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Title 440 – Conservation Programs Manual

**Part 501 – Locally Led Conservation and Program  
Delivery**

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**Part 501 – Locally Led Conservation and Program  
Delivery**

**Subpart A – General Information**

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**501.0 General**

- A. This subpart provides guidance on administrative procedures and general information about locally led conservation processes and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation program delivery. If this guidance conflicts with statute or regulation, the statute or regulation will be followed.
- B. Title 440 Manual Part 500, “Locally Led Conservation,” has been retired and incorporated into this manual. See subpart B, “Locally Led Conservation Process.”

**501.1 Definitions**

- A. **Conservation Action Plans**, developed by conservation districts in coordination with local working groups, use information from the conservation needs assessment to set measurable conservation goals and determine conservation needs to address local natural resource conservation priorities.
- B. **Conservation Districts**, established in 1937, coordinate and provide leadership in the locally led conservation process. They are experienced in assessing local natural resource needs, determining priorities, and coordinating conservation program delivery, including technical assistance, to meet the natural resource conservation needs and priorities of community stakeholders.
- C. **Conservation Needs Assessments**, developed by conservation districts in coordination with local working groups, are comprehensive evaluations of the work needed to achieve broad conservation goals and solve natural resource concerns.
- D. **Local** refers to a county, portion of a county, watershed, multicounty region, or other geographic area that is best suited to address conservation needs. This may include groups based on operation type, operator, or other mutual resource concerns.
- E. **Local Working Group** is a local committee, in a given administrative area or county, that provides input on local natural resource priorities and recommend criteria for conservation activities and programs.
- F. **Locally Led Conservation** is a multi-step process, primarily led by conservation districts, that seeks to address local natural resource conservation needs by involving

community stakeholders in natural resource planning, implementation of solutions, and evaluation of results.

G. **State Conservationists**, including the directors of the Caribbean and Pacific Island areas, direct and supervise NRCS activities in their respective states.

H. **State Technical Committees** provide information, analysis, and recommendations on the implementation and technical aspects of natural resource conservation activities and programs in each state. The state technical committee is established under 16 U.S.C. §§ 3861–3862 and 7 CFR Part 610, subpart C.

**Note:** See [Title 440 Manual Part 502, “Terms and Abbreviations Common to All Programs,”](#) for more definitions related to conservation programs.

**Note:** Under 16 U.S.C. § 3862(d), the state technical committees and local working groups are exempt from the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App. 2).

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Subpart B – Locally Led Conservation Process

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501.10 Background and Purpose

- A. This subpart provides policy on locally led conservation previously contained in archived Title 440 Manual part 500, “Locally Led Conservation.”
- B. Locally led conservation begins with the community itself, working through the local conservation district. It is based on the principle that community stakeholders are best suited to identify local natural resource concerns and any related economic and social concerns. By identifying the local natural resource concerns, the community stakeholders can then determine the applicable federal, state, local, and non-governmental programs to address those concerns.
- C. An essential element of locally led conservation includes gathering input from a broad range of agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals in the local area. These individuals and groups should have an interest in sustainable natural resource management and be familiar with local resource needs and conditions. Representation may include, but is not limited to, local natural resource and agriculture professionals, private landowners, farmers, and ranchers.
- D. The locally led conservation process involves:
  - 1. Performing a conservation needs assessment;
  - 2. Developing a conservation action plan; and
  - 3. Implementing and evaluating a conservation action plan.

**Note:** See exhibit 501.51A, “Locally Led Process Chart,” for more guidance.
- E. Leadership of the Locally Led Conservation Process
  - 1. As described in the state-level memorandum of agreement (MOA) between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the local conservation districts, and the state conservation agency, the agencies agree to:
    - a. Facilitate cooperation and agreements between agencies, landowners, and others;
    - b. Develop comprehensive action plans; and
    - c. Bring those plans to the attention of landowners and others in the district.

2. Conservation districts lead the locally led conservation process by:
  - a. Recommending local natural resource priorities and criteria for NRCS conservation activities and programs based on the conservation needs assessment and public input;
  - b. Developing the conservation needs assessment through broad-based community participation and in accordance with NRCS policy and procedures; and
  - c. Identifying NRCS program resources, develop and implement conservation plans and natural resource systems, and evaluate/measure the technical and community impacts of solutions.
3. NRCS supports the locally led conservation process by:
  - a. Helping to identify conservation needs;
  - b. Providing technical and programmatic information to the community stakeholders; and
  - c. Assisting in developing and implementing strategies to include all potential stakeholders in the process.

