National Association of State Conservation Agencies
In Completion of Requirements
Of
Contribution Agreement Number 68-3S75-5-105

<u>Final Report</u>
On the
Evaluation of the Nation's Conservation Delivery System
<u>Phase Two</u>

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To

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National Association of State Conservation Agencies
Contribution Agreement Number 68-3S75-5-105
Final Report
Evaluation of the Nation's Conservation Delivery System
Phase Two

Executive Summary

After hosting two regional listening sessions in mid-2005 in Ohio and Utah to obtain input from interested parties as part of a project to evaluate the nation's conservation delivery system, the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) conducted an extensive program of outreach and state and local follow-up under a second phase of the project. This continuing project is a partnership initiative by NASCA and the US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, to determine how to improve the conservation delivery system, making it more effective and efficient in achieving results in conserving our natural resources and serving our nation's citizens.

The purpose of a second phase was to follow-up on four key areas for improvement that emerged from the two listening sessions, including ***improved local decision-making and added flexibility***, ***streamlined and simplified programs***, ***reduced delays and inconsistencies***, and ***improved use of personnel and technology***. NASCA also identified the need for further work to solicit input from interests that were under-represented at the listening sessions, and conducted outreach to these groups under the second phase, including tribes, multi-cultural interests, women landowners and operators, wildlife managers, and service non-recipients, as well as private sector technical service providers. NASCA conducted additional work with groups and individuals representing these interests, and with states and national partners, to develop more fully recommendations from the listening sessions into more detailed final recommendations and action steps by May 2006.

Phase Two reinforced the four general areas of improvement identified in Phase One, with these re-emerging with additional support and detail. Phase two outreach also added further value to the project's findings by including a more diverse perspective on recommendations, and by providing specific examples of how various partnerships are working to overcome shortcomings and improve delivery of conservation services to a more diverse customer base and local community.

NASCA concluded the second phase of the project with a national conference at which it presented findings and recommendations via a series of panel discussions involving many partners and interests to whom NASCA had reached out, and at which attendees developed specific action steps to assist implementation of recommendations supported by those in attendance. NASCA consolidated and reported all information collected from the second phase into a final report.

Phase two findings indicated strong and diverse support for improved flexibility in local decision-making, accommodating regional and geographical differences, providing local decision-makers with more direct access to funding and greater input to program development, more comprehensive conservation planning, streamlined and simplified programs and procedures, greater outreach to potential customers considering changing land ownership trends and diversity, improved participation by private sector and other non-governmental organizations in delivering conservation services, improved training of all delivery system personnel, application of new and existing technology to aid in communicating with and informing different potential customer groups, and other recommendations. The national conference attendees further developed a number of action steps that can assist in implementation of strongly supported recommendations.

NASCA plans further work to secure NASCA membership and partnership concurrence on the recommendations received and on the best approach to implement recommended improvements to the conservation delivery system. NASCA will track improvements implemented, and will continue to communicate with new and traditional partners to maintain progress.

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Background

During 2004 and 2005, the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) entered into two contribution agreements with the US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to conduct an evaluation of the national conservation delivery system. This two-phase project is a partnership initiative to determine how to improve the conservation delivery system, making it more effective and efficient in achieving results in conserving our natural resources and serving the needs of our citizens.

The first phase of the project was devoted to collecting information and input from a wide array of sources and interests regarding suggested improvements to the conservation delivery system. The results of Phase One were reported by NASCA in a Final Report on the Evaluation of the Nation's Conservation Delivery System, November 18, 2005, delivered to NRCS in completion of requirements of Contribution Agreement Number 68-3A75-4-206. That report summarized the findings and input from two regional listening sessions held in 2005, and identified further work needed to build out details of recommended actions and to reach out to interests who were under-represented at the listening sessions.

From more than twenty prioritized recommendations developed by attendees a number of key areas for needed improvement emerged from the two listening sessions. These were summarized in four general categories of recommendations to organize efforts at further and more detailed development:

1. Improve flexibility and local decision-making to advance locally-led as a means of accommodating regional and local differences and priorities;

2. Simplify and streamline the delivery process, and make it more "user friendly" to improve participation;

3. Reduce delays and inconsistencies in programs and agencies that slow the process and impede participation; and,

4. Better apply technology and human resources in staffing, distribution and training, and improve use of the private sector, to increase capacity to properly deliver conservation services.

The report's executive summary is included here as **Appendix A**. The reader is encouraged to review the full text of the Phase One report, available on the NASCA website, www.NASCAnet.org. These categories and their associated recommendations served as a foundation for further work under the project's second phase.

Approach and Design of Phase Two

The second agreement (Contribution Agreement Number 68-3S75-5-105) continued progress under the evaluation project, covering a period from September 2005 through May 2006. NASCA conducted the Phase Two effort as a continuation of the evaluation process, to build on the recommendations of the two listening sessions. The primary task for NASCA under Phase Two was to develop specific actions that can be taken to implement the Phase One recommendations to achieve the desired improvements, and to conduct extensive outreach to interests and geographic areas under-represented in Phase One to obtain needed perspectives and input.

Under Phase Two, NASCA focused on the following sources of follow-up and outreach:

- State NASCA member follow-up within states (including some areas originally under-represented), using focus group meetings, surveys, and workshops;

- NASCA outreach to added interest groups (under-represented, new partners) at the national, regional and state level; and,

- NASCA consultation with traditional partnering organizations (e.g., NRCS, NACD, NASDA).

Phase Two was also designed to include a strategy for action to assure that the work product of this effort by NASCA and NRCS is used to improve the conservation delivery system. NASCA will apply a “modular” approach in dealing with recommendations for various conservation organizations. For example, what must NASCA do to help member state conservation agencies increase their ability to help implement solutions? What should conservation districts and local partners do to efficiently implement locally-led and to take advantage of greater flexibilities? What can federal, state and local agencies do to support local decision-making and to make the delivery system more streamlined and user-friendly? What roles should new partners play?

To that end, Phase Two culminated in a national conference in April 2006, to pave the way for implementation of recommendations to improve the conservation delivery system, and to outline a shared vision for conservation in the future, constructed around recommendations received during the project (see page 11).

NASCA has prepared this report to include all input and recommendations received during the project’s second phase, to share reports and analyses about specific outreach efforts, and to describe future actions planned and underway by NASCA to move ahead, together with new and traditional partners, to implement well-supported and meaningful improvements to the conservation delivery system.

Outreach Activities

As mentioned above, NASCA conducted extensive outreach as part of the Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project. After initially seeking input during Phase One on how to develop the project and how to attract participation by a wide variety of organizations, NASCA then conducted outreach under Phase Two to interests specifically identified as under-represented at Phase One listening sessions. Outreach activities for both phases are summarized below, together with lead NASCA representatives and key contact persons for the organizations involved.

Phase One

January 2005

NASCA **External Advisory Group** meeting, Washington DC – Jake Jacobson, Jim Cox, David Vogel

June 2005

Columbus, **Ohio** listening session – Gordon Wenk, David Hanselmann, Jim Cox, David Vogel

July 2005

Park City, **Utah** listening session – Gordon Wenk, Jake Jacobson, Jim Cox, David Vogel

September 2005

National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) Annual Conference, Cooperstown NY – David Vogel; contact Charlie Ingram, NASDA

October 2005

NASCA **External Advisory Group** meeting, Washington DC – David Hanselmann, Jim Cox, David Vogel

Phase Two

November 2005

The NASCA Phase One Report identified under-represented interests from Phase One listening sessions – tribes, service non-recipients, and private sector Technical Services Providers. The report also noted certain under-represented geographic areas. Phase Two outreach efforts and state follow-up proceeded in eight states to address these interests and geographic areas, together with continued outreach to associations and organizations at the national level.

Nevada State Conservation District Association Annual Meeting Session – Kelly McGowan

Washington State Conservation District Association Annual Meeting Session – Mark Clark, Ray Ledgerwood

December 2005

NASCA session at **Indian Nations Conservation Alliance/Intertribal Agricultural Council Symposium**, Las Vegas, NV – Kelly McGowan, David Vogel; contact Dick Gooby, INCA

January, 2006

Technical Service Provider (TSP) teleconference (Validus) – Jim Cox, David Vogel; contact Earl Dotson, Validus CEO, IA

Georgia State Conservation District Association Annual Meeting Session – David Bennett/Brent Dykes, Jim Cox

Maryland State Conservation District Association Annual Meeting Session – Louise Lawrence, Jim Cox

NACD Annual Convention, Houston TX, partner outreach and updates – Gordon Wenk, Jim Cox, David Vogel

February 2006

Michigan Multi-Cultural and TSP outreach meetings – Gordon Wenk, Jim Cox; contacts Morse Brown, MSU, Juan Marinez, MSU, Steve Davis, MI State Conservation Engineer, Richard Hoddrup, Mendon Prairie Associates, MI, Eric Rupprecht, Wilcox Professional Services, MI

TSP (Validus) meeting, Raleigh NC – Jim Cox, David Vogel; contacts Earl Dotson, Validus CEO, Dennis Pate, Validus, IA

South Dakota State Conservation District Association Focus Group/Leadership Session – Pete Jahraus, David Vogel; contact Angela Ehlers, SDACD

Teleconference with Jerry Thompson, NRCS, WI (tribal issues) – Jim Cox, David Vogel

Teleconference with Mike Tenebaum, Gun Lake tribe, MI – Jim Cox, David Vogel

Maryland Mid-Atlantic CCA Survey – Maryland State Soil Conservation Committee, Louise Lawrence

March 2006

Iowa Focus Group sessions (2) with women landowners and operators; meeting with study group on absentee landowners – Paul Valin, David Vogel; contacts Gina Kraus, NRCS , Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen, NRCS State Outreach Coordinator, Rick Tafoya, M&M Divide RC&D, Tom Buman, Agren, Inc.

West Virginia State Conservation Leadership Session – Carolyn Hefner, David Vogel

North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference NASCA Session, Columbus, OH – David Vogel; contact Ron Helinski, Wildlife Management Institute

<u>State Focus Groups and Workshops</u>

As a part of Phase Two outreach and follow-up activities described above, NASCA prepared reports on state focus groups, workshops and annual meeting sessions held in eight states (Nevada, Washington, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, South Dakota, Iowa, and West Virginia).

State conservation district association annual meeting sessions were held in four of these and provided local input from traditional conservation partners in different geographic regions. A summary of the results of these four meetings is included in **Appendix B**.

State focus groups and workshops in four other states allowed an expanded sharing of information about the project, reaching state and local audiences otherwise unavailable to participate in the previous regional listening sessions. Through these state sessions hosted by state conservation agencies, NASCA not only obtained additional input regarding recommendations already received but gained added value through the introduction of new ideas and examples of successful local and state models for improving the delivery system.

In addition to verifying shared perspectives of traditional local partners and strengthening identification of regional differences, state focus groups played a critical role in establishing contact with a number of other interests, and in learning about innovative activities going on at the state and local level under local leadership. These include local initiatives to network and educate women landowners and operators, to improve coordination of local conservation staff with state forestry and state wildlife program managers, and to develop new tools to outreach to absentee landowners.

For example, a number of informative interviews resulted from NASCA evaluation in Michigan. These included input on multi-cultural issues and experiences with application of technical services providers. An example of innovative work to make additional resources available to potential customers is the program highlighted by interviewees in Michigan, the Michigan Food and Farming Systems (MIFFS) program, and its work to bring together farmers and their communities, and to identify farmer issues, resources and marketing opportunities.

Other examples and more detailed information about focus groups in South Dakota, Iowa and West Virginia are included in **Appendices C - E**. These appendices include an analysis section describing how results of the state focus groups compare to findings from Phase One and from other groups.

National Organizations

Under Phase Two, NASCA reached out at the national level to both traditional and new interests. NASCA continued to consult with the project's External Advisory Group (details on this group are provided in the Phase One final report) to obtain input on the project's planning and progress, and to establish contact with affiliated national organizations for further work.

NASCA made contact with other national interests, such as tribal representatives, technical service provider consultants, and leadership of traditional conservation partners, to share information about the project and obtain added input. These included project briefings, presentations, and discussion sessions.

As a result of these activities, NASCA received input and suggestions from representatives of organizations such as NRCS, National Association of Conservation Districts, National Conservation District Employees Association, National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, the Intertribal Agriculture Council, Indian Nations Conservation Alliance, U.S. Landcare, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Wildlife Management Institute, American Farm Bureau Federation, USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, and private businesses delivering conservation consulting services in multiple states.

Through contact with organizations at the national level, and by communication with a number of experienced individuals around the country, NASCA was able to compile information and perspectives not routinely included in past evaluations of this type. For example, outreach to tribal organizations and affiliated individuals has provided input on improvements to the delivery system that are, at the same time, unique to complex tribal government relationships and shared with other potential customer groups now under-served.

In another example, NASCA outreach to private sector technical service providers has contributed to an assessment of that process from the perspective of consultants doing varied technical work in multiple states in cooperation with federal, state and local conservation agencies. Further information and input related to technical service providers was gathered through a survey conducted by the Maryland State Soil Conservation Committee of consultants representing the Mid-Atlantic Certified Crop Advisors.

Reports on a number of these outreach activities are included in **Appendices F, G and H**.

National Conference and Workshop

On April 11-12, 2006, NASCA hosted a national conference in Louisville, Kentucky, to pull together the results of phases one and two, and to invite partners and interested parties to participate in the development of actions to implement recommendations to improve the conservation delivery system. NASCA invited to this working conference persons and organizations taking part in Phase One, groups to whom NASCA had reached out under Phase Two, and those who wished to present *their ideas* about how to institute needed delivery system improvements in an effective and efficient manner.

The purpose of the two half-day conference and workshop was to produce specific action steps to implement recommendations that enjoy wide support among the diverse attending interest groups. The meeting was billed as a *conference and workshop* because attendees had the opportunity to both listen to diverse interests *and* to become active participants in developing detailed action steps for implementation.

Using the recommendations resulting from phases one and two, workshop attendees developed ***strategic priorities*** – those recommendations that panel discussions revealed to enjoy strong support for moving ahead – and ***action steps*** – those actions attendees identified to proceed with implementation of recommended improvements. This conference and workshop concluded the data collection phase of the project.

Text from the report on the national conference and workshop is included in **Appendix I**. The reader is encouraged to review the full document and its appendices by visiting the NASCA website.

Phase Two Findings Summary

As NASCA conducted follow-up and outreach activities under Phase Two, several important points emerged. First, it is important to note that the four primary areas of recommended improvements to the conservation delivery system identified in Phase One (as presented on page 5) retained their key importance throughout the Phase Two process. Following considerable outreach to and involvement by many diverse interests, these most significant areas for improvement re-emerged in the recommendations most supported under Phase Two.

For purposes of organizing the NASCA conference and workshop (described above), and for future action, two of these four categories were combined to produce ***three overall categories***:

1. Improve flexibility and local decision-making to advance locally-led as a means of accommodating regional and local differences and priorities;

2. (*Combined*) Simplify and streamline the delivery process, and make it more "user friendly" to improve participation, and reduce delays and inconsistencies in programs and agencies that slow the process and impede participation; and,

3. Better apply technology and human resources in staffing, distribution and training, and improve use of the private sector, to increase capacity to properly deliver conservation services.

Second, there are many suggested improvements to the delivery system that appear to ***enjoy common support*** among different geographic regions and different interest groups. State focus groups and state association annual meetings showed ***strong reinforcement*** of findings of Phase One listening sessions. Many varied groups shared common objectives with respect to some, but not all, of the recommendations. Several of these are discussed in the analysis sections of the appendices. Many are summarized below.

Third, NASCA found that, under Phase Two outreach, participating interest groups ***added value*** to earlier recommendations by giving additional perspectives, and by providing examples of ongoing work at the local and state level to resolve shortcomings and improve local delivery. This combination of strong reinforcement and added value is the most substantial result of Phase Two. Examples follow along the lines of these three general categories.

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<u>Category One</u> - Improve flexibility and local decision-making to advance locally-led as a means of accommodating regional and local differences and priorities.

Attendees strongly indicated that ***strengthening local decision-making*** would have important benefits, including the strengthening of local participation (via local working groups and other local stakeholder/participant venues). Phase Two participants also agreed that ***added flexibility*** should accompany improved local decision-making, making conservation programs less complex to navigate and more adaptive to meeting varied local needs.

In every location, participants acknowledged the need to respect ***regional (or geographic) differences*** – differences in customers to be served, and differences in the land itself. However, this was not considered a stumbling block to more effective delivery. As Phase One concluded, outreach activities helped to refine the idea that concerns about regional differences could be addressed through improved local decision-making, added flexibility, simplified and more adaptive programs, and greater funding certainty and application.

Because local decision-making and flexibility is dependent on local resources, many participants recommended that local conservation agencies and partners obtain ***more direct access to funding***, such as a ***base level*** of funding delivered to the local level, to directly address customers' needs rather than trying in all cases to fit customers into specific and complicated programs. Such direct base funding could be used by local districts for administrative and technical staff, and as a basis for increasing local participation and leadership. Attendees also suggested diversifying funding sources for local programs, by expanding beyond agricultural programs to consider Clean Water Act s.319 (non-point source water quality) programs, stormwater management, local solid waste programs, erosion and sediment control, and others.

All focus groups and workshops in Phase Two acknowledged the importance of ***maintaining and improving accountability mechanisms***, such as the need for reasonable and accurate accountability for funding spent and results achieved, to build credibility and to help sustain funding. Attendees also often stated the need for added local resources to track and measure success of conservation projects and services provided at the local level.

<u>Category Two</u> - Simplify and streamline the delivery process, and make it more "user friendly" to improve participation, and reduce delays and inconsistencies in programs and agencies that slow the process and impede participation.

It was everywhere agreed that the delivery system should emphasize a "***resource-driven***" approach, as opposed to today's "program-driven" approach, and that local staff can have greater success delivering services and benefits known to be needed by local producers and landowners without reference to rigid and complex programs. At the same time, participants strongly indicated that the delivery system should promote ***more comprehensive conservation planning***, whether as an educational tool to producers, as a stepping stone to more efficient practice planning, or as a method to capture local priority resource needs. Attendees were quick to point out that conservation planning requires added resources and training, and that it requires a certain amount of "front-loading" of funding.

Phase Two participants also discussed the implications of today's trends in ***changing land ownership***, age demographics, ethnicities, and gender, as well as landowner transition issues, in relation to peoples' participation in conservation. For example, a large percentage of land in many states is now owned (and often operated) by women and minority ethnic landowners. Many of these have assumed a role as decision-maker for their land for the first time. Much land is now owned by absentee landowners. These "new" customers appear to have many needs in common, and state focus groups and other outreach efforts identified some of these for further development of recommendations.

For example, Phase One listening sessions had identified the need to provide ***better information to potential applicants*** to make conservation programs and services more user-friendly. Outreach activities under Phase Two further identified that, for many women and ethnic groups, better information is a basic and critical need that will have a significant impact on their access to and participation in conservation programs. Phase Two found that ***new methods of communication and presentation*** are needed to reach these potential customers. Suggested methods included web-based tools, tutorials, various groups' network newsletters, direct mailings, welcome wagon concepts, and telephone consultations, including multi-lingual communication – all of which would help reach these potential customers.

The need for better communication was strongly endorsed by women's groups and networks at work in Iowa (and other states) to educate women landowners and increase their access to and participation in conservation programs. Further, another Iowa project is studying absentee landowners and operators, to help design better ways to identify, reach and involve them in conservation decisions for their land. It was noted that many of these groups – whether women, minority groups, or absentee landowners – are in need of ***basic information*** about the opportunities for conservation on their lands. Many of these landowners and operators are ***at a starting point*** in their consideration of conservation, and the system must be patient and adaptive in reaching out to them. NASCA received some very good ideas about use of modern communication technology, such as DVDs, IPODs and computer simulations, to aid in reaching these groups and presenting basic conservation messages in different manners (e.g., verbally, visual).

NASCA identified in Phase One a need to outreach to tribal representatives, to obtain input relating to ***delivery of conservation services on tribal lands***. Through participation in a national tribal conference, and via interviews, NASCA obtained some very insightful input on complex tribal issues. NASCA found that tribal leaders share with other, non-tribal local conservation-minded individuals a desire for self-determination and greater local leadership in conservation. Tribal interests also suggested a greater emphasis on flexibility and simplification of programs, so they may be adapted to meet local needs as identified by experienced tribal leaders.

Tribal issues with the delivery system were strongly focused on cultural aspects, and what appears to be a lack of a well-established tribal infrastructure within which to promote and deliver conservation services. Other issues included tribal land use (leased lands, forestlands, idle lands, fragmentation, etc.), access to traditional public agency services and resources, and incorporation of tribal economic benefit together with conservation. Tribal governments are highly varied with respect to familiarity with conservation agencies and programs; many are ***only starting to interact*** with the conservation delivery system.

It should be pointed out that tribal issues are very complex due to a number of factors unique to tribal sovereignty and tribal relations with the federal government. However, some of the tribal concerns relating to conservation program eligibility, technical standards, and traditional Indian practices can be addressed through this greater simplification, flexibility and local decision-making emphasis. It should also be noted that these and other recommendations that foster improved local leadership and decision-making in conservation should provide mutual benefits to tribal and non-tribal lands alike. A report on the tribal conference and an analysis of findings is included as **Appendix F**.

<u>Category Three</u> - Better apply technology and human resources in staffing, distribution and training, and improve use of the private sector, to increase capacity to properly deliver conservation services.

Participants in Phase One identified an apparent conflict in the effectiveness of how the delivery system employs the ***private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as Technical Service Providers (TSPs)*** or under contribution agreements. Phase One included recommendations to ***both*** improve the use of TSPs ***and*** eliminate the provisions for TSPs. Because of the importance of these private organizations and businesses in expanding the capacity of delivery to landowners and producers, NASCA attempted to obtain added input to resolve this conflict in Phase One recommendations. NASCA also reached out to other non-governmental organizations for input.

Findings from Phase Two indicate that most participants prefer that the delivery system make more effective use of non-governmental service providers (TSPs and NGOs), as well as local and state agencies (via contribution agreements). Phase Two clarified that TSPs and NGOs should be used in the delivery system ***where it makes sense***, depending on their capabilities and availability, and where their proper role can be established in conjunction with available public sector conservation agency resources. Attendees also emphasized that a greater private/NGO role in delivering conservation services must be ***balanced*** with increased opportunity for local conservation districts to acquire and maintain their own technical staff to meet demands on the local district. Participants noted that this will require greater certainty and consistency in funding for these provisions, a more cost-effective workload assignment process (e.g., batching certain TSP work, finding ways to efficiently utilize smaller, local TSPs), reduced paperwork, and a reduced match burden on state and local partnering agencies under contribution agreements.

NASCA obtained valuable input from private sector TSPs performing varied work in multiple states, through interviews, meetings and their participation in the national conference and workshop. Although their perspective is but one part of the TSP picture (larger, multi-state operations, as opposed to small local consulting businesses), their input does demonstrate areas where improvements are needed and perhaps some model approaches to achieve improvements. A report of Technical Service Provider findings is included as **Appendix G**.

Another group of NGOs and public agencies that provide an increasing level of conservation services to landowners are ***wildlife managers***. These groups participate as TSPs, as government agencies providing services via contribution agreements, or independently outside of public conservation programs. Many representatives of these groups share similar concerns with other public and private sector interests adapting to participate in the conservation delivery system. These concerns include a desire for easier access to becoming part of the delivery system, greater certainty and long-term reliability of funding for contribution agreements and TSP funding, reduction in partner match requirement for contribution agreements, fewer paperwork requirements, more simple and adaptable programs, improved capacity to deliver information to potential customers, and better communication with lead public conservation agencies.

By participating in the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference and inviting wildlife representatives to participate, in turn, in the NASCA conference and workshop, NASCA received a number of good ideas for how the delivery system may improve the application of these groups. Examples include co-location of technical staff to provide a more coordinated point of service delivery, more effective and reliable use of contribution agreement funding, and a greater role for these groups in promoting more comprehensive conservation planning.

These groups see their role expanding in marketing to private landowners the opportunities for wildlife management options in conservation programs. It was noted that many wildlife organizations appear to be ***in transition*** – adapting from public lands management to deal with the more complex relationships required to provide services to private landowners and managers. This transition requires a shift in attitudes and expertise in some cases about how to communicate with owners, how to gain access through the conservation delivery system, how to understand more complicated landowner needs, and how to become a partner in delivering wildlife-related information and services to private landowners. A report on the national wildlife conference session is included as **Appendix H**.

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In general, NASCA believes that Phase Two outreach provided strong reinforcement to Phase One recommendations, and gave considerable added value through presentation of both unique and shared perspectives, local success stories, and suggested model approaches to dealing with these recommended improvements.

Further Actions

At this point in the process, many involved organizations share interest (and would share benefits) in the implementation of recommendations and action steps described above and in attachments to this report. All parties, of course, are encouraged to proceed at their level of interest with implementation of any recommendations that apply to their agency or group (as is NASCA). However, many recommended actions will rely on the cooperative and coordinated efforts of multiple partners, indicating a need for active consultation among partners and varied interests in developing the best approach by which to proceed.

To these ends, and based on the results of the project's two phases of information collection, NASCA will conduct the following further actions as a means of proceeding with implementation of recommended improvements to the conservation delivery system:

- NASCA will secure its membership's concurrence on recommendations to endorse for action in general, and on specific actions to be taken directly by NASCA related to its member state conservation agencies. Citing one of the project's recommended actions, for example, this could include actions to be taken by NASCA in support of state conservation agencies' role in assisting local conservation partnerships with improving local decision-making and flexibility. Another example could include actions to assist in the development of local and state outreach programs to reach under-served segments of local communities. This membership concurrence process will begin with distribution of this final report to members, and will be completed at the NASCA Annual Business Meeting in September 2006.

- NASCA will prepare a plan to consult and coordinate with partners about recommendations and about the best approach to implementation, to begin in or before September, 2006. As part of this task, NASCA will "modularize" recommendations and communicate to partners about their opportunities to contribute to implementation of these improvements. NASCA will also endeavor to participate in partners' professional and business meetings, to encourage dialogue about cooperative implementation approaches.

- NASCA will track implementation actions taken by all involved parties regarding recommended improvements compiled under this project, and will report on progress to partners and interested organizations and individuals.

NASCA work on these tasks has been incorporated into a work plan for a third contribution agreement with NRCS, for Phase Three of the Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project – ***Implementation and Tracking***. Phase Three sets in motion an implementation process and schedule for an ongoing and continual effort to improve delivery of conservation services.

