



**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
ARIZONA STATE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Meeting Minutes - March 4, 2025

Opening:

The regular meeting of the Arizona State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) was called to order at 10:00 a.m. on March 4, 2025, by Keisha Tatem, State Conservationist, Arizona NRCS.

Membership and Guests Present:

Keisha Tatem, Chair, State Conservationist, Arizona NRCS
Aaron Wilkerson, Natural Resource Specialist, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Bureau of Land Management
Abbie Hannon, Assistant to the Director, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
Ayman Mostafa, Director, The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension
Brandon Clark, Director of Sustainability, United Dairymen of Arizona
Clay Crowder, Assistant Dir., Wildlife Management Division, Arizona Game and Fish Department
Dan Sturla, Landowner Relations & Habitat Enhancement Program Mgr., Arizona Game and Fish Dept.
Darren Chapman, CEO, Tiger Mountain Foundation
Deborah Smith, Executive Director, Arizona Association of Conservation Districts (AACD)
Erika Luna, Deputy Forest Supervisor, Tonto National Forest, USDA U.S. Forest Service
Jaclyn Reynolds, Sustainability Analyst, United Dairymen of Arizona
Jadee Rohner, Executive Director, Arizona Cotton Growers Association
Jane Coghlan, Senior Communications Specialist, ASU Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems
Jennifer Kaplan, State Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Jody Norris, Protection Program Director, The Nature Conservancy
Kimber Lanning, CEO, Local First Arizona Foundation
Luke Messer, Ag BMP Inspector, Arizona DEQ – Air Quality Division
Naomi Pier, Program Manager, The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension
Natalie Muilenberg, Program Manager, Arizona DEQ – Watershed Improvement Unit
Oscar Atkinson, Acting State Executive Director, USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)
Paul Brierley, Director, Arizona Department of Agriculture
Scott Poppenberger, Pheasants Forever Inc.
Tom Finley, Director, Arizona Game and Fish Department

NRCS Staff Present:

Brett Myers, Acting Assistant State Conservationist – Water Resources, NRCS, Tucson, Arizona
Dave Beyman, State Conservation Engineer, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona

Erika Boyland, Assistant State Conservationist (ASTC) – Programs, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona
Jamilah McCoy, State Resource Conservationist, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona
Jennifer Krentz, Program Manager RCPP, NRCS, Tucson, Arizona
Katherine Stockton, Executive Assistant, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona
Meredith Truelove, Program Manager RCPP, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona
Nathan Starman, Senior Regional Soil Scientists, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona
Phillip Jacquez, Urban Conservationist, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona
Ralph Ware, Assistant State Conservationist (ASTC) – Field Operations, NRCS, Tucson, Arizona
Valentino Reyes, Public Affairs Specialist, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona

NOTE:

Presentations and associated documents for the Arizona State Technical Advisory Committee may be accessed at: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/state-offices/arizona/technical-advisory-committee>.

Meeting Agenda

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. Opening Remarks and Introductions
Keisha Tatem | 10:00AM |
| 2. STAC Roles and Responsibilities
Keisha Tatem | 10:10AM |
| 3. Partner Spotlight – Arizona Association of Conservation Districts (AACD)
Deborrah Smith | 10:20AM |
| 4. Conservation Practice Standards Updates
Jamilah McCoy & David Beyman | 10:50AM |
| 5. FY25 Programs Updates
Erika Boyland | 11:10AM |
| 6. ACEP - Grasslands of Special Significance (GSS)
Erika Boyland | 11:20AM |
| 7. Local Working Groups Updates
Erika Boyland & Deborrah Smith | 11:30AM |
| 8. Call to the Public
Keisha Tatem | 11:50AM |
| 9. Closing Remarks
Keisha Tatem | 12:00PM |

1. Opening Remarks and Introductions

Keisha Tatem, State Conservationist, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona, keisha.tatem@usda.gov.

State Conservationist Tatem commenced the meeting at 10:00 a.m., welcomed all meeting attendees, and invited Committee members to introduce themselves and the federal and state agencies and partner organizations represented.

During opening remarks, State Conservationist Tatem confirmed ongoing rapid changes throughout the federal government and stated that NRCS staff is operating under a high degree of uncertainty about the anticipated restructuring of the federal government and future of NRCS staffing levels. Arizona NRCS incurred significant staff losses due to resignations and probationary employee firings in February. State Conservationist Tatem stated that Arizona NRCS is monitoring workloads to ensure that Arizona NRCS is able to deliver services to Arizona producers as required by the Farm Bill. State Conservationist Tatem confirmed that all Arizona NRCS employees are working in-office and advised that due to agency restructuring and staff losses, Arizona NRCS will need to rely heavily on its partners in the near term and beyond.

2. State Technical (Advisory) Committee Roles and Responsibilities

Keisha Tatem, State Conservationist, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona, keisha.tatem@usda.gov.

Statutory Role

- Chaired by the State Conservationist and operates in accordance with statute, regulation, and policy.
- The role of State Technical Committees is advisory in nature. Committees do not have implementation or enforcement authority; however, the Secretary gives strong consideration to the recommendations of committees in administering USDA programs.
- Each State Technical Committee advises the Secretary in establishing priorities and criteria for USDA programs, including the review of whether local working groups are addressing those priorities. (e.g. review language, wording of policy).

Responsibilities

- Provide information, analysis, and recommendations to USDA on conservation priorities and criteria for natural resources conservation activities and programs, including application and funding criteria, recommended practices, and program payment percentages.

- Identify emerging natural resource concerns and program needs (e.g. drought mitigation with new technology).
- Recommend conservation practice standards and specifications.
- Recommend state and national program policy based on resource data.
- Review activities of the local working groups to ensure state priorities are being addressed locally.
- Make recommendations to the State Conservationist on requests and recommendations from local working groups.
- Assist NRCS with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers' training needs.

Statutory Membership

- The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- The USDA Farm Service Agency.
- The USDA Forest Service.
- The USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.
- Arizona fish and wildlife agency, forester or equivalent Arizona official, Arizona water resources agency, Arizona department of agriculture.
- Arizona association of soil and water conservation districts.
- Agricultural producers representing the variety of crops and livestock or poultry raised within Arizona.
- Owners of nonindustrial private forest land (not currently represented in Arizona).
- Nonprofit organizations within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of title 26 with demonstrable conservation expertise and experience working with agriculture producers in Arizona.
- Agribusiness.
- Cooperative Extension Service and land grant university in Arizona.

Additional Membership

The State Conservationist will invite other relevant federal, state, and regional agencies, organizations, and persons knowledgeable about economic and environmental impacts of natural resource conservation techniques and programs to participate as needed.

Meeting Minutes

Minutes are distributed and are posted on Arizona NRCS website.

Policy and Guidance

- [16 U.S. Code § 3861 - Establishment of State Technical Committees](#)
- [16 U.S. Code § 3862 - Responsibilities](#)
- [7 CFR Part 610 Subpart C](#)
- [Title 440 Part 501 - USDA Conservation Program Delivery](#)

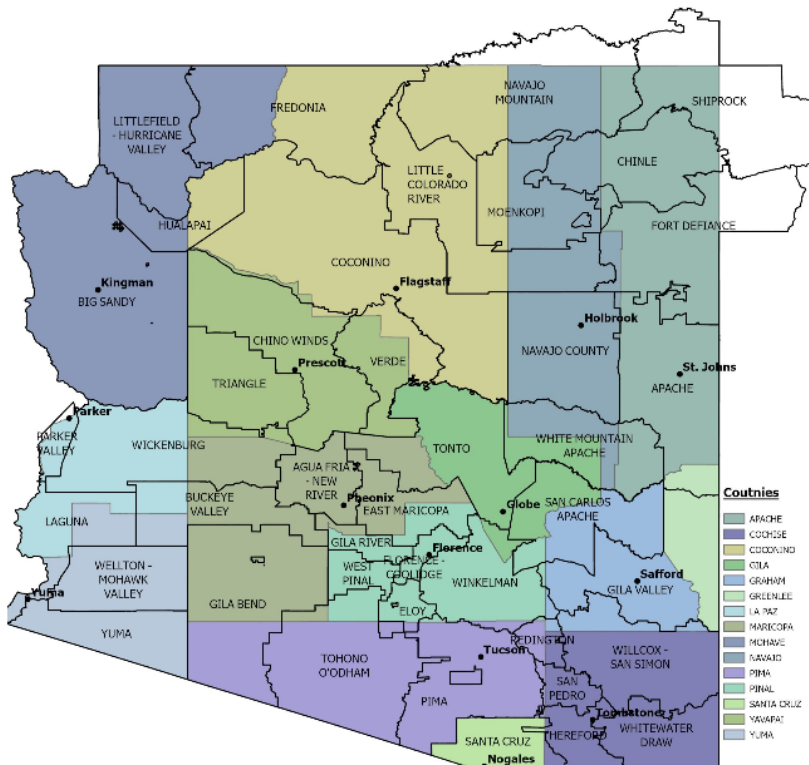
Questions/Actions/Outcomes:

Question: What is the process for recommendations to be incorporated into NRCS process or policy?

Answer: The recommendation is reviewed and discussed by the Committee. For deeper discussion or recommendation requiring longer study and/or deliberation, the State Conversationist will establish a new Sub-Committee or send the recommendation to an established Sub-Committee.

3. **Partner Spotlight – Arizona Association of Conservation Districts (AACD)** Deborrah Smith, Executive Director, AACD, smith.aacd@gmail.com.

[Arizona Association of Conservation Districts](#) (AACD) was established as a means of support to help coordinate and fund locally led conservation efforts across Arizona and to unify and represent Arizona's forty-two [Natural Resource Conservation District](#) goals and interests. As a nonprofit, AACD can apply for federal and state government grant programs and non-governmental monies that Districts, as subdivisions of government, oftentimes cannot. Through its efforts, AACD helps to get more conservation funds to the Districts so that they can get more conservation work on the ground.



In 1941, the Arizona Legislature established Arizona's Conservation Districts in response to the devastation of the great dust storms of the 1930's. In the beginning, there were only four Districts, while today, there are forty-two Districts dedicated to the conservation of Arizona's natural resources. The Districts are charged by the Legislature with the statutory responsibility to provide for the conservation and restoration of lands, water, wildlife, and other natural resources, and to protect water rights, public lands, and the general health and welfare of the people. Several Tribes in Arizona have passed resolutions to establish Districts so there are ten Tribal Conservation Districts that operate in accordance with the laws of their Tribe, not under the auspices of the State.

New State Natural Resource Conservation Districts Board

Deborah Smith advised the Committee on a recent legislative change in Natural Resource Conservation Districts (NRCDC's) oversight. In 2024, Arizona Legislature enacted legislation to transfer oversight of the NRCDC's from the Arizona State Land Commissioner to the newly created [State Natural Resource Conservation Districts Board](#) (NRCDC Board). As of January 1, 2025, the NRCDC Board manages all state resource conservation programs.

NRCDC Board – eleven members, staggered three-year terms.

NRCDC Fund – Funding to cover administration fees (e.g. liability insurance, office supplies, board member expenses, etc.).

NRCDC Board Advisors – Includes NRCS State Conservationist and others selected by the Board.

NRCDC Board Responsibilities –

- To aid supervisors of Districts in carrying out their powers and programs.

- Keep supervisors of each District informed of activities and experiences of other Districts and of relevant information from other states, and facilitate cooperation and interchange of advice, experience and program opportunities between districts.
- Coordinate programs of the several Districts insofar as possible by advice and consultation.
- Require supervisors of each District to file with the Board annually any audits and the records of the operations of the district for the preceding year in the form and detail as the board prescribes.
- Secure the cooperation and assistance of federal agencies and agencies of this state, in the work of Districts as local units of state government with special expertise concerning land, soil, water and natural resources management within the boundaries of the District, as the board deems for the best interest of the state.
- Disseminate information throughout the state concerning the activities and program of Districts.
- Meet at least quarterly to receive updates from the Board's administrative officer regarding any relevant issue or matter necessary to carry out this chapter, provide guidance to the administrative officer and vote on any matters requiring a decision by the board.
- Assist a District when the District is cooperating or coordinating with a federal agency.
- Assist Districts with developing conservation action or district-wide plans.
- Adopt administrative rules that the board deems necessary and proper to carry out this chapter.

More information on NRCD Board membership, powers, and duties is contained in [ARS Title 41 Chapter 58 Article 2 Section 6001](#).

Questions/Actions/Outcomes:

Question: Is the new structure going to allow the Districts to fund themselves?

Answer: Under the previous structure, Districts were able to request funding for administrative functions from the State totaling no more than \$40,000 per year. Moving forward, the Board will present to the Legislative Budget Committee to request administrative and conservation project related funding based on need. No cap.

4. Conservation Practice Standards Updates and Virtual Fencing

Jamilah McCoy, State Resource Conservationist, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona,
jamilah.mccoy@usda.gov.

David Beyman, P.E., State Resource Engineer, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona,
david.beyman@usda.gov.

Arizona NRCS is required to provide notice to the State Technical Committee regarding updates and/or changes in Conservation Practice Standards.

States have one year to implement the updates into their practice standards. Input from partners may be solicited for assistance and guidance to implement the updates.

Ecological Sciences Conservation Practice Standards:

National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP) Notice 176 (Oct. 1, 2024)

- Amending Soil Properties with Gypsum Products (333)
 - Updated definitions. Revised sections to reduce wordiness, provide clarity, and change expression to active voice. Deleted the “Additional Criteria to Reduce the Potential for Pathogen Transport” section.
- Conservation Cover (327)
 - Revised to improve organization and clarity. Revised the last purpose (“improve soil health”) to focus on a measurable metric (“maintain or increase soil organic matter (OM) content”). Added three purposes (“improve soil aggregate stability,” “improve habitat for soil organisms,” and “reduce compaction”) and added Criteria sections for “improve habitat for soil organisms” and “reduce compaction.”
- Cover Crop (340)
 - Revised for clarity. Added erosion tools approved for determining biomass requirements. Added a requirement for a contingency plan or alternative cover crop seeding recommendation in the Plans and 2 Specifications section. Updated hyperlinks.
- Woody Residue Treatment (384)
 - Reduced the practice life span to 1 year. Refined Purpose section from ten to six purposes. Modified the purpose “reduce the risk of harm to humans and livestock” to “reduce the risk of harm to humans, livestock, and property.” Modified the purpose “improve the soil organic matter” to “maintain or increase soil health and organic matter content.” Modified the burning criteria to follow Prescribed Burning (Code 338). Refined the Consideration, Plans and Specifications, and Operations and Maintenance sections and updated the References section.

National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP) - [Notice 177](#) (Nov. 1, 2024)

- Hedgerow Planting (422)
 - The practice lifespan was reduced from 15 years to 5 years. The number of purposes was reduced from 10 to 5, mostly through combining purposes. Living fences were included under the barrier purpose. Boundary delineation and contour guidelines were removed as a purpose but retained as a consideration.
- Seasonal Water Management for Wildlife (646)
 - Revised the standard title to “Seasonal Water Management for Wildlife”. The updated version of the standard removes development and focuses on management. The lifespan will be changed from 5 years to 1 year to align with other management practices. The requirement to utilize a state approved habitat assessment has been added.
- Wetland Restoration (657)
 - This practice will have a 15-year lifespan. The primary purpose of this revision was to clarify that this CPS covers restoration of the abiotic characteristics (hydrology, topography, or soils). Supporting practices were included, as well as a list of activities that do not fall under this standard to alleviate confusion. All references to permitting requirements were removed, as those requirements are provided by NRCS national conservation planning policy and should not be included in a technical standard.

Additional State Conservation Practice Updates

- Adopted Practices
 - [Feed Management \(592\)](#)
 - [Soil Carbon Amendment \(336\)](#)
- Arizona Updates to Existing Practices
 - Virtual Fencing
 - Virtual Fencing (VF) is a relatively new technology that allows ranchers to control livestock distribution in rangeland landscapes without physical fences.

- Livestock wear collars that communicate using GPS and cellular reception towers to form a virtual fence set by the rancher or land manager.
 - When livestock reach the limit of the virtual fence, auditory stimuli (a series of loud beeps), emit from the collar.
 - If livestock continue traveling in the direction of the virtual fence, livestock receive a benign shock.
 - If they become caught on something, collars are designed to break away from livestock for safety reasons.
 - Managers can create and adjust virtual fence lines with a digital map interface, communicated to the collars.
 - Allows ranchers to change the locations of livestock grazing, both between and within years.
 - Allows ranchers to move livestock with reduced labor inputs.
 - Can be used in areas that are difficult to fence.
 - Eliminates wildlife conflicts with traditional wire fencing.
 - VF is paid for 5 years.
 - Year 1 will use CPS 382 – Fence (to cover costs for startup e.g. base stations, collars).
 - Years 2 to 5 will use CPS 528 – Prescribed Grazing (to cover costs for subscription fees and maintenance of collars).
 - It is available in all Arizona counties.
- Updated Implementation Requirements (IR) for:
 - Brush Management (314)
 - Conservation Crop Rotation (328)
 - Cover Crop (340)
 - Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (647)
 - Hedgerow Planting (422)

- High Tunnel System (325)
- Irrigation Water Management (449)
- Nutrient Management (590)
- Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till (345)
- Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities (643)
- Soil Carbon Amendment (336)
- Structures for Wildlife (649)
- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645)
- Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644)
- Wildlife Habitat Planting (420)

All Arizona conservation practice standards can be located in Arizona Field Office Technical Guide ([AZ FOTG](#)).

Additional Information regarding NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/resources/guides-and-instructions/conservation-practice-standards>

Questions/Actions/Outcomes:

Question: There is interest in virtual fencing in Arizona; however, virtual fencing is an experimental practice, what happens if the producer cannot make the practice work for the full five years? Do funds need to be paid back to NRCS?

Answer: Recognizing that this is an experimental practice, Arizona NRCS will be considerate in its determination of performance of this practice.

Question: Are there any animal safety concerns with virtual fencing?

Answer: The producer will work with virtual fencing vendor to purchase and install the system. The vendor and producer will discuss safety concerns. Generally, the system has been

researched extensively and operates on automatic audio cues, so animals quickly learn to respond to the audio cue. Collars will emit sounds as the animal approaches the virtual fence boundary. These sounds are designed to get the animal's attention and, with appropriate training, cause the animal to turn away from the virtual fence boundary. If the animal continues to approach the virtual fence boundary, an electrical stimulus is given to the animal through the collar. This stimulus is designed to cause the animal to turn away from the boundary. If the animal does pass through the virtual fence boundary, the system will allow the animal to return to the grazing area without experiencing additional stimulus. Collars have a safety breakaway feature.

Question: What is the status of climate smart practices?

Answer: No updates have been provided by National Headquarters.

Engineering Conservation Practice Standard Updates:

National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP) - [Notice 176](#) (Oct. 1, 2024)

- Watering Facility (CPS 614)
 - Updated Reference section. Corrected a typo.

National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP) - [Notice 177](#) (Nov. 1, 2024)

- Irrigation Pipeline (Code 430)
 - Minor rewording throughout to improve readability. Maximum permitted surge for high density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe was added to the “Flexible conduit design” subsection. Updated “Additional Considerations for Economics” subsection to include collapsible lay flat tubing application, replaced as operation and maintenance. Updated “Additional Considerations for Water Quality and Quantity” subsection to include impacts to downstream drinking water and drought mitigation. Updated references.

All updates have been incorporated into [Arizona's Field Office Technical Guide](#) (FOTG).

Questions/Actions/Outcomes:

None

5. FY25 Programs Rollout, Payment Schedule Recommendations

Erika Boyland, ASTC for Programs, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona, erika.boyland@usda.gov.

Executive Order (EO): Unleashing American Energy (Jan. 20, 2025)

AFFECTED: Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) programs and activities.

- Until further notice, NRCS is not authorized to obligate any **new partner** or **new producer** contracts and agreements (or easements) using IRA and/or BIL funds, or to work on these activities.
- NRCS is authorized to make payments on existing IRA conservation program contracts with **producers** for the following NRCS programs:
 - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
 - Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – only for activities completed prior to 2/25/2025
- NRCS is not authorized to make payments on existing IRA technical assistance contracts and agreements with partners at this time. Payments are paused.

NOT AFFECTED: Farm Bill programs and activities.

- **New producer** contracts and agreements and payments on existing producer and existing partner contracts and agreements for:
 - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
 - Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Questions/Actions/Outcomes:

Question: What is the future of new Conservation Innovation Grants?

Answer: Currently under review.

Question: What about the Voluntary Public Access & Habitat Improvement Program (VPA-HIP)?

Answer: VPA-HIP is authorized for payment. There is a pause on processing payments.

6. Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Erika Boyland, ASTC for Programs, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona, erika.boyland@usda.gov.

Grasslands of Special Significance

Grasslands of Special Significance (GSS) has been identified as a state priority. Arizona NRCS will continue program enrollments statewide, as work is being done to address the threat of conversion across Arizona's landscapes.

- GSS designation allows for federal funding to be raised from 50% (General ACEP ALE) to 75% (ACEP ALE - GSS) of fair market value of the agricultural land easement.
- GSS – grasslands that contain little or no noxious or invasive species, as designated or defined by state or federal law; are subject to the threat of conversion to non-grassland uses or fragmentation; and the land:
 - Is rangeland, pastureland, shrubland, or wet meadows on which vegetation is dominated by native grasses, grass-like plants, shrubs or forbs,
 - Is improved, naturalized pastureland, rangeland, or wet meadows,
 - Provides, or could provide, habitat for threatened or endangered species or at – at risk species,
 - Protects sensitive or declining native prairie or grassland types or grasslands buffering wetlands,
 - Provides protection of highly sensitive natural resources as identified by NRCS, in consultation with the state technical committee.

Questions/Actions/Outcomes:

Outcome: Does the STAC still support GSS as a resource concern priority for Arizona?

Answer: Yes.

7. Local Working Groups Updates

Erika Boyland, ASTC for Programs, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona, erika.boyland@usda.gov.
Deborah Smith, Executive Director, AACD, smith.aacd@gmail.com.

Statutory and Regulatory Origins of Local Work Groups (LWG)

- [USDA 440-CPM, Part 501, Subpart A 501.13](#)
- [A.R.S. 41- 6054. Powers of Districts](#)
- [7 CFR Part 610 Subpart C](#)

Local Work Groups are subcommittees of the State Technical Committee.

- The LWG is the foundation of NRCS' conservation program delivery process.
- LWG's support locally led conservation efforts by coordinating NRCS programs with other federal, state, and local conservation programs to provide an integrated solution to addressing natural resource concerns in the area.
- The role of the LWG is advisory in nature and has no implementation or enforcement authority. However, Arizona NRCS strongly considers the recommendations of the LWG in administering NRCS programs.
- Responsibilities of LWG members may include:
 - Developing a conservation needs assessment.
 - Identifying priority resource concerns that can be addressed by NRCS programs.
 - Recommending NRCS conservation program application and funding criteria, eligible practices, and payment rates.
 - Assisting NRCS with public outreach and information efforts.
 - Recommending program policy to the State Technical Committee.

- LWG membership is wide-ranging and focused on agricultural interests and natural resource issues. Examples of members include members of the agricultural community, farmers, ranchers, producers; members of Natural Resources Conservation District (NRCD) boards; members of the county Farm Service Agency (FSA) committee; members of agricultural groups, environmental organizations, and other agencies carrying out natural resource conservation programs; state or locally elected or appointed officials; and other federal and state government representatives.
- LWG Meetings
 - Meetings must be held at least once a year.
 - Meetings are open to the public and must be announced via a public forum (e.g., website or local newspaper) in accordance with state laws.
 - Agendas must be provided in advance in accordance with state laws.
 - Summaries of all meetings must be made available to the public via the local NRCS office.
 - LWG recommendations are submitted to the State Technical Committee by the NRCD Designated Conservationist.

Arizona NRCS has partnered with AACD to revive and strengthen LWG's in Arizona

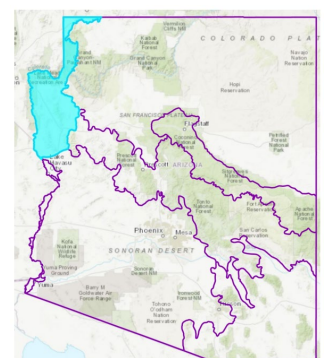
- Help to further define the process for Arizona.
- Establish reoccurring LWG meetings throughout the state across Conservation Districts.
- Develop trainings on new tools and protocol and efforts.
- Provide feedback on local priorities across the state to Arizona NRCS and the STAC based on the outcome of the meetings to support conservation within the state.