**Note:** NRCS is not responsible for leading the locally led conservation process. NRCS's role is to support the process and provide technical information upon request. If a conservation district is not present or chooses not to fulfill its responsibilities, the NRCS designated conservationist will assume those responsibilities. See [Title 440 Manual Part 502, "Terms and Abbreviations Common to All Programs"](#) for the definition of designated conservationist.

## 501.11 Conservation Needs Assessment

- A. The first step of the locally led conservation process is for the conservation district, in coordination with the local working group, to complete a conservation needs assessment. The assessment is a comprehensive evaluation of the area's natural resources based on input and data from all interested parties. The conservation needs assessment is used to make decisions about priorities and policies for local delivery of conservation programs, including technical assistance, by identifying:
  1. The most important natural resource concerns to be addressed such as clean drinking water, healthy soils, and sustainability;
  2. The type and extent of needed conservation systems and practices;
  3. Funding scope, priorities, and priority areas to be addressed; and
  4. Federal, state, tribal, and local conservation programs that help private landowners and producers.
- B. NRCS designated conservationists will support the development of the conservation needs assessment by:
  1. Helping to assemble natural resource inventories and data;
  2. Helping to analyze the data and other information; and

3. Providing information on human considerations involved in determining the conservation needs.

**Note:** See steps 1 through 4 of the areawide conservation planning process in Title 180 Handbook, part 600, National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH), subpart F, section 600.51 (A-D) (Phase I).

## 501.12 Conservation Action Plan

### A. Developing the Conservation Action Plan

1. Using information from the conservation needs assessment, conservation districts, in coordination with the local working group, will develop a conservation action plan by identifying:
  - a. Natural resource conservation priorities and concerns;
  - b. Measurable conservation goals;
  - c. Conservation technology needed to achieve goals;
  - d. Responsibilities and a timeline for implementing the plan;
  - e. Federal, state, tribal, local, and non-government programs and services needed to address specific conservation needs; and
  - f. Whether new programs or processes need to be developed to address problems not covered by existing programs.
2. NRCS designated conservationists will support the development of the conservation action plan by:
  - a. Providing overall planning assistance;
  - b. Explaining NRCS conservation programs and services; and
  - c. Identifying non-USDA programs that may be of assistance.

**Note:** See steps 5 through 7 of the areawide conservation planning process in Title 180 Handbook, part 600, National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH), subpart F, section 600.52 (A-C) (Phase II).

### B. Implementing the Conservation Action Plan

1. Conservation districts, in coordination with the local working group, will determine the availability of programs and services needed to address the problems listed in the conservation needs assessment. This may include, but not limited to:
  - a. Coordinating existing assistance available through private organizations and federal, state, tribal, and local agencies;
  - b. Making sure that applicable program application processes are followed;
  - c. Developing detailed proposals for new programs; and
  - d. Seeking financial, educational, and technical assistance as necessary.
2. NRCS designated conservationists will support the implementation of the conservation action plan by:
  - a. Explaining, interpreting, and clarifying NRCS policies and procedures;
  - b. Giving input on other potential sources of assistance from federal, state, tribal, and local government or private sources; and

c. Implementing designated roles and responsibilities as defined in this subpart.

**Note:** See step 8 of the areawide conservation planning process in Title 180 Handbook, part 600, National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH), subpart F, section 600.53A (Phase III).

C. Evaluating Results of the Conservation Action Plan

1. Conservation districts, in coordination with the local working group, will evaluate if planned goals have been achieved. The evaluation may result in reassessment of any of the previous steps in the locally led conservation process.
2. NRCS designated conservationists will support the conservation district and the community stakeholders in evaluating their locally led conservation efforts by:
  - a. Offering updated natural resources information and assessments;
  - b. Making sure stakeholders are aware of changes with NRCS programs and program delivery processes; and
  - c. Helping to evaluate the impacts that the conservation action plan will have on the condition of the natural resources.

**Note:** See step 9 of the areawide conservation planning process in Title 180 Handbook, part 600, National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH), subpart F, section 600.53B (Phase III).

### 501.13 Locally Led Conservation Input into Conservation Program Delivery

- A. The locally led conservation process provides NRCS with input on local conservation needs, resource concerns, priorities, and recommendations regarding conservation program administration and implementation.
- B. NRCS seeks input from state technical committees and local working groups on the delivery of NRCS conservation programs, including technical assistance. State technical committees and local working groups are advisory in nature and have no implementation or enforcement authority.
- C. State technical committees and local working groups may offer information, analysis, and recommendations to NRCS for the following, as applicable:
  1. Conservation programs, initiatives, and technical assistance administered and implemented by NRCS;
    - a. Proposed updates to conservation practice standards should be vetted by the state conservationist.
  2. Conservation compliance;
  3. Conservation of private lands;
  4. Technical service providers; and
  5. Other activities as decided by state leadership.
- D. Conservation districts, in coordination with their local working group, will submit to the designated conservationist recommendations on how to address identified local and state

priorities and criteria for conservation program delivery. Examples of recommendations that may be submitted are in exhibit 501.51(B).

1. The designated conservationist will consider the local working group's recommendations when developing local priorities for conservation programs available in the assigned geographic area.
  2. The designated conservationist will submit state-level recommendations for conservation program delivery to the state technical committee.
  3. The state technical committee will consider the local working group's recommendations when developing state priorities and program delivery recommendations for the state conservationist's consideration.
- E. Along with technical expertise of staff and national program policies, the state conservationist, to the extent possible, uses the recommendations from the state technical committee to develop the priorities and criteria for the state.

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**Subpart C – Local Working Groups**

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**501.20 Purpose**

This subpart has policy, procedures, and general information about local working groups established under the authority of 7 CFR Part 610, subpart C.

**501.21 Responsibilities**

A. Local working groups will:

1. Make sure that a conservation needs assessment is developed using community stakeholder input. See section 501.11;
2. Identify priority natural resource concerns and high-priority areas needing conservation program or technical assistance, as applicable;
3. Use the conservation needs assessment to identify applicable funding opportunities and conservation practices to address priority resource concerns and emerging challenges;
4. Recommend conservation program application sign-ups, funding criteria, conservation practices, and payment rates. See exhibit 501.51(B) for examples;
5. Take part in multicounty coordination when program funding and priority area proposals cross county lines;
6. Help NRCS and conservation districts with public outreach efforts as well as identifying information and education opportunities and producer training needs;
7. Recommend state policy updates to the state technical committee based on resource data;
8. Forward recommendations to their local designated conservationist; and
9. Adhere to standard operating procedures in section 501.23.

B. Conservation districts will:

1. Publicize local working group meetings as outlined in section 501.23(C);
2. Prepare the meeting agenda on conservation district letterhead;
3. Assemble, conduct, and chair the local working group meetings;

4. Develop the conservation needs assessment as outlined in section 501.11;
5. Develop the conservation action plan as outlined in section 501.12; and
6. Give the local working group's recommended priority resource concerns, high-priority areas, and funding requests to the designated conservationist.

C. NRCS designated conservationists will:

1. Take part in the local working group;
2. If the conservation district is unable or unwilling to chair the local working group, the designated conservationist, or designee, will carry out the duties in section 501.21(B);
3. Encourage other agencies to take part in the locally led conservation and local working group efforts, as applicable;
4. Help with identifying members for the local working group;
5. Support the development and implementation of the conservation needs assessment and conservation action plan as outlined in sections 501.11 and 501.12;
6. Help with identifying program priorities and resources;
7. Help in the development of program priority area proposals;
8. Provide technical support to the local working group and advise on program policies and procedures, and other matters of conservation program delivery;
9. Make sure that local working group members are:
  - a. Given an opportunity to comment before final recommendations are submitted.
  - b. Allowed to apply for NRCS conservation programs.
10. Analyze performance indicators and reports;
11. Report on the conservation program impacts on natural resources;
12. Prioritize the local working group's recommendations for programs, initiatives, and activities. All recommendations will be considered and adopted to the extent possible;
13. Make sure the local working group's recommendations align with the identified natural resource concerns in that local area; and
14. Elevate the local working group's priority resource concerns, high-priority areas, and funding requests to the state conservationist or state technical committee, as applicable.

## 501.22 Membership

- A. Membership of a local working group should represent the community with a focus on agricultural interests and natural resource issues existing in the local community.
- B. Examples of potential members include:
  1. NRCS designated conservationists;

2. Conservation district officials;
  3. Members of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committee;
  4. FSA County Executive Director (CED) or designee;
  5. Local Cooperative Extension Service (board members, managers, or agents);
  6. Other federal, state or local government representatives that represent a variety of interests and disciplines in the soil, water, wetlands, plants, and wildlife sciences;
  7. Federally recognized Indian tribes in the local area;
  8. Nonprofit organizations that demonstrate experience working with agricultural producers in the local area;
  9. Agricultural producers representing the variety of crops and livestock raised in the local area, including urban and organic agricultural producers; and
  10. Non-industrial private forest landowners.
- C. To make sure that the local working group's recommendations consider the needs of all groups served by NRCS, membership will include, to the extent practicable, producers with historically low participation.
- D. Individuals or groups wanting to become members of a local working group may submit a request to the applicable conservation district and the NRCS designated conservationist that explains their interest and justification for becoming a member. The designated conservationist will help the conservation district review and act on membership requests.

