



State Technical Committee Meeting

NRCS Utah - September 8, 2026

A recording of the meeting [is available here on the NRCS Utah YouTube Channel](#).

Meeting Summary

NRCS Strategic Funding and Local Prioritization Process: Travis Mote, Acting State Conservationist for NRCS Utah led a discussion on the evolution of NRCS's funding allocation, emphasizing the shift toward locally led conservation planning, strategic funding projects, and the integration of conservation districts and local workgroups to identify and prioritize resource concerns, with input from district conservationists and state leadership.

- **Locally Led Conservation Planning:** Travis Mote went over the NRCS locally led process, defining the roles of the State Technical Committee, local workgroups, and Conservation Districts in setting priorities and developing conservation action plans.
- **Conservation Needs Assessment:** Process that involves local workgroups convened by conservation districts to gather geographic and resource concern information, resulting in needs assessments and prioritized action plans that outline issues, required resources, costs, and expected outcomes.
- **Strategic Funding Proposals and Priority Resource Opportunities:** NRCS District conservationists submit strategic funding proposals (SFPs) for targeted, multi-year projects, and more recently, Priority Resource Opportunities (PROs) for year-to-year flexibility, both driven by local priorities and conservation action plans.
- **Funding Allocation and Stakeholder Engagement:** Travis Mote described the allocation of \$62 million in financial assistance for 2026, with \$42 million focused on EQIP funds, and emphasized the need for STAC and other stakeholders to play an active role in identifying resource concerns and influencing funding decisions.

District Conservationist Reports on Local Priorities and Projects: District conservationists including Jeff Schick, Justin Elsner, Kenny Oswald, Jenny Jo Cox, Jeremy Maycock, Tyrell Belknap, Lowell Gardner, Wade Ingram, Justin Deakin, Kristi Westwood, and Mike Marshall presented their local workgroup priorities, strategic funding proposals, and ongoing projects, highlighting resource concerns and collaborative efforts across Utah counties.

- **Soil Health and Regenerative Agriculture:** Jeff Schick and Justin Elsner reported strong demand for soil health and regenerative agriculture programs, with significant funding allocated and ongoing pilot projects in Box Elder and Cache counties, supported by conservation districts and local producers.

- **Water Optimization and Irrigation Efficiency:** Multiple district conservationists emphasized irrigation efficiency and water optimization as top priorities, with projects targeting canal improvements, water conveyance, and partnerships with state programs to address water scarcity and quality.
- **Wildfire Resiliency and Invasive Species Control:** Several teams discussed efforts to reduce wildfire risk, control invasive species like phragmites and Russian olive, and implement virtual fencing and plant diversity improvements to enhance rangeland and wildlife habitat.
- **Urban Agriculture and Land Preservation:** Jenny Jo Cox and others highlighted urban agriculture initiatives and the challenge of agricultural land loss, with strategic funding pools supporting small acreage producers and efforts to preserve open space amid development pressures.
- **Livestock Water and Grazing Management:** Resource concerns related to livestock water, grazing improvements, and brush management were addressed by district conservationists in Rich, Carbon, Emery, and San Juan counties, with targeted SFPs and PROs to improve pasture systems and rangeland health.

Statewide Initiatives: Migratory Big Game and RPP Updates: Matt Philippi and Brian David provided updates on the Migratory Big Game Initiative and the RPP program, detailing statewide action plans, funding allocations, partner collaborations, and requests for feedback on eligible practices and resource concerns from the STAC and local stakeholders.

- **Migratory Big Game Initiative Expansion:** Matt Philippi described the expansion of the Migratory Big Game Initiative to additional states, the development of a Utah management plan, and collaboration with DWR and other partners to identify priority areas and practices for wildlife habitat conservation.
- **Application and Funding Process:** The initiative received 86 applications in 2026, funding \$1.2 million across seven contracts, with over \$10 million in additional requests, and plans to increase funding in 2027, depending on national allocations and state needs.
- **RPP Practice and Resource Concern Review:** Brian David outlined the RPP program's requirements, including soil health testing and eligible practices, and solicited input from STAC on refining the list of resource concerns, land uses, and practices to better target funding and address local priorities.
- **Partner Engagement and Conservation Credits:** Discussion included the emergence of conservation credit programs, with groups like Sand County Foundation and Audubon Society seeking collaboration with NRCS.

IMPAC Pilot Program and Process Changes: Garrett Fish introduced the IMPAC pilot program, explaining its goals to streamline application and contract management, prioritize technical assistance and conservation planning, and shift from numeric ranking to high/medium/low prioritization, with input from local workgroups and STAC.

- **IMPAC Program Overview:** Utah was selected as one of nine pilot states for the program, which aims to improve management of program applications and contracts by emphasizing planning-first, field-focused engagement, and faster funding obligations.
- **Technical and Administrative Work Separation:** The program will divide technical conservation planning from contract administration, assigning program assistants and partner employees to handle contract management, while technical staff focus on planning and fieldwork.

- **Prioritization and Ranking Changes:** IMPAC eliminates numeric ranking systems, instead using high, medium, and low prioritization based on local workgroup input, conservation action plans, and ready-to-implement project status, with ongoing feedback sought from STAC and stakeholders.
- **Stakeholder Input and Training:** NRCS leadership requested input from STAC on prioritization tools and processes and announced upcoming training for field staff to implement IMPAC, with the goal of refining the approach based on pilot outcomes and stakeholder feedback.

STAC Engagement, Meeting Structure, and Subcommittee Formation: Participants discussed the need to revamp STAC meetings to increase engagement, empower stakeholders in setting priorities, and form a subcommittee to develop recommendations for future meeting structure and funding allocation processes.

- **Revamping STAC Meetings for Greater Impact:** Participants expressed concerns that STAC meetings had become reporting sessions rather than forums for setting priorities, advocating for a return to active engagement where STAC input directly influences funding decisions and resource prioritization.
- **Partner and Agency Involvement:** Suggestions included inviting more partners and agency heads to present and collaborate, leveraging zone meetings to identify representatives, and ensuring that local workgroup priorities are brought forward and discussed in depth.
- **Pre-Meeting Preparation and Information Sharing:** Recommendations were made to distribute local priorities, proposals, and supporting documents ahead of meetings to facilitate informed discussion and allow STAC members to review and provide meaningful input.
- **Subcommittee Formation and Next Steps:** Travis Mote solicited volunteers for a subcommittee to work with leadership on structuring future STAC meetings, with Troy, Clint, Wade, Garrett, Tyler Thompson, and others agreeing to participate and develop actionable recommendations.

Follow-Up Tasks:

- **RPP Program Feedback and Practice Recommendations:** NRCS will send out the RPP program spreadsheet and related documents to STAC members and collect their feedback and recommendations on eligible practices, land uses, and resource concerns for the upcoming submission.
- **STAC Structure Revamp:** Assemble a subcommittee to discuss and propose a new structure for the state technical committee (STAC) to improve engagement and prioritization of local and state resource concerns.
- **Partner and Agency Engagement:** Develop and implement a plan to personally invite additional partners and agency heads to future STAC meetings to increase participation and input on resource prioritization.
- **Pre-Meeting Materials Distribution:** Distribute local work group priority lists and relevant materials to STAC members at least two weeks prior to the next meeting to facilitate informed discussion and prioritization.

- **Impact Pilot Feedback:** Gather input from STAC members on how to identify and rate projects through a non-numeric prioritization system (high, medium, low) for the Impact pilot and provide feedback to NRCS leadership.