
Montana State Technical Advisory Committee

FY 2020 Standard Operating Procedures

Overview

The Montana State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) serves in an advisory capacity to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) on the implementation of conservation technical and financial assistance. In Montana, the NRCS State Conservationist and the Farm Service Agency State Executive Director will co-chair the Montana STAC, which is composed of representatives from Federal and State agencies, American Indian Tribes, agricultural and conservation groups, and agricultural and forestry producers.

Explanation

The Food Security Act of 1985 (1985 Farm Bill) required the formation of State Technical Committees to advise NRCS on a variety of issues. The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (the 2018 Farm Bill) amends the 1985 Farm Bill to identify additional mandatory members and designate multiple areas where the State Technical Committee must be involved in or consulted on during the 2018 Farm Bill implementation.

Responsibilities of the State Technical Advisory Committee

The STAC provides recommendations for establishing technical guidelines and program criteria and priorities necessary to carry out conservation provisions of the Farm Bill. The role of the Committee is advisory in nature and has no implementation or enforcement authority. Roles and responsibilities include providing advice on issues such as:

1. Information, analysis, and recommendations to USDA on conservation provisions and criteria for natural resources conservation activities and programs, including application and funding criteria, recommended practices and program payment percentages.
2. Identification of emerging natural resource concerns and program needs.
3. Recommendations for conservation practices standards and specifications.
4. Recommendations for state and national program policy based on resource data.
5. Reviewing activities of the local work groups to ensure State priorities are being addressed locally.
6. Making recommendations to the State Conservationist on requests and recommendations from local working groups.
7. Assisting NRCS and FSA with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers training needs.

State Technical Advisory Committee Membership

The Montana STAC will include agricultural producers, nonindustrial private forest land owners, and other professionals who represent a variety of conservation and agricultural interests. The Montana STAC will include representatives from among the following, if willing to serve:

1. NRCS
2. Farm Service Agency (FSA)
3. Forest Service
4. National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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5. The State fish and wildlife agency
6. The State forester or equivalent state official
7. The State water resources agency
8. The State department of Agriculture
9. The State association of soil and water conservation districts
10. Agricultural producer representing the crops and livestock raised within Montana
11. Owners of nonindustrial private forest land
12. Nonprofit organizations (as defined under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986) that demonstrate conservation expertise and experience working with agricultural producers in the State
13. Agribusiness
14. The State Cooperative Extension Service and Land Grant University
15. Each of the Federally recognized American Indian Tribal Governments
16. FSA State Committee
17. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
18. Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
19. Rural Development (RD)
20. Risk Management Agency (RMA)

The State Conservationist will invite other relevant government agencies, organizations, and persons, knowledgeable about economic and environmental impacts of conservation programs, to participate as needed.

New Membership

It is the responsibility of the State Conservationist to seek a balanced representation of interests among the membership on the STAC. The STAC should consider the needs of the diverse groups served by USDA. Membership will include, to the extent practicable, individuals with demonstrated ability to represent the conservation and related technical concerns of historically underserved groups and individuals; as defined by the Farm Bill. Individuals or groups wanting to participate on the Committee within Montana may submit a request to the State Conservationist that explains their interest and outlines their credentials. Decisions regarding membership are at the discretion of the State Conservationist. State Conservationist decisions on membership are final and not appealable to any other individual or group within USDA.

Specialized Subcommittees

Specialized subcommittees composed of STAC members may be needed to analyze and refine specific issues or research topics. The State Conservationist may assemble certain committee members, including members of local working groups and other experts to discuss, examine, and focus on a technical or programmatic topic, or combination of such. The State Conservationist shall appoint one of the Montana STAC members as a chair. NRCS will be represented on each subcommittee with the appropriate staff member depending on subject. Recommendations of specialized subcommittees will be presented in general sessions of the STAC.

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Montana STAC Subcommittees

Montana STAC members are encouraged to participate on one or multiple subcommittees. The subcommittees can be comprised of non- members. Each subcommittee will have an assigned non-NRCS chair or co-chair, an NRCS representative, and landowner representation on the subcommittee. The following are examples of subcommittees.

- **Water** - The roles and responsibilities of the Water subcommittee is to provide input and direction for conservation delivery involving water quality and quantity.
- **Grazing Land** - The roles and responsibilities of the Grazing Land subcommittee is to provide input and direction for conservation delivery on grazing lands.
- **Cropland** - The roles and responsibilities of the Cropland subcommittee is to provide input and direction for conservation delivery on cropland .
- **Forestry** - The roles and responsibilities of the Forestry subcommittee is to provide input and direction for conservation delivery for private forest land.
- **Wildlife** - The roles and responsibilities of the Wildlife subcommittee is to provide input and direction for conservation delivery that impacts wildlife.
- **Conservation Delivery** – The roles and responsibilities of the Conservation Delivery subcommittee is to provide input and direction for the delivery of all conservation programs. Input and direction may include, but is not limited to, the following:
 - Application ranking criteria
 - Geographic area rate caps
 - Local and state priorities

Meetings and Frequency

The Montana STAC will meet three times a year. Other meetings may be held at the discretion of the State Conservationist in a format of his or her choosing. The State Conservationist will call a meeting whenever he or she believes that there is business that should be brought before the committee for action. However, any USDA agency may make a request of the State Conservationist for a meeting. In-person meetings are the preferred method and therefore teleconference lines will not be provided.

| USDA Fiscal Year | Meeting Location | Meeting Date |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Fall 2020 | Billings, MT | October 30, 2019 |
| Spring 2020 | Virtual | April 1, 2020 |
| Summer 2020 | Great Falls, MT | July 14, 2020 |

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Public Notification

- A public meeting notice will be published at least 14 calendar days prior to the meeting.
- The meeting notice will be posted to the Montana NRCS website and will include meeting time, location, agenda items, and point of contact.

Meeting Information

- The meeting agenda will be developed to reflect the purpose and responsibilities of the Montana STAC.
- Requests for agenda items will be emailed to Kyle Tackett, Partnership Liaison, 21 days in advance of the meeting.
- A meeting agenda will be prepared and provided to the committee members at least 14 calendar days prior to a scheduled meeting.
- The State Conservationist may amend the agenda at any time without notice.

Record of Meetings and Meeting Minutes

- Summaries for all STAC meetings will be available within 30 calendar days of the committee meeting and distributed to committee members.
- The summaries will be filed at the NRCS State Office and posted to the Montana NRCS website.

Response to Committee Recommendations

- The State Conservationist will inform the STAC as to the decisions made in response to all Committee recommendations within 90 days.
- Notification will be made in writing to all STAC members and posted to the NRCS State Website.

Annual Review of Montana STAC

- Members will be reviewed annually for changes to the roster.
- The Montana STAC SOP will be updated as needed to reflect any changes.