USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

FY22 NRCS-Local Working Group (LWG) Strategy Package

Local Working Group To Do List

Submittal Requirements:
LWGs are normally chaired by the Conservation Districts to facilitate discussion about local conservation resource needs. In the time of COVID-19, NRCS and Conservation Districts may need to find alternative ways to gather input on NRCS program delivery, including virtual meeting venues such as Teams or Zoon (USDA does not endorse or prefer any platform over others). To assist in program goals, the DCs are asked to review their responsibilities and assist the CDs in convening the LWG. Please review the LWG policy defined in NRCS General Manual 450 Part 501 B. Note that the LWGs are advisory in nature and have no implementation or enforcement authority; however, NRCS uses their input and recommendations to identify conservation planning needs, prioritize resource concerns for the state's programs, and develop ranking questions and procedures.

The LWG meetings will be conducted as an open discussion among members. LWG members will be provided program information in advance of the meeting. Review material will include a review of FY18 Farm Bill, new EQIP policy in FY2020, current fiscal year (FY) decisions and focus on identifying and prioritizing local natural resource concerns for the subsequent FY. All recommendations will be considered.

LWG meetings are open to the public. Across the state, many organizations and individuals continue to express interest in participating in LWGs. To facilitate participation, Alaska NRCS will post the schedule for all LWG meetings on the Alaska NRCS web site. With the 2018 Farm Bill, the LWG membership has been expanded to include anyone who requests membership and is deemed to have knowledge of local resource concerns. See CPM 501.12 regarding selection of members.

The following guidelines will govern discussions:

- The SWCD/TCD chairperson will lead the discussion. Facilitation services will be provided by the NRCS District Conservationist upon request.
- A note keeper will be assigned to keep a summary of the meeting, but minutes will not be kept.
- Plain language will be used and acronyms will be avoided, so that everyone can follow the discussions.
- Every participant should have an opportunity to speak. The chairperson is responsible for recognizing speakers.
- Members may be polled, but voting on issues is not appropriate.
- The NRCS District Conservationist will help the LWG walk through the technical information. The information from this spreadsheet will be provided as an online survey.

LWG input and recommendations may assist our agency in identifying any of the following conditions:

Natural resource concerns for agricultural land and forest land;
Environmental Quality Inventive Program (EQIP) funding pools;
Ranking criteria for evaluating applications;
Eligible conservation practices;
Working Lands for Wildlife Projects;

Identifying needs for Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG);
Identifying special projects;
Ag Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) priority natural resource concerns;
ACEP ranking and associated point values;
ACEP geographic area rate caps

Action Items:

1. DCs are to attend the kickoff teleconference on **Month XX, 2020 *from time to time*** at: 888-XXX-XXXX; and use the following access code***: XXXXXX***. DCs are to provide this information to their LWG Chairperson and encourage them to also attend the kickoff teleconference. Please note that LWGs may convene before this date if they chose; contact Scott Crockett for more information.

2. As soon as the date for the LWG meeting has been set by the LWG Chair, DCs will inform Scott Crockett and Amanda Crowe and email the time, location, agenda, and date of the meetings to Tracy Robillard, Public Affairs Officer, at tracy.robillard.usda.gov, to be posted to the web site. Each LWG meeting date must be posted a *minimum of two weeks* in advance. Additionally, notification must be published in one or more newspapers. DCs will be required to submit proof of public notification to Scott Crockett no less than two weeks before their LWG meeting.

3. In advance of the LWG meeting District Conservationists will develop reports that can be presented to the LWG that show the LWG's prior year decisions. Additionally, DCs will bring maps showing their team boundaries that will include watersheds at the 10-digit hydrologic unit. Contact the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (ASTC-P) if you need assistance with the development of maps or other visual materials.

4. Hold LWG meetings by ***MONTH XX, 2021***. Record the LWG's discussions and decisions (minutes).

5. DCs will compile LWG decisions/recommendations on the LWG Data Collection Spreadsheet and email to Scott Crockett with a cc to Amanda Crowe***, by Month XX, 2021.*** The local NRCS field office will retain a copy of the LWG Data Collection Spreadsheet and make it available to the public, if requested. *Note: If you need to make modifications to the data collection spreadsheet contact Scott Crockett.*

6. **The LWG's input specific to prioritized resource concerns, prioritized fund pools, working lands for wildlife projects and special projects, Conservation Innovation Grants, ACEP program changes and technical practice recommendations will** be presented to the State Technical Committee for consideration on ***Month XX, 2021***

Questions should be directed to Scott Crockett at (907) 761-7758 or by email at scott.crockett@usda.gov.