### **501.23 Standard Operating Procedures**

- A. **Organization and Function.** Local working groups, advisory in nature, are assembled to give input and recommendations as outlined in section 501.21(A). Local working groups are normally chaired by the local conservation district. If the conservation district is unable or unwilling to chair the local working group, see section 501.21(C)(2).
- B. **Meeting Scheduling.** The local working group should meet at least annually at a time and place chosen by the conservation district unless otherwise agreed to by the members of the local working group. Additional meetings may be held at the discretion of the conservation district whenever there is business that should be brought before the local working group.
- C. **Public Notification**
1. Local working group meetings are open to the public. A meeting notice must be published in at least one media outlet, including recommended tribal publications. The meeting notice will also be posted to the state's NRCS website.
  2. The meeting notice should be published at least 14 calendar days before the meeting except when state open-meeting laws require a longer notification period. This requirement may be waived in limited situations, as determined by the conservation district or NRCS designated conservationist.

3. The meeting notice will include the time, place, agenda items, and point of contact for the meeting.
- D. Meeting Information. Agendas and information must be given to the local working group members at least 14 calendar days before the meeting. The NRCS designated conservationist will help the conservation district, as requested, in preparing meeting agendas and necessary background information for meetings.
- E. Public Participation. Individuals attending the local working group meetings will be given the opportunity to address the local working group. Individuals may also have the opportunity to address non-agenda items at the end of the meeting if time allows. Speakers are encouraged to provide written records of their comments to the conservation district at the time of the meeting but are not required to do so.
- F. Conducting Business
1. The meetings will be conducted as an open discussion among members. Discussions will focus on getting the relevant input and information to fulfill the responsibilities of the local working group. See section 501.21(A).
  2. The following guidelines will govern meeting discussions:
    - a. The conservation district will lead the discussion.
    - b. Only one person may speak at a time.
    - c. Every participant should have an opportunity to speak.
    - d. The conservation district or designee is responsible for recognizing speakers.
    - e. The conservation district, in consultation with those members present, may set time limits for discussion on individual agenda items.
    - f. Members may be polled but may not formally vote on issues.

**Note:** A poll is an informal inquiry to get information or opinions. A vote is a formal decision leading to a specific outcome.
    - g. Agenda items that are not covered because of time limits will be delayed to the next meeting.
- G. Record of Meetings. The conservation district will develop meeting summaries within 30 calendar days of the meeting. Summaries will be available to the public at the local NRCS office.
- H. Local Working Group Recommendations. NRCS designated conservationist will submit the local working group's recommendations to the state conservationist or state-designated point of contact, as applicable, within 30 calendar days of the meeting.
- I. Statewide Local Working Group Report. The state-designated point of contact will collect all recommendations and give a summary to the state conservationist for review and approval. The summary may be presented during the first state technical committee meeting of the fiscal year.

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**Subpart D – State Technical Committees**

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### 501.30 Purpose

This subpart contains policy, procedures, and general information about state technical committees established under the authority of 16 U.S.C. §§ 3861–3862 and 7 CFR part 610, subpart C.

### 501.31 Responsibilities

A. State technical committees will:

1. Provide information, analysis, and recommendations to NRCS on conservation priorities and criteria for natural resources conservation programs, including application sign-ups, funding criteria, conservation practices, and payment rates (see exhibit 501.51B);
2. Identify emerging natural resource concerns and barriers to implementing conservation practices;
3. Recommend new and updated conservation practice standards and specifications that address state conservation priorities;
4. Recommend state and national program policy based on resource data;
5. Review requests and recommendations from the local working groups and make recommendations to the state conservationist;
6. Help NRCS with public outreach and information efforts; and
7. Identify education and training needs for producers.

B. State conservationists will:

1. Chair the state technical committee;
2. Make sure membership is a balanced representation of all agricultural interests (including agencies and individuals knowledgeable of economic and environmental impacts of conservation techniques and programs) to the extent practicable;
3. Consider the committee’s advice on NRCS programs, initiatives, and activities;
4. Provide public notice of meetings;

5. Follow the standard operating procedures in section 501.33;
6. Provide committee recommendations to other agencies for programs under their purview;
7. Make sure that recommendations, when adopted, align with natural resource priorities and concerns; and
8. Respond to requests for membership as outlined in section 501.32.