Acknowledgements

The activities and work-products of Phase Two of the Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project were made possible in part by a contribution agreement between NASCA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (Contribution Agreement Number 68-3S75-5-105). NASCA appreciates the cooperation and assistance offered by NRCS leadership and staff during this project.

NASCA thanks member state conservation agencies that provided leadership in hosting state focus groups, workshops and surveys to obtain additional perspectives and input to the delivery system evaluation process. NASCA also thanks those individuals and organizations that participated in the project's two phases, and who took the time and effort to play an active role in identifying today's issues and determining the proper course of action to take in preparing recommended improvements to the conservation delivery system. Lastly, NASCA thanks the many individuals who took personal interest to help with outreach to the varied interests contacted during the project.

List of Appendices

Appendix A
Executive Summary
***from* NASCA Final Report on the Evaluation of the Nation's Conservation Delivery System (Phase One), November 18, 2005**

The National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) hosted two regional meetings to obtain input from interested parties as part of a NASCA effort to evaluate the nation's conservation delivery system. This project, performed by NASCA under a Contribution Agreement with US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, is a partnership initiative to determine how to improve the conservation delivery system, making it more effective and efficient in achieving results in conserving our natural resources and serving our nation's citizens.

NASCA sought participation by broad national interest groups in listening sessions in Ohio and Utah. Together, 137 invitees participated in the listening sessions, representing a wide range of interests including public sector service providers, local conservation district and local government officials, state and federal agencies, local conservation district and other agency staff, private landowners, agricultural producers, agricultural and commodity organizations, private sector service providers, and non-governmental organizations.

From more than twenty prioritized recommendations, a number of key areas for needed improvement emerged from the two listening sessions. These can be summarized in four categories of recommendations that warrant further and more detailed development. First is to improve flexibility and local decision-making to advance locally-led as a means of accommodating regional and local differences and priorities. Second is to simplify and streamline the delivery process, and make it more "user friendly" to improve participation. The third is to reduce delays and inconsistencies in programs and agencies that slow the process and impede participation. The final area is to better apply technology and human resources in staffing, distribution and training, and improve use of the private sector, to increase capacity to properly deliver conservation services.

Listening sessions also pointed out the need for further work to solicit input from interests that were under-represented at the sessions. NASCA plans additional action to outreach to these groups, such as private sector technical service providers, tribes, and service non-recipients. NASCA also plans additional work within states, and in consultation with partners, together with outreach, to continue to develop recommendations from the listening sessions into more detailed final recommendations by May 2006 for action to improve the conservation delivery system.

Appendix B
State Annual Meeting Workshops

In November 2005 and January 2006, four states (Nevada, Washington, Georgia and Maryland) included conservation delivery system project sessions as part of their state conservation district association annual meetings. At these state sessions, attendees were given a brief overview of the NASCA project, and were invited to describe their issues and ideas on how to improve the delivery system. These state sessions were held in part to allow sharing of information about the project in geographic areas that NASCA determined should receive added coverage.

The format for these state annual meeting sessions varied according to time available for this addition to agendas. Sessions in Nevada and Georgia were brief presentations and sharing of information with state partnerships, with limited opportunity for formal discussion. Sessions in Washington and Maryland included more formal discussions, and produced written summaries, excerpts of which are included below to reveal state response and highest priority actions recommended.

Primary points of interest from reports of the Maryland and Washington sessions included:

Maryland –
1. Advance locally-led
    - Acquire and focus additional local resources and staff.
2. Reduce delays in service delivery
    - Provide full funding and staffing.
    - Place added technical assistance in the field.
3. Simplify and streamline programs and procedures
    - Make computer programs facilitate application information transfer among conservation programs.
4. Improve application of human resources
    - Improve coordination between NRCS and FSA, making delivery more seamless.

Washington –
1. Strengthen local decision-making
    - Empower the state level of federal agencies to be more responsive to local input and local priorities (e.g., use the Local Working Group model for state priorities.
    - Improve communication to clients about what the programs are about.
    - Employ professional facilitators to help local stakeholder groups stay focused and on track.

Appendix B *continued*

- Establish clear program parameters and priorities.
- Experiment with the concept of a block grant to a region (group of CDs) within a state - without strings - to prioritize what needs to be done on the ground; see what protocol and processes occur by lifting constraints.

2. Make conservation more “resource-driven” rather than “program-driven”
   - Provide adequate technical assistance to local districts and related local authority to decide priorities.
   - Make a central state-wide grants expertise resource available to districts.
   - Provide a block grant program to an area – define by a natural resource issue.
   - Plan and distribute funding based on resource inventories and priorities.
   - Make programs available to match the priorities brought forward.

3. Simplify and streamline programs
   - Create standard application for programs and funding sources.
   - Create standard report and data collection format.
   - Speak plain English!
   - Assure timely agency responses to issues, questions, needs.
   - Expand districts’ role to provide service for land managers associated with regulatory and permitting issues.
   - Play a role in the development of a “blanket permit process”.
   - Share concepts and technical expertise among districts.

4. Expand the role of local districts
   - Provide funding to districts funding that is not tied to a specific program.
   - Raise the state and county awareness of the importance of conservation work by districts.
   - Make [producer] access to TSP easier.
   - Change authorities to allow districts to charge for services.
   - Recognize districts as professionals in delivering conservation services.
   - Make better use of technology sharing (e.g., farmer to farmer network, farmer-district, etc.).
   - Create a network on a regional scale for technology transfer and networking.

Appendix C
South Dakota Focus Group Report

South Dakota CDS Session Summary
February 15, 2006

Background

At two national listening sessions in 2005, the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) collected input from many interests as part of a Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project. This cooperative project between NASCA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) produced recommendations that dealt with improvements to all aspects of the nation's conservation delivery system and service delivery, including local leadership, streamlining programs, reducing delays, and improving our use of technology and personnel resources.

In 2006, under a Phase Two agreement with NRCS, NASCA is seeking additional input on delivery system issues from customers and potential customers (including those who may not now participate in conservation programs and services), from conservation service providers in both the public and private sector, and from others interested in improving the conservation delivery system.

A number of interest groups were under-represented at the two listening sessions, and NASCA is conducting additional outreach to capture input from any omitted groups. Also, additional details are needed regarding many of the recommendations outlined under Phase One. To that end, NASCA is sponsoring and participating in State Focus Groups and project workshops linked to state association annual meetings in a number of states, to help identify and clarify issues at the state and local level, to build on Phase One recommendations, to outreach to other interests, to incorporate geographic differences, and to work toward shared support for recommended solutions that will make the conservation delivery system more effective and efficient.

SDACD Leadership Conference

On Wednesday, February 15, 2006, South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts (SDACD) held a Conservation Delivery System session at its 2006 SDACD Leadership Conference at Oacoma, SD. Attendees were invited to participate in discussions about the following delivery system issues (focusing on highlighted issues):

- **Strengthen local decision-making**
- **Making conservation more "resource-driven" rather than "program-driven"**
- **Overcome staffing inadequacies**

Appendix C *continued*

- Expand the role of local districts
- Simplify and streamline programs
- Reduce delays and inconsistencies
- Create a more "user-friendly" process
- Focus adequate resources in the field
- Ensure adequate funding

Attendees made the following comments and recommendations (by category) in response to being asked questions about the delivery system. Following the comment summary is an analysis of findings at this listening session as they relate to the NASCA Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project.

Category One: Strengthen local decision-making

Attendees were asked to comment on aspects of delivery now subject to decision-making locally, and on what additional decision-making authority and responsibility they wish to obtain locally. Attendees were also asked what resources and training they will need to support added local decision-making, what should be the proper role for federal and state conservation agencies in support of local decision-making process, and how they would balance national and state resource priorities with local priorities and decisions.

In conjunction with improved local decision-making, attendees were asked how they would achieve the required local accountability (e.g., record-keeping, prioritizing, ranking, public input, fairness, outreach), and how they would strengthen the role of local working groups and stakeholder groups to support local decision-making.

Comments:

- More funding to the local level is needed.
- There are problems getting local producers involved - need more information and education delivered at the local level (e.g., meetings that everyone can attend).
- To improve information and participation, have added meetings along with another event (e.g., stock show).
- Need more direct local access to the money, rather than through programs; district needs access to funds available to help producer do what he/she wants or needs.
- EQIP uses ranking board (Local Working Group) to get local involvement; this tool should be applied to other programs.
- Local district board of supervisors needs to have greater flexibility to address individual local needs, and to accommodate regional differences.

Appendix C *continued*

- No funds are available for certain practices (e.g., rejuvenating shelterbelts); should be a system set up to allocate a base level of funding to locals, and then each board can set criteria to work with.
- Funding for a base-program needs to be available for those who don't qualify for specific programs.
- Ranking is done locally, but decisions are often made outside (state/federal), other than locally; need more local input and decision-making.
- CRP, EQIP and other programs need simpler forms, generating less paperwork for federal and local staff.
- Have gone through process several times trying to get several agencies to accept same forms (single application); it would be simpler in the long run but is hard to do.
- Time is wasted when local conservationist spends a lot of time working on programs (e.g., EQIP package), when producer does not in the end qualify or does not receive funding.
- How long does it take to get EQIP payments?
- Need to better coordinate efforts when producer does not qualify for EQIP but does qualify for emergency programs.
- If programs are offered they need to be funded on a local level, not just regional or state level.
- Great Plains Conservation Program was as close to perfect as it could get; need to get back to that.
- What works for one doesn't work for all; what is decided at local level is not always what gets done.
- Great Plains and ACP worked together, and more was accomplished.
- Accountability maybe should stay at the state level rather than the federal level.
- It's hard to get away from the Golden Rule: "He who holds the gold makes the rules." Non-local agency funding brings agency goals and strings attached.
- There are inconsistencies in the programs; they need streamlining.

<u>Category Two</u>: Make conservation more "resource-driven" rather than "program-driven"

Attendees were asked what negative effect today's "program-driven" focus has on delivery of conservation programs, and how they would shift emphasis toward a "resource-driven" approach. They were asked to consider how to employ more comprehensive conservation planning to identify and address resource concerns using available programs, and how they would ensure that local "resource-based" decisions meet the most urgent local resource needs.

Appendix C *continued*

Attendees were asked how they would account for progress in managing natural resources under a "resource-based approach (keeping track of gains, measuring improvement), rather than counting program numbers (plans written, contracts, etc.) as is done today under the "program-driven" approach. They were also asked what added flexibility they would need in order to make available programs work well to meet locally targeted resource needs.

Comments:

- A resource-based mechanism could be simple, and could be initiated locally - which could be a basis of funding.
- Great Plains Conservation Program was good (shelterbelts, grass plantings, grazing paddocks); this type would be a better use of programs and resources.
- Things have changed dramatically in last 10 years; programs jump from one extreme to the other.
- While getting back to true conservation planning is important, the downside of whole-farm planning is when all a producer really needs is a grazing system for livestock near the creek. Then you have tied up a lot of time you didn't need to. Rather, the system should be made easy to use.
- In addition to whole-farm planning, we may need to return to "Bootstraps" philosophy, showing financial as well as environmental benefit as practices are "ramped up" (see attachment, Description: Bootstraps).
- Resource-based approach could produce clear environmental results; refer to water quality goals met for Bad River, SD.

<u>Category Three</u>: Overcome staffing inadequacies

Attendees were asked to identify their most important staffing inadequacies, and their staff training needs. They were asked about their current staff recruitment and training approach.

Attendees were asked how the Technical Service Provider provision has worked in South Dakota, and about how to employ the private sector and non-governmental organizations to assist in getting conservation work done. They were asked how they would expand the resources available to acquire added technical and professional staff (e.g., contribution agreements, local government, state legislature, private funding sources, or grants).

Comments:

- There should be a base level of statewide funding (e.g., for staff); would make more sense than supporting a district by selling tree plantings.
- Need to be able to get involved in other beneficial programs; the more involved district is, the more involved the producers would be, but there isn't enough staff to do everything.

Appendix C *continued*

- Cultural resources requirement causes delays and added costs. If local staff is trained in cultural resources, why aren't they good enough to do the work?
- District supervisors often have trouble drawing a line between district and NRCS staff as to what is done.
- A lot of little tweaking would help the programs; as soon as good programs get going, stumbling blocks come up; supervisors are the ones who need to make themselves heard, by calling or writing their congressman/legislators.
- Paperwork should be reduced; get staff back into the field.
- NRCS uses TSPs in South Dakota, but they are kind of slow in getting things done and don't always do it right.
- How many districts work with local crop consultants? Most crop consultants have no idea what the district plan is about, but it is to the crop consultant's advantage to know.
- Some districts have experience using private subcontractors for 319 grants.
- TSP's don't always know the regulations and plans are not always approved the first time.
- NRCS does not have much of a way to regulate or oversee the job done by TSP's; need some way to make them fit the program.
- Locally controlled funding might help sort out this TSP issue.
- The sheer number of different agencies we need to work with makes it hard to get things done.
- Funding could be distributed locally for administrative and technical staff.
- Need to convince only one person to get adequate local district funding (Governor).

<u>Analysis</u>

The South Dakota leadership expressed many similar concerns to those identified at Phase One listening sessions. The above comments reinforce many similar recommendations related to these three issues. When comparing these to Phase One findings, several strongly shared recommendations emerge.

