

July 29, 2019

INDIANA BULLETIN NO. 300-19-24

SUBJECT: LTP – The role and establishment of Local Working Groups

ACTION REQUIRED BY: October 30, 2019 and November 1, 2019

Purpose: To provide background on the duties of and distribute guidance on the establishment of the Local Working Groups in each county.

Expiration Date: November 1, 2019

The implementation of 2020 programs place great importance on the roles and responsibilities of the Local Working Groups in each county. In each state, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has established a State Technical Committee to assist in making recommendations regarding implementation of technical aspects of natural resource conservation activities and programs. This is an advisory committee that may be utilized by any USDA agency with conservation obligations.

The Farm Bill designates the Local Working Groups as a subcommittee of the State Technical Committee. The Local Working Group's role is to provide similar recommendations and advice as the State Technical Committee, with a focus on the resource priorities of the local community. These priority resource concerns will be used to prioritize the rankings for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP.) The Local Working Group should consist of representatives who are able to provide input on the wide range of natural resource and agricultural concerns for a county. These resource concerns will be aggregated at a conservation delivery team or area level to maximize the efficiencies of the conservation assessment ranking tool (CART.) The Local Working Groups provide recommendations on local natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs, within the scope of State outlined resource priorities (7 CFR 610.25(2)).

The Local Working Group should consist of a diverse group of individuals from public and private entities interested in conservation in the county. It is the responsibility of the local Soil and Water Conservation District to chair the Local Working Group (CPM 440 Part 501, Subpart B). At a minimum, the following individuals are to be invited to participate in the Local Working Group (CPM 440 Part 510 Subpart B):

- Member(s) of the Conservation District board
- NRCS Designated Conservationist
- Agricultural producers representing the variety of crops and livestock operations in the county, including but not limited to commodity crop producers, specialty crop producers, confined animal facility producers, pastured livestock producers, historically underserved producers etc. These individuals are not required to have conservation expertise.
- Non-industrial private forest land owners
- Member(s) of the County FSA Committee
- Cooperative Extension (board members or managers)

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- Other Federal and State government representatives and professionals representing relevant agricultural and conservation interests such as:
 - Indiana Department of Natural Resources – Division of Fish and Wildlife
 - Indiana Department of Natural Resources – Division of Forestry
 - Indiana State Department of Agriculture
 - Indiana Department of Environmental Management – Watershed Specialists
 - Private contractors and consultants
 - Non-government organizations (livestock groups, commodity groups, not-for-profit groups, etc.)

Also consider inviting:

- State or local elected or appointed officials
- US Fish & Wildlife Service Biologists
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- The Environmental Protection Agency
- FSA County Executive Director or designee
- Individuals with experience in natural resource conservation subjects specific to historically underserved groups and individuals (i.e. minorities, women, economically and socially disadvantaged, etc.)

Please note that if an NRCS employee or immediate family member is planning to participate in conservation programs please contact your Area Conservationist to discuss ethics and alternatives.

The Local Working Group meeting is considered a public meeting and will follow standard state open meeting laws, like the requirements of Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Board Meetings. At a minimum, the Local Working Group meeting announcement will be published 14 days prior to the meeting date, in at least one or more newspapers, and any other suitable media circulation.

The meeting agenda should be developed by the SWCD and provided to all participants ahead of time. A sample meeting agenda (Attachment B) has been included with this bulletin to give an example of discussions that should take place at the Local Working Group meeting. This sample is provided only as an example and is not mandatory to use. Local Working Group meetings should be held at least once per year (CPM 440 Part 501.14 (B)). District Conservationists should contact the Area Conservationist for assistance in making special accommodations for meeting attendees. Under the Farm Bill, the State Technical Committee is responsible for reviewing the efforts of the Local Working Groups to determine if they are addressing the state priorities (7 CFR 610.24(b)).

We are continuing to ask the Local Working Groups to discuss how well Indiana's current technical information and programs address local resource concerns. To assist in relaying this information to the Indiana State Technical Committee, please complete the attached survey (Attachment C) to provide input from the Local Working Group meeting. District Conservationists should summarize comments and recommendations using the electronic version of Attachment C, this form is optional.

The NRCS District Conservationist's responsibility is to serve as a resource and advisor to the committee on NRCS Program rules and regulations, and Field Office Technical Guides Standards. In the event a Soil and Water Conservation District is unable or unwilling to take the lead as the committee chair, the District Conservationist must fill the role. The District Conservationist must take responsibility to invite members, schedule a meeting date, and publicize required notices as well as chair the meeting.

The District Conservationist must compile the Local Working Groups' recommendations, invitees, attendees, and meeting minutes then forward them to the Area Conservationist by **October 30, 2019**. The Area Conservationist or designee will then upload these documents to the State Office Shared Drive under <S:\Service Center\NRCS\FARM BILL PROGRAMS\Local Work Groups\2020 Local Workgroup Data> as they are received but no later than **November 1, 2019**.

The Area Conservationist, or designee must also combine the list of resource concerns for all counties in the area according to the example provided in Attachment D.

Statewide analyses of at-risk areas were conducted by NRCS through a State Resource Assessment (SRA) process. This effort was designed to identify which areas of the state are at risk for some Resource Concerns. These data are compiled into short reports with maps by resource concern and can provide useful information to Local Work Groups for assessing resource concern priorities at the local level.

These SRA reports are available in the Indiana Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) website Section II>State Resource Assessments>Assessments by Resource Concern.

Attached is a current list of identified Indiana Resource Concerns, which the Local Working Group can use to assist in prioritizing the resource concerns at the county level for all NRCS Programs (Attachment E). The local District Conservationist will be able to assist if there are any questions about these resource concerns.

For more information regarding the specific establishment of the Local Working Group and their standard operating procedures, please see NRCS Programs Manual Title 440 Part 501 and 7 CFR Part 610.

Questions related to this bulletin may be directed to Gerald Roach, Assistant State Conservationist – Farm Bill Programs at 317-295-5801, or for technical questions, contact Shannon Zezula, State Resource Conservationist at 317-295-5888.

/s/

JERRY RAYNOR
State Conservationist

Attachment A - Letter to SWCD Board Chair
Attachment B - LWG Sample Meeting Agenda
Attachment C - LWG Survey
Attachment D - Area Summary of Resource Concern
Attachment E - Resource Concern Categories
Attachment F - STC Letter on Local Working Group to ISTC