## 501.32 Membership

- A. Each state technical committee will include agricultural producers, non-industrial private forest landowners, and other professionals who represent a variety of interests and disciplines in the soil, water, wetlands, plants, and wildlife sciences.
- B. Each state technical committee will include representatives from among the following, if willing to serve:
  1. NRCS;
  2. Farm Service Agency (FSA);
  3. FSA state committee;
  4. Forest Service;
  5. Federally recognized Indian tribes in the state;
  6. State departments and agencies within the state, including:
    - a. Fish and wildlife agency
    - b. Forestry agency
    - c. Water resources agency
    - d. Department of Agriculture
    - e. Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
    - f. Soil and water conservation agency
  7. Agricultural producers representing a variety of crops and livestock raised in the state, including urban and organic agricultural producers;
  8. Non-industrial private forest landowners;
  9. Nonprofit organizations that have conservation experience working with agricultural producers in the state;
  10. Agribusiness, including technical service providers;
  11. The state Cooperative Extension Service and land grant universities; and
  12. Other federal agencies and individuals that are knowledgeable about urban, economic and environmental impacts of conservation techniques and programs.
- C. To make sure that the state technical committee's recommendations consider the needs of all groups served by NRCS, membership will include, to the extent practicable, customers with historically low participation.

- D. Individuals and groups wanting to become members of a state technical committee may submit a request to the state conservationist explaining their interest and justification for becoming a member. The state conservationist will review and act on membership requests. All membership requests will receive a response within 60 calendar days.
- E. State conservationist decisions on membership of the committee are final and not appealable to any other individual or group within NRCS.

## 501.33 Standard Operating Procedures

### A. Organization and Function

1. State technical committees will give information, analysis, and recommendations to NRCS and other agencies responsible for natural resource conservation activities and programs under title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.
2. State technical committees are advisory in nature and recommendations are considered and adopted to the extent possible.
3. In some situations, specialized subcommittees made up of state technical committee members may be needed to analyze and refine specific issues. The state conservationist may assemble certain committee members to discuss, examine, and focus on technical or programmatic topics as applicable.
  - a. Specialized subcommittees are open to the public and may seek public participation.
  - b. Recommendations of specialized subcommittees will be presented in general sessions of the state technical committee, where the public is notified and invited to attend.
  - c. See exhibit 501.51(C) for examples of specialized subcommittees.

B. Meeting Scheduling. The state technical committee should meet at least annually at a time and place chosen by the state conservationist. Any Department of Agriculture agency or state technical committee member may submit a meeting request to the state conservationist for consideration. Additional meetings may be held at the discretion of the state conservationist when there is business that should be brought before the committee.

### C. Public Notification

1. State technical committee and subcommittee meetings are open to the public. The state conservationist must give public notice of and allow public attendance at all state technical committee meetings.
2. The state conservationist must publish a meeting notice at least 14 calendar days before the meeting except when state open-meeting laws require a longer notification period. This requirement may be waived in limited situations, as determined by the state conservationist.
3. The meeting notice must be published in at least one widely available media outlet, including recommended tribal publications. The meeting notice will also be posted to the state's NRCS website.

4. The meeting notice will include the time, place, agenda items, and point of contact for the meeting.

#### D. Meeting Information

1. The state conservationist must prepare a meeting agenda and give it to the committee members at least 14 calendar days before the meeting. Other background materials may be provided before the meeting at the discretion of the state conservationist. Other agenda items will be considered if submitted to the state conservationist at least 5 working days before the meeting.
2. The state conservationist may amend the agenda before the meeting without notice to the state technical committee, or at the meeting, based on suggestions from participating committee members. The agenda will be posted to the state's NRCS website.

#### E. Public Participation

1. Individuals attending state technical committee meetings will be given the opportunity to address the committee and present their opinions and recommendations. Individuals may also have the opportunity to address non-agenda items at the end of the meeting if time allows.
2. State conservationists are encouraged to request written comments on agenda items from all members of the state technical committee whether they attend the meeting or not. Presenters are encouraged to provide written copies of their comments but are not required to do so.
3. After the meeting, if the state conservationist decides that certain topics need more comments and recommendations, the state conservationist will notify all members of the state technical committee within 7 calendar days of the meeting. The notification will fully explain the request for information and give at least 14 calendar days for a response.
4. Comments received will be summarized and presented at the next state technical committee meeting and posted on the state's NRCS website as part of the meeting summary.

#### F. Conducting Business

1. The meetings will be conducted as an open discussion among members. Discussions will focus on the programs and activities listed in sections 501.13 and 501.31(A).
2. The following guidelines will govern meeting discussions:
  - a. The state conservationist or designee will lead the discussion.
  - b. Only one person may speak at a time.
  - c. Every participant should have an opportunity to speak.
  - d. The state conservationist or designee is responsible for recognizing speakers.
  - e. The state conservationist, in consultation with those members present, may set time limits for discussion on individual agenda items.
  - f. Members may be polled but may not formally vote on issues.

**Note:** A poll is an informal inquiry to get information or opinions. A vote is a formal decision leading to a specific outcome.

- g. Agenda items that are not covered because of time limits will be delayed to the next meeting.
- G. Record of Meetings. The state conservationist or designee will develop meeting summaries for all state technical committee meetings and make them available to all members within 30 calendar days of the meeting. The summaries must be filed at the appropriate NRCS state office and posted to the state's NRCS website.
- H. See exhibit 501.51(D), "Tips for Hosting a Successful State Technical Committee Meeting," for more guidance and recommendations on the requirements in this subpart.

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**Subpart E – RESERVED**

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**501.40**

This subpart is reserved for use in future revisions.

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**Subpart F – Exhibits**

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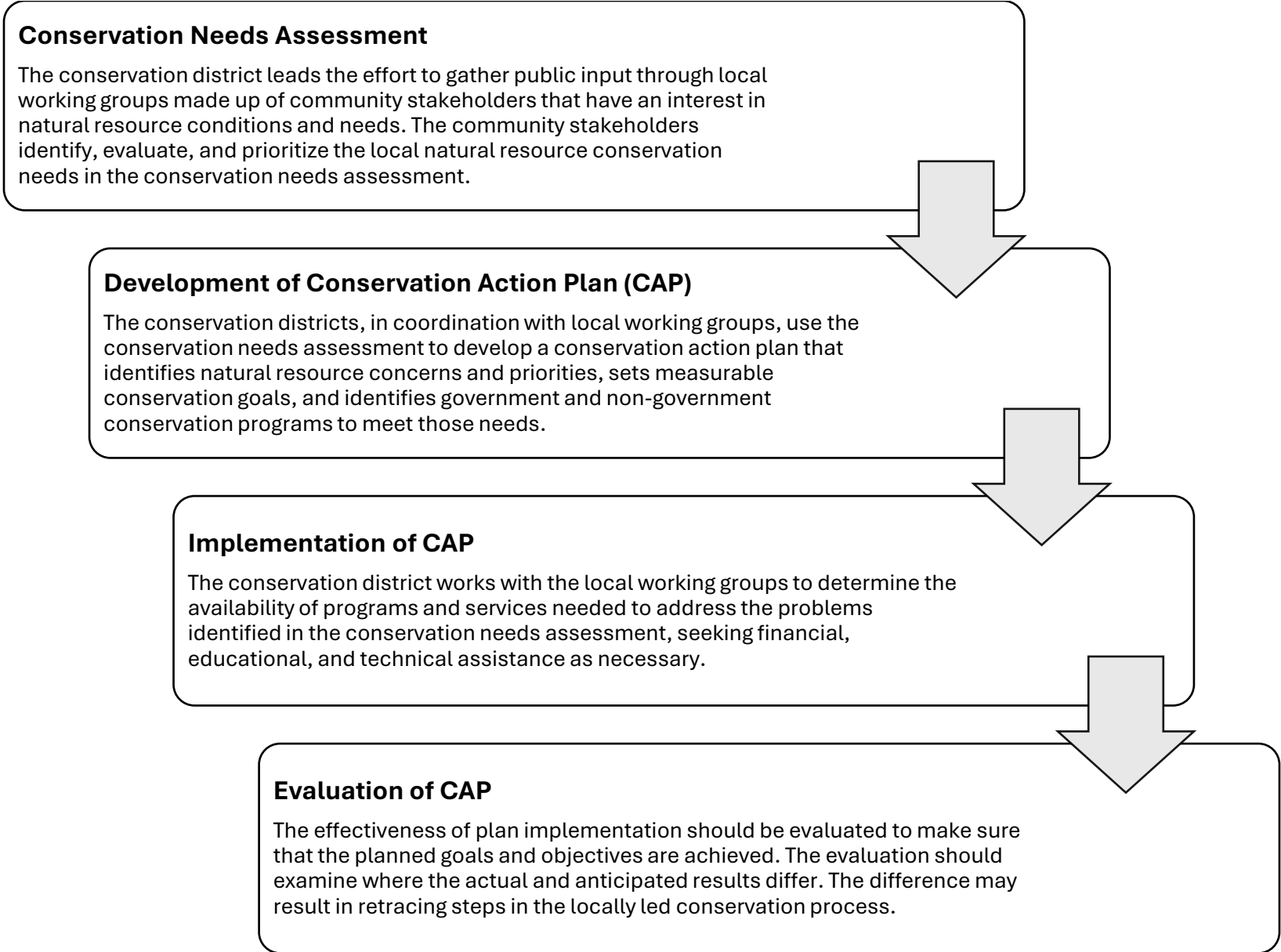
**501.50 General**