Attendees believed that ***strengthened local decision-making*** has important benefits, including the strengthening of local working groups (and other local stakeholder/participant venues), increasing participation by producers and landowners, resolving concerns about possible national or other high-level ranking priority setting, and eliminating constant change in programs. Attendees expressed a need to ***obtain more direct access to funding***, such as a base level of funding, to directly address producers' needs rather than trying to fit customers into specific programs and timetables, and to accommodate their unique local issues. Attendees made repeated reference to the ***Great Plains***

Conservation Program, and its flexibility in assisting landowners. Attendees believed that accountability maybe should stay at the state level rather than the federal level, as local decision-making requires a greater local effort to demonstrate fairness, methodology, participation, etc.

South Dakota attendees emphasized that a "***resource-driven***" approach would be an improvement to the current "program-driven" approach, and that local staff would have greater success delivering services and benefits known to be needed by local producers and landowners without reference to varied and complex programs. Attendees suggested that the resource-based approach could be initiated locally and could serve as a basis for more local funding, and that it might be more conducive to measuring results (e.g., Bad River water quality goals). Attendees recognized the need for ***more comprehensive conservation planning***, but ***cautioned*** that full planning often wastes time and resources when a producer may only require a single (e.g., grazing) practice, or where insufficient funds are available in a program to cover a producer's needs. It was suggested that a "bootstrap" process might be beneficial in demonstrating both resource and economic benefits as conservation practices are ramped up on a property.

Staffing inadequacies were also noted as a problem in South Dakota. Attendees recognized the benefits of districts ***participating in more programs and services***, but noted that adequate staffing was not available to do everything. Attendees believed that some concerns about the role of non-governmental organizations as technical service providers, or ***TSPs***,(e.g., application, standards, and ***oversight***) might be resolved via more local controlled funding and decision-making. Attendees expressed a ***need for direct "base" funding*** to local districts for administrative and technical staff, as a basis for increasing local participation and services. Supervisors recognized the need for their action and leadership in obtaining adequate resources.

NASCA believes that the South Dakota leadership session results reinforce many recommendations received during Phase one, and demonstrate widespread support for making suggested improvements in the above areas to the conservation delivery system. Added details were also proposed as to how certain recommendations in these three areas might be achieved (e.g., direct "base" funding to local districts, added flexibility in program decisions and strengthening the role of local working groups).

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

NASCA appreciates the opportunity to participate in South Dakota's 2006 Leadership Conference, and the important input provided by attendees on the

Appendix C *continued*

Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project. Special thanks are extended to Jack Majeres, SDACD President and Angela Ehlers, SDACD Executive Director, for their leadership and cooperation in making this session possible.

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Attachment
South Dakota CDS Session Summary
Description: BOOTSTRAPS

I. Introduction

Bootstraps is a holistic farm/ranch management strategy. The program is based on the idea that a sustainable agricultural enterprise results when good natural resource conservation practices are followed. The “Bootstraps” program began when a group of agricultural producers from south central South Dakota came together in December, 1988 to develop a plan to address their concerns over the future of their operations. The concerns were not only for their individual profitability, but for the welfare of their families and their communities. Together with community leaders, they agreed they had to find a way to assure some kind of continuity in farm/ranch ownership from one generation to the next.

The group decided to create a tool to systematically match family needs with the economic and informational resources already available from local, state and federal agencies. They also agreed that the foundation for any successful farm or ranch operation is its natural resources. And that the most basic economic rule is that no family can remain on the land for long without profit. Also they agreed that none of these efforts could succeed without better family communication and goal setting. The heart of the whole effort is to match up the family and their livestock to the land they possess.

During the development process, the Todd and Mellette County Conservation Districts worked with the South Dakota Department of Agriculture, SD Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Extension Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Rosebud Sioux Tribe, South Dakota State University, South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts, RC&D’s and private Industry. Funding was provided in part by grants from DENR through the Department’s Pollution Prevention Incentives to States and 319 non-point source Information and Education Project Grants from EPA. Additional funding was provided by the Conservation Commission through the Coordinated Soil and Water Conservation Grant Program, Moorman Feeds, Norwest Bank and other private sources.

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II. Program Structure

Each Bootstraps group consists of approximately 15 to 30 farm and ranch families. Participation in Bootstraps provides farmers and ranchers with the tools necessary to manage their operations in a profitable and environmentally sound manner. Each Bootstraps group determines the particular training/skills to be stressed based on their local needs. But all groups receive training in planning for change, goal setting, record keeping, natural resources management (conservation practices), marketing, planning for and surviving drought, financial and natural resource planning, and monitoring.

The program emphasizes that each family's needs are different, and that each family must, as a team, develop its own plan to address its own needs. A six-step approach is used. The first step is to develop an inventory of the financial, livestock, and natural resources of each participating farm and ranch including the skills of the family members. Second, each of the families develops goals and commits them to paper. Third, a long range operational plan is developed to reflect the family goals. The fourth step is to strengthen the skills of family members in areas such as record keeping, computers, communications, marketing, etc.. Fifth, each family's progress is monitored to find out what worked and what didn't. Sixth, re-plan.

All six steps become a continuous process, not a short term workshop. Each step involves not only finding and using the right kind of outside help among the various agencies and service organizations, but the development of an adult education program that enhances each family's own ability to make the best use of the help available. The bootstraps format can be modified to fit any producer's operation whether it is farming or ranching or a combination.

Appendix D
Iowa Focus Group Report

<u>Iowa CDS Session Summary</u>
March 1, 2006

<u>Background</u>

At two national listening sessions in 2005, the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) collected input from many interests as part of a Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project. This cooperative project between NASCA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) produced recommendations that dealt with improvements to all aspects of the nation's conservation delivery system and service delivery, including local leadership, streamlining programs, reducing delays, and improving our use of technology and personnel resources.

In 2006, under a Phase Two agreement with NRCS, NASCA is seeking additional input on delivery system issues from customers and potential customers (including those who may not now participate in conservation programs and services), from conservation service providers in both the public and private sector, and from others interested in improving the conservation delivery system.

A number of interest groups were under-represented at the two listening sessions, and NASCA is conducting additional outreach to capture input from any omitted groups. Also, additional details are needed regarding many of the recommendations outlined under Phase One. To that end, NASCA is sponsoring or is participating in State Focus Groups and project workshops linked to state association annual meetings in a number of states, to help identify and clarify issues at the state and local level, to build on Phase One recommendations, to outreach to other interests, to incorporate geographic differences, and to work toward shared support for recommended solutions that will make the conservation delivery system more effective and efficient.

One under-represented interest group in Phase One is women landowners and operators – either as on-the-farm operators or as off-the-farm "non-operators" - placed into a decision-making position for their land. Also, a number of Phase One recommendations dealt with cultural aspects of service delivery, such as improving the ability of technical staff to approach potential customers in diverse ways. To explore these issues, two sessions (afternoon and evening) were held on March 1, 2006, with women landowners/operators associated with was the Women Land and Legacy℠ (WLL℠) Project in Iowa (see Appendix A). These meetings, held in Ottumwa, Iowa, were intended to help identify and clarify issues of women landowners and operators, and to determine where women landowners/operators share delivery system issues with others, and where they have unique concerns that need to be addressed.

Appendix D *continued*

This summary records the combined results from the two sessions, based on responses by attendees to questions outlined below. Following session notes is an analysis of results as they relate to the NASCA Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project.

Session Notes

1. *Are you a user of the current conservation delivery system? Does today's conservation delivery system achieve effective participation by women landowners and operators in conservation programs?*

   - Yes, I am an Assistant (District) Commissioner.
   - I attend meetings.
   - I participate in CRP, timber land improvement, buffers.
   - I own land and participate in multiple counties; multiple states.
   - When husbands sign-up, wives sign also.
   - Tenant takes care of program sign up and marks the maps, and then contacts (me) the landowner to approve; but I want to learn more about my options for the land; tenants may not have the same conservation ethic as the landowner.
   - The wife does the paper work, has equal knowledge, and worked in farm office.
   - Women help do taxes and paper work.
   - Women became more involved after retirement; now doing work on farm and making decisions.
   - Husband is a District Commissioner.
   - I am not currently very involved, but would like to gain more knowledge. Was somewhat intimidated at (an earlier) informational meeting. I was the only woman, knew others there, but did not have the background being new to farming.
   - I learned the most serving on the local FSA board, as a minority advisor. Husband is a District Commissioner which also helped.
   - I use cost share program for terraces, and follow a conservation plan. I use commodity programs.
   - I've done tree planting working with Pheasants Forever.
   - I participated 40 years ago in building a pond (still working). I was in CRP, but 2nd bid was not high enough to qualify.
   - I made a Reclaimed Coal Fields application with the state in 2004, but it still hasn't happened.
   - I built terraces in cooperation with tenant.
   - Since 1991, I've participated in CRP.

Appendix D *continued*

- Since my husband was disabled, I've had to deal with compliance issues; was fined $2800 soon after purchase of the farm. I appealed and won reduction of fine. Now I fear acting when I have weeds - need help to follow correct expectations. I want to be in compliance, but there are too many rules; too complicated. To whom can I turn for help? No one has come forward to help me.
- Needed to do a controlled burn on Indiangrass. Need assistance that is not now available.
- I had a farm for 12 years. Need to get a handle on things. We have a plan for conservation.
- My farm is high in wildlife; not planted to crops. Have hay ground. I want to tap into the delivery system for wildlife, but I'm not sure how.
- I have little understanding, and have need for more information.
- I think today's delivery system is effective (in achieving participation by women) if they know what is going on and when.
- Women may not have all the information needed in a timely manner in order to fully participate.
- While in CRP, neighbors mowed all the time without consequence; need consistency in enforcement of rules, or flexibility to do the right thing before fines are imposed.
- Rules are too complicated to understand; should translate into basic language for user-friendly materials. Rework the manuals.
- Web based information would be helpful.
- Programs like Women Land and Legacy are helpful, because they bring women together, and provide education.
- People need to be made aware of what they can do, and need better information on programs and requirements.

2. *What is the <u>best</u> feature of today's conservation delivery system and programs from the perspective of women landowners and operators?*

- Fortunate to have good people at local offices; they listen; good communication at local offices.
- Local offices have a diverse workforce; helps in communicating with women.
- Extra assistance when dealing with in multi-county offices.
- Cost share (financial assistance) programs enable us to do things we couldn't otherwise do, and do more. Cost share is an enabler.
- EQIP program – fencing, interseeding with additional funds, large pond structures.
- Financial assistance - timberland 75% cost share
- Good that women are becoming more involved.

Appendix D *continued*

- Local offices now assisting more with women.
- Increased awareness regarding women owners/operators.
- Good program goals to care for the land.
- Local employees are dedicated, genuine to help out; very positive.
- Tax relief associated with conservation (i.e., land retirement) use (e.g., Forest Reserve), but with caution that there is a perception that conservation use tax break should not be there because it may penalize remaining cropland with higher taxes.

3. *What is its worst feature?*

- Customer service varies by county; personal relationships vary.
- Local staff performance is based on their personality/mood, how much they care about a program; sometimes who kicked their cat this morning.
- Long-term attitudes did not consider women.
- Responsiveness – sometimes staff need to acknowledge that someone is waiting at the counter.
- Financial assistance (e.g., EQIP manure management contract) non-transferable between counties of farm ownership.
- Talk of closing county offices continues to be an issue.
- Many want to do work without cost share; have their own equipment, and can do job more cost effectively than following government requirements (e.g., fencing). Requirements are too over-built, not cost effective.
- Delays and government bureaucracy; fragmentation; e.g., wetland determinations delays; mitigation - several months to get this done; sign offs by higher level agency take too long; everyone has to sign off on project when completed.
- Permits take too long to get permission (e.g., COE).
- Most landowners don't want to destroy their land, but programs may be taking away landowner control.
- Government intrusion - should be more rewards for doing the right thing rather than fines for infractions. Sometimes enforcement/regulatory has an overall negative impact on participation.
- Ponds need to be repaired/rehabilitation; funding not available.

4. *Are there unique factors for women landowners and operators that should be addressed in delivering conservation services?*

- Labor is often hired (not done by a male owner as when her husband was around); women need additional advocates and extra guidance to help make proper decisions when dealing with hired labor (e.g., forester and others who knew about timber; local office staff also went out to site visit prior to sign-up with program).

- Women who must hire labor are often are placed at the bottom of the list by service providers unless they have a male advocate who makes arrangements (possibly creating problems meeting program deadlines).
- Women encounter different responses from staff in different parts of the state to having to work with women landowners compared to a male (e.g., staff asking woman if her land is for sale soon after death of spouse, instead of offering continued assistance); women believe they must get used to remarks (often derogatory) about being a woman and being a landowner.
- Women often don't know who to contact with questions; often are uncomfortable going to office to ask for help because of their lack of knowledge.
- Female staff in local office needed - diverse staff.
- Some women haven't done any paperwork or paid checks until husband is gone; need someone to come and inform them about paperwork and requirements after death of spouse.
- Women are more likely to turn on the computer at home, on their time, to learn more about conservation assistance. There should be web-based tutorials on how to sign up for programs, and for practice in filling out paperwork before going to the local office.
- Women prefer educational meetings, and would attend to learn more.

5. *Does agency technical staff communicate effectively with women landowners and operators about programs and services? Is staff adequately trained to communicate effectively with women landowners and operators? What makes local staff effective?*

- Need staff training on how to assist folks who are unfamiliar with programs and services.
- Training is part of the picture, but staff attitude is critical, as is a high level of communication.
- The fact that staff are local is an important reason for their effectiveness.
- Women need to be aware of who the staff are in the office, and their different positions.
- It is helpful when staff acknowledge in meetings that there are people that are starting from the beginning and need basic information.
- Staff is becoming more diverse.

Appendix D *continued*

6. *Do women landowners and operators understand how to gain access programs and services?*

    - Women are getting better about having a good understanding of agriculture and the programs, because of how big a part women play in agriculture.
    - I don't think so unless they are already actively involved in the farm operations.
    - Many don't know all of the acronyms and language of conservation programs.
    - Some don't know about technical assistance (e.g., that they can ask for technical assistance without participating in a specific program).
    - Many are concerned that gaining access (going in and asking for help) might result in their getting into trouble on something.
    - Many women feel intimidated when they seek out services for what they need.
    - More women could better access programs if staff were more patient in helping them to understand the programs.
    - Women should stay engaged with the person (staff in office) until they understand a program or until they have answered needed questions.
    - Women read newspaper accounts about top 10 payments to farmers, but little in explanations of benefits gained from the programs.
    - Women landowners/operators should receive letters explaining briefly what is needed (e.g., after death of spouse, or at key program deadlines). Women could rely on groups like WLL℠ for further assistance, to follow up on information needed.
    - Agencies should develop a "Welcome Wagon" approach to reaching and informing new women landowners/operators about services.
    - Agencies need new ways (e.g., web-based educational tools, newsletters, informational meetings) to reach women who must now make decisions and are new to conservation or farming.
    - Some women prefer direct one-on-one to tutorials, but need to decide and be comfortable in asking for that help; need to overcome fear of asking "stupid question".

7. *What feedback have you heard from other women landowners and operators about today's delivery system and how it might be improved?*

    - Many women express fear about what they will do when their husband dies or is disabled; they've been working in town and not involved on the farm, and are not knowledgeable about decisions that hev been made for the farm.

Appendix D *continued*

- Some women are afraid that they might be doing something wrong (regarding a program requirement); they are reluctant to come forward and ask for help.
- Some are wary of government intrusion and regulation.
- However, some single women landowners do have knowledge of farm programs and can assist other women landowners.
- Some women and men as well are afraid to ask questions, because they don't understand. There is no stupid question.
- Some women ask questions in another county rather than in the county they have land ownership, to check whether they are getting the same answer. Don't be afraid to do this.
- Concern about tenants (e.g., cash rent tenant suggesting she give him power of attorney); she can give POA and still maintain control for the farm via the rental agreement.

8. *What opportunities are there for state conservation agencies to better participate in partnership with local conservation districts, the federal government, and women's organizations to improve delivery of conservation services?*

- Help speed up progress.
- Conduct/sponsor more informational workshops and meetings, dealing with women's issues.
- Develop brochures, guidebooks about programs and services.
- Send out advance notice and reminders about deadlines, opportunities.
- Provide added money and manpower for the local office.
- Give (state) shared positions the responsibility to help dispense information on the basic level for women to meet their needs; maybe regional staff too.
- Make manuals more understandable.
- Address women landowner/operator transitional issues.

9. *How does your local soil and water conservation district involve women in making decisions about planning and delivery of conservation services to women landowners and operators within the boundaries of a conservation district?*

- Some have women on the board as Commissioners and Assistant Commissioners; also women FSA board members; not afraid to speak their mind at meetings.

Appendix D *continued*

- Very difficult to get people to run for election as commissioners.
- Have diversity in staff (e.g., a woman District Conservationist in field office and other women on staff at conservation agency); different talking to women staff rather than men.
- Some progress in personalities.
- Recognize need to do training.
- Some staff too “title-conscious”; with a closed mind; don’t give other options; staff often too busy to explain.
- Participation in the WLL project.

10. *If women landowners and operators do not participate in conservation programs, what might be some of the reasons?*

- Programs are too difficult, too complicated to understand.
- Having a bad experience in the office, and not wanting to go back.
- Dissatisfaction with program because it didn’t actually address their need.
- Some women are too afraid to ask questions.
- Programs come with strings attached.
- Women not willing to be assertive.
- How they are treated in the office.
- Don’t know how.
- Nothing is totally free; fear of being “caught” doing something wrong by the government.
- Some women landowners’ hearts are not in the farming venture, so they do not participate in conservation programs.

11. *As Congress prepares for the next Farm Bill, what would you most like to change about today’s conservation delivery system and programs?*

- (A Farm Bill listening session was held in Iowa the previous day. None of today’s attendees had received word about the meeting.)
- Need more effort, funding for education.
- Need better public awareness about agriculture; students are not aware of agriculture; where their food comes from.
- Need demonstration education sites.
- EQIP program needs more involvement with livestock producers, fencing, ponds.
- EQIP – Need uniform ranking and ability to transfer contracts between counties.
- Add diversity to local boards.
- Continue financial assistance (cost share) programs.

Appendix D *continued*

- Establish a reward system associated with conservation plans; reward people that follow their plan (connection with Conservation Security Program); some such approach for good conservation land use on working lands; fully fund such an effort.
- Eliminate program changes that change too often to meet the landowner resource goals.
- Water quality confinement facilities (DNR) rules are too loose. Need stricter rules to protect the water; violators are willing to risk costs.
- Shouldn't pay taxes on TSP-update aerials/maintain this Forest Reserve program.
- Greater respect for farm sector.
- Under EQIP, consider total resources with livestock producers.

12. *What suggestions do you have in changing awareness for women? Describe your experiences and models that would help other women.*

- A model for success - Women Land and Legacy[SM] Project from Iowa (see Appendix A) can be spread to other states; education and information workshops targeted to women; locally-led by a core group of women; empowering and confidence-building.
- Need fully supportive local districts; local agencies' help with forming women's network.
- Need web-based tools.
- Send personal mail – addressed to women at address.
- Demographic issue – landuse/ownership changes; need programs to help landowners keep control of their land during fast changing agricultural land ownership.
- Concern about impacts of absentee ownership; transfers of properties where people don't want to deal with these issues, and sell land to others with different goals and intent for the land.
- Deliver basic training through meetings to cover priority topics. Get help from each other who may have dealt with similar issues on making difficult decisions.
- Use meetings to learn things we can do to make a profit.
- User-friendly agencies.
- Get involved with the local district.
- Advisory committee.
- Sit in on local Commissioners public meetings.
- Women need to be comfortable being aggressive when necessary, and
- calling upon their and others' knowledge and expertise.

Appendix D *continued*

Analysis

Women have been equal and important decision-makers for land for many generations. However, today, because of changing land ownership, and landowner transition issues associated with landowner age and farmer demographics, many women are now being placed into a role as decision-maker for their land for the first time. Many women owning agricultural and forested lands are not familiar with natural resource conservation programs and services, frequently having had those decisions made by their spouse or by land tenants.

In Iowa, nearly half of the state's working lands are owned by women. Many of the women attending the Iowa session were active participants in conservation programs through their local district office – indeed, a few were local conservation district officials or held FSA positions. However, even as active program participants (e.g., CRP, EQIP), some attendees were not confident or comfortable with their understanding of programs and services, nor were they certain regarding their level of compliance with regulations and program requirements.

NASCA recognizes that some of the concerns and ideas reported by women landowners and operators are shared by many other individuals interested in conservation. For example, Phase One listening sessions identified the need to provide better information to potential applicants about conservation programs and services. For many women, this is a basic and critical need that will have a significant impact on their access to and participation in conservation programs.

Phase One also identified cultural aspects of delivery (e.g., diverse communication) as important to participation. Iowa session attendees recommended that new methods of communication (e.g., web-based tools, tutorials, women's network newsletters, direct mailings) would help reach women, and would be considered more preferable to traditional office walk-in or male-dominated farm meetings approaches. Iowa session attendees indicated that women landowners and operators, as well as non-operators, are not comfortable participating in traditional approaches to learning about or seeking conservation benefits and services. Whether because they do not wish to appear unknowledgeable about conservation, or because they are intimidated by office structure and personnel, or because they fear that government may find that they are making a mistake, this reduces their opportunities to participate. Based on the success of the Women Land and Legacy^{SM} initiative in Iowa, many of these women want to learn more and to participate, but they are unsure how to initiate and complete the process.

Appendix D *continued*

The Iowa session results both reinforce Phase One recommendations and add to them, by demonstrating how important the communication and presentation aspects of delivery are to this segment of the customer population, and by illustrating several suggested solutions that could improve participation by women. Like Phase One attendees, the Iowa group placed a strong value on having good local conservation district staff – staff who are familiar, knowledgeable and friendly. Women recognize the benefit of a diverse work force, in that they are aware that the delivery system is changing in a way that improves awareness about women's issues and communication with women. However, attendees noted that customer service and responsiveness varies with respect to women, and that training is needed for staff to understand how to improve communication with women.

Iowa attendees identified factors unique to women (e.g., dealing with hired labor, male staff attitudes, preference in communication) that should be addressed in improvements to delivery. Attendees suggested that agencies need new ways (e.g., web-based educational tools, newsletters, informational meetings, "Welcome Wagon" approach) to reach women who must now make decisions about their land, or who are new to conservation and farming.

Attendees suggested also that it is other women who might offer the best support in education and experience, where women's networks can be established. The Women Land and Legacy^{SM} initiative itself is identified as a model for success in dealing with these unique factors, indicating that this type of initiative is very productive in forming women's networks, improving education, outreach, training, and making agencies more user-friendly to women. Attendees emphasized that this type of initiative, with close support by local districts and the state conservation agency, supports education for both the customer and service provider – it helps women increase their understanding and confidence in seeking assistance, and helps agencies understand how best to outreach to and communicate with women landowners and operators about available services.

NASCA believes that the Iowa session adds value to the Phase One findings, and further identifies how the conservation delivery system can be made more inclusive, more user-friendly, and more effective in achieving participation by this very important segment of the customer population.

Appendix D *continued*

Acknowledgements

NASCA expresses appreciation to Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen, State Outreach Coordinator, and Gina Kraus, with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), for their efforts in making the Iowa session possible, and in bringing together women landowners and operators for such good discussion.

NASCA also thanks Kenneth Tow, Director, and Paul Valin of the Division of Soil Conservation, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, for their leadership and support in the NASCA Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project and program outreach in Iowa.

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Attachment
Project Description: Women, Land and Legacy^{SM} Project, Iowa

Background

According to the 2002 Census of Agriculture, the number of women involved in agriculture continues to increase. The census shows that the number of women principal farm operators increased 12.62% from 1997 to 2002. In most Iowa counties, the percentage of women landowners is actually 40 percent or more. Because of this increase, the conservation partnership in Iowa recognizes the need for outreach, information, and education with the growing number of women who have become the decision-makers for conservation on their land. They include women who have inherited land, women who are currently farm partners actively engaged in work on the farm, and women who have assumed the decision-making process for other reasons.

Women, Land and Legacy^{SM}; Building Your Farm's Future Today

The project *Women, Land and Legacy^{SM}; Building Your Farm's Future Today*, was developed by the Iowa USDA State Outreach Council, a partnership of various USDA agencies, state and local agencies, and non-profit organizations. Together, these groups are working to address outreach needs and eliminate barriers to non-traditional and under-served individuals and groups. Women Land and Legacy^{SM} (WLL^{SM}) was developed to respond to the need for outreach to women involved in agriculture in Iowa. The project began in five counties, including Wapello County, site of the Ottumwa session on the NASCA Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project. Eight new counties have begun the process, and others are expressing interest in WLL^{SM} .

Appendix D *continued*

The goal of WLL^{SM} is to develop a grassroots approach to establish a local women's informational and educational network, involving a local planning team consisting of USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), ISU Extension Service, and the local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), working in partnership with the statewide council. Often the local planning team works with other groups such as the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) and Women Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN).

In the five participating counties, local meetings are held to have a "focused conversation" among women engaged in agriculture, to allow women in attendance to share their experiences in farming, their dreams for their land (including conservation), to discuss what is required to meet their business and economic needs, and to help them realize their dreams. These initial meetings lead to future activities to meet the informational and educational needs of agricultural women in the county. The ultimate goal is to build a working support network for farm women, a resource that has been identified as lacking in many Iowa communities, and to help change the way farm agencies in Iowa provide information and services to women clients.

Appendix E
West Virginia Focus Group Report

West Virginia CDS Session Summary
March 6, 2006

Background

At two national listening sessions in 2005, the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) collected input from many interests as part of a Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project. This cooperative project between NASCA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) produced recommendations that dealt with improvements to all aspects of the nation's conservation delivery system and service delivery, including local leadership, streamlining programs, reducing delays, and improving our use of technology and personnel resources.

In 2006, under a Phase Two agreement with NRCS, NASCA is seeking additional input on delivery system issues from customers and potential customers (including those who may not now participate in conservation programs and services), from conservation service providers in both the public and private sector, and from others interested in improving the conservation delivery system.

A number of interest groups were under-represented at the two listening sessions, and NASCA is conducting additional outreach to capture input from any omitted groups. Also, additional details are needed regarding many of the recommendations outlined under Phase One. To that end, NASCA is sponsoring and participating in State Focus Groups and project workshops linked to state association annual meetings in a number of states, to help identify and clarify issues at the state and local level, to build on Phase One recommendations, to outreach to other interests, to incorporate geographic differences, and to work toward shared support for recommended solutions that will make the conservation delivery system more effective and efficient.

West Virginia Local Conservation Delivery System Listening Session

On March 6, 2006, the West Virginia Conservation Agency held a Local Conservation Delivery System Listening Session in Bridgeport, WV. This workshop was the second held to obtain state input to the NASCA Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project. The session was attended by representatives of local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, state and federal partnering agencies, and livestock and poultry associations.

The session covered the following delivery system issues:

Appendix E *continued*

- **Expand the role of local districts**
- **Make conservation more "resource-driven"**
- **Simplify and streamline programs**
- **Reduce delays and inconsistencies**
- **Focus adequate resources in the field**
- **Ensure adequate funding**

Attendees were asked what their significant issues were in these areas, and presented the following comments and suggestions about how they would achieve these recommendations. Following the comment summary is an analysis of findings at this listening session as they relate to the NASCA Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project.

EXPAND THE ROLE OF LOCAL DISTRICTS

- Present clear definition of Local Work Group; give more choices and input; need better stakeholder representation; better advance information to supervisors before decisions are required.
- Get input from non-supervisors.
- Local Work Groups become discouraged when decisions are made elsewhere; need to use the suggestions of local work group; don't make decisions ahead of time.
- Educate partnership personnel on how the partnership works, and the lead role for districts; consider "partner" training, similar to the supervisor training.
- Give districts a real voice in programs, supported by local work groups.
- Listen to recommendations of local work group.
- Improve communications.
- WV Lime Incentive Program is a good example of successful, locally lead program (see attached description).
- Multiflora Rose Control Program is also a good example of locally lead program (see attached description).
- Create a budget for districts and/or state association for direct programs; provide funding to the districts from a variety of sources (e.g., SWCA, DEP, 319, streambank project funding, local solid waste programs, local stormwater programs, etc.).
- Share more information across state lines to see what works effectively in other states.
- Consider programs outside the Farm Bill, non-agriculture related programs.
- Districts Supervisors must step up and be counted; if districts do not take the lead, someone else will.

Appendix E *continued*

- Districts should be able to generate income.
- Districts need to establish revenue source to support technical staff positions.
- When cleaning up along watersheds, take care of small areas and work down; don’t focus on the entire watershed at once.

MAKE CONSERVATION MORE RESOURCE DRIVEN

- Focus on whole resource concern; don’t just write ‘contract’ plans.
- Sometimes locals identify resource concerns for a producer only to find that there is no available program (or funding) to assist the producer with those needs.
- Reduce emphasis on individual programs.
- Revise requirements of programs to fit local problems.
- Look at programs as an opportunity to correct problems, not how to get money from the federal government.
- Use broader categories for resource needs to apply locally.
- Conservation planning should be a pre-requisite; plan should come first, then program options can be developed (e.g., forest stewardship plan requirements for FLEP; conservation plan leading to a program contract).
- Train field office staff on the need for a conservation plan for all programs.
- Educate producers on the benefits of a conservation plan before he/she signs-up for federal programs.
- Improve perception of what conservation plans are; consider revising the name “conservation plan” to something else.
- Conservation planning serves as an educational tool for the landowner/producer.
- However, real conservation planning requires staff resources and staff training.
- Conservation planning requires a team approach, dealing with all resources.
- Planning may lead to technical assistance, even though no program financial assistance might be sought.
- How can you “front-load” the planning process when funding comes primarily from a program-specific technical assistance budget allocation?
- Technical assistance budget must be restored to provide for conservation planning services, either in NRCS or in district.
- Conservation Districts must be ready to pick up technical support for producers.

Appendix E *continued*

- Educate producers that programs are not (generally) entitlements, but an opportunity to help them do something in the way of conservation.
- Locals need resources (staff, monitoring) and innovative methods to measure effectiveness of conservation programs and produce accountability.
- Show before and after results of water quality issues.
- Keep good records in order to provide reports and evidence on improvements.
- Use long-range planning.
- Use reasonable and innovative ways for accountability.
- In West Virginia, multi-county districts result in a variety of different resource priorities locally; local district planning process (e.g., annual plan) must include a stakeholder process to address these.

SIMPLIFY AND STREAMLINE PROGRAMS

- Don't make or change requirements at the federal level without understanding what is going on locally (e.g., program ranking criteria).
- Because of market conditions, producers sometimes cannot meet varying program requirements (e.g., cost share match); cost share rate sometimes insufficient for producers (small farms); need to have mechanism to decrease the percentage producers are required to contribute to participate in programs based on market/profit changes.
- EQIP rankings illustrate a possible problem in points awarded for *multiple* versus *single* practices; preference for multiple practices may increase costs for producers wishing to receive funding.
- Reduce red tape, strings attached and "mission creep"; always another requirement for producer to fulfill with added costs.
- Design programs to be beneficial to everyone; but with limited funding, there is a tension between participation (with its *expectation* of receiving funding) and available program funds.
- As new programs are developed, consider getting rid of some other programs.
- Accommodate regional (geographical) differences; consider a West program and East program; regionalize programs.
- Better communication between partners.

REDUCE DELAYS AND INCONSISTENCIES

- Attract more TSPs in private sector; not enough TSPs certified.
- For small West Virginia farms, there might not be sufficient profit potential for private sector TSPs unless work is batched.

Appendix E *continued*

- Districts need to provide their own additional technical people.
- Lack of consistent and reliable federal funds, and uncertain and delayed budget for contribution agreements inhibits investment and planning for contribution agreements by state and local agencies (e.g., DNR for wildlife plans) that could otherwise result in accomplishing more work and promoting programs.
- Create a consistent and reliable stream of program funding; need more long-term funding commitments.
- Reduce turnaround time for reimbursements to producers; delays cause difficulties when producer is required to cover costs up front.
- The idea of a response deadline from agencies receiving applications or requests for services (Phase One) is not generally advised; not feasible given limited staff and program popularity/demand; a better idea is to place more staff in local offices.
- Programs should allow more workable sign-up periods; work is sometimes abandoned due to roll-out schedules and deadlines.
- Create more realistic program start-times.
- Emphasize conservation plans to reduce the amount of time needed to apply for programs (e.g., time savings in developing a wildlife plan from the existing conservation plan).
- Need better cooperation among the many government units involved.

FOCUS ADEQUATE RESOURCES IN THE FIELD

- Districts need their own staff.
- Have a ‘good old fashioned secretary’ (administrative assistant) in the field office (e.g., a live person to respond to calls, rather than a machine).
- To reduce office time, move the desk into the field (e.g., vehicle-installed communications technology).
- Resolve interagency rivalries, work as true partnership.
- Revise federal contribution agreements to reduce cost-share burden on partnering state and local agencies.
- Hire employees at the District level to write program contracts.
- Include grant writing in duties of key District employees.
- Train new agency employees (state, federal) in the ways the partnership should be working; provide role for supervisors to train new employees.
- Provide programmatic training, including other programs such as 319, stormwater.
- Supervisors must provide orientation to new employees.
- Continue (basic) district supervisor training.

Appendix E *continued*

- More effort at outreach targeting non-traditional participants (e.g., women landowners and operators).
- Increase public awareness of Conservation Districts and programs available.
- Complete routine follow-ups, review programs with landowners.
- Lack of understanding about just how many farmers actually work on a computer, and which have reliable internet service (to take advantage of computer technology).

ENSURE ADEQUATE FUNDING

- Need accountability for funds spent.
- When searching for funds, need to show what you need funds for; what you will accomplish with funds.
- Show the results you expect and have received.
- Measuring effectiveness results in credibility, sustainability, and builds demand (for services).
- Public awareness is important; refer to success of marketing Liming Program.
- Continue traditional methods of contacting, informing and requesting.
- Continue to support partnering agencies and organizations.
- Need program and service beneficiaries to support funding requests.
- Need more public input, not as much special interest input.

Analysis

Attendees to the West Virginia session shared a number of concerns and recommendations with those resulting from listening sessions in Phase One of the Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project. The West Virginia session both reinforced and added value to earlier NASCA findings, as attendees provided suggestions and comments about the issues developed under Phase One, and expressed some unique concerns relating to structure and function of the partnership in West Virginia.

Overall, results of the West Virginia session reinforce many findings of Phase One. Attendees recognized the value of strong local leadership in conservation delivery, and emphasized the need for local districts to play a larger role in decision-making, to expand the role of local producers and stakeholder groups (e.g., via local work groups), and to create a source of revenue and a budget for district activities that would support services and the development of technical and administrative staffing. Attendees also recommended having partnership training (showing employees how the partnership does and should work), creating a more 'resource-driven" process, giving greater emphasis to conservation planning, improving accountability mechanisms, streamlining programs, accommodating regional differences, increasing the effectiveness of non-governmental service providers (TSPs) and agency contribution agreement services, creating a reliable and consistent source of program funding, increasing outreach efforts, and ensuring local credibility and sustainability in the funding process.

Attendees used two West Virginia programs as examples of success in local initiation – the Liming Incentive Program, and the Multi-flora Rose Control Program. These programs had strong local leadership, marketing and services, and can serve as models for success in planning, developing and funding other programs, under leadership of local districts.

Attendees suggested diversifying funding sources for local programs, by expanding beyond agricultural programs to consider 319 (non-point source programs), stormwater management, local solid waste programs, erosion and sediment control, and others. Some success already exists in some of these areas for local projects in West Virginia.

Attendees appreciated the need to promote more comprehensive conservation planning – as an educational tool to producers, as a stepping stone to more efficient practice planning (e.g., EQIP contract, wildlife plan), and as a method to capture local priority resource needs. Attendees pointed out, however, that conservation planning requires resources and training, and that a team approach is necessary for it to succeed in meeting landowners' and producers' needs. Attendees recognized the difficulty in "front-loading" conservation planning when federal technical assistance funding is tied to specific programs, and recommended that general technical assistance funding be restored for planning purposes, either in NRCS or in local districts.

Because of how districts are structured in West Virginia as multiple counties, attendees recognized how diverse resource priorities can exist within a district, and suggested that the local district annual and long-range plans are a vehicle to address these resource priorities, and to involve all local stakeholders. At a larger scale, attendees recommended accommodating regional and geographical differences by allowing flexibility for regional differences in programs (e.g., east/west versions).

Attendees cautioned that participation in government programs often comes at the price of increasing producer costs (e.g., multiple practices), and with attached strings such as additional requirements to be met. Local attendees felt that this hindered participation and reduced producer satisfaction with available programs.

Appendix E *continued*

Because of limited TSP work in West Virginia, and in part because of limited size of farming operations in that state, attendees believed that greater use of non-governmental TSPs and agencies (via contribution agreements) is needed. But attendees noted that this will require greater certainty and consistency in funding, a more cost-effective batching TSP approach to delivering services to small farms, and a reduced match burden on state and local partnering agencies under contribution agreements. Attendees also emphasized that a greater private/NGO role in delivering conservation services must be balanced with increased opportunity for local districts to have their own technical staff to meet demands on the local district.

The Phase One recommendation for establishing agency response deadlines (e.g., 60 days) was not well-received. Attendees cautioned that limited available agency personnel resources and high producer demand for programs would make agency deadlines infeasible. Rather, attendees recommended additional staff and more workable program sign-up periods, as well as possible benefits derived from more up-front conservation planning when it came time to developing program contracts.

Attendees had several recommendations on maintaining adequate field resources – including a combination of keeping "good, old-fashioned" personal one-on-one telephone responses in the field office, and "moving the desk into the field" via new field communications technology for technical staff (e.g., state forestry pilot initiative).

Attendees recognized the need for good accountability for funding spent and results achieved, to build credibility and to sustain funding, as well as having a clear picture of benefits that are expected to result from funding being requested. Attendees also stated the need for added local resources to track and measure success of conservation projects.

Acknowledgements

NASCA appreciates the thoughtfulness, input and assistance of all West Virginia session participants. NASCA appreciates the work of West Virginia Conservation Agency staff, Carolyn Hefner, Robin Holstein, Mark Buchanan and others in planning and conducting this informative session, and thanks Truman Wolfe, Executive Director, for his strong support. NASCA also thanks Gary Oates, President of the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts, for his leadership and support for the session. NASCA also thanks state and federal partners who participated so productively in session discussions.

Attachment
West Virginia Lime incentive Program

West Virginia farmers can save up to half of their liming bills starting August 1, 2005, thanks to a new incentive program being offered by our local Conservation District and the West Virginia Conservation Agency (WVCA). Farmers with eligible lands can receive a 50 percent cost-share for lime they purchase to improve their grasslands. This program is aimed at promoting active management of these lands in a way that benefits farmers and the environment. Besides providing high-quality food for livestock, healthy grasslands prevent soil erosion, protect streams from excessive run-off and help to minimize the effects of flooding.

Eligibility requirements include:

1. Landowner must be owner/operator with the need to sign-up as a District Cooperator.
2. Landowner must apply this practice to land that requires maintenance, improvement or protection. This will be with the recommendation of the State Technical Committee.
3. Land must be established in permanent grasses and/or legumes.
4. Land must be used for agricultural purposes. Priority will be given to pasture/grasslands; hay lands will be given second priority.
5. A current soil test must be filed with the Conservation District.
6. The requirement for application will be determined by the certified soil sample.
7. Land shall not have been planted in an annual row crop for a minimum of five years prior to the practice application.
8. If the field which the practice is being requested is under contract, that field is ineligible for the West Virginia Lime Incentive Program.

Other cooperating agencies include the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, West Virginia University Cooperative Extension Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and USDA Farm Service Agency.