Resource Priorities – Agriculture Lands

Directions: Identify and rank the top 8 resource priorities for Agricultural Lands (agricultural lands include: Cropland, Pasture, Range, Associated Agricultural Land, & Farmstead)		EXAMPLE:	
	Air Quality Emissions		Air Quality Emissions
	Aquatic Habitat	1	Aquatic Habitat
	Concentrated Erosion		Concentrated Erosion
	Degraded Plant Condition	6	Degraded Plant Condition
	Field Pesticide Loss		Field Pesticide Loss
	Field Sediment, Nutrient, and Pathogen Loss	5	Field Sediment, Nutrient, and Pathogen Loss
	Fire Management		Fire Management
	Inefficient Energy Use	3	Inefficient Energy Use
	Livestock Production Limitation		Livestock Production Limitation
	Pest Pressure	7	Pest Pressure
	Salt Losses to Water	4	Salt Losses to Water
	Soil Quality Limitations		Soil Quality Limitations
	Source Water Depletion		Source Water Depletion
	Storage and Handling of Pollutants	2	Storage and Handling of Pollutants
	Terrestrial Habitat		Terrestrial Habitat
	Weather Resilience	8	Weather Resilience
	Wind and Water Erosion		Wind and Water Erosion

Access the Resource Concern & Categories tab, "National Resource Concern List and Planning Criteria" and "Resource Concerns Fact Sheets" for information regarding each concern listed below at:

National Resource Concern List

Resource Concerns Fact Sheets

Resource Priorities – Forest Lands

Directions: Identify and rank the top 8 resource priorities for Forest Lands		EXAMPLE:	
	Air Quality Emissions	4	Air Quality Emissions
	Aquatic Habitat		Aquatic Habitat
	Concentrated Erosion		Concentrated Erosion
	Degraded Plant Condition	3	Degraded Plant Condition
	Field Pesticide Loss		Field Pesticide Loss
	Field Sediment, Nutrient, and Pathogen Loss	8	Field Sediment, Nutrient, and Pathogen Loss
	Fire Management		Fire Management
	Inefficient Energy Use	5	Inefficient Energy Use
	Livestock Production Limitation		Livestock Production Limitation
	Pest Pressure		Pest Pressure
	Salt Losses to Water	1	Salt Losses to Water
	Soil Quality Limitations		Soil Quality Limitations
	Source Water Depletion	6	Source Water Depletion
	Storage and Handling of Pollutants		Storage and Handling of Pollutants
	Terrestrial Habitat	7	Terrestrial Habitat
	Weather Resilience		Weather Resilience
	Wind and Water Erosion	2	Wind and Water Erosion

Access the Resource Concern & Categories tab, "National Resource Concern List and Planning Criteria" and "Resource Concerns Fact Sheets" for information regarding each concern listed below at:

National Resource Concern List

Resource Concerns Fact Sheets

Resource Concern Category	Resource Concern
Wind and water erosion	Sheet and rill erosion
	Wind erosion
Concentrated erosion	Ephemeral gully erosion
	Classic gully erosion
	Bank erosion from streams, shorelines or water conveyance channels
Soil quality limitations	Subsidence
	Compaction
	Organic matter depletion
	Concentration of salts or other chemicals
	Soil organism habitat loss or degradation
	Aggregate instability
Weather resilience	Ponding and flooding
	Seasonal high water table
	Seeps
	Drifted snow
	Naturally available moisture use
Source water depletion	Surface water depletion
	Groundwater depletion
	Inefficient irrigation water use
Field sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss	Nutrients transported to surface water
	Nutrients transported to groundwater
	Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications transported to surface water
	Sediment transported to surface water
Field Pesticide loss	Pesticides transported to surface water
	Pesticides transported to groundwater
Storage and handling of pollutants	Nutrients transported to surface water
	Nutrients transported to groundwater
	Petroleum, heavy metals and other pollutants transported to surface water
	Petroleum, heavy metals and other pollutants transported to groundwater
Salt losses to water	Salts transported to surface water
	Salts transported to groundwater
Air quality emissions	Emissions of particulate matter (PM) and PM precursors
	Emissions of greenhouse gases - GHGs
	Emissions of ozone precursors
	Objectionable odor
	Emissions of airborne reactive nitrogen
Pest pressure	Plant pest pressure
Degraded plant condition	Plant productivity and health
	Plant structure and composition
Fire management	Wildfire hazard from biomass accumulation
	Feed and forage balance

Resource Concern Category	Resource Concern
Livestock production limitation	Inadequate livestock shelter
	Inadequate livestock water quantity, quality and distribution
Terrestrial habitat	Terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates
Aquatic habitat	Aquatic habitat for fish and other organisms
	Elevated water temperature
Inefficient energy use	Energy efficiency of equipment and facilities
	Energy efficiency of farming/ranching practices and field operations
Long term protection of land	Threat of Conversion
	Loss of functions and values

EQIP Fund Pool Prioritization

Directions: You have 10 votes to inform NRCS which fund pools should be prioritized (i.e. which fund pools should receive more funding than other fund pools). Your 10 votes can be placed in any number of fund pools. For example, you could place all 10 votes in 1 fund pool, spread them out over 4 fund pools, or place 1 vote in each fund pool.

# Votes Here	Fund Pool Name	Fund Pool Description
	Beginning Farmer	Available only to applicant's who self certify as a beginning farmer/rancher when submitting an EQIP application. Available to address all NRCS resource concerns on all land uses.
	CAP	Available for the development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP).
	Forestry	Available to address forest health resource concerns on non-industrial private forestland as identified in an NRCS approved Forest Management Plan.
	General	Available to all applicants to address all NRCS resource concerns on all land uses.
	High Tunnel	Available to address resource concerns that a high tunnel can solve or address resource concerns in an existing high tunnel through supporting or management practices. This is the only fund pool with the High Tunnel Conservation Practice.
	On-Farm Energy	Available to address recommendations from an Agricultural Energy Management Plan (AgEMP) or On Farm Audit that meets ASABE S612 Performing On Farm Energy Audits Comprehensive Type 2 standards which has been completed or updated within the last four years.
	Organic	Available for organic, transition to organic and organic-exempt producers to address natural resource concerns related to organic production as well as requirements related to the National Organic Program (NOP) requirements.
	Socially Disadvantaged	Available only to applicant's who self certify as a socially disadvantaged farmer/rancher when submitting an EQIP application. Available to address all NRCS resource concerns on all land uses.
	Soil Health	Available to applicants who's primary focus is addressing soil health resource concerns. This fund pool is only available for cropland. The NRCS Copland In-Field Soil Health Assessment is required.
	Wildlife	Available to address aquatic or terrestrial habitat resource concerns on all land uses.

EQIP Ranking Question and Practice List

NRCS uses the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) to rank applications for funding. CART evaluates applications by assessing existing conditions, planned practice effects, resource priorities, program priorities and cost efficiency. The FY21 Ranking Questions and Conservation Practice List can be accessed at:

FY21 Fund Pool, Ranking Questions and Conservation Practices

Questions:

Does the LWG have any concerns associated with the ranking questions?

Is there any conservation practices not offered by NRCS that should be?

Working Lands for Wildlife

Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) is not a program - its an approach which brings together diverse partners who are grounded in the belief that wildlife an agriculture have mutual goals. WLFW is used to strategically implement a host of programs to target appropriate resources.

Alaska currently has 1 WLFW which is on the Kenai Peninsula and targets Salmon. To learn more visit: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/initiatives/?cid=stelprdb1046975

Question:

Has the LWG identified a need for WLFW?

Species identified:

Partners who are interested:

Geographical area of interest:

State Conservation Innovation Grant

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) are competitive grants that drive innovation in the field of conservation through the development and adoption of innovate approaches and technologies for conservation on agricultural lands.

CIG does not fund projects supporting technologies and approaches commonly used in Alaska, including those already eligible for funding through EQIP. An applicant's CIG funding request must be matched at least 1:1 with non-federal funding. The grantee is also responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully complete the project. CIG applications are accepted from state or local governments, federally-recognized American Indian tribes, non-governmental organizations, and individuals.

For more information on CIG visit: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/cig/

In FY20 Alaska offered three priorties for a State CIG Competition: Wildfire Hazard from Biomass Accumulation, Plant Productivity and Health, and Soil Health

Question:

Has the LWG identified a need for State CIG in Alaska?

Special Projects

Think of this question as a white board - a place to tell us your ideas for future project that NRCS may be invovled with. Projects within your local work group that further the mission of NRCS. NRCS will take these into consideration when implementing programs, funding, and partnerships.

Question:

Has the LWG identified any special projects?

Easement Ranking Questions

NRCS uses the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) to rank applications for funding. CART evaluates applications by assessing existing conditions, planned practice effects, resource priorities, program priorities and cost efficiency. The FY21 Ranking Questions and Conservation Practice List can be accessed at:

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ak/programs/easements/acep/

Questions:

Does the LWG have any concerns associated with the ranking questions?

Does the LWG have any concerns with the point values associated with the questions?

Easement Geographic Area Rate Cap

Compensation for ACEP easements or 30-year contracts are based on the lowest of fair market value of the land using an area wide market analysis (AWMA) or uniform standards for professional appraisal practices (USPAP), the geographic area rate cap (GARC) or a voluntary offer made by the land owner.

Because the landowner retains certain reserved rights to the land, GARCS will always be less than the fair market value determined in teh AWMA's. Datas used to develop GARCs include data sets previously obtained ACEP-WRE appraisals, local real estate market values, tax rates and assessments, location of the land, soil types and productivity, agricultural statistics, historic values accepted and rejected by landowerns for program participation, and rates paid by other conservation easement programs with similar purposes.

Currently, AK has established a GARC rate cap at 80% of the value, with a maximum of $5,000 per acre.

Question:

Is the current GARC acceptable?