This subpart contains exhibits that supplement the policy in this manual and includes references, charts, and examples.

**501.51 Exhibits**

- A. Locally Led Conservation Process Chart
- B. Local Work Group and State Technical Committee Recommendation Examples
- C. State Technical Committee Specialized Subcommittee Examples
- D. Tips for Hosting a Successful State Technical Committee Meeting

## Exhibit 501.51A – Locally Led Process Chart



## Recommendation Examples

### Local Working Group

- Locally identified natural resource concerns and funding opportunities
- Local priorities for conservation program delivery
- Local screening and ranking criteria for program applications
- Local conservation practices offered in specific programs to address locally identified resource concerns
- Program payment percentages documented in practice schedules or maximum payment on conservation practices
- Opportunities for program outreach
- New eligible practices for ACEP-WRE

### State Technical Committee

- State- or regional identified natural resource concerns, priorities, and opportunities
- State or regional priorities for conservation program delivery
- State or national program policy changes
- Revision to or new interim conservation practices in the electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG)
- Program payment percentages documented in practice schedules or maximum payment on conservation practices
- Levels of financial and technical support from available programs needed to address identified resource concerns
- Need for special initiatives focusing on priority resource concerns or areas
- Opportunities for program outreach
- New land eligibility or prioritization parameters for ACEP-ALE enrollment in highest-priority areas of state

**Note:** This chart is only a list of possible examples to serve as a guide and is not all inclusive.

**Exhibit 501.51C – State Technical Committee Specialized Subcommittee Examples**

Examples of Specialized Subcommittees	Examples of Programs and Topics	Examples of Tasks
<b>Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)</b>	Ranking Criteria	Provide input to develop state ranking criteria and make recommendations to the state technical committee.
<b>Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)</b>	Local Land Uses (e.g., Crop, Forest, Range)	Identify critical natural resource concerns impacting or resulting from agricultural operations in that specific local land use.
<b>Forestry</b>	All financial assistance programs and related key topics (e.g., Forest Management, Agroforestry); Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Provide recommendations to the state technical committee on forestry conservation practices and payment rates that support program objectives and state and local priorities.
<b>Easements</b>	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) including Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE) and Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE); Regional Conservation Partnership Program Easements (RCPP Easements)	Develop recommendations for: 1) the geographic area rate cap and present to the state technical committee, 2) new eligible practices for ACEP-WRE, or 3) prioritization parameters for ACEP-ALE enrollment.
<b>Interim Conservation Practice</b>	Financial Assistance (FA) and Easement Programs	Provide recommendations for new and interim practice payment scenarios that support program objectives and state priorities.
<b>Wildlife Habitat</b>	Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW)	Provide recommendations to the state technical committee for the state WLFW plan that incorporates priorities of the state comprehensive wildlife action plan and similar plans and initiatives.
<b>Wetlands</b>	ACEP-WRE; Wetland Mitigation Banking	Provide technical input into the Wetland Restoration Criteria and Guidelines (WRCG) components such as historic and alternative wetland and associated habitats, restoration, and management recommendations.
<b>Priority Watersheds</b>	Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) and National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)	Recommend priority watersheds to focus funding for effective use of available resources.

**Note:** This chart is not an all-inclusive list of all possible specialized subcommittees but only a list of possible examples to serve as a guide.

## **Tips for Hosting a Successful State Technical Committee Meeting**

**Objective:** The information in this exhibit helps support the application of 440 Manual part 501, subpart D. The state technical committee serves as an advisory group to the state conservationist of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Members provide feedback and recommendations for the state and local implementation of conservation programs, including technical assistance. This exhibit offers a practical framework to help agency leaders organize effective state technical committee meetings that support the NRCS’s conservation priorities and emphasizes locally led conservation efforts.