Appendix E *continued*

Attachment
West Virginia Multiflora Rose Control Program

This program was created to provide technical and financial assistance to West Virginia farmers to control an alien invasive plant (multiflora rose) in their pastures. A multifloral rose infestation decreases access to pasture, which causes poor quality forage for livestock production, increased soil erosion, and severe economic losses to farmers.

Participating landowners receive funds to develop conservation plans and implement management practices that remove Multiflora Rose from pastures. These practices enhance farm productivity while protecting water and forage quality.

COST-SHARE RATE:	50% with a maximum of $25/Acre
ELIGIBLE CLIENTELE:	Landowners throughout West Virginia who are actively involved in grazing land agriculture

Appendix F
Intertribal Agriculture Council / Indian Nations Conservation Alliance Symposium Report

Thursday, December 8, 2005
Summary and Analysis

Background

Topic of Session: "What do you need from USDA, INCA, IAC to meet your conservation district and conservation needs?"

A presentation was made by David Vogel and Kelly McGowan (Nevada) on the NASCA Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project as part of the stage setting for attendees' discussion on the featured topic. NASCA also provided a Discussion Guide to help facilitate consideration of specific issues. Dick Gooby, Executive Director, INCA, moderated the session.

The basic question asked via the NASCA presentation (in close alignment with the session topic) was: "Is today's conservation delivery system effective in achieving tribal participation in conservation programs, and in meeting today's tribal natural resource needs? If not, what do you think needs to change so tribes and tribal members can effectively use programs to meet their conservation needs?"

Attendees responded to both topic and NASCA questions with issues falling into three general areas – delivery system and program structure and applicability, the system's decision-making process, and the adaptability of programs to traditional tribal practices and experience on the land. These are described below.

Also, NASCA attended a Farm Bill Roundtable Discussion the day following the session, hearing topics and concerns expressed by tribal attendees. Where these discussions amplify similar issues raised at the Thursday session, notes are included in this analysis.

Summary Notes

Delivery System and Program Structure and Applicability

1. Program parameters are too restrictive for Indian lands (and practices)
2. Programs should be simple enough to be adapted to meet local tribal needs
3. Presentation (cultural) aspects are important; greater outreach needed, using tribal organizations
4. Need better tribal awareness of programs and benefits; how to access
5. Need better distribution of information to tribes; information on all USDA programs needed

Appendix F *continued*

6. Need to organize tribal conservation interests, promote tribal government action
7. Conservation may not be a tribal priority (as is education and economic development)
8. Establishment of Tribal Districts has helped to capture resources, focus local tribal efforts
9. Need fully staffed federal technical assistance agencies; vast areas and distances involved
10. Need greater USDA consultation with tribes on federal regulations
11. Federal agency communication and consistency is important (USDA/BIA)
12. BIA does not provide funding for conservation care of land, so tribes look to USDA
13. Possible lack of appreciation of the role of other government levels (i.e., state) and opportunities for partnership with tribes
14. Recognized need to include (coordinate) conservation with product development, marketing (e.g., biomass)

Decision-making Process

1. Locally-led should be an emphasis in conservation; who makes decisions for Indian lands?
2. Need a balance between science (education) and land experience; traditional tribal knowledge is important, and must be part of the decision-making process
3. Need to clarify the role of Elders (e.g., combined with technical staff) in conservation planning on tribal lands
4. Flexibility is needed in how programs are applied to tribal lands
5. Recommended "pilot" for tribal self-determination in running conservation programs on tribal lands
6. Tribes need to be better informed about resources data (e.g., wildlife harvest) for Indian lands, to help make better decisions
7. Need to obtain resources for local/tribal technical staff (e.g., ACES program)
8. Gear tribal education (e.g., youth) programs to develop local expertise for conservation work

Adaptability to Traditional Tribal Practices and Experience on the Land

1. Better define "subsistence" farming, as term may apply to programs – include traditional practices (e.g., EQIP); consider what level of management is required; broaden definition of "production"
2. Evaluate potential conflict between traditional practices and official technical guides; are technical criteria for Indian lands adequate, based on experiences on the land?
3. Program standards should be flexible to accommodate long-term tribal land experience.

Appendix F *continued*

4. Programs need to be flexible to include traditional practices, idle lands, program eligibility, and farming history requirements
5. Program parameters are too restrictive for Indian lands (and practices)
6. Avoid programs' over-reliance on "preservation" tactics (e.g., conservation easements) for Indian lands

<u>Analysis</u>

Many of the concerns raised by tribal interests about conservation are very complex due to unique tribal sovereignty issues, traditional Indian land use practices and policies, and the nature of intergovernmental agreements between tribes and the federal government and its agencies. However, NASCA believes that the tribes' rich heritage in land management, and their deep desires for self-determination for Indian lands conservation reinforce some basic findings from 2005 NASCA listening sessions. These include the desire for greater emphasis on locally led (local leadership and decision-making) in conservation, and for a simplification of programs that can be adapted to meet local conservation needs.

Tribal leaders look for better balance in decision-making between educated specialists and tribal elders with long-term experience in managing tribal lands. Tribes recognize the need for better resource information for local tribal lands, as a requirement for better local decision-making. This is *both* an issue of how to increase participation by knowledgeable tribal members in the conservation planning process *and* of who actually makes decisions about program eligibility and application locally.

Also, tribal leaders showed strong interest in simplifying and having greater flexibility in programs, so that programs can be easily adapted to meet local needs, as determined by local tribal leaders. Many of the tribal concerns relating to conservation programs, technical standards, and traditional Indian practices can be addressed through this simplification and flexibility emphasis, as local tribal leaders make use of better resource information, apply more streamlined and simplified programs, and increase their local role in the decision-making process.

NASCA heard similar local concerns and recommendations at listening sessions from others involved in the conservation process. Although tribal issues are complex, NASCA believes that input from the IAC/INCA Symposium reinforces and adds to some of what has already been stated in the NASCA CDS Final (Phase One) Report. NASCA should cautiously note, however, that tribal issues and relations are much more complex than can be covered by the NASCA project, and should be addressed ***both*** via improvements to the conservation delivery system shared by everyone ***and*** through continuation of intergovernmental dialogue and progress between tribes and the federal government.

Appendix F *continued*

Tribal leaders share with other, non-tribal local conservation-minded individuals a desire for self-determination and local leadership in conservation. The means to achieve this may differ somewhat for tribal interests, due to the complexities of their agency relationships and tribal land use policies. But recommendations that foster improved local leadership and decision-making in conservation should provide mutual benefits for tribal and non-tribal lands alike. The accompanying simplification and flexibility in programs will lend mutual support as well, and will, in fact, rely on improved local decision-making.

NASCA intends to incorporate the above analysis into a Final Report for Phase Two in May, 2006.

Acknowledgements

NASCA appreciates the assistance and support of IAC, and INCA (their Boards of Directors, and members) and Dick Gooby in providing NASCA representatives with an opportunity to present information and participate in the discussion of tribal conservation concerns.

Appendix G
Technical Services Provider Outreach Report
Summary of Recommendations Received

The role for Technical Service Providers, or TSPs, in delivering conservation services and programs has expanded during implementation of the 2002 Farm Bill. Much effort has been made to establish procedures for private businesses, non-governmental organizations and public sector agencies to participate in the delivery process by providing additional technical services associated with conservation programs. NASCA effort here focused on private sector TSPs (see other sections and appendices dealing with NGOs and public wildlife agencies).

The make-up of TSPs varies according to size and geographic range of operation, number and degree of experience of employees, and the type(s) of conservation services performed. In its outreach to TSPs, NASCA found it difficult to obtain input from the full range of TSPs involved, perhaps due to methods employed, availability of TSP personnel, or willingness of TSPs to participate in an evaluation of ongoing business interests. Because NASCA outreach covered only a portion of the TSP landscape, NASCA recognizes that there may be concerns and solutions involved other than those reported here.

However, NASCA was successful in reaching private sector consultants who have a broad experience base in doing TSP work in multiple states, and NASCA has compiled input received as to how to correct important shortcomings in the TSP process. Suggestions received are presented here as models of a sort, based on successful TSP operation in several states. Model solutions, while discussed here in reference to private sector TSPs, may have value in responding to issues associated with other non-governmental organizations adapting to TSP work.

TSP input and suggestions are presented here as combined examples from a number of states where public agencies and TSPs have collaborated to enhance the delivery system. This is by no means the only manner by which results may be achieved – others may have equally impressive examples. It is presented to show ***what is working***, and to illustrate how public agency representatives and private sector TSPs in some states appear to have resolved a number of issues to work together effectively as intended by the 2002 Farm Bill.

Input and suggestions received are broken down into four components:

- Bringing TSPs into the delivery system
- Approaches to employing TSP work
- Clarity of expectations and program administration
- Ensuring technical quality; TSP work review

Appendix G *continued*

1. **Bringing TSPs into the delivery system**

The Farm Bill and subsequent agency regulations have outlined steps to register and certify TSPs at the national level for conservation work. TSPs have become certified for work by going through an on-line process known as "TechReg", where an applicant can document experience and training for work at the national level. Applicants may also file a Request for Qualifications (RFQs) with state representatives of US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Whether TSPs successfully become a part of the delivery system depends on a number of factors. States vary with respect to their experience with private sector businesses, and with respect to the level of expertise available in public sector agencies doing conservation work. Information about TSP services available (e.g., to producers) varies as well, considering available websites, printed materials and newsletters. States also vary in the degree to which public agencies are seen as the source of technical assistance for conservation programs. These factors lead to differences in how private sector TSPs (and perhaps others) are received, promoted and managed.

In order for the TSP process to work as intended (i.e., private sector contributing to an expanded workforce for conservation), TSPs and the private sector as a whole must be viewed and managed as a part of the conservation delivery system, and as a partner to the public sector. The private sector offers unique opportunities to contribute to improvement in delivery, including:

- Speed of response (mobilization, service) to clients
- Additional technical expertise, especially in fields lacking in government
- Maintenance of confidentiality of client records (depending on funding sources)
- Historical relationships with agricultural and commodity groups
- Potential to market to and reach underserved groups
- An expanded emphasis on conservation planning prior to practice implementation

NASCA identified several issues in evaluating how readily TSPs are embraced as part of the delivery system, and how they are managed by public agencies. These include the attitude of public sector agencies and their experience and willingness – at different levels – to work with private sector TSPs, the capacity of various private sector businesses within a state to perform technical work, approaches best suited for TSP work, and the administrative and technical procedures involved in managing TSP services.

Appendix G *continued*

There is no doubt that personal attitudes demonstrated by staff within public agencies varies on this issue. Attendees at NASCA listening sessions and state focus groups acknowledged that there may be differences between agency policy and personal attitudes and practices in the field in some locations that has resulted in inconsistencies in TSP application. From the TSP perspective, technical assistance is not the sole domain of public agencies. Part of the problem in expanding the conservation workforce by employing private sector businesses appears to be ***attitude***, and some ***lack of understanding*** of each other's potential and capabilities between public and private sectors.

2. Approaches to employing TSP work

This component deals both with the method of applying TSP services, and the process for payment for services provided. The concept embodied in the 2002 Farm Bill presumed that a farmer could choose any TSP (certified) to perform technical work under a conservation program. For example, a farmer or rancher, on ***an individual basis***, could select a TSP to plan, design or install a conservation practice, and the TSP would be paid for services rendered under the program.

At the same time, NRCS has historically collaborated with non-governmental organizations to employ them to perform ***specialized services***. This experience led to the practice of federal contracts for ***batch jobs***, such as a TSP agreement for a large number of program contracts in CRP, or for comprehensive nutrient management planning. This batch work, completed in response to requests from NRCS for TSP submittal of Request for Qualifications (RFQs) or Requests for Proposals (RFP's), can provide the added advantage of economy and consistency, with similar multiple jobs performed by the same TSP organization, often where public and/or private sector resources are lacking or insufficient.

Payment rates for TSP work have been established by NRCS according to a cost of services comparison (e.g., government versus private sector). From the perspective of many TSPs, resulting payment rates appear to be below ideal rates and serve as a disincentive to some in the private sector becoming involved in delivery of conservation services.

Input received by NASCA indicates that both approaches (individual and batch) are useful in conservation work. The following three examples illustrate how these approaches can be used to encourage application of TSP services where most needed, and in addressing payment rates for services provided.

Appendix G *continued*

Individual Approach:

1. State team (NRCS) decides that the individual approach fits their needs situation best.
2. State team decides what program items (e.g., comprehensive planning) are eligible for TSP assistance.
3. State team may determine that the not-to-exceed (NTE) payment rates for the eligible items are ***insufficient*** to garner TSP interest, and that the client should bear some added cost.
4. Realizing the NTE itself could not be adjusted, at least not in a timely manner, the state team may establish an added program ***incentive payment*** for completion of the eligible item (e.g., comprehensive plan), and for implementing certain associated practices.
5. State team notifies qualified TSP's of the program and provides a list of potential participating clients.
6. State team may instruct local conservation staff to notify potential clients that the NTE rates are intended as a ***cost-share*** type of arrangement, of the availability of the added incentive program, and provides a list of qualified TSP's.

RFQ (batch) approach:

1. State team decides that batching jobs of the same type of work is their best approach.
2. A RFQ announcement is prepared based on NRCS national requirements and state law requirements for the proposed work, and an announcement for Fed Biz Ops is posted.
3. As TSP applicants respond, applications are reviewed and successful respondents are notified.
4. Proposals are issued for pricing (see also RFP approach below).
5. NRCS issues task orders, and notifies clients that the TSP will be working with them.

RFP (batch) approach:

1. State team decides that batching jobs of the same type of work is their best approach.
2. NRCS contacts TSP's to determine what information will best help them be able to price the work, and, using that information, the NRCS prepares and posts an announcement in Fed Biz Ops.
3. After TSP applicants respond and are selected, the agency issues task orders and notifies clients that the TSP will be working with them.

Further, with respect to payment rates, there are examples of states applying innovative funding approaches to improve payment rates available to TSPs. Florida is an example of a state supplementing federal payment rates with state funding for certain priority practices or planning.

Appendix G *continued*

3. Clarity of expectations and program administration

A key benefit to including TSPs in the conservation delivery system is to take advantage of their capabilities in technical expertise, speed, mobility, and flexibility. TSPs can mobilize to deliver services where needed at a given time without the need for government to establish additional public employee infrastructure or to move existing employees – both of which are expensive and time-consuming. TSPs can work weekends and evenings—a time when some clients are only available. TSPs will make the greatest contribution where agencies and TSPs work together to take best advantage of these TSP qualities.

Administrative procedures have a clear influence on how well the agency/TSP relationship works. Some suggestions and examples offered by TSPs can illustrate how agency and TSP representatives may facilitate better administration. Whether a TSP is employed as an individual, or as a respondent to an RFP or RFQ, partners should consider how to work together to assure good communication on the following key parameters:

- The TSP work schedule allowed (if weekend or evening work isn't allowed, it negates considerably the flexibility which a TSP can provide).
- The specific NRCS Standard(s) to be met.
- Any specific template/format required for plans and reports (consistent among locations).
- Materials to be furnished by the agency – these should be accurate and furnished in a timely manner relative to TSP deadlines. (If inaccurate or not provided in a timely manner, relief should be provided without penalty.)
- Due dates and any milestones expected should be clearly specified.
- Deliverables (e.g., how many copies; who gets them) should be specified.
- Understanding that agency technical specialists will deal with technical questions, and agency contracting people will deal with contracting questions.
- Stating what is required to be submitted for payment, and that payment will be made within a reasonable time-frame (30 days) or interest will be paid.

These and other administrative and procedural considerations can facilitate performance and reduce delays, as both parties are clear about consistent expectations and requirements.

4. Ensuring technical quality; TSP work review

With a large number of additional technical service providers entering the workplace (and with a substantial number already employed in some states), special interest has been focused on ensuring the technical quality and competence of TSP work. Regulations provide for review of both TSP qualifications and technical work by NRCS. Qualifications are to be reviewed during the certification process. Under NRCS quality control policy, review of work normally takes the form of a sampling of work, or spot checks, to determine whether TSP work is performed in accordance with requirements.

Comments received by NASCA indicate that TSP performance varies in different locations, depending on the experience and qualifications of different TSPs and their agency reviewers. Comments also indicate that the work review process used by public agencies in some locations results in inconsistencies and lengthy delays (e.g., 30-50 days) in agency review of work.

Two suggested examples offered by TSPs can be used to illustrate, in composite fashion, how various states have assured quality in TSP work while expediting the review process and improving consistency in how the work is reviewed. These examples, presented as options, show how agency and TSP representatives can establish clear procedures that bring greater consistency and timeliness to TSP performance review, and that reduce delays in getting conservation work complete.

Option A:

1. TSP and agency technical specialist discuss what is expected. The technical specialist specifies that there will ***not*** be a 100% review of work performed.
2. Agreement is reached regarding what technical content - not format or personal preference – will determine the agency review response.
3. Agency technical specialist makes it clear that the TSP is responsible for quality work, and that the agency quality control policy will be followed (i.e., spot check of work).
4. The two parties agree that they will meet after the first few products are completed in draft, and come to agreement on changes needed. From then on, review will follow agency quality control policy.

Option B:

1. TSP and agency technical specialist discuss what is expected. The technical specialist specifies that there will be a 100% review of the TSP work.
2. Agreement is reached regarding what technical content - not format or personal preference – will determine the agency review response.
3. The two parties agree to meet after the first few products are completed in draft, to review the product and come to agreement on changes needed.
4. To avoid delays associated with the agency review schedule, the agency specialist agrees to provide a single, consolidated set of agency comments back to the TSP within 15 days of product receipt; otherwise the TSP may consider products approved to proceed.

Of course, another perspective on this issue is the need for identification of efficient and effective TSP's. Despite the fact that a TSP may be approved on Tech Reg, not all perform equally. NASCA received input that suggests that, as TSPs operate in a local area, that the local conservation partnership needs to be able to provide information to producers and cooperators about which TSPs are proven performers for the type of work the client is seeking to complete.

<u>Other recommendations and continuing challenges</u>

The above examples and descriptions are included here to share input received from TSPs, landowners and federal, state and local conservation officials about how to improve overall application of TSP work, to aid states that lack experience dealing with the private sector, and to resolve problems that might be experienced in states or programs in getting the work done most effectively and efficiently. In addition to the suggestions outlined above, NASCA received other comments and recommendations from TSPs and from others participating in TSP-related discussions. These include:

- Difficulties encountered in qualifying TSPs for work in multiple states; impacts of state-specific requirements (e.g., nutrient management).

- Build the role of TSPs in promoting the use of conservation planning as a basis for program participation; conduct follow-up to assure that conservation plans are being followed and maintained; cooperate to ensure that funds for planning purposes are available and best applied; increase the number of certified TSPs as conservation planners to handle a greater percent of the planning workload; collaborate to achieve all steps in the planning process; reduce the current trend of "cookie-cutter" or practice plans; training for TSPs in conservation planning.

- Improve communication and collaboration between TSP and local agency staff in on-site consultation, planning, implementation and follow-up work with farmer or rancher; cooperate to best assist the client to do more than the minimum to conserve natural resources; create or enhance state TSP liaison position with NRCS in each state.

- Apply TSPs to improve outreach and program participation (e.g., potential or under-served customers; preparing producers for CSP).

- Determine TSP role(s) in promoting market-based or value-added incentives to conservation.

- Employ TSPs to help make system more user-friendly – working outside normal business hours, creating downloadable materials, adapting technology.

Appendix G *continued*

- How does the need for added local flexibility and decision-making connect with the need to establish rules governing Technical Service Providers and their creativity in developing solutions? What should be the direct partnership between local conservation districts and TSPs?

- Identify practices and services for which private sector TSPs make sense, and make it work.

- Landowner feedback is positive about the private sector involvement but negative about delays and paperwork.

- Concern over liability seems to hamper communications between TSPs and NRCS with respect to exchanging information and guidance on specific projects.

- TSPs need to market their value to producers, who might then agree to support enhancing the NTE or "not to exceed" payment rate, perhaps renaming NTE rate as technical assistance incentive rate.

- TSP does not get paid if farmer does not complete a project.

- Landowners are frequently unprepared to move ahead on projects, due to out-of-date soils tests, etc.

- More private sector businesses would participate if certification were easier and compensation greater.

- Reduce paperwork.

- Small contracts (e.g., few acres on a farm) are not cost-effective for many businesses.

Appendix H
North American Wildlife and Natural Resources
Conference Session on Wildlife Management Interests
March 24, 2006
Columbus, OH

Summary Report

At two national listening sessions in 2005, NASCA collected input from broad interests as part of a Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project (see separate project summary). A number of recommendations from the listening sessions dealt, for example, with making the delivery system more "resource-driven" versus "program-driven", and including all the resource management objectives of landowners and land operators. NASCA is seeking additional input on delivery system issues from customers and potential customers, or from those who may not participate in conservation programs and services, and from those who may provide additional services to address natural resource needs.

A number of interest groups were under-represented at the two listening sessions, and NASCA is taking steps to capture input from any omitted groups. Also, NASCA is seeking additional details on how to implement recommendations already received. To that end, NASCA participated in the NAW&NRC to obtain input from wildlife management interests about how to improve the conservation delivery system with regard to wildlife management and landowner objectives.

The following questions were distributed to serve as a guide for discussion. However, due to a change in meeting arrangements, the guide was not used as an agenda. Rather, an abbreviated session was held with wildlife managers as part of an existing committee meeting. Comments received have been organized as appropriate into the discussion guide. Additional comments were incorporated from the committee's earlier discussion of the Farm Bill.

Comments received:

1. Is today's overall conservation delivery system effective in achieving needed participation by landowners (from the perspective of wildlife management interests and landowner objectives) in conservation programs, and in meeting their natural resource needs? If not, what do you think needs to change?

   COMMENTS: Overall, attendees stated that participation by their members (wildlife managers) had improved under certain programs (e.g., via contribution agreements, technical service provider, or TSP, certification), but that wildlife professionals could do more if the delivery system were to more easily accommodate them as a participant. Attendees also noted that their *members are trying to adapt to deliver services on private lands, as compared to work on publicly-owned lands. A number of comments follow below regarding needed change.*

2. How do the ideas contained in the NASCA Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Final Report (November, 2005) relate to problems experienced by landowners interested in protecting and managing wildlife? Are there common points of interest? What's missing?

   *COMMENTS: (See **Analysis** section)*

3. What would you say is the *best* feature of today's conservation delivery system and programs from the perspective of wildlife management interests?

   COMMENTS: Attendees noted that the system works best when we achieve "seamless" delivery, and when staff from various agencies is co-located to provide a single source of information to landowners.

4. What would you say is its *worst* feature?

   COMMENTS: Attendees catalogued a number of features of the delivery system that need improvement, including cutbacks in agency personnel, lack of agency staff expertise to offer landowners wildlife management options, staff selling programs instead of identifying true landowner needs, reduction in time spent in the field with landowners, excessive paperwork, and internal agency bickering.

5. Where does wildlife protection and management fit in today's priorities for the conservation delivery system?

   COMMENTS: Attendees suggested that a higher priority should be placed on wildlife interests, by adding a wildlife perspective to the Farm Bill's Forestry Title, dealing with privately owned forest lands. Attendees noted that there is no program that presently meets landowner needs related to wildlife on private forestlands. Also, attendees suggested that a higher priority should be placed on communication between agencies (i.e., developing programs and regulations) and wildlife interest groups. Examples includes current efforts to re-enroll CRP acreage, and initiatives to develop energy and bio-fuels options for agricultural lands (e.g., switch-grass co-burning for energy), and their benefits and impacts to wildlife.

Appendix H *continued*

6. How do wildlife management objectives relate to other (e.g., water quality) conservation program objectives, and how can these be made to best work together?

   COMMENTS: Did not cover in abbreviated session.

7. Are there unique situations for wildlife management that limit successful landowner and operator participation, and that should be accommodated through improvements to the delivery of conservation services? For example, how do landowners find information about programs to protect and manage wildlife and gain access to services?

   COMMENTS: Attendees indicated that landowner conservation plans may not be reviewed and improved upon with available information on wildlife management. Also, attendees suggested that landowners sometimes receive different or conflicting advice for land management and conservation, especially if different experts do not coordinate input to landowner (e.g., soils, timber production, wildlife management). Co-locating staff in a single office and making joint visits to properties is seen as a way to improve this situation.

8. Are today's incentives and practices for informing landowners about wildlife options in conservation programs adequate to reach, educate and stimulate landowners?
   (*combined*)
9. What feedback have landowners and operators provided about today's programs and delivery system related to their wildlife management goals?

   COMMENTS: Attendees indicated that programs are often too jargoned (acronyms) or otherwise described (e.g., CP-33) to make sense to landowners, and that landowners prefer plain-speaking about what programs really do. Lack of understanding by landowners about objectives or technical implications of wildlife-related conservation practices often serves as a disincentive to participation. Excessive paperwork also hinders participation (e.g., difficulty in adding acres to an existing contract). Landowners would like more flexibility to adapt programs to meet their needs. Landowners view staff as selling programs – often neglecting to raise wildlife management as an option, and lacking information about landowner opportunities.

10. What has been the experience of wildlife managers in gaining acceptance and certification as Technical Service Providers (TSPs), and participating in delivery of conservation programs and services on private, working lands?

    COMMENTS: Wildlife managers report some success working under TSP arrangements or under contribution agreements. However, they suggest that *much more could be done if more consistent and certain funding was provided for these agreements, perhaps under block grant arrangements. Uncertainties result in lack of investment by TSPs and partners under agreements (e.g., permanent, non-entry level staff), and sometimes result in a lack of expertise in both the public and private sector on wildlife management. Attendees recommended a lower partner match rate (than 50%) for contribution agreements. Experience suggests that more comprehensive conservation planning with landowners would be a benefit, and would help educate landowners about wildlife options and "plug them in" to wildlife programs. Attendees cited that "cookie-cutter" conservation plans are becoming a market-driven problem under the system now employed. Attendees also cited excessive paperwork as a problem (e.g., citing a 140 page application for 2 acres enrolled in WHIP).*

11. Do wildlife management interests appreciate the need to adapt their services to enhance their participation in conservation on privately owned working lands (as opposed to work performed on publicly owned lands)? What changes are needed to accomplish this?

    COMMENTS: As wildlife managers shift focus to privately owned lands management and landowner needs, and as they become familiar with conservation programs and infrastructure, several adaptations are recognized as needed. With a reduction in federal staffing levels, state wildlife management agencies and NGOs see their role increasing in working with private landowners. Many wildlife management organizations have learned how to communicate with and work with private landowners in conjunction with conservation programs. They also see their role in marketