

One Team-One Goal

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State Conservationist



Today I would like to discuss



- NRCS Legislative Authority, Staffing, Budget, and the Impact on State Cost Share Program
- Why Conservation Desktop?
- NRCS's Investment to the Partnership
- Looking to the Future
- Wrap Up Listening Session



USDA-NRCS Our Mission

“Helping People Help the Land”

We deliver conservation solutions so agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world



Legislative Authority



Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1935

- Conservation Technical Assistance
- Soil Survey, Snow Survey and Plant Materials

Farm Bills Impact on Direction


Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996


- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- 2002 – Conservation Security Program (CSP)
- 2008 – Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- 2014 – Regional Conservation Partnership Program



Setting Agency Priorities



- 
- Congress
 - President
 - Secretary of Agriculture
 - Chief
 - State Conservationist
 - District Conservationists or Field Teams
 - Local Conservation Districts



Can NRCS have a priority outside a legislative mandate?



Government Performance and Results Act

- Legislation signed in 1994
- Promotes results-oriented government

Workload Analysis

- Captures time it takes to do each “product” that NRCS does
- Assesses what part is done by NRCS and by partners/others
- Identifies staff skills and discipline needs
- Includes field input of time requirements for each product
- Agency began using the **Performance and Result System (PRS)**



Government Performance and Results Act

Change was not only needed but was mandated by Congress to keep up the ever-expanding agency mission

The Performance Results System (PRS) is no longer a functioning system and has been discontinued.

NRCS is now using reports based on conservation planned and applied in CD to determine workload and potential staffing for states.

All conservation planning activity must be entered into CD for Missouri to capture all planning data and to avoid negatively impacting our **future staffing and conservation delivery budget.**



Impacts to Staffing



Missouri NRCS Staffing

- 2019 – 289 NRCS Employees in MO hit all time low
- 2020 and 2021 – Capped at 330 – **Direct Hire Authority**
- 2022 – Staffing caps no longer exist but we have a Planning Number of 359 if budget can support it.
- Missouri has 259 conservation planners certified in database
- 188 NRCS and 71 SWCD employees (approximately 27%) located in 46 different counties
- Level I = 38 planners and Level III = 33 planners



NRCS Staff Allocation

Historically, workload was defined by states mainly Farm Bill Program Delivery

Optimally Productive Field Office model was launched and for the first time we could accurately see all work including State Cost Share – More Robust

2021 - Workload Analysis of all activities in county, then by Field Office Service Area (FOSA) – Had a complete flip of some offices



1G	Aaron Rives	High
4E	Paul McDonald	High
2C	Clint Roby	High
2B	Tommy Ketchum	High
2H	Gary Applegate	High
2A	Jesse Linscott	High
1E	Corey Walker	Medium-High
2G	Tammy Teeter	Medium-High
3B	James Hunt	Medium-High
3G	Steve Watson	Medium-High
4B	Goman Bennett	Medium-High
2F	Tony Hoover	Medium-High
3C	Shane Bess	Medium-High
3E	Michelle Gross	Medium
1A	Chris Rader	Medium
3D	Melissa Welch	Medium
4G	Nathan Bilke	Medium
2E	Mike Snellen	Medium
4H	Aaron Hoefler	Medium
1B	Randall Buck	Medium
1F	Brian McCarthy	Medium
4C	Mike Morris	Medium
4A	Jody Jones	Medium-Low
4D	Stacey Mannis	Medium-Low
1C	Rodney Saunders	Low
2D	Josh Stewart	Low
4F	Diana Sheridan	Low
3F	Darin Gant	Low
1D	Jason Saunders	Low
3A	Renee Cook	Low

Why such a drastic change?

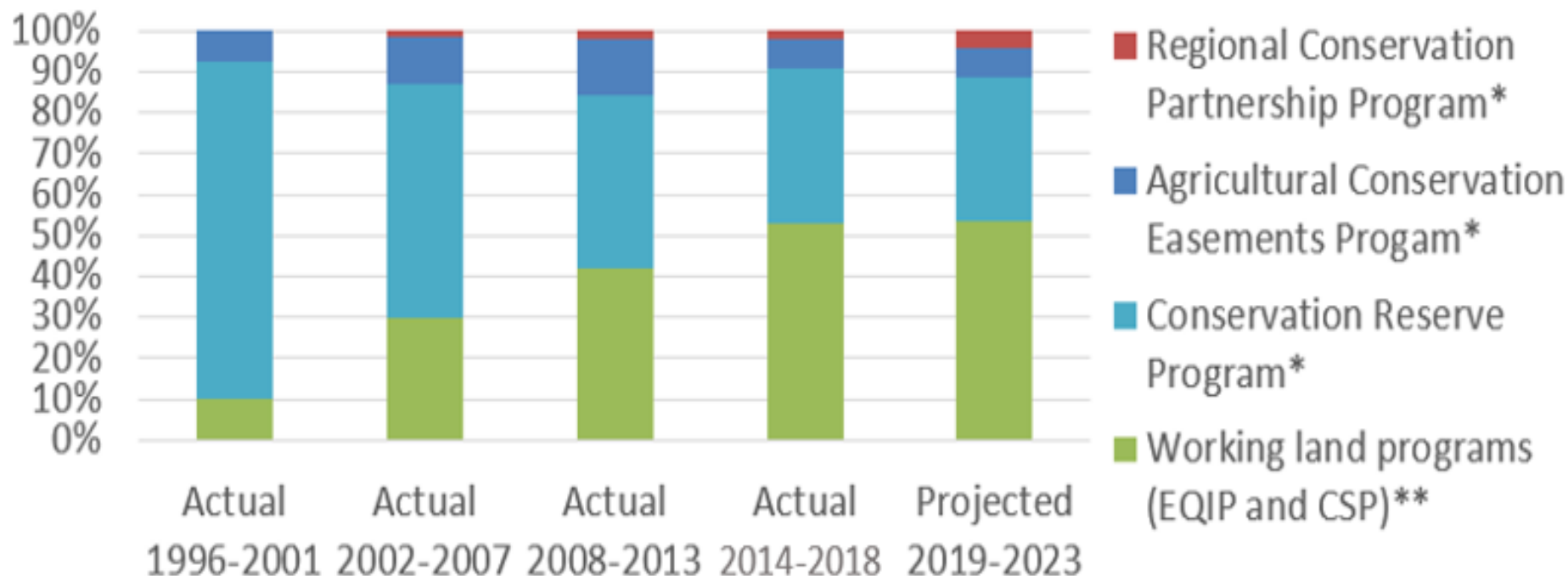
Mitigation Components

Category	Relative Weight	Total NSDM Impact	Data Utilized	Systems Referenced	SMEs
Work Quality	19%	3.75%	PIR, CIR, Avg Mods per Contract	KPI dashboard (ProTracts)	Mike Bzdil; Lane Johnson
Non-NRCS Support	25%	5.0%	% of non-NRCS system users vs NRCS employees	ProTracts/CD zRoles	WLA team
Farm Bill Implementation	13%	2.5%	Payments Made (\$)	ProTracts	Gwen Gilbert
Historically Underserved	25%	5.0%	Strikeforce presence in state; SDA % of customer base; % of HU Obligation Dollars; % of HU Contracts	ProTracts; AgCensus; StrikeForce	HUWG
Climate Impact	19%	3.75%	CO2 equivalent reduction	COMET; ProTracts	Adam Chambers
Total :	100%	20%			





Share of Conservation Spending by Major Programs and Predecessors in the 2018 and Previous Farm Acts



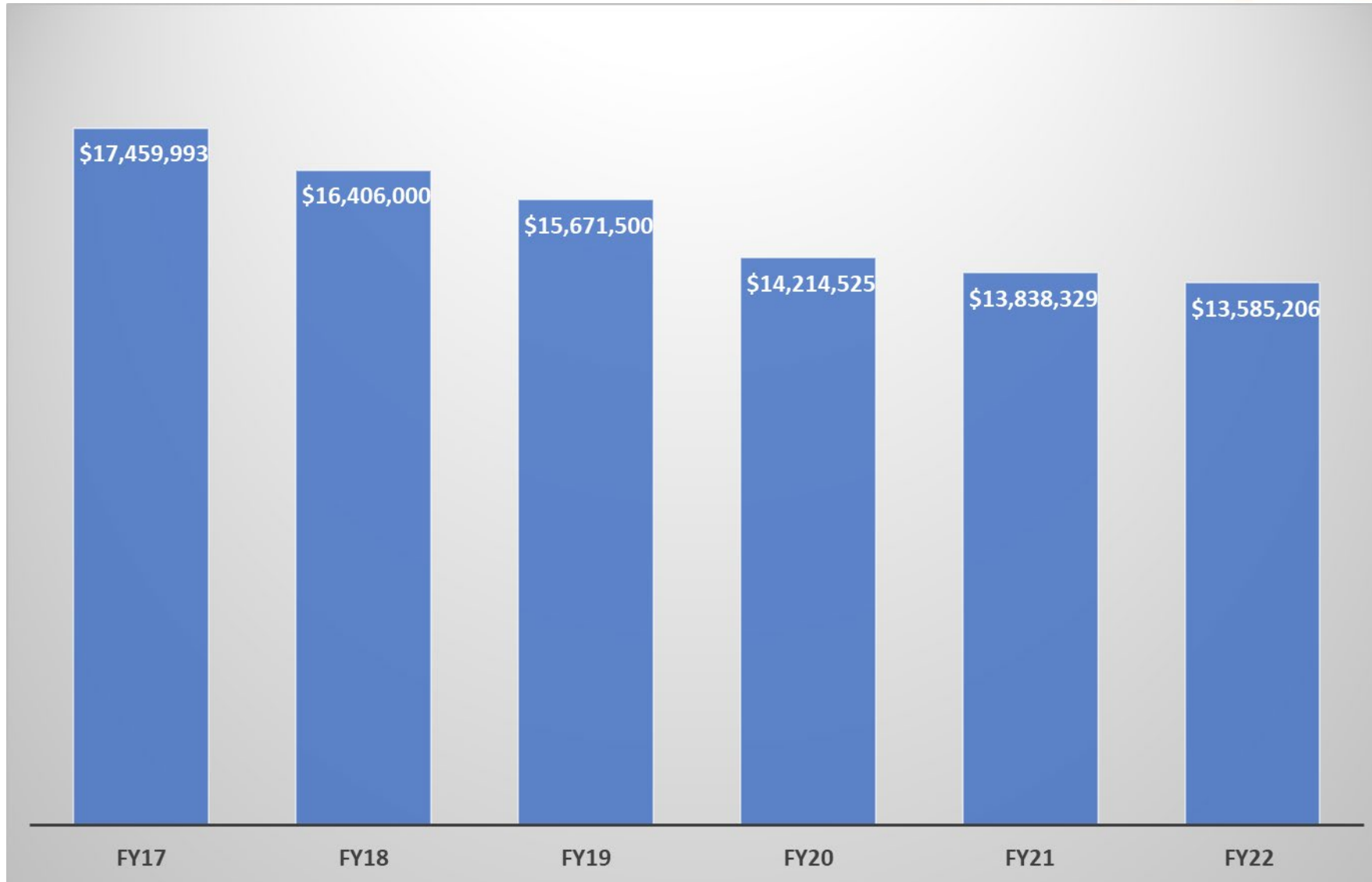
*Includes predecessor programs.

**Includes the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CS) and predecessor programs. The programs are shown together because they are combined in the CBO estimates.

Sources: ERS analysis of Office of Budget and Policy Analysis data for 1996-2017 and Congressional Budget Office Estimates for 2018-2023.



Continual Erosion of Conservation Technical Assistance



NRCS EQUIPMENT AND VEHICLES FOR THE FIELD

129 shared computers currently deployed to partner staff

- A new computer cost the agency \$2,800 to purchase.
- Each units cost the agency \$4,500 yearly for IT support for a total expense of \$580,500.

NRCS has 307 vehicles in the field available for partner use.

- 1/3 of the fleet is GSA Lease with a \$550,000 annual fee

104 Trimble Units deployed to the Field Offices

- NRCS engineering staff assisting technicians with Trimble issues
- NRCS updates software every 3rd year and each update costs \$1,200 per unit.



Office Space and Leasing Dashboard



BETHANY SERVICE CENTER (810)

1400 N 41ST STREET, BETHANY, MISSOURI 64424-1776

COST & SQUARE FOOTAGE SUMMARY

Annual Cost	Rentable SqFt	Site Total Usable SqFt	Site SqFt to Personnel	Site Annual Cost Per Personnel	Cost per SqFt
\$81,524	5,865	5,865	244	\$3,397	

The Site SqFt to Personnel was derived by dividing the Site Total Usable SqFt by the Site Total Personnel number shown in the "HEADCOUNT" section. If a site has multiple leases, the Site Total Usable SqFt is calculated as the sum of usable space across all of the site's leases.

SPACE USED BY AGENCY

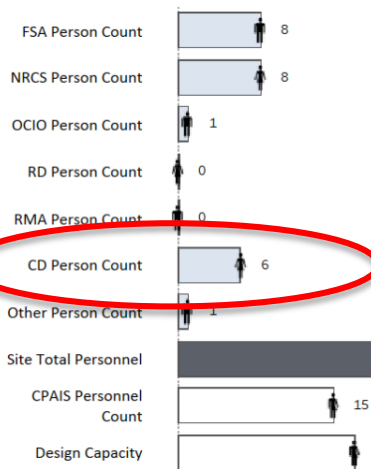
	Annual Cost	Office SqFt to Personnel	Total Rentable SF
FSA	\$39,683	357	2,855
NRCS	\$41,840	201	3,010

Data on space use by agency may not be available for all leases. The Square Footage per Personnel value may also be left blank if a given agency does not have any personnel in the office.

SQFT/PERSONNEL RATIO

Below/At 250

SITE HEADCOUNT



KIRKSVILLE SERVICE CENTER (8517)

2410 S. FRANKLIN STREET, KIRKSVILLE, MISSOURI 63501-4616

COST & SQUARE FOOTAGE SUMMARY

Annual Cost	Rentable SqFt	Site Total Usable SqFt	Site SqFt to Personnel	Site Annual Cost Per Personnel	Cost per SqFt
\$59,348	6,433	6,088	381	\$3,709	

The Site SqFt to Personnel was derived by dividing the Site Total Usable SqFt by the Site Total Personnel number shown in the "HEADCOUNT" section. If a site has multiple leases, the Site Total Usable SqFt is calculated as the sum of usable space across all of the site's leases.

SPACE USED BY AGENCY

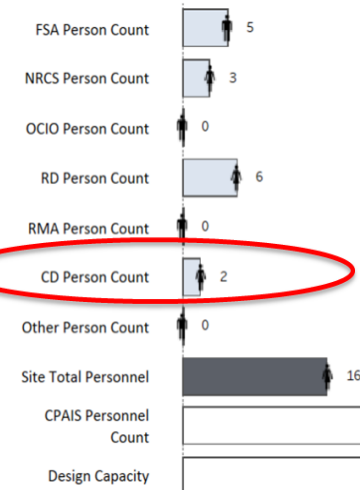
	Annual Cost	Office SqFt to Personnel	Total Rentable SF
FSA	\$17,777	258	1,292
NRCS	\$19,289	280	1,402

Data on space use by agency may not be available for all leases. The Square Footage per Personnel value may also be left blank if a given agency does not have any personnel in the office.

SQFT/PERSONNEL RATIO

Between 350 & 450

SITE HEADCOUNT



99 Offices - \$30,000 average annual investment - \$2,970,00



Partnership Benefits Provided By NRCS

- **Technical Expertise**
- **Engineering Assistance**
- **Quality Assurance**
- **Equipment & Training**
- **Investigation and Reporting**

Costs Associated with Engineering Assistance

- **Annual Realized Benefits Provided to SWCD through NRCS CTA**

Benefit	Annual Cost
Technical Assistance / Quality Assurance	\$713,000
Training	\$387,000
Investigation & Reporting	\$101,000
Agreements – 50/50 Shared Tech	\$500,000
<u>Total</u>	<u>\$1,701,000</u>

NRCS Training for SWCD Employees



High turnover of District Technician and 50/50 District Technician

NRCS primarily responsible for technical training

NRCS Soil Conservationist and Resource Conservationists provide 100s of hours of OTJ training for new SWCD employees

- Performing design, layout, checkout of common practices

NRCS District Conservationist provides 10-20 hours per new employee of onboarding assistance and training

- VMT/WEX card
- AgLearn
- Lincpass etc.



Engineering Job Approval Authority

Non-NRCS employees may be granted limited EJAA

- **Granted by the engineer technically responsible (Area Engineer)**
- **Job Class I or II**
- **11 Practices**
 - (i) Diversion (362)
 - (ii) Grassed Waterway (412)
 - (iii) Irrigation Land Leveling (464)
 - (iv) Pipeline (516) (Except those connected to a source or supply used for human consumption)
 - (v) Spring Development (574)
 - (vi) Surface Drain Field Ditch (607)
 - (vii) Terrace (600)
 - (viii) Watering Facility (614)
 - (ix) Underground Outlet (620)
 - (x) Water and Sediment Control Basin (638)(Maximum fill height of 5 ft measured from natural ground at centerline of embankment)
 - (xi) Well Decommissioning (351)

Ecological Science Job Approval Authority

- DC maintains ESJAA for all SWCD staff
- SWCD DTs, SCs, RCs, and DC provide training for ESJAA
- DC reviews completed designs and checkouts of Ecological Science practices
- DC enters the recommended ESJAA for all SWCD staff
- DC makes recommendations to SWCD Board for signing



Snapshot of NRCS Assistance for State Cost Share

- One office in the FOSA has zero Level III Certified Conservation Planners. NRCS SCs sign conservation practice designs and checkouts for all SWCD work in this county
- NRCS Planners are consulted regularly with planning pipelines, initial site visits to talk with landowners, preconstruction visits and where to place tanks.
- County 1 Activity = 45 pipeline designs completed by NRCS and 40 field checkouts and check out reviews
- County 2 Activity = 37 surveys, 35 designs, 29 layouts, check outs 17
- Pest management plan reviews: over 100 reviews in the FOSA



Snapshot of NRCS Assistance for State Cost Share

- I depend heavily on the three SWCD Legacy Level III planners to assist in training NRCS, SWCD, and 50/50 staff
- SWCD employees are willing helpful participants in Spot Checks and QARs
- Once SWCD staff are fully trained, certified, and granted signature authority they work independently to administer State Cost Share
- We have a very strong working relationship with the districts in my FOSA and we pride ourselves on customers not knowing if they are being helped by SWCD or NRCS employees



SWCD Case Study – When it all Stops Working

In 2021 a SWCD in Missouri lost an experienced Technician leaving only a District Specialist/Clerk in the office. Very limited State Cost Share work could be completed.

NRCS was on full telework status with only 25% capacity in the office. SWCD staff allowed into the office to try and complete their State Cost Share work. Technician was coming in 5 days a week but with limited results.

SWCD Board had reached a point of maximum frustration and called me!

There was an existing backlog of 98 participant requests dating back to 2015 needing surveys completed. Total funding allocated \$275,000 with only \$39,000 obligated.



After the call, I directed NRCS staff to rotate in beginning September 2021 and provide priority assistance across county and FOSA lines.

Engineering staff devoted 3 days a week to provide training, survey, design, and checkout assistance.

NRCS Technicians in the FOSA – 2 assigned to help

- 1 Assigned full time to just SWCD Technical assistance and then later training of new employee hired for SWCD District Specialist/Technician.
- 1 Technician provided assistance with survey, design, and checkouts 2 days a week.



December of 2021 – 90 Days of Assistance

- Backlog of requests went from 98 to 53 with the oldest request being from 2020.
- District received additional allocations that moved their initial funding from \$275,000 to just over \$450,000.
- Obligation of funds went from \$39,000 to \$240,000
- 6 NRCS staff spent over \$30,000 dollars in salary and assistance to the state cost share program for Training, Survey, Designs, and Checkouts



Maintaining This Level of Support

- Tremendous growth potential of the State Cost Share Program.
- MO NRCS is committed to continuing this level of support, but we must have the authority, budget and staff to maintain this level of assistance.
- The most significant way to impact this is to fully utilize Conservation Desktop for all activity across Missouri.
- On August 8, 2022, I issued state policy that requires All new District Cost-Share Conservation Plans to be entered into Conservation Desktop.



Highlights from the Missouri Instruction on Conservation Planning and Application

All new District Cost-Share Conservation Plans will be entered into CD.

The DC/Designated NRCS Staff sign as the Technician on both the Contract and Payment documents. They do not approve contracts or authorize payments.

The DC/Designated NRCS Staff will confirm that the conservation planner has used CD to develop a conservation plan that supports a District Cost-Share Contract, verify the practice planning is technically adequate, meets NRCS Standards and Specifications, follows the SWCP Practice Policies, and follows NRCS Planning Policies.

This includes the completion of all required Implementation Requirements and designs. Once this has been completed, a designated Level III or IV Conservation Planner (NRCS or SWCD employee) is authorized to sign the conservation plan.

During the development of the conservation plan in CD, a CART assessment must be completed for the planned practices by the conservation planner.



Transferring Soil and Water Web Application Data to CD

The Missouri Resource Inventory and Assessment section have provided a template and instructions for ArcGIS Pro to assist users in transferring data between the Soil and Water web app and Conservation Desktop.

Practice locations and boundaries that have been created in the Soil and Water web app can be transferred to CD using provided import layers in ArcGIS Pro. A project folder has been provided which includes map templates, planning layers, transfer layers, and the Engineering Toolbox.

The provided tools and layers should allow for easier transfer between the two systems and should prevent duplication of work. Instructions on the SWCD Transfer Tools and Templates.

The manuals also include instructions for using LiDAR within the ArcGIS Pro environment and on the NRCS Engineering Tools.

Series of trainings have been launched in a small group setting for new users, existing user refreshers and demonstrations of state cost share CART runs.



Why the Mandate to Use Conservation Desktop

The SWCP policy requires cooperators to have an approved conservation plan prior to board approval of a cost-share contract.

CD was designated the official agency approved software to create, manage, and approve conservation plans in October 2019.

The NRCS NPPH, Amendment 9, requires all planning activities to be implemented using agency approved planning software, which is currently Conservation Desktop Version 3.22.

CD is now being used exclusively to track all progress and goals. This in turn impacts CTA Budget and Staffing Levels.



We must always remember.....

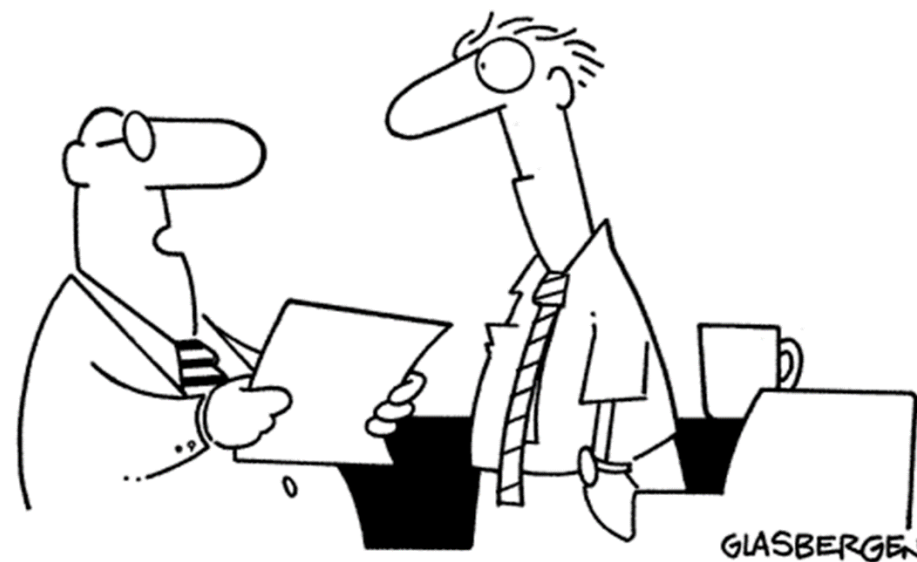


Important Truth No. 1 People don't *want* to change

As human beings, change is hard for every one of us. Neuroscience teaches us that our brains associate change with mistakes, threats, and fear.

“If it ain't broke, don't fix it,”

This is a luxury that we do not have as a partnership. As planning policy changes and metrics for budget and staffing evolve, we must adapt to continue the success this partnership has enjoyed.



“I want you to find a bold and innovative way to do everything exactly the same way it's been done for 25 years.”





United States Department of Agriculture

Looking to the Future.....



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

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Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill

Inflation Reduction Act





Watershed Operations Program

General Purposes

- Preventing damage from erosion, floodwater, and sediment
- Furthering the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water
- Furthering the conservation and proper utilization of land

PL 83-566 Projects



- Sponsor makes a formal request in writing to NRCS for assistance.
- Missouri NRCS seeks NHQ approval to develop a Preliminary Investigative Feasibility Report (PIFR). If the PIFR is favorable, next step is to develop a watershed plan.
- If approved by NHQ, funds will be made available to the Sponsor for a watershed plan.
- Once the planning phase is completed, a request will be made to NHQ to fund engineering designs.
- Upon completion of the engineering phase, a construction authorization will be requested from NHQ.



Missouri's NRCS PL 83-566 Priorities

- Projects that have already been planned but unfunded.
- Capacity of the sponsor to administratively complete the project.
- Projects that can be completed in less than 5 years.
- Projects that have already acquired land rights or control.
- Projects that address multiple resource concerns.
- Projects that address high priority resource concerns.

- Flood Prevention
- Ag Water Management
- Watershed Protection
- Public Fish and Wildlife

Disadvantaged communities receiving benefits from the federal action.

- Low income, Poverty, and low enrollment in higher education
- Health Burdens and low life expectancy
- Expected ag or population losses from climate change
- Energy Burden
- Pollution and Traffic
- Affordable Housing

Actions impact significant portions of the watershed.



Cost-Share



Purpose	Install Construction	Engineering	Real Property Rights
Flood Prevention	100%	100%	0
Watershed Protection	Variable, not to exceed existing programs	100%	0
Public Fish and Wildlife or Public Recreation	No more than 50%	100%	No more than 50%
Agricultural Water Management	Up to 75%, but not to exceed existing programs	Up to 100%	0
Municipal and Industrial Water Supply	No more than 50%, assistance involves loans	0	0
Water Quality Management	To be determined by the Secretary of Agriculture	Up to 100%	
Conservation Easements		Not less than 50%	Not less than 50%
Mitigation of Habitat Loss		No more than 50%	No more than 50%



Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)



- Last Monday, President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) into law. This is a historic, once-in-a-generation investment and opportunity for this country and for the rural and agriculture communities we serve at USDA.
- It invests \$40 billion into existing USDA programs promoting climate smart agriculture, rural energy efficiency and reliability, forest conservation, and more.
-
- Approximately \$20 billion of this investment supports our NRCS conservation programs that are oversubscribed, meaning that more producers will have access to conservation assistance.
- These additional funds will help farmers and ranchers implement expanded conservation practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase storage of carbon in their soil and trees.
-
- The conservation funding is on top of otherwise available program funds and is targeted to support climate-smart agriculture. We'll be immediately focused on FY23 implementation.



Major Initiatives in FY23



Crop, Pasture, Forestland and Urban

- Drought Resiliency
- Nutrient Management
- Native Warm Season Grasses for Grazing
- Forest Management
- St. Louis Urban Office



Major Shift in COVID Guidance

CDC philosophy transitioning from managing individual transmission to reducing the severe effects of COVID, **we are removing the FPAC staffing limitations effective on Monday, August 22, 2022.**

- **All FPAC facilities may operate at 100% of authorized staffing** unless we see a serious local outbreak and this issue is discussed between state/local leadership and the FPAC Incident Management Team.
- We will no longer be **teleworking USDA Service Centers for 3 days** following a Positive Exposure in the office. Instead, all employees will be required to wear a mask for 10 days following the date of the positive exposure.
- All First Order exposures who are not symptomatic will no longer Quarantine from the office for 5 days. Instead, the employee must now wear a mask for 10 days following the date of the first order exposure.
- We are still requiring a COVID worksheet to be submitted ONLY for Employees who Test Positive for COVID-19.
- Employees who are SYMPTOMATIC or TEST POSITIVE will be required to telework for at least 5 days or until they are symptom free.
- Masks are still required in counties with a High Community Level. The FPAC Incident Management Team will continue to provide a list of Community Levels in all U.S. counties each Friday.



Stakeholder Input



State Technical Committee

- Provides advice for technical considerations and technical guidelines necessary to implement the conservation provisions of USDA legislation.
- Provides recommendations on several issues within a variety of USDA conservation programs.

Local Work Groups

- Provide recommendations on local natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs.
- Comprised of a diverse group of ag producers, professionals and individuals in the local community
- Meetings are open to the public and individual will be given an opportunity to address the group.
- To join a LWG contact your local District Conservationist.



Questions?

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GovDelivery: Text NRCSMOEvents to 468311 or enroll through Missouri NRCS website.





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Questions:



- Why should district employees do NRCS work entering the info in CART?
- Is NRCS dictating how the state cost-share program should be done?
- Why is NRCS wanting to capture District work just to inflate their output?
- Will NRCS now be signing all state Cost-share documents?
- Not all district staff have access to SharePoint. How will they get to the folders/documents mentioned at the end?
- Low internet speed and trouble with Centrix will make this impossible?

