

Local Work Groups

Arizona Association of Conservation Districts

District Training Program

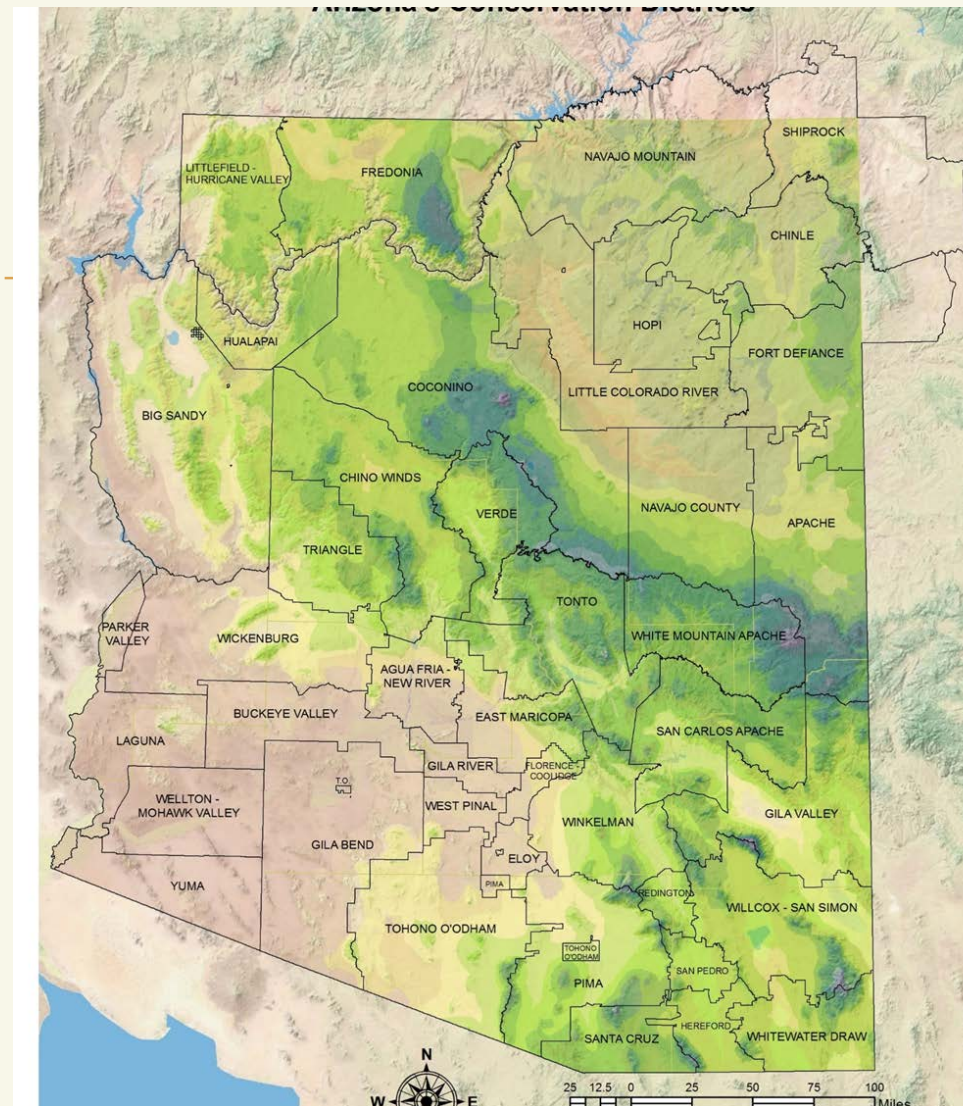
2018

Locally Led Conservation

NRCS Programs Manual 440 Part 500



- ☞ Locally led conservation begins with the community, working through the local Conservation District.
- ☞ Based on the principle that community stakeholders are best suited to deal with local resource problems.
- ☞ Involve community stakeholders in the natural resource planning, implementation of solutions, and evaluation of results.



Natural Resource Driven



- ❧ Locally led conservation is driven by natural resource conservation needs rather than by programs.
- ❧ Identify natural resource concerns, along with related economic and social concerns.
- ❧ Identify appropriate Federal, State, local, and nongovernmental program tools can be used to address these resource concerns and meet the goals of the community stakeholders.



State Technical Committee

7 CFR Part 610

- ❧ Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will establish in each State a Technical Committee to assist in making recommendations relating to the implementation and technical aspects of natural resource conservation activities and programs.
- ❧ State Technical Committees will include agricultural producers, nonindustrial private forest land owners, and other professionals who represent a variety of disciplines in soil, water, wetlands, plant, and wildlife sciences.
- ❧ NRCS will establish and maintain national standard operating procedures governing the operation of State Technical Committees and Local Working Groups in its directive system.



Local Working Groups

7 CFR Part 610

- ❧ Conservation District officials
- ❧ agricultural producers representing the variety within the local area
- ❧ nonindustrial private forest landowners
- ❧ other professionals representing relevant agricultural and conservation interests and a variety of disciplines in the soil, water, plant, wetland, and wildlife sciences
- ❧ who are familiar with private land agricultural and natural resource issues in the local community



Local Working Groups

- Local Working Groups **provide recommendations on local natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs**
- Decisions resulting from recommendations of Local Working Groups will be communicated to NRCS in accordance with the standard operating procedures described in § 610.23(b).



Conservation Needs Assessment

- ❧ **A conservation needs assessment is the first step and a critical element of locally led conservation.**
- ❧ With input and resource data from all interested parties, this assessment should provide a comprehensive evaluation of the condition of the area's natural resource base
- ❧ It is the platform for making decisions about local priorities and policies for conservation programs delivered at the local level.



Conservation Needs Assessment

- ❧ **Ensure that conservation efforts address the most important local resource needs.**
- ❧ Identify the type and extent of needed conservation systems and practices.
- ❧ **Make recommendations on funding priorities and priority areas to be addressed by the various conservation programs available.**



Conservation Needs Assessment



- ❧ The conservation needs assessment is the foundation for carrying out Federal programs such as the USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).
- ❧ may also be used to assist localities in implementing the
 - ❧ Clean Water Act
 - ❧ Safe Drinking Water Act
 - ❧ Endangered Species Act
- ❧ **Identify State, Tribal, and local programs that provide assistance** to private land owners and managers.



Conservation Action Plan

- ❧ The conservation district involves community stakeholders to develop and agree on an conservation action plan
- ❧ This plan will –
 - ❧ Identify natural resource conservation priorities.
 - ❧ Set measurable conservation goals and objectives.
 - ❧ Identify conservation technology needed to achieve these goals and objectives.



Conservation Action Plan



- ❧ Identify responsibility for action and create a time schedule for completion of elements.
- ❧ Identify Federal, State, Tribal, local, and nongovernment programs and services needed to address specific conservation needs.
- ❧ Identify a need to develop new programs or processes to address those problems not covered by existing programs.



Conservation Action Plan

Implementation



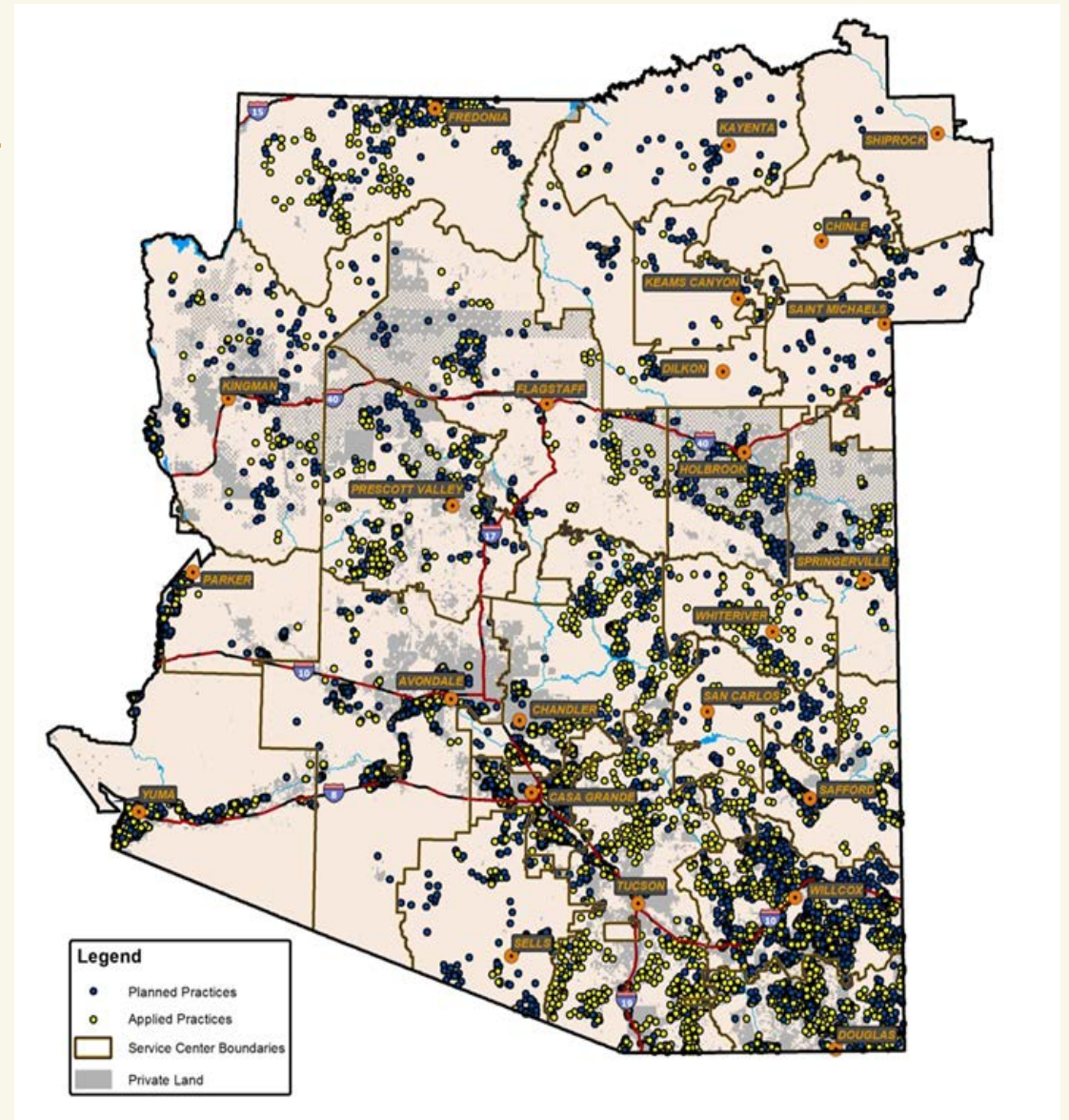
- ❧ Community stakeholders obtain the needed programs and services to address the problems identified by their conservation needs assessment.
- ❧ Coordinate assistance, available through private organizations, Federal, State, Tribal, and local agencies, including USDA;
 - ❧ ensure that appropriate program application processes are followed;
 - ❧ develop detailed proposals for new programs; and
 - ❧ seek financial, educational, and technical assistance as necessary.



Conservation Action Plan Monitoring



- ☞ The effectiveness of plan implementation should be evaluated to ensure that the community stakeholders' planned goals and objectives are achieved.
- ☞ Determine where the actual results differ from those anticipated.



Conservation Action Plan Monitoring



- ❧ The NRCS designated conservationist will
 - ❧ Assisting in the evaluation process.
 - ❧ Providing updated natural resources information and assessments.
 - ❧ Keeping them aware of changes in the USDA programs and the program delivery process.
 - ❧ Assisting in interpreting the impact of conservation action plan implementation on the condition of the natural resources.

- ❧ Refer to step nine of the areawide planning process in the National Planning Procedures Handbook for specific guidance.



Local Working Groups

NRCS Program Manual 440 Part 501 Subpart B



☞ In accordance with 7 CFR Part 610, Subpart C, local working groups are subcommittees of the State Technical Committee and provide recommendations to USDA on local and state natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs.



☞ Local working groups are normally chaired by the appropriate Conservation District (NRCD or SWCD).

Responsibilities of the Local Working Group

- ❧ Ensure that a conservation needs assessment is developed using community stakeholder input.
- ❧ Utilize the conservation needs assessment to help identify program funding needs and conservation practices.
- ❧ Identify priority resource concerns and identify, as appropriate, high-priority areas needing assistance.
- ❧ Recommend USDA conservation program application and funding criteria, eligible practices (including limits on practice payments or units), and payment rates.



Responsibilities of the Local Working Group

- Assist NRCS and the conservation district with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers' training needs.
- Recommend State and national program policy to the State Technical Committee based on resource data.
- Utilize the conservation needs assessment to identify priority resource concerns that can be addressed by USDA programs.
- Forward recommendations to the NRCS designated conservationist or Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Executive Director, as appropriate.



Local Work Group Conservation District Responsibilities



- ❧ Develop the conservation needs assessment as outlined in 440-CPM, Part 500, Subpart A.
- ❧ Assemble the USDA local working group.
 - ❧ Set the agenda.
 - ❧ Conduct the USDA local working group meetings.
- ❧ Transmit the USDA local working group's priority area and funding requests to the NRCS designated conservationist or the State Technical Committee, as appropriate.
- ❧ Local working group recommendations are to be submitted to State Technical Committee chairperson, the district conservationist (or designated conservationist), or both (as appropriate) within 14 calendar days after a meeting.



NRCS Designated Conservationist



- ☞ Encourage and assist other USDA agencies to participate in the locally led conservation and working group efforts, as feasible.
- ☞ Assist with identifying members for the local working group.
- ☞ Help identify program priorities and resources available.
- ☞ Assist in the development of program priority area proposals.
- ☞ Comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, nondiscrimination statement, and other environmental, civil rights, and cultural resource requirements.
- ☞ Support and advise the local working group concerning technical issues, program policies and procedures, and other matters relating to conservation program delivery.



NRCS Designated Conservationist



- ❧ Ensure that populations are –
 - ❧ Provided the opportunity to comment before decisions are rendered.
 - ❧ Allowed to share the benefits of, not excluded from, and not affected in a disproportionately high and adverse manner by Government programs and activities affecting human health or the environment.
- ❧ Analyze performance indicators and reports.
- ❧ Report the conservation programs' impacts on resources.
- ❧ Perform the responsibilities of the conservation district where a conservation district is not present or chooses not to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in 440-CPM, Part 501, Subpart A, Section 501.6A.

NRCS Designated Conservationist



- ☞ Give strong consideration to the local working group's recommendations on NRCS programs, initiatives, and activities.
- ☞ Ensure that recommendations, when adopted, address natural resource concerns.
- ☞ The designated conservationist will inform the local working group as to the decisions made in response to all local working group recommendations within 90 days. This notification will be made in writing to all local working groups members and made available for the public at the appropriate local NRCS office.