



**Indiana State Office**

6013 Lakeside Blvd  
Indianapolis, IN 46278

March 5, 2025

Dear Soil and Water Conservation District Board Chair:

The Farm Bill emphasizes the importance on the roles and responsibilities of the Local Working Groups in each county. In each state, NRCS has established a State Technical Committee to assist in making recommendations relating to the implementation of technical aspects of natural resource conservation activities and programs. This is an advisory committee that may be utilized by any USDA agency with conservation obligations.

The Farm Bill designated the Local Working Groups as a subcommittee of the State Technical Committee. The Local Working Group's role is to provide similar recommendations and advice as the State Technical Committee, with a focus on the resource priorities of the local community. These priority resource concerns will be used to prioritize the rankings for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation programs including Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP.) The Local Working Group should consist of representatives who are able to provide input on the wide range of natural resource and agricultural concerns for your county. The Local Working Groups provide recommendations on local natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs, within the scope of State outlined resource priorities (7 CFR 610.25(2)). These resource concerns will be aggregated at a conservation delivery team or area level to maximize the efficiencies of the conservation assessment ranking tool (CART.)

According to NRCS Program policy, it is the responsibility of the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to convene the Local Working Group. The District Conservationist can provide technical assistance to the group, such as explaining existing and potential resource concerns, associated conservation practices and general program information. If a Soil and Water Conservation District is not present or chooses not to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in 440-CPM Part 510, Subpart A, Section 501.13, the NRCS District Conservationist must fulfill these duties.

To incorporate local priorities into our programs, I am requesting that you organize your Local Working Group meeting soon so that the District Conservationist can forward the ranking priority and comments to their Area Conservationist as soon as possible but no later than **October 6, 2025**. This meeting is considered a public meeting and must follow State open door laws, the same requirements of regular SWCD Board Meetings. The Local Working Group announcement should include information about the format of the

meeting so members of the public may participate in whatever format is used. For 2025 programs if a non-contact form of communication is used:

- The public meeting announcement shall include this information ensuring any interested members of the public will be included in email or other communication if they contact the SWCD in advance of the meeting deadline.
- At a minimum a phone/virtual meeting should occur to discuss the process and importance of the resource concern evaluation.

Local Working Groups should consist of representatives who are able to provide input into the wide range of natural resource and agricultural concerns for the county. NRCS policy outlines that at a minimum, the following individuals should be invited to participate:

- Member(s) of the SWCD board
- NRCS designated conservationist
- Agricultural producers representing the variety of crops and livestock operations in the county, including but not limited to commodity crop producers, specialty crop producers, organic producers, confined animal facility producers, pastured livestock producers, etc. These individuals are not required to have conservation expertise.
- Non-industrial private forest landowners
- Member(s) of the County Farm Service Agency (FSA) Committee
- Cooperative Extension (board members or managers)
- Other Federal and State government representatives and other professionals representing relevant agricultural and conservation interests such as:
  - Indiana Department of Natural Resources – Division of Fish and Wildlife
  - Indiana Department of Natural Resources – Division of Forestry
  - Indiana State Department of Agriculture
  - Indiana Department of Environmental Management – Watershed Specialists
  - Private contractors and consultants
  - Non-government organizations (livestock groups, commodity groups, not-for-profit groups, etc.)

Also consider inviting:

- FSA County Executive Director or designee
- US Fish & Wildlife Service Biologists
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- The Environmental Protection Agency
- State or local elected or appointed officials
- Local drinking water/Source Water Protection Area managers
- Individuals with experience in natural resource conservation subjects specific to historically underserved groups and individuals (i.e. minorities, women, economically and socially disadvantaged, etc.)

This year we are asking the Local Working Groups to discuss how well Indiana's current technical information and programs address the local resource concerns. To assist in relaying this information to the Indiana State Technical Committee, please complete the attached survey to provide your input from the Local Working Group meeting.

I am attaching a comprehensive list of identified resource concerns in Indiana to assist with your discussions, and to assist in prioritizing your top 10 local resource concerns for the local portion of all NRCS Conservation Programs ranking.

I will be instructing the District Conservationists to provide a list of those invited attendees, recommendations, and meeting minutes of the Local Working Group meeting to the NRCS SharePoint by October 6, 2025.

Thank you for your efforts to lead conservation in your county.

**DAMARYS MORTENSON**

*State Conservationist*

Attachment B - LWG Sample Meeting Agenda

Attachment C - LWG Survey

Attachment D - Area Summary of Resource Concern

Attachment E - Resource Concern Categories

Attachment F - STC Letter on Local Working Group to ISTC