### **I. Pre-Planning & Strategic Alignment**

- State technical committee and subcommittee meetings are open to the public.
- The state conservationist must give public notice of all state technical committee meetings, inform state technical committee members of the meeting agenda, solicit input, and respond to recommendations.
- State technical committees should meet at least annually. Consider using a consistent date (for example the second Tuesday in October) for easy planning.
- Start planning 2 to 3 months in advance to ensure alignment with agency goals, fiscal year timelines, and committee member availability.
  - Meet internally with NRCS leadership and technical experts to align priorities.
  - Begin outlining the meeting agenda and delegating meeting roles and responsibilities.
  - Define meeting goals early in the calendar year, including expected outcomes, key discussion themes, and emerging conservation priorities.
  - Review previous meetings for lessons learned, areas of opportunity, and follow-up on any action items.
  - Start conversations with committee members and other stakeholders to shape agenda content and determine possible speakers.
- Determine pre-planning tasks and a timeline for completion.
- Develop a brief summary that can help new members and stakeholders understand the committee’s purpose and roles.

### **II. Agenda Development & Facilitation**

- Develop a well-balanced agenda with NRCS and committee member input.
- State conservationist or designee will moderate meetings and serve as the timekeeper to ensure meetings remain on schedule.
- Give time for subcommittees (e.g., Agriculture, Wildlife, Forestry, Water Quality, Local Work Groups, Easements, Wetlands, Urban, Tribal) to report updates or follow-up on action items.

### **III. Speaker Engagement & Content Strategy**

- Select knowledgeable speakers who reflect priority topics and unique perspectives.
- Speakers are encouraged to give copies of their presentation or comments in advance to the state conservationist to make sure they support meeting goals.
- Develop and maintain a record for tracking speakers, including topics, notifications, and confirmations.
- Before the meeting, the speaker should develop a list of items that may require committee feedback (e.g., funding pools, levels of funding, priorities, Conservation Innovation Grant topics).

### **IV. Meeting Format & Logistics Oversight**

- Review with meeting participants the purpose and roles of the state technical committee to prevent misconceptions about the advisory role of the committee.
- Emphasize in-person meetings for relationship-building; offer hybrid options to expand participation.
- Partner with local organizations or associations for venue and logistics support.
- Consider rotating locations to ensure statewide participation.
- Give an update on recommendations submitted during the previous meeting.
- Consider presenting a statewide report on local working group activities and recommendations to the committee.

### **V. Coordination Protocols & Executive Invitations**

- Confirm speakers at least 60 days in advance with alternates identified.
- Customize invitations for committee members and send them 30 days before the meeting.
- Schedule reminders to be sent to committee members at 7 days and 1 day before the meeting. Make sure that speakers are included.
- Provide public notice of the meeting at least 14 calendar days before the meeting.

### **VI. Executive-Level Communication & Stakeholder Engagement**

- All committee communications should be reviewed and sent out by the state conservationist or designee.
- Promote transparency and shared goals across agencies and committee members.
- Share NRCS program updates and policy changes, as applicable.
- Encourage open dialogue between agencies, committee members, and stakeholders to build trust and collaboration.
- Allow time during meetings for public participation, feedback, and acknowledgement of new participants.

### **VII. Documentation, Accountability & Action Tracking**

- Assign a detailed note-taker to record all comments and recommendations.

## **Exhibit 501.51D – Tips for Hosting a Successful State Technical Committee Meeting**

- If the meeting is virtual or hybrid, notify participants if the meeting will be recorded.
- Distribute finalized meeting notes within 30 days after leadership review, as per section 501.33(G).
- Track participation (in-person and virtual) and capture key takeaways.
- Create a follow-up plan to address action items and integrate feedback into future decisions.

### **VIII. Recognition of Contributions**

- Send “Thank you” letters to speakers and key participants within 5 business days from the state conservationist or designee.
- Acknowledge the contributions of participants, including landowners, producers, partners, and community leaders.

### **IX. Web Presence & Transparency**

- Make sure the state technical committee webpage is current and accessible.
- Post meeting summaries, presentations, and photos within 30 days.

### **X. Post-Event Evaluation & Strategic Follow-Up**

- Hold an internal debrief within 1 to 2 weeks to discuss key takeaways, strengths, areas for improvement, and pending actions from previous meetings.
- Collect feedback from participants through surveys or follow-up conversations.
- Incorporate lessons learned into planning materials and guidance documents.

### **XI. References**

- Title 440 Conservation Program Manual, Part 501 “Locally Led Conservation and Program Delivery,” Subpart D “State Technical Committees”
- 7 CFR Part 610 Subpart C