



NRCS - State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting

FY 26: Quarter 3 - Tuesday, June 16, 2026

WY NRCS State Office: 100 East B St., Room 3002, Casper, WY 82601

9:00 a.m.

- Welcome.....Jackie Byam
- Introductions.....Katie Vaporis
- FY 26 Farm Bill Programs Overview.....Katie Vaporis
 - Allocation
 - Ranking Categories
 - Obligation Update

Break

- Local Work-group Updates/Priorities.....Rusty Schwartz and Jake Hogan
- GARC.....Katie Vaporis

Break

- FY 27 Suggestions.....All
- Questions.....All
- Partner Updates.....All

1:00 p.m.

- Adjourn

OUR PRIORITIES

KEEPING WORKING LANDS IN WORKING HANDS

1. Preserve and protect agricultural land



2. Shift to outcome-based conservation and farmer empowerment



3. Recenter field engagement and strengthen technical expertise



4. Expand wildlife conservation and outdoor access



5. Strengthen partnerships by streamlining processes and accountability



6. Optimize mission delivery by strengthening workforce culture



7. Modernize NRCS infrastructure and technology.





STAC FY 26 3rd Quarter Meeting Minutes

June 16, 2026

Attendees-In person

- Rusty Schwartz - NRCS
- Jackie Byam - NRCS
- Katie Vaporis - NRCS
- Shawn Follum - NRCS
- Jake Hogan - NRCS
- Andi Neugebauer-Bailey - NRCS
- Tracy Crow - NRCS
- Samantha Peterson - NRCS
- Michelle Huntington - Converse County Conservation District
- Lisa Shaw - Niobrara County Conservation District
- Anita Bartlett - Powder River Conservation District
- Sarah Bargston - Wyoming Water Development Office

Attendees-Online

- Emma Allen - NRCS
- Laurie Boner - Farm Service Agency
- Brian Linton - Wyoming Association of Rural Water Systems
- Burt Reno - Campbell County Landowner
- Carmen McIntyre - Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts
- Cheyenne Love - Wyoming Water Development Office
- Corey Williams - Cody Conservation District
- Jennifer Hayward - NRCS
- Holly Kennedy - Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts
- Jackie Turner- Sheridan County Conservation District
- Janessa Julson - NRCS
- Demont Grandy - Lincoln County Conservation District
- Kresta Hedges - Star Valley Conservation District
- Justin Caudill - Wyoming Department of Ag
- Karla Schwartz - Campbell County Conservation District
- Katie Wynn - Laramie Rivers Conservation District
- Kelsey Beck- Popo Agie Conservation District
- Tanner Liby - NRCS
- Max Lewis - Jackson Hole Land Trust
- Allison McKenzie - NRCS
- Michael Johnson - Ducks Unlimited
- Lisa Ogden - Natrona County Conservation District
- Phillip Osterley- United States Forest Service
- Mason Peebles - NRCS

- Jenna Perez - NRCS
- Ray Striker - Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality
- Sarah Albright - Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
- Shaleas Harrison - Western Landowners Alliance
- Ron Steg- Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality
- Simon Teaff- NRCS
- Tyler Harrison- Rural Development
- Michelle Christopher - Wyoming Association of Rural Water Systems

Opening Remarks & Agency Updates

The meeting began with announcements from State Conservationist Jackie Byam. Including the appointment of a new NRCS Chief, Colton Buckley, and updates on agency priorities. Reorganization information is expected by the end of June with hopes for staffing increases. The updated 'Big Game' framework was released, and FY26 Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP) obligations are nearly complete. Input was requested on additional practices for the next year.

Program Allocations & Contracting

Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, Katie Vaporis, provide FY26 advisory allocations and contracting progress were reviewed for EQIP, AMA, CSP, RCPP, and Easements. AMA funds were pulled nationwide, leaving very little in Wyoming.

Local Working Group (LWG) Updates

Both Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations, Rusty Schwartz and Jake Hogan, presented on LWG meetings. In the High Plains area LWG meetings were conducted in the individual 13 counties.

