

Local Working Groups

A voice for locally-led conservation in Alaska



What is a Local Working Group?

No one knows more about a community's natural resource priorities than the people who live and work there. That's why the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) routinely seeks input from local communities throughout Alaska to inform and shape its decisions.

Local Working Groups (LWG) are an important mechanism to give local landowners, Tribes, tribal entities, and partners a voice in how to best prioritize and address natural resource concerns in their communities.

LWGs typically are held annually between October and February. They are convened by a Soil and Water Conservation District or a Tribal Conservation District. NRCS may also convene the LWG if a conservation district is unable to organize a meeting.

Responsibilities

The role of the LWG is advisory in nature, however, NRCS gives strong consideration to the recommendations of the LWG.

The primary responsibility of a LWG is to develop a **conservation needs assessment**. This is a comprehensive evaluation of natural resource concerns that identifies areas where conservation efforts are needed. It includes recommended activities and programs to address natural resource issues.

Developing a conservation needs assessment is a critical part of NRCS's locally-led conservation approach, where community stakeholders and NRCS work together to address natural resource concerns and set conservation priorities.

Responsibilities of a LWG may include:

- Developing a conservation needs assessment
- Identifying priority resource concerns that can be addressed through USDA programs
- Recommending USDA conservation program application and funding criteria, eligible practices, and payment rates
- Assisting NRCS and the conservation district with public outreach and information efforts
- Recommending program policy to the State Technical Advisory Committee



NRCS staff Matt Kugel (left) and Chris Tcimpidis (right) look at forest soils in Talkeetna, Alaska.

LWG Benefits

- Provide a voice for local landowners and partners to influence NRCS program and technical delivery in Alaska.
- Identify priority natural resource concerns in the community that may be addressed with NRCS assistance.
- Develop a conservation needs assessment for the community.
- Supports partnership building across multiple community members, agencies, and organizations.
- Provide input on NRCS business processes such as recommending new interim conservation practices, modifying a payment schedule, adjusting program application ranking criteria, revising or creating new NRCS state or national policy, and more.





Pictured Above: NRCS staff Emily MacDonald (center), Ryan Lee (left) and his daughter Amelia inside a seasonal high tunnel in Homer, Alaska.

Membership

LWG membership should be diverse and focus on agricultural interests and natural resource issues in the area. Membership may include but is not limited to federal, state, county, tribal, and/or local government representatives. Examples of LWG members include:

- Agricultural producers
- Tribes, tribal entities and tribal landowners
- Cooperative Extension
- Agricultural industry / business representatives
- Members of the county Farm Service Agency committee and the County Executive Director
- Members of agricultural groups, environmental organizations, and other agencies carrying out natural resource conservation programs
- State or locally-elected or appointed officials
- Other federal and state government representatives

Local Voices for Statewide Decisions

LWGs are considered sub-committees to the NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC). Therefore, information gathered at each LWG is reported to and discussed at the STAC which is chaired by the NRCS State Conservationist.

By elevating local priorities to the STAC, strategic decisions can be made at a statewide level to ensure NRCS programs, technical resources, and capacity are meeting the unique needs of Alaskans from all corners of the state. LWGs are a direct connection for landowners and partners to influence and advise NRCS on decisions.

Members of a LWG may also be members of the STAC depending on their role within their organization.

How to Join

Contact your local conservation district or NRCS office to inquire about becoming a member of a LWGs in your area. Meetings are open to the public and membership is not required to attend. Meetings dates are posted on the NRCS Alaska website at:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/state-offices/alaska/technical-committee>.



Bison grazing in Delta Junction, Alaska.



Representatives from the Native Village of Tyonek and the Tyonek Tribal Conservation District, with other agency partners, at a ribbon cutting ceremony for a culvert fish passage project in Tyonek, Alaska.

