

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

South Dakota State Technical Advisory Meeting Minutes

September 10, 2025 | 10 a.m. Central Time

Hybrid meeting on Teams and in person held at the DANR Matthew Training Center, Pierre, SD

[STC MEETING RECORDING ON THE NRCS SD YOUTUBE CHANNEL](#)

[NRCS SD STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE WEB PAGE](#)

- **Welcome and Opening Remarks: Colette Kessler and Tony Sunseri**
 - The State Technical Committee (STC) is an advisory committee to NRCS that helps provide recommendations to the State Conservationist for prioritizing the agency's resources for delivering conservation across South Dakota. This meeting launched a renewed structure with a focus on active subcommittees moving forward.
 - Please welcome our four volunteers for the STC Steering Committee who will provide leadership on for subcommittee recommendations and making decisions for South Dakota. Those recommendations go to the NRCS Leadership Team for discussion and action. The Steering Committee will also help keep NRCS accountability of the recommendations and the outcomes.
- **Congressional Delegates Updates**
 - **Ben Ready (Senator Thune)**

Passed the appropriations bill for agriculture in the Senate; for the NRCS technical and/or financial assistance farmers and ranchers; and funding for watershed and flood prevention programs. "The Big 4" workings lands conservation programs: EQIP, CSP, Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) were included in the One Big Beautiful Bill. Includes additional funds for the small watershed program, the grassroots source water protection program, and the volunteer public access and habitat incentive program.
- **Reinvigoration South Dakota's Locally Led Conservation Leadership: Tony Sunseri**

NRCS is working to revitalize our support for conservation districts and supervisors through the locally led conservation leadership approach. NRCS is a locally led agency that helps producers voluntarily address resource concerns. Going forward, we will hear from producers at the local level through the local working groups, hosted by the conservation districts who will feed that information up to the state level.

New ideas or recommendations generated of the local work groups may go to subcommittees or will be assigned to an NRCS leadership team member who will guide it through a subcommittee(s). Each subcommittee will have different members as appropriate to represent various interests related to the topic to ensure a good variety of perspectives.

NRCS is changing the frequency of the State Technical Committee meetings from four per year to two per year. Fall meetings will be primarily focused on conservation programs of the Farm Bill and program implementation and prioritization. Spring meetings will be more focused on technology – the ecological and engineering side of delivering conservation and addressing any new conservation practices. The summer meeting will be in the field and feature conservation outcomes. Winter meetings will be partner focused. Partnerships are important for delivering conservation technology to producers. We have between 50-70 agreements statewide.
- **Congressional Delegates Updates**
 - **Jim Selchert (Rounds)**

- **Farm Service Agency: Roger Chase**
Update and overview of FSA
- **South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts: Angela Ehlers**
Presented on the history of conservation districts in South Dakota and their role and responsibilities (*PowerPoint in the video and handout*).
- **SD Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources: Hunter Roberts**
Update and overview of DANR
- **SD Game, Fish and Parks: Kevin Robling**
Update and overview of SD GF&P
- **South Dakota USDA NRCS Department Reports and Subcommittee Updates**

Conservation Programs of the Farm Bill and Subcommittee Report, Val Dupraz, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) is one of the oldest Farm Bill conservation programs that fits nearly every producer's needs.

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) was released in 2008 Farm Bill; it is more of a management focused program and evaluates the producer's entire operation.

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is the most diverse of all the programs. RCPP partners with non-government organizations to implement locally identified projects to address priority resource concerns.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) has been around more than three decades. It has two components – Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) which keep working lands as working lands and Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) to protect wetlands and provide wildlife habitat.

Val presented a summary of Fiscal Year 2025 applications.

- Discussion of percentage of producers in SD who enroll in programs compared to those who receive assistance but might not apply for financial assistance, then discussion of the need and how to capture brief technical assistance.
- Question was asked: how many producers do all the planning and then don't get funded? Answer: At this time, there is no real, good way to track that as much of our technical assistance is direct and not administered through computer programs and not currently manually tracked.
- The *Dakota Conservation Network* web site is a resource for producers who don't get funding through NRCS and that has other organizations that offer services or financial assistance.

Programs Subcommittee Report

Four items were discussed and concurrence requested to update processes and policies within South Dakota. Items Discussed were as follows:

1. Fund pool structure-Review ranking pool structure and seek input on considering small scale/specialty producer applications as their own fund pool so they competed amongst similar applications.
2. Management practice payment-Reduce the number of times a management practice is paid with South Dakota EQIP contracts from 5 to 3 to fund additional applications.
3. High priority practices-Review current high priority applications and seek recommendations.
4. ACEP-WRE prioritization and Support for Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC)-Reduce prioritization categories from 5 to 3, update prioritization criteria, and seek support of the recently completed GARC.

Summary and recommendations are as follows:

1. Fund pool structure-Committee reviewed the current fund pool structure within depth conversation about the request to evaluate small scale/specialty producer applications within a separate pool from conventional producers. Discussion was held about the definition of small scale/specialty producer. NRCS agreed to align with FSA's program and use specialty producer instead of small scale. Suggestions were provided to NRCS on how to define specialty producer and NRCS made notes of suggestions to incorporate input into a more well-defined definition of the application type.
 - a. **Subcommittee Recommendation:** Evaluate specialty producer applications within their own fund pool. The recommendation is to update the term from small scale to specialty producer plans to be implemented in FY2026.
2. Management Practices Recommendations-Committee discussed the advantage and disadvantage of shortening the number of years management payment are allowed for EQIP in SD. CSP has policy in place and cannot be changed that allows for greater than three years. The change for EQIP would shorten contracts and allow more funds for the backlog of unfunded applications. Producers have the opportunity to seek out CSP at the end of three years if they are interested in increasing the level of management practices on their operation.
 - a. **Subcommittee Recommendation:** Reduce the maximum number of payments from 5 years to 3 for EQIP.
3. High Priority Practices: State has identified 10 high priority practices to address water quality, mitigate drought and declining water aquifers, and meet other environmental priorities. There is an increased payment for the 10 high priority practices if an application is funded within the identified priority areas. Identifying additional source water protection areas will be brought to the subcommittee next year. Question and discussion regarding perennial native plantings/restorations of grasslands and why it was not on the list of 10 priority practices. Discussion about which of the existing practices should be removed to add the perennial seedings but none of the existing practices were identified to be removed. When seeding perennial vegetative within source water protection areas, they receive higher payment rates within contracts for most conservation practices. Perennial seeding practices are available across the state for implementation like all other practices, however, a participant only receives a higher payment rate in source water protection areas and not all priority areas. The committee supported the current 10 high priority practices selected. Additional discussion regarding targeted outreach within priority areas was held. There has been limited targeted outreach within most targeted areas. Producers who are within priority areas are eligible to receive higher payment rates for certain practices and priority within ranking in some instances. Local offices explain priority areas and payment rates to producers as they evaluate applications. Funding is the most limiting factor for applications. Additional effort will be made to better communicate high priority areas in FY2026 to partners and public
 - a. **Subcommittee Recommendation:** Continue with the current high priority practices and increase outreach in target areas.
4. ACEP-WRE Prioritization: Priority categories were reduced from five categories (very high, high, medium, low and very low) into three categories (high, medium and low). Prioritization criteria were supported as presented as the committee.

Geographic Area Rate caps for FY26 were recently completed. Rates were reviewed and support was provided to use in FY2026 after brief discussion was held on the rate calculations and criteria to be considered comparable sales.

 - a. **Subcommittee Recommendation:** Continue with the FY2026 WRE Prioritization Worksheet for FY2026.
 - b. **Subcommittee Recommendation:** Use the FY26 Geographic Area Rate caps for program administration in FY2026.

- Question and discussion regarding Programs subcommittee member make up followed agenda item discussion. Interested organizations or individuals can reach out to the respective NRCS Leadership Team member who is leading the subcommittee, and for Programs, contact Val Dupraz, ASTC Programs, at valorie.dupraz@usda.gov or 605-690-6724.
- Ecological Sciences and Subcommittee Report, Jessica Michalski, State Resource Conservationist

No subcommittee meeting for ecological conservation practices has been held yet; Interested entities or individuals should contact Jessica Michalski. The Role of this subcommittee will be to review conservation practice standard updates and review new and updated technical conservation practice standard notes. The subcommittee will need to review and provide feedback on small scale and urban ag needs. Will meet this winter with action and a report for the spring STC meeting.

One standard that will be addressed is prescribed grazing which has been changed to grazing management.

Conservation Engineering Update and Subcommittee Report, Jim Reedy, State Conservation Engineer

- Provided an overview of two proposed new standards that NRCS could potentially adopt in SD.
 - Phosphorus Removal System practice standard 624. Do not intend to adopt this in SD at this time unless the committee thinks otherwise. Action: Committee concurred.
 - Controlling Existing Flowing Well practice standard 352. Action: Another subcommittee is needed for this topic since seeing some conflicts between this practice and SD Codified Law.
- A variance has been placed on the current conservation practice standard 642 for water wells. Supposed to have an aquifer test done on each well. Pushback from the states to national design leaders and national geologist. The national variance allows states to move the aquifer testing out of the criteria section over to the considerations section and would just recommend aquifer testing of wells in question. Action: Intending to adopt this recommendation and will be revising the conservation practice standard 642 in SD.
- Livestock Shelter Structure practice 576 (fabricated windbreaks). The manufacturer reached out and wanted help for a new configuration and an engineering analysis so their product would meet SD conservation practice standards. The Standard calls for the structure to be able to handle a 90 mile per hour wind.
- Portable shade structures are also in the initial communications stages to be designed to meet NRCS Conservation Practice standards. Shade mesh criteria must be 80% blockage and meet wind requirements. Resource concern in pasture settings might focus on getting livestock out of the riparian corridors and up on solid ground.

Engineering Conservation Practices Subcommittee Report

The Engineering Subcommittee met on Waste Transfer conservation practice standard 634. Dairy industry had reached out inquiring about the pumping from storage to field and if that could be funded through conservation programs. Currently, NRCS does not fund it due to the overall amount of funding available, and the practice is grouped into the ag waste fund area.

Came up with two options.

- #1: Not to change anything in the language yet and see what the funding picture looks like with the new Farm Bill.
- #2: This is what the subcommittee would ultimately like to recommend. Remove the language and allow our pressure pipeline installations only, at this point. Action: Move forward with subcommittee recommendation #2.

Some resource concerns that this practice would address would be prevention of increased nutrient loading. Waste distribution can get to different locations. Timing issues would be addressed to get the product out faster and prevention of discharges or hose breaks on public road rights of ways.

Ranking would be based on first operations with no controls, second those with need for mortality, third is operations with existing controls that need upgrades, fourth would be this waste transfer system to field and fifth would be everything else. Payment cap of \$50,000.00 for this practice.

Discussion on the actual use of this practice.

Tribal Conservation Advisory Committee (TCAC) Report, Nate Grueb

The Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (TCAC) has been meeting for over 20 years. With the renewed focus and support of the subcommittees and Steering Committee of the STC, the TCAC is looking to ensure representation and a delegate from each tribe.

Locally Led Conservation and Local Working Groups Report

Conservation Districts and their Supervisors lead the local workgroup effort. The purpose is to obtain feedback from their communities, from the farmers and ranchers at the local level. Districts are able to bring in non-federal individuals to give feedback for prioritizing federal resources.

- **Partners Update**

- **US Fish & Wildlife Service: Chuck Pyle**
- **Pheasants Forever: Matt Gottlob**

Comments regarding prescribed fire program getting started with first ever prescribed fire coordinator based out of Chamberlain NRCS office. With the public access to habitat program, SD is now over 70,000 acres since September 1, 2023. Exceeding the original goals of 10,000 acres a year.

- **South Dakota State University Extension: Pete Bauman**

Power point on "Considerations for improved application of prescribed fire by landowners on USDA-funded program land in South Dakota" and discussion.

- **Closing, Tony Sunseri**

The Steering Committee will not meet this winter. The next STC Steering Committee will be held Spring of 2026. A Partnerships and Agreements sharing session is being planned. A Tour is being planned in the summer 2026.

Respectfully submitted,

Randi Papka, Secretary, USDA NRCS SD Partnerships and Public Affairs