- Crook, Natrona and Carbon counties have had to reschedule due to weather conditions.
- Albany Co-Katie Wynn gave brief re-cap/update of LWG meeting. They are considering doing 2 per year.
- Campbell County -Burt Reno (landowner) gave re-cap of meeting, offered thanks to NRCS and the Conservation Districts for their work.
- Niobrara Co-Lisa Shaw gave re-cap of meeting. Landowners in Niobrara Co are unhappy about not AMA funds this year.
- Goshen Co-Rusty gave update from meeting minutes.
- Weston Co-Rusty gave update from meeting minutes.
- Sheridan Co-Jackie Turner gave re-cap of meeting. Pointed out Sheridan Co has a backlog of irrigation projects. See Handout for more information.
- Laramie Co-Rusty gave update from meeting minutes
- Converse Co-Michelle Huntington gave re-cap of meeting. No applications were funded for FY26 in Converse Co. Landowners have questions and concerns about limited livestock water and drought.
- Platte Co-Jenna Perez gave meeting re-cap. Worked with district on a survey regarding resource concerns for Platte Co producers.
- Johnson Co-Anita Bartlett gave meeting re-cap. Anita shared thoughts on how ranking should be ranked on percentage of improvement from practices, would like to see ranking questions for management practices.

- Big Horn County-Emma Allen gave re-cap of meeting.
- Combined meeting with Park, Washakie, Big Horn and How Springs Co.
- Park County -Cory Williams s stated that Park Co had an additional meeting of their own.
- Fremont Co – Jake Hogan gave re-cap of meeting. Kelsey spoke and gave re-cap of meeting, attendance, resource concerns and diversity of county.
- Lincoln Co-Janessa and Conservation District gave re-cap of meeting. Kresta Hedges (Star Valley) re-capped, ranking concerns, high tunnel restriction concerns wishes there was more priority on aging infrastructure. Demont-gave re-cap of their meeting.
- Teton Co-Simon Teaff- gave re-cap of meetings for Teton and Sublette Co-met and talked with some landowners new to NRCS.
- Sweetwater/Uinta-Tanner gave re-cap of meeting and resource concerns.

Attendance & Outreach Strategies

Jackie thanked everyone involved in the LWG meetings for this year and asked, for the District's that had high attendance, what they did different this year to boost attendance. Districts shared successful outreach strategies including emails, joint invite lists, flyers, social media, and face-to-face invitations.

Ranking & Funding Discussions

Requests were made for ranking improvements emphasizing percentage improvements and management plans. Questions arose on invasive grass eligibility, AGI waivers, and forestry payment rates.

Area Ranking Pools & Funding Allocation

The transition from county-level to area ranking pools sparked concerns. Unallocated funds and second sign-up processes were reviewed.

Geographic Area Rate Caps as it Relates to Wetland Reserve Easements

A presentation was given and input was requested on GARC and WRE criteria. A deadline of having feedback to Katie Vaporis y Wednesday, June 24, 2026 was given.

FY27 Suggestions & Planning

Discussions focused on conservation assessments, district plans, targeted priorities, and ranking pool structure. FY27 allocations remain uncertain.

Partner Updates & Presentations

Partner organizations provided updates on staffing changes, weed bounty programs, and ongoing conservation efforts.

Statewide Recommendations

Priorities included invasive annual grass management, water resource resilience, stronger ranking tools, rangeland health, staffing support, and expanded emergency programs.

Conclusion

Recurring statewide concerns included plant health, water availability, drought resilience, rangeland condition, and invasive annual grasses. Staffing shortages and funding structures were highlighted as ongoing challenges.

WYOMING NRCS

Local Working Group Summary Report (2026 Cycle)

Prepared For

• USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – Wyoming • Wyoming State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) • Local Conservation Districts and Partners

Purpose

This report summarizes priority natural resource concerns and additional county-identified needs for guiding 2027 Farm Bill program planning and resource allocation.

Local Work Group 2026 – Full Notes

(Covers Johnson, Sheridan, Campbell, Albany, Niobrara, Weston, Goshen, Laramie, Platte, Converse Counties)

The 2026 Local Work Group (LWG) meetings across Wyoming counties highlighted consistent themes in natural resource concerns and producer needs. Nearly all counties reported ongoing issues with plant health, rangeland condition, livestock water availability, invasive annual grasses, and soil erosion or soil health decline.

Counties with irrigation infrastructure emphasized inefficient irrigation water use, aging systems, or a need for improved delivery efficiency.

Several counties—including Johnson and Weston—shared frustration with statewide changes to NRCS funding structures, particularly the move away from county allocation funding toward area-based funding. Ranking processes were a recurring topic, with participants requesting improvements that better reflect local priorities and management plans.

Producers and partners emphasized concerns related to drought, water quantity, forest health, grazing distribution, and the need for more flexibility in practice standards. Invasive annual grasses (especially *Ventenata* and cheatgrass) were consistently identified as high-priority threats.

Attendance varied, with some meetings held in traditional settings and others—such as Laramie County—conducted open “stop-in” survey formats.

Overall, the cycle produced consistent recommendations: prioritize invasive annual grass control, address water-related resource concerns, support livestock water development, and ensure ranking tools reflect meaningful improvements.

Counties Included

• Albany County • Campbell County • Niobrara County • Goshen County • Weston County • Sheridan County • Laramie County • Converse County • Platte County • Johnson County

Each section follows the same formatting: • Date • Location • Time • **Priority Resource Concerns (Ranked)** • **Additional / Other Concerns** • **Meeting Summary**

County Sections

Albany County Local Work Group

Date: April 7, 2026

Location: Fire Station #3, 2374 W. Jefferson St., Laramie, WY 82070

Time: 11:00 a.m.

Priority Resource Concerns (Ranked)

- Degraded Plant Condition
- Source Water Protection
- Forest Health
- Wind & Water Erosion

Additional / Other Concerns

- Conifer encroachment
- Rangeland health decline
- Streambank erosion
- Water quality & wildlife habitat concerns
- Irrigation delivery inefficiency
- Drought impacts
- Partner-driven landscape project needs
- Forestry & irrigation cost adjustments needed
- CET vacancy
- Need for updated soil surveys

Meeting Summary

The group reviewed agenda topics including erosion, rangeland health, and water resource concerns.

Campbell County Local Work Group

Date: April 16, 2026

Location: Pine Room, Campbell County Courthouse

Time: 10:00 AM – 1:30 PM

Priority Resource Concerns (Ranked)

- Animal
- Plant
- Soil

Additional / Other Concerns

- NRCS staffing reductions (25%)
- Transition to regional funding pools
- Reduced IRA funding
- ~\$7.5 million in county applications
- Water availability & quality issues
- Plant encroachment & land condition changes
- Livestock water, shelter, fencing needs
- Wildlife habitat improvements
- Energy efficiency opportunities
- Wildfire preparedness concerns
- Invasive species management

Meeting Summary

Discussion emphasized the changing funding environment, application volume, and resource concerns.

Niobrara County Local Work Group

Date: May 7, 2026

Location: Lusk NRCS

Priority Resource Concerns (Ranked)

1. Livestock Production Limitations
2. Plant Health
3. Soil Health
4. Water Quantity

5. Energy

Additional / Other Concerns

- Soil compaction
- Cover crop concerns
- Irrigation variability
- Explanation of statewide funding pools

Meeting Summary

Chairman Bruce Kilmer opened the meeting. Survey results were reviewed, and historical EQIP practices discussed.

Goshen – South Goshen Conservation District Local Work Group

Date: May 8, 2026

Location: Prior to SGCD Board Meeting

Time: 12:00 PM

Priority Resource Concerns (Ranked)

1. Water Quality/Quantity
2. Soil Improvements
3. Plant Health
4. Animal Health
5. Air Quality
6. Energy

Additional / Other Concerns

- Meetings attended only by conservation district board members
- No public or external stakeholder presence
- All three LWGs (SGCD, NPV, LFLCD) agreed on the same priorities
- SGCD recommendation letter used for documentation

Meeting Summary

The SGCD Local Working Group met May 8, followed by NPV on May 14, and LFLCD earlier. All consisted solely of board members, with no public attendance.

Weston County Local Work Group

Date: May 14, 2026

Location: USDA Service Center

Time: 9:00 AM

Priority Resource Concerns (Ranked)

- Inadequate Livestock Water
- Forest Health
- Drought
- Irrigation & Cover Crops

Additional / Other Concerns

- CSP program structure concerns
- Areawide funding structure concerns
- Ranking system seen as one-size-fits-all

Meeting Summary

Discussion focused on drought impacts and livestock water access.

Sheridan County Local Work Group

Date: May 20, 2026

Location: Sheridan County Conservation District Office

Time: 10:00 AM

Priority Resource Concerns (Ranked)

- Drought & Low Snowpack
- Stream Connectivity & Restoration
- Livestock Water Development
- Irrigation Efficiency
- Urban Water Conservation

Additional / Other Concerns

- EQIP funding structure changes
- Increased statewide allocations
- Wildfire recovery practices needed

Meeting Summary

Attendees reviewed EQIP updates, drought conditions, and project backlogs.

Laramie County Local Work Group

Date: April 23–24, 2026

Location: Tree pickup event with Laramie County Conservation

Priority Resource Concerns (Ranked)

1. Water – Groundwater depletion
2. Soil – Wind erosion
3. Plant – Wildfire hazard & pest pressure
4. Animal – Feed/forage imbalance & livestock water

Additional / Other Concerns

- 21 survey participants
- Concerns consistent with 2025 LWG

Meeting Summary

Discussion focused on erosion, groundwater, fire risks, and livestock water.

Converse County Local Work Group

Date: May 21, 2026

Location: EWC, Douglas

Priority Resource Concerns (Ranked)

- Water Availability & Quality
- Soil Health & Erosion
- Plant Condition & Encroachment
- Livestock Water & Fencing Needs
- Wildlife Habitat
- Energy Efficiency

Additional / Other Concerns

- NRCS staffing reductions (~25%)
- Regional competition for funding
- Reduced IRA funding

Meeting Summary

Emphasis on water resource concerns, rangeland condition, and cropland transitions.

Platte County Local Work Group

Date: April 9, 2026

Location: First State Bank Conference Center, Wheatland, WY

Time: 10:13 a.m.

Priority Resource Concerns (Ranked)

1. Plant Health
2. Water Quantity
3. Soil Health
4. Livestock Health

Additional / Other Concerns

- Review of priority concerns from past 5 years
- SWAPA+E discussion
- NRCS staffing shortages
- Importance of targeting Farm Bill dollars
- Statewide issues may be elevated to STC
- Results to be published in PCRD & FSA newsletters

Meeting Summary

Meeting opened by Brady Irvine. Jenna Perez presented LWG purpose and led prioritization exercise. Four concerns emerged due to a tie. Rusty Schwartz discussed staffing challenges. Meeting adjourned at 10:34 a.m. Minutes by Sydney Burek.

Johnson County Local Work Group

Date: May 20, 2026

Location: Johnson County Fire Hall, 790 Volunteer Lane, Buffalo, WY

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Priority Resource Concerns (Ranked)

- Inefficient Irrigation Water Use
- Inadequate Livestock Water Quantity, Quality, and Health (Range)
- Plant Productivity and Health – major concern: invasive annual grasses (Ventenata, cheatgrass)

Additional / Other Concerns

- Concern over statewide funding changes
- WY NRCS staffing shortages (91 statewide)
- Need for improved ranking questions (focus on % improvement)
- Request for initiative targeting invasive grasses
- Recommendation to add ranking points for management plans
- Explore EWP funding for grass impacts
- AGI/contract limit flexibility requests
- Appreciation for Water Entity Pool

Meeting Summary

Anita Bartlett opened the meeting. Allison McKenzie outlined the LWG purpose and local EQIP applications. Tim Becket provided statewide updates. The group reaffirmed top priorities and selected Bartlett to represent the county at STAC. Recommendations included improved ranking tools, new invasive grass initiative, EWP funding options, and management-plan support

Recommendations

The 2026 Local Work Group (LWG) meetings generated several consistent, statewide recommendations to guide 2027 Farm Bill program planning:

1. Prioritize Invasive Annual Grass Management

- Establish or expand dedicated funding pools for Ventenata, cheatgrass, and other invasive annual grasses.
- Provide flexibility in AGI limits or contract caps for large-scale treatments.
- Incorporate management plan points into ranking tools.

2. Improve Water Resource Resilience

- Increase support for irrigation efficiency upgrades and aging infrastructure replacement.
- Expand assistance for livestock water development under drought conditions.
- Support watershed-scale planning for water quantity and quality.

3. Strengthen Ranking Tools & Funding Processes

- Transition ranking questions to emphasize measurable improvement (%) rather than number of practices.
- Increase transparency in statewide/area funding pools.
- Align ranking criteria more closely with county-level priorities.

4. Support Rangeland Health & Grazing Distribution

- Expand practices addressing grazing distribution and plant condition.
- Support long-term rangeland monitoring and planning.

5. Address Staffing Limitations

- Counties widely emphasized the need for adequate NRCS field staffing.
- Consider strategies to streamline workload through statewide templates or coordinated partner support.

6. Expand Emergency & Resilience-Based Programs

- Explore Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) eligibility for post-invasive-grass watershed damage.
- Increase flexibility for wildfire recovery and drought-resilience practices.

Conclusion

The 2026 Local Work Group cycle revealed clear, recurring priorities across Wyoming counties. Despite differences in local landscapes, producers and partners consistently emphasized plant health, water availability, drought resilience, rangeland condition, and invasive annual grass control as key concerns. Many also expressed frustrations with staffing shortages and emerging funding structures that limit the ability to address localized needs.

The recommendations summarized in this report reflect shared statewide themes and unique county-level insights. As NRCS Wyoming prepares for the 2027 Farm Bill program year, these findings offer a strong foundation for refining ranking tools, improving resource allocation, and enhancing the effectiveness of conservation investments across the state.
