

Vermont Bulletin: SB_VT_440-26-11

Date: November 20, 2025

Subject: Announcement of Fiscal Year 2026 Financial Assistance Working Groups

Purpose: This bulletin announces various working groups and subcommittees that will be used to assist NRCS with implementing conservation on working lands through financial assistance programs authorized under the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018. These working groups and subcommittees will identify priority resource concerns, suggest funding levels, establish funding cycles, suggest ranking pools and categories, establish other ranking priorities, and refine the use of the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) for Fiscal Year 2027.

Action Due by: Numerous deadlines, see dates below.

Background: In accordance with 7 CFR Part 610, Subpart C, local working groups are subcommittees of the State Technical Committee and provide recommendations to USDA on local and state natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs. NRCS has overall leadership for conservation programs to deliver financial assistance to eligible producers. NRCS is responsible for establishing State policies, guidelines, and priorities for financial and technical assistance. When establishing State policies, NRCS will consider stakeholder input from various groups to include, but not limited to, the State Technical Committee and Local Working Groups.

Instructions: NRCS has established a schedule of working groups and subcommittees to collect stakeholder input during FY 2026 on how to prioritize NRCS financial assistance in Fiscal Year 2027. POCs will have a facilitator and note taker for each meeting. NRCS staff will host these subcommittees and collect input on the following:

- Identify subcommittee priority resource concerns
- Identify subcommittee priority conservation practices
- Identify subcommittee priority geographic areas
- Identify other subcommittee priorities
- Recommend any funding pools or CART categories to address subcommittee priorities
- Recommend funding levels to address subcommittee priorities
- Recommend any prioritization/screening/workload management criteria
- Advise on coordination of technical assistance resources to support subcommittee priorities
- Document any other input from the subcommittee regarding financial assistance delivery, to include how to best provide equity to all customers and minimize barriers to entry

Upon completion of each subcommittee, the information collected should be submitted to the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs by **May 15, 2026** by filling out the [Reporting Template Microsoft Form](#). The information collected will be used to guide development of financial assistance program delivery for Fiscal Year 2027.

Scheduling: Subcommittees are anticipated to be hosted virtually via Microsoft Teams, but the POC may offer an in-person opportunity at the discretion of the subcommittee. Partner and public notification will occur via GovDelivery along with an announcement on the [VT NRCS State Technical Committee website](#). Although most working groups are partner-oriented, a small number of NRCS employees may participate. Any NRCS employees should obtain supervisory concurrence for participation in any working group.

- **Soils Subcommittee**

May 7, 2026 (1:00pm-2:30pm): The Soils subcommittee will host partner-oriented meetings to provide information, analysis, and recommendations to NRCS on conservation priorities and criteria for natural resources conservation activities that address soil health through financial assistance programs. POC for this workgroup is Chadd.Cupit@usda.gov.

- **Water Quality Subcommittee**

March 12, 2026 (9:00am-10:30am): The Water Quality subcommittee will host a partner-oriented meeting to provide recommendations to NRCS for addressing water quality related resource concerns in the State. POC for this workgroup is Joseph.Bondi@usda.gov.

- **Locally Led Conservation Delivery Subcommittee:**

December 10, 2025 (1:00-2:30), January 15, 2026 (11-12), January 29, 2026 (1-2), February 12, 2026 (11-2), April 30, 2026 (10:30-11:30) May 7, 2026 (1-2), August 6, 2026 (11-12). The Locally Led Conservation Delivery subcommittee will host a series of partner-oriented meetings to provide NRCS recommendations for implementing the locally led process in Vermont. Locally Led Conservation Proposals are due to the NRCS State Office by February 27, 2026, see SB_VT_440-25-06 for more information. POC for this workgroup is Diana.Dellinger@usda.gov.

- **Small Farms Subcommittee:**

January 21, 2026, April 15, 2026, and May 8, 2026 (1:00pm-2:30pm) The Small farms subcommittee will host a series of partner-oriented meetings to provide recommendations to NRCS on how to best support small farms, urban farms, and community scale agriculture in the State through technical and financial assistance programs. POCs for this workgroup are Luis.Aponte@usda.gov and Cheyanne.Rico@usda.gov.

- **Forest and Wildlife Subcommittee:**

February 5, 2026, and April 9, 2026 (10:00am-11:30am) Forest and Wildlife subcommittee will host a partner-oriented meeting to provide recommendations to NRCS for addressing forestry and wildlife related resource concerns in the State. POC for this workgroup is Toby.Alexander@usda.gov.

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Subcommittee**

February 5, 2026, March 5, 2026, April 2, 2026 (10:00am-11:30am): The State Office will host a series of partner-oriented meetings to provide recommendations to NRCS on implementing the ACEP WRE and ALE programs. The February meeting will be focus on all easements, the March meeting will be focused on WRE, and the April meeting will be focused on ALE. Information will be collected regarding priority geographic areas, ranking criteria, valuation methodology, GARC rates, and Wetland Restoration Criteria Guidelines. POC for this workgroup is James.Eikenberry@usda.gov and/or Julia.Grey@usda.gov.

- Local Working Groups**
On-going, varies by NRCD- Feedback due May 15, 2026 The NRCDs will host a series of community stakeholder-oriented local working group meetings to provide recommendations to the District Conservationists on NRCS technical and financial assistance programs and identification of local priorities for Fiscal Year 2027. District Conservationists will report feedback via the [Reporting Template Microsoft Form](#) by **May 15, 2026**. It is recommended that Districts that are planning to submit a Locally Led Conservation Proposal convene their meetings by December 31, 2025 to gather stakeholder feedback prior to the proposal submission. POC for the LWG subcommittee is Phylicxia.Moore@usda.gov.
- Subject Matter Experts**
April 15, 2026 (9:30am - 11:30am) The State Office will host an internal staff meeting for Field Office employees to provide recommendations to the NRCS Program staff on improvement of program delivery, evaluation of new processes, and identification of priority resource concerns and practices. POC for this effort is Diana.Dellinger@usda.gov.
- Working Lands (EQIP/CSP) Subcommittee**
April 22, 2026 (9:30am-11:30pm): The State Office will host an external partner oriented meeting for key partners to provide recommendations to the NRCS Program staff on improvement of program delivery, evaluation of new processes, and identification of priority resource concerns and practices. POC for this effort is Diana.Dellinger@usda.gov.
- TBD:** Any other subcommittees determined to be needed will be added. POC for this meeting is Diana.Dellinger@usda.gov.
- State Technical Meetings**
Thu., January 22, 2026; Wed., May 20, 2026; Wed., July 15, 2026 (9:30 am – 12:00 pm)
 For information on the State Technical Committee contact Angela.Hyldburg@usda.gov.

Continuous Feedback: NRCS employees and stakeholders should continuously monitor performance of NRCS financial assistance programs for changes or improvement in the next Fiscal Year cycle. Submit suggestions for improvements to NRCS Programs through the [Programs Support Application](#) throughout the year.

Specific questions or volunteers for each workgroup should be submitted to the contact listed above. General questions related to this bulletin can be directed to the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, Diana.Dellinger@usda.gov.

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