

ND State Tribal Advisory Council Meeting – June 09, 2026 - Notes

Today's meeting was held at the United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck. Mark Hayek, Assistant State Conservationist-(Partnership Coordinator) and mediator for today, started the meeting at 12:45 p.m. with welcoming everyone and introductions.

Dan Hovland, ND State Conservationist USDA- Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), welcomed and thanked everyone for joining in the ND State Tribal Advisory Council Meeting. Dan explained that the purpose of the State Tribal Advisory Council (TAC) is to serve as an advisory council to NRCS as a subset of the ND State Technical Committee and will provide recommendations to the State Conservationist and others regarding how NRCS programs can work better from a technical and policy standpoint on tribal lands. Dan talked about how the TAC will focus on maintaining communication with the State Conservationist communicating conservation needs, plans, and priorities and engage the State Conservationist in developing annual budgets for natural resources conservation. Dan said the goal is to make NRCS programs work better for Tribal Nations – technically, culturally, and operationally.

Mark Hayek asked for Agency updates starting with NRCS. Steve Kassian, ND State Tribal Liaison, started with major themes within the state to include technical assistance, conservation planning, education and outreach, interagency coordination, and support of TAC. Brad Thykeson, ND State Executive Director USDA – Farm Service Agency (FSA), was next saying that they are embracing modernization due to limited staffing to support 51 offices across the state. FSA is utilizing pop-up offices, having FSA support in offices on certain days of the week, rotating offices to provide assistance by appointments. Mark Wax, ND Deputy State Director USDA - Rural Development (RD), gave an update on 2 programs specifically for producers, Value Added Producer Grant with is a 50% cash match and Meat/Poultry Expansion Production Grant which is a 25% cash match. Fanny Brewer, Great Plains Technical Assistant Specialist - Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC), gave a background of IAC and how the agency represents the native producers and tribes and that there are approximately 11 states that are under an umbrella agreement with NRCS to assist with technical support.

Jarvis Keney, Assistant State Conservationist (Programs), start discussing the Tribal category within the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Area Pools with currently allocating around 4% of the budget to this category which is approximately \$700,000 to start out but have always requested and received additional funds to fund more applicants. Over the past 3 years, NRCS has had 20 non-tribal members successfully funded in the tribal pool for 2.7 million dollars and that same year we funded 37 Tribal members for 1.9 million dollars. Of those 37, only 10 applicants were funded in the Tribal pool, the rest were funded through the socially disadvantaged pool. NRCS is looking for the State Tribal Advisory Council's input/recommendation if we should continue with the Tribal category or eliminate it. If we eliminate it, we will bring forward in the socially disadvantage category, the ranking questions of:

Are 75% of the application acres Tribal lands?

And

Are all acres within the Tribal Reservation?

Dan Hovland concluded the meeting by saying that this forum is for you to bring the problem up so we can figure out what the blockage is and how that can be changed or if it can be. Dan also said that these meetings are very important because you have direct contact with the State Conservationist, the ND State FSA Executive Director, and the ND RD State Director to listen, learn, and work together to strengthen conservation programs that support Tribal lands, people, and goals.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Questions asked/Concerns:

Turtle Mountain (Jeff Desjarlais – Tribal Liaison) – wants to discuss the fencing scenario on forested land at next meeting.

Spirit Lake (Adam Flaagan – Tribal Liaison) – asked if different entities can be separated on different contracts?

Fort Berthold (Jesse Baker) – concerned because there is slow participation due to different agencies have different opportunities, but the timelines don't match up giving enough time to complete applications.

Action Items:

Due by August 1, 2026, to Steve Kassian: Should NRCS continue the Tribal category in North Dakota or eliminate it and add two questions to the Socially Disadvantaged category?

Discuss how many meetings per year and either rotate meeting locations or keep them in Bismarck.

Mark will send out some dates for the next meeting to see what will work for the entire group, possibly October, November, or December.

Next Meeting: TBD, at the United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck.