAIRIE RIVERS	2001
IA	PRAIRIE WINDS	2002
IA	RC&D FOR NE IOWA	1971
IA	SOUIX RIVERS	1998
IA	SOUTHERN IOWA	1970
ID	CLEARWATER	1975
ID	HIGH COUNTRY	1979
ID	MID-SNAKE	1998
ID	PANHANDLE LAKES	1964
ID	SOUTHWEST IDAHO	1994
ID	THREE RIVERS	1992
ID	WEST CENTRAL HIGHLANDS	1991
ID	WOOD RIVER	1970
IL	BLACKHAWK HILLS	1973
IL	INTERSTATE	1998
IL	LINCOLN HERITAGE	2002
IL	POST OAK FLATS	2003
IL	PRAIRIE HILLS	1976
IL	PRAIRIE RIVERS	1992
IL	SHAWNEE	1966
IL	SOUTHWESTERN ILLINOIS	1991
IL	TWO RIVERS	1971
IL	WABASH VALLEY	2001
IN	ARROW HEAD COUNTRY	1975
IN	FOUR RIVERS	1972

IN	HISTORIC HOOSIER HILLS	1971
IN	HOOSIER HEARTLAND	1980
IN	LINCOLN HILLS	1964
IN	NORTHWEST TERRITORY	2001
IN	SYCAMORE TRAILS	1973
IN	WHITE RIVER	2002
IN	WOOD-LAND-LAKES	1996
KS	CENTRAL PRAIRIE	2001
KS	FLINT HILLS	1971
KS	GLACIAL HILLS	1991
KS	LAKE REGION	1973
KS	SANTA FE TRAIL	2001
KS	SEE-KAN	1971
KS	SOLOMON VALLEY	2003
KS	SUNFLOWER	1968
KS	WESTERN PRAIRIE	1996
KY	BIG SANDY	1972
KY	CUMBERLAND VALLEY	1973
KY	CUMBERLAND-GREEN LAKES	1971
KY	EAGLE	2001
KY	GATEWAY	1998
KY	GREEN RIVER	1975
KY	HERITAGE	1992
KY	JACKSON PURCHASE	1998
KY	KENTUCKY RIVER	1994
KY	LICKING RIVER VALLEY	1992
KY	LINCOLN	1994
KY	MAMMOTH CAVE	1991
KY	PENNYRILE	1965
KY	THOROUGHbred	2002
LA	ACADIANA	1996
LA	BAYOU LAND	2002
LA	CAPITAL	1971
LA	IMPERIAL CALCASIEU	1994
LA	NORTHEAST DELTA	1992
LA	TRAILBLAZER	1966
LA	TWIN VALLEY	1970
MA	BERKSHIRE-PIONEER	1968

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MA	PATRIOT	2002
MA	THE PILGRIM AREA	1973
MD	MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE	1980
MD	SOUTHERN MARYLAND	1971
MD	WESTERN MARYLAND	1994
ME	DOWN EAST	1975
ME	HEART OF MAINE	1992
ME	ST. JOHN-AROOSTOOK	1965
ME	THRESHOLD TO MAINE	1970
ME	TIME AND TIDE	1972
MI	CONSERVATION RESOURCE ALLIANCE	1968
MI	HURON PINES	1972
MI	POTAWATOMI	1991
MI	SAGINAW BAY	1992
MI	SAUK TRAILS	1975
MI	TIMBERLAND	1994
MI	UPPER PENINSULA	1971
MN	GIZIIBII	1973
MN	HIAWATHA VALLEY	1975
MN	LAURENTIAN	1996
MN	ONANEGOZIE	1967
MN	PEMBINA TRAIL	1992
MN	PRAIRIE COUNTRY	1991
MN	THREE RIVERS	2001
MN	WESMIN	1964
MO	BIG SPRINGS	1975
MO	BOOTHEEL	1976
MO	GREEN HILLS	1972
MO	NORTHEAST MISSOURI	1996
MO	OSAGE VALLEY	1993
MO	PRAIRIE ROSE	1993
MO	SOUTHWEST MISSOURI	1967
MO	TOP OF THE OZARKS	1965
MS	CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI	1992
MS	MISSISSIPPI COASTAL PLAINS	2001
MS	NORTH CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI	1994
MS	NORTHEAST MISSISSIPPI	1967
MS	NORTHWEST MISSISSIPPI	1965

MS	SOUTHEAST MISSISSIPPI	1971
MS	SOUTHWEST MISSISSIPPI	1972
MT	BEARTOOTH	1970
MT	BITTER ROOT	1965
MT	CENTRAL MONTANA	1991
MT	EASTERN PLAINS	1992
MT	HEADWATERS	1972
MT	NORTH CENTRAL MONTANA	1998
MT	NORTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAIN	2002
MT	NORTHWEST MONTANA	1993
NC	ALBEMARLE	1975
NC	BLUE RIDGE	1992
NC	CAPE FEAR	1994
NC	CAROLINA LAND AND LAKES	2001
NC	ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT	1981
NC	MID-EAST	1973
NC	MOUNTAIN VALLEYS	1976
NC	PIEDMONT CONSERVATION COUNCIL INC	1967
NC	PILOT VIEW	1996
NC	SOUTHWESTERN NO. CAROLINA	1969
ND	DAKOTA PRAIRIES	1970
ND	DAKOTA WEST	1973
ND	LAKE AGASSIZ	1972
ND	NORTHERN PLAINS	1975
ND	RED RIVER	1980
ND	SOUTH CENTRAL DAKOTA	1976
ND	UPPER DAKOTA	1993
ND	WILLISTON BASIN	1993
NE	FIVE RIVERS	1996
NE	LOUP BASIN	1993
NE	NEBRASKA GREAT PLAINS	2002
NE	NEBRASKA LOESS HILLS	2001
NE	NORTH CENTRAL	1973
NE	NORTHEAST NEBRASKA	1993
NE	PANHANDLE	1970
NE	PRAIRIE LAND	2002
NE	SANDHILLS	2003
NE	SOUTH CENTRAL NEBRASKA	1998

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NE	SOUTHWEST NEBRASKA	1994
NE	TRAILBLAZER	2001
NH	NORTH COUNTRY	1967
NH	SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE	1998
NJ	NORTH JERSEY	1972
NJ	SOUTH JERSEY	1976
NM	ADELANTE	1993
NM	BLACK RANGE	1968
NM	EL LLANO ESTACADO	1975
NM	HUB	1976
NM	JORNADA	1991
NM	NORTHERN RIO GRANDE	1964
NM	SOUTH CENTRAL MOUNTAIN	1975
NM	SURESTE	1992
NV	DA KA DOIYABE	2001
NV	HIGH DESERT	1998
NV	WESTERN NEVADA	1973
NY	BLACK RIVER-ST. LAWRENCE	1976
NY	GREATER ADIRONDACK	1975
NY	HUDSON-MOHAWK	1996
NY	LOWER HUDSON-LONG ISLAND	2001
NY	ONTARIO LAKE PLAINS	1998
NY	SENECA TRAIL	1967
NY	SOUTH CENTRAL NEW YORK	1966
NY	SULLIVAN TRAIL	1972
OH	BUCKEYE HILLS	1967
OH	CROSSROADS	1971
OH	ERIE BASIN	1991
OH	HEART OF OHIO	2002
OH	MAUMEE VALLEY	1971
OH	MIAMI VALLEY	1992
OH	OHIO VALLEY	1975
OH	TOP OF OHIO	1972
OH	WESTERN RESERVE	2001
OK	ASCOG	1971
OK	CHEROKEE HILLS	1965
OK	CROSS TIMBERS	1992
OK	FUN COUNTRY	1975



OK	GREAT PLAINS	1981
OK	HIGH PLAINS	2001
OK	OUACHITA MOUNTAINS	1970
OK	TALL GRASS	1992
OK	WHEATLAND	1992
OR	CASCADE PACIFIC	1964
OR	COLUMBIA-BLUE MOUNTAIN	1970
OR	NORTHWEST OREGON	1973
OR	SOUTHWEST OREGON	1993
OR	WY'EAST	1996
PA	CAPITAL	2002
PA	ENDLESS MOUNTAINS	1967
PA	HEADWATERS	1975
PA	MID-STATE	1994
PA	PENN SOIL	1964
PA	PENN'S CORNER	1973
PA	POCONO-NORTHEAST	1980
PA	SOUTHEASTERN PA	1998
PA	SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES	1990
PB	MARIANAS	1992
PR	EL ATLANTICO	1993
PR	EL CARIBE	1979
PR	U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS	1971
RI	RHODE ISLAND	1971
SC	EAST PIEDMONT	1968
SC	EDISTO-SAVANNAH	1998
SC	FOOTHILLS	2001
SC	LOWCOUNTRY	1966
SC	NINETY SIX DISTRICT	1972
SC	PEE DEE	1994
SC	SANTEE-WATEREE	1971
SD	BADLANDS	1994
SD	BLACK HILLS	1968
SD	LOWER JAMES	1973
SD	NORTH CENTRAL SOUTH DAKOTA	1975
SD	RANDALL	1964
SD	SOUTH CENTRAL	1994
SD	TATANKA	2001

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TN	APPLACHIAN	1994
TN	BUFFALO-DUCK RIVER	1996
TN	CENTRAL BASIN	2002
TN	CHICKASAW-SHILOH	1973
TN	CLINCH-POWELL	1990
TN	CUMBERLAND MOUNTAIN	2001
TN	FIVE RIVERS	1971
TN	HULL-YORK LAKELAND	1965
TN	SMOKY MOUNTAIN	1998
TN	SOUTHEAST TENNESSEE	1972
TX	ALAMO	1991
TX	BIG 8	1975
TX	BIG COUNTRY	1991
TX	BLUEBONNET	1998
TX	CENTRAL TEXAS	1994
TX	CHIHUAHUAN DESERT	2001
TX	CHISHOLM TRAIL	1998
TX	CONCHO VALLEY	1998
TX	DE-GO-LA	1971
TX	FOUR WINDS	1973
TX	HIGH PLAINS	2001
TX	HILL COUNTRY	2002
TX	LEON-BOSQUE	1970
TX	NORTH ROLLING PLAINS	1980
TX	NORTHEAST TEXAS	1973
TX	PECOS VALLEY	1998
TX	PINEY WOODS	1992
TX	RIO BRAVO	1972
TX	RIO GRANDE-NUECES	2002
TX	SAM HOUSTON	1976
TX	SOUTHEAST	1966
TX	WES-TEX	1994
UT	BEAR RIVER	1966
UT	BONNEVILLE	1998
UT	CASTLELAND	1990
UT	COLOR COUNTRY	1972
UT	DINOSAURLAND	1975
UT	PANORAMALAND	1992

UT	UINTA HEADWATERS	1998
VA	BLACK DIAMOND	1994
VA	EASTERN SHORE	1973
VA	NEW RIVER-HIGHLANDS	1972
VA	OLD DOMINION	1991
VA	SHENANDOAH	2003
VA	SOUTH CENTRE' CORRIDORS	2002
VA	TIDEWATER	1992
VT	GEORGE D. AIKEN	1964
VT	NORTHERN VERMONT	1972
WA	BIG BEND	1998
WA	BLUE MOUNTAIN	2001
WA	COLUMBIA-PACIFIC	1971
WA	NORTH CENTRAL WASHINGTON	1992
WA	NORTH OLYMPIC PENINSULA	2001
WA	SOUTH CENTRAL WASHINGTON	1973
WA	UPPER COLUMBIA	1993
WI	GLACIERLAND	2001
WI	GOLDEN SANDS	1972
WI	LUMBERJACK	1968
WI	PRI-RU-TA	1964
WI	RIVER COUNTRY	1976
WI	SOUTHWEST BADGER	1996
WI	TOWN AND COUNTRY	2003
WV	GREAT KANAWHA	1979
WV	LITTLE KANAWHA	1966
WV	MOUNTAIN	1967
WV	NORTHERN PANHANDLE	1990
WV	POTOMAC HEADWATERS	1969
WV	WES-MON-TY	1971
WY	BIG HORN BASIN	1971
WY	HISTORIC TRAILS	2001
WY	NORTHEASTERN WYOMING	1991
WY	SOUTHEASTERN WYOMING	1972
WY	WESTERN WYOMING	1967

## *List of Acronyms and Abbreviations*

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AMS	Agricultural Marketing Service
ARS	Agricultural Research Service
CSREES	Cooperative State, Research, Education and Extension Service
ERS	Economic Research Service
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
FSA	Farm Service Agency
FS	Forest Service
FY	Fiscal Year
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
NARC&DC	National Association of RC&D Councils, Inc.
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
PAB	USDA RC&D Policy Advisory Board
PART	Program Assessment Rating Tool
RC&D	Resource Conservation and Development
RD	Rural Development : Office of Community Development and Rural Utilities Services
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture

# *List of Figures and Tables*

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Figure 1: Number of RC&D Areas by Year .....	2
Figure 2: RC&D Designated Areas and Applicant Areas .....	3
Figure 3: FY 2002-2004 RC&D Contribution Percentages by Source .....	4
Table 1: FY 2002-2004 RC&D Contributions in Dollars by Source .....	5
Table 2: Funding Source Percentage by Program Element .....	6
Table 3: Percentage of Total Funds Supporting Program Elements .....	6
Table 4: Benefits by Program Element-FY 2002-2004 .....	7, 8
Table 5: Listening Session Participant Affiliation .....	8
Table 6: Number and Percentage of Area Plans Meeting Requirements .....	11
Figure 4: Percentage of RC&D Areas Addressing the Four Elements .....	14
Side Note: Applicable USDA Strategic Goals and Objectives .....	19
Side Note: Applicable NRCS Strategic Goals and Objectives .....	20