ConserveAZ Portal

Deborrah Smith, Executive Director, AACD, smith.aacd@gmail.com.

Deborrah Smith provided an overview and live demonstration of the Portal.

The ConserveAZ Portal was developed by the Arizona Association of Conservation Districts in partnership with NRCS to support Arizona's Conservation Districts with the development of Conservation Action Plans. District Supervisors, NRCS staff, and Local Work Groups can access a wide range of diverse data through this unique mapping portal to conduct



resource needs assessments, identify resource priorities, track the progress of conservation practices, and develop conservation plans.

The Portal is not open to the public. Only authorized NRCS personnel, Conservation District Supervisors, and authorized AACD consultants may gain access to the Portal. However, if a member of the public is interested in learning more about their local Conservation District, they should visit the Conservation Districts webpage to learn more and to find contact information for each District. The Portal does not share any private landowner information.

Questions/Actions/Outcomes:

None.

8. Call to the Public

Keisha Tatem, State Conservationist, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona, keisha.tatem@usda.gov

No public comments received.

9. Closing Remarks

Keisha Tatem, State Conservationist, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona, keisha.tatem@usda.gov

Keisha Tatem thanked all partners and Committee Members for their attendance and contribution to the discussions. Keisha Tatem requests volunteers for partner spotlight for the next Committee Meeting. Date TBD. Keisha Tatem adjourned the meeting at 12:05 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Katherine Stockton, Executive Assistant, NRCS, Phoenix, Arizona,
katherine.stockton@usda.gov

Approved by:



KEISHA L. TATEM
Natural Resources Conservation Service
State Conservationist

Attachment: Presentation Slides

NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting

March 4, 2025

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

Agenda

Topic	
1. Opening Remarks and Introductions – Keisha Tatem, State Conservationist	10:00am
2. STAC Member Roles and Responsibilities – Keisha Tatem	10:10am
3. Partner Spotlight: Arizona Association of Conservation Districts – Deborrah Smith, AACD	10:20am
4. Conservation Practice Standards Updates – Jamilah McCoy & David Beyman	10:50am
5. FY25 Programs Update – Erika Boyland	11:10am
6. ACEP – Grasslands of Special Significance – Erika Boyland	11:20am
7. Local Working Groups Updates – Erika Boyland	11:30am
8. Call to the Public – Keisha Tatem	11:50am
9. Closing Remarks – Keisha Tatem	12:00pm



STAC Roles and Responsibilities

Keisha Tatem
State Conservationist



What is the State Technical (Advisory) Committee?

Chaired by the State Conservationist and operates in accordance with [statute](#), [regulation](#), and [policy](#).

Statutory Role:

- *The role of State technical committees is **advisory in nature**, and such committees shall have no implementation or enforcement authority. However, the Secretary shall give **strong consideration** to the recommendations of such committees in administering the programs under this [chapter](#).*
- *Each State technical committee shall advise the Secretary in establishing **priorities and criteria for the programs** in this chapter, including the **review of whether local working groups are addressing those priorities**.*

Responsibilities of STAC

1. Provide information, analysis, and recommendations to USDA on conservation priorities and criteria for natural resources conservation activities and programs, including application and funding criteria, recommended practices, and program payment percentages.
2. Identify emerging natural resource concerns and program needs.
3. Recommend conservation practice standards and specifications.

Responsibilities of STAC

4. Recommend State and national program policy based on resource data.
5. Review activities of the local working groups to ensure State priorities are being addressed locally.
6. Make recommendations to the State Conservationist on requests and recommendations from local working groups.
7. Assist NRCS with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers' training needs.

Who is on the STAC? (Statutory Membership)

- The Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- The Farm Service Agency.
- The Forest Service.
- The National Institute of Food and Agriculture.
- The State fish and wildlife agency.
- The State forester or equivalent State official.
- The State water resources agency.
- The State department of agriculture.
- The State association of soil and water conservation districts.
- Agricultural producers representing the variety of crops and livestock or poultry raised within the State.
- Owners of nonindustrial private forest land.
- Nonprofit organizations within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of title 26 with demonstrable conservation expertise and experience working with agriculture producers in the State.
- Agribusiness.
- The State Cooperative Extension Service and land grant university in the State.

Additional Members of STAC (Regulation)

