

## How Can I Participate?

Do you have an interest in soil, water, air, plants, wetlands, wildlife, and agriculture? Do you want to support voluntary natural resource management by landowners and managers on private lands? Are you willing to work with natural resource experts from around the State? Then consider serving on a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Technical Committee to help guide national conservation programs that address local needs.

Individuals and groups can receive more information on serving as a State Technical Committee member by writing to the NRCS State Conservationist for that State and describing their qualifications for membership. NRCS State Conservationists determine who will serve on the Committee.

Individuals and groups can participate by providing input to the conservation district through their local conservation needs assessment process. Conservation districts gather this feedback not only to direct their own programs, but also to share with their Local Work Group.

## What Are State Technical Committees and Local Work Groups?

The 1985 Farm Bill (Food Security Act) established State Technical Committees to advise NRCS in making technical decisions related to the implementation of the Act's conservation provisions. The role of the committees was expanded by the 1996 Farm Bill (Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act). These Committees offer an opportunity for interested individuals and groups to advise NRCS on how best to locally implement conservation programs.

*"Their [State technical committee] involvement can help NRCS assure that limited financial and technical assistance is targeted to priority natural resource concerns and the conservation needs of people at all levels are considered."*

NRCS State Conservationist and  
State Technical Committee Chair

Local Work Groups make recommendations to the State Technical Committee on local technical and conservation issues. These recommendations are based on resource needs assessments that are developed by conservation districts through community and stakeholder input. Local Work Groups support districts' locally led efforts by coordinating USDA programs to help provide an integrated solution to addressing natural resource concerns. In keeping with the Federal Advisory Committee Act, Local Work Group membership is limited to Government representatives. Community and stakeholder input, however, is open to all interested citizens.

## What Are the Roles of State Technical Committees and Local Work Groups?

State Technical Committees serve as an advisory body to the NRCS State Conservationist. They

provide recommendations on technical aspects of Farm Bill conservation programs, including:

- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
- Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)
- Conservation Security Program (CSP)
- Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

They also may provide guidance on other technical matters, such as practices not already described in NRCS field office technical guides, criteria for evaluating and ranking projects, cost share and incentive payment levels, and measures related to achieving a program balance regardless of agricultural sector or farm or

ranch size. Committee input also is sought on information and outreach strategies. NRCS State Conservationists determine specific items and/or issues for Committee reviews and recommendations.

Local Work Groups ensure that a conservation needs assessment is developed, submit priorities and funding requests to the State Technical Committee, and conduct Civil Rights impact analyses for all funding requests and program implementation.

## Some State Technical Committee Activities

- Produced a briefing on new appraisal process for NRCS conservation easement programs to be used with the Wetlands Reserve Program, the Grassland Reserve Program, and the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.
- Provided guidance in keeping geographic rates by county, but updating dollar value to reflect current year values, and agreed to re-evaluate prior to next year's use.
- Reviewed CSP accomplishments to date, reviewed selection criteria for watersheds, and prioritized remaining watersheds for future CSP sign-ups.
- Reviewed standards for the Wildlife Habitat Appraisal Guide and recommended types of enhancements to offer in Conservation Security Program contract modifications and sign-ups.
- Ensured the State WHIP Plan was updated to address national and State priorities by the deadline.
- Shared information and issues from each organization to provide better participant recognition and build understanding and collaboration.



## Can You Be a Member of the State Technical Committee?

State Technical Committee meetings are open to the public and members of the public are welcome to attend and offer their input. Usual membership, however, includes one representative from the following Federal agencies:

USDA:  
NRCS  
Farm Service Agency  
FSA State Committee  
Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service  
Rural Development  
Forest Service

Department of the Interior:  
Bureau of Indian Affairs  
Bureau of Reclamation  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
U.S. Geological Survey  
Bureau of Land Management

Department of Defense:  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Committees also include members from State agencies such as a State's Department of Natural Resources (as identified by the NRCS State Conservationist) and each federally recognized tribal government that encompasses 100,000 acres or more in a State.

Membership also may include private interests such as individuals with conservation expertise, agricultural producers, nonprofit organizations, persons knowledgeable about conservation techniques and programs, and representatives from agribusiness. NRCS also seeks members with natural resource conservation experience specific to historically underserved groups and individuals, e.g., minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and socially and economically disadvantaged groups. NRCS State Conservationists determine the formal composition of the Committee.

## What Is Expected of a State Technical Committee Member?

Committee members are expected to attend all meetings, which typically range from quarterly to annually. Many are scheduled based on need as determined by the NRCS State Conservationist. Members also may be asked to participate in subcommittees for a more in-depth study of programs, processes, and resource issues. Committees range in size from 14 to more than 200 individuals. The most successful Committees follow a meeting agenda, listen as well as voice their opinions, and recognize that the Committee serves to provide advice to the NRCS State Conservationist who makes his or her decisions as the designated Federal authority. Although the Committee has no implementation or enforcement authority, NRCS gives serious consideration to Committee advice. Committee members are volunteers and receive no reimbursement for their participation.



*"Conservation in your community needs local input, direction, and leadership."*

Tribal Conservation District official and State Technical Committee member

## Where Can I Find Information About My State Technical Committee?

Many State Web sites provide information about their State Technical Committee. Contact information is available on State Web sites at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/organization/regions.html> or by calling the local NRCS office listed in the Federal Government pages in the phone book.

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# A Seat at the Table for Conservation Policy



**State Technical Committees and Local Work Groups**

*Helping People Help the Land*