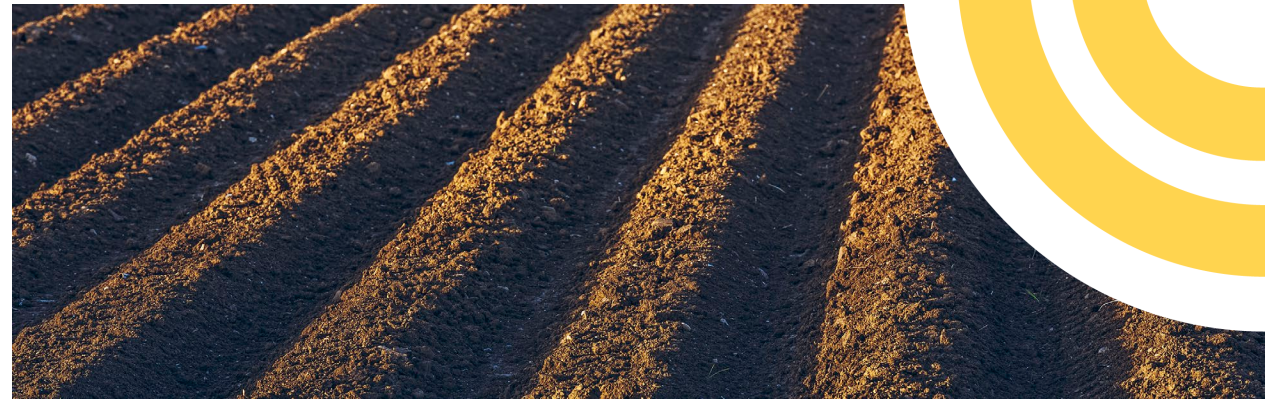
The State Conservationist will invite other relevant Federal, State, and regional agencies, organizations, and persons knowledgeable about economic and environmental impacts of natural resource conservation techniques and programs to participate as needed.



Partner Spotlight

Arizona Association of Conservation Districts (AACD)

Deborrah Smith
Executive Director





Conservation Practice Standards Updates

Jamilah McCoy, State Resource Conservationist
and Dave Beyman, State Conservation Engineer



Ecological Sciences Practice Standards Updates

■ National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP)- Notice 176 (October 1, 2024)

- Amending Soil Properties with Gypsum Products (333)
- Conservation Cover (327)
- Cover Crop (340)
- Woody Residue Treatment (384)

■ National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP)-Notice 177 (November 1, 2024)

- Hedgerow Planting (422)
- Seasonal Water Management for Wildlife (646)
- Wetland Restoration (657)

State Practice Updates

- Adopted Practices Feed Management (592), Soil Carbon Amendment (336)
- Updated Implementation Requirements (IR):
 - Brush Management (314)
 - Conservation Crop Rotation (328)
 - Cover Crop (340)
 - Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (647)
 - Hedgerow Planting (422)
 - High Tunnel System (325)
 - Irrigation Water Management (449)
 - Nutrient Management (590)
 - Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till (345)
 - Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities (643)
 - Soil Carbon Amendment (336)
 - Structures for Wildlife (649)
 - Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645)
 - Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644)
 - Wildlife Habitat Planting (420)

Engineering Practice Standards Update:

NHCP Notice 176 (October 1, 2024)

- Watering Facility (CPS 614)

Reference update to new National Range and Pastureland Handbook, June 2022

Typo correction "skids" to "kids"

NHCP Notice 177 (November 1, 2024)

- Irrigation Pipeline (Code 430)

Minor rewording.

Updates: (1) Maximum permitted surge for high density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe; (2) new subsection to address protection of pipeline & appurtenances; (3) included collapsible lay flat tubing application, replaced as operation and maintenance; (4) impacts to downstream drinking water and drought mitigation; (5) references



FY 25 Programs Update

Erika Boyland

Assistant State Conservationist – Programs



FY 25 Programs Updates

Executive Order: Unleashing American Energy signed on January 20, 2025

- Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)
 - We are **NOT** authorized to obligate any new contracts, agreements or easements using these funds or to work on these activities currently.
 - Secretary Rollins provided NRCS approval to make producer payments on existing IRA contracts for the following:
 - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)



FY 25 Programs Updates

Farm Bill 2018

- Actively working on applications and obligations and payments across:
 - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
 - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
 - Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)



Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Erika Boyland

Assistant State Conservationist – Programs



ACEP – GSS

Grasslands of Special Significance has been identified as a state priority, and we would like to continue these enrollments statewide as we work to address the threat of conversion across Arizona's landscapes.

- GSS designation allows for federal funding to be **raised from 50% (General ACEP ALE) to 75%** (ACEP ALE- GSS) of fair market value of the agricultural land easement.
- GSS – grasslands that contain little or no noxious or invasive species, as designated or defined by State or Federal law; are subject to the threat of conversion to Non-grassland uses or fragmentation; and the land:
 - Is rangeland, pastureland, shrubland, or wet meadows on which vegetation is dominated by native grasses, grass-like plants, shrubs or forbs
 - Is improved, naturalized pastureland, rangeland, or wet meadows
 - Provides, or could provide, habitat for threatened or endangered species or at – at risk species
 - Protects sensitive or declining native prairie or grassland types or grasslands buffering wetlands
 - Provides protection of highly sensitive natural resources as identified by NRCS, in consultation with the State technical committee.

Does the State Technical Advisor Committee (STAC) still support this priority for Arizona?





Local Work Group

Erika Boyland

Assistant State Conservationist – Programs



Local Work Group

Local Work Groups (LWGs) are subcommittees of the State Technical Committee and provide recommendations to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on local and state natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs.

- The results of LWGs are also valuable to local and state leaders in the development of priorities, programs, and policies.
- LWGs are rooted in the locally-led conservation process, connecting Conservation Districts, the NRCS, State and local partners, and producers to work through an assessment of current natural resource concerns in each area or region and to identify opportunities and challenges that NRCS and partners can address through their conservation programs.
- This input helps guide local decision-making and can influence policy development.

Reinvigorate LWGs

- **NRCS has partnered with AACD to reinvigorate LWGs.**
 - Help to further define the process for Arizona.
 - Establish reoccurring LWG meetings throughout the state across districts.
 - Develop trainings on new tools and protocol and efforts.
 - Provide feedback on local priorities to NRCS and the STAC across the state based on the outcome of the meetings to support conservation within the state.





Closing Remarks

Presenter

Title



USDA Non-Discrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Updated: 2/2025



Thank you!

ARIZONA'S LOCAL WORK GROUPS



WHAT ARE THE STATUTORY & REGULATORY ORIGINS OF LOCAL WORK GROUPS?

- USDA 440-CPM, Part 501, Subpart A 501.13
 - **It is the responsibility of the conservation district to:**
 - (i) Develop the conservation needs assessment as outlined in 440-CPM, Part 500, Subpart A.
 - (ii) Assemble (Convene) the USDA local working group.
 - (iii) Set the agenda.
 - (iv) Conduct the USDA local working group meetings.
 - (v) Transmit the USDA local working group's priority area(s) and funding requests to the NRCS designated conservationist or the State Technical Committee, as appropriate.

WHAT ARE THE STATUTORY & REGULATORY ORIGINS OF LOCAL WORK GROUPS?

- A.R.S. 37-1054 (A) (1) & (6)

- *(1) Conduct surveys, investigations and research relating to the character of the soil, soil erosion prevention within a farm or ranch, methods of cultivation, farm and range practices, seeding, eradication of noxious growths and any other measures that will aid farm and range operations, disseminate information pertaining thereto, and carry-on research programs with or without the cooperation of this state or its agencies or the United States or its agencies.*

- Example: Resource Needs Assessments

- *(6) Develop, publish and bring to the attention of landowners within the district comprehensive plans for the conservation of soil and water resources within the district that specify in such detail as may be feasible the acts, procedures, performances and avoidances necessary or desirable for the effectuation of the plans.*

- Example: Conservation Action Plans

WHAT ARE THE STATUTORY & REGULATORY ORIGINS OF LOCAL WORK GROUPS?

- US Title 7, Subtitle B, Chapter 6, Subchapter B, Part 610, Subpart C
 - *1985 Farm Bill (Section 1261): The Secretary of Agriculture establishes State Technical Committees through the Soil Conservation Service (NRCS). STCs can make recommendations on the implementation of conservation programs and activities at the state level.*
 - *1996 Farm Bill: The role of State Technical Committees is expanded to include an opportunity for interested stakeholders to advise NRCS on how best to implement conservation programs/activities at the local level*
 - *2008 Farm Bill: Local Work Groups are made subcommittees of the State Technical Committee, exempting them from the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA).*

WHAT ARE LOCAL WORK GROUPS?

- LWGs are subcommittees of the State Technical Committee
- LWGs act in an advisory capacity
 - *Provide recommendations on local and state natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs to NRCS and others*
- LWGs should be made up of local stakeholders who are in some way involved in natural resources in your area
 - *Conservation District Supervisors and staff*
 - *Local producers*
 - *Federal and State natural resource/land management agencies, including your area's NRCS-Designated Conservationist*
 - *Agricultural Organizations (e.g., Farm Bureau)*
 - *Fish & Wildlife Organizations (e.g., Pheasants, duck, quail, etc.)*
 - *Environmental Organizations (e.g., The Nature Conservancy, Audubon, etc.)*
 - *State or Local elected officials*
 - *FSA county executive director/County Committee Members*
 - *Cooperative Extension*
 - *Tribal Representatives*
 - *Resource Conservation and Development Councils*

WHAT IS THE NRCS-DESIGNATED CONSERVATIONISTS' ROLE?

- Help conservation districts identify members for the LWG
- Help prepare information/materials to support the LWG (resource priorities/program needs)
- Support/Advise LWGs on technical, programmatic, and procedural matters
- Ensures thoughtful consideration is given to LWG's recommendations (resource needs, suggested practices, ranking, etc.)
- Provides the LWG with the status of recommendations given to the State Technical Committee within 90 days of submission

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES OF LWG MEETINGS

- LWG meetings must be held at least once a year—ideally, you should be doing more than one, and be doing more than “ticking the box” (more on that later).
- LWG meetings are open to the public and must be announced via a public forum (e.g., website) in accordance with state laws.
- Agendas must be provided in advance in accordance with state laws.
- Summaries of all meetings will be made available to the public via the local NRCS office.
- LWG recommendations are submitted to the State Technical Committee by the NRCD Designated Conservationist.

OUTPUT

Identify the following and provide recommendations:

- Resource Needs
- Priority Resource Areas
- Resource Concerns of each area (High, Medium, Low)
- Practices to address concerns
- Ranking questions needed to focus funds to address resource concerns
- Provide data for price changes needed for Incentives/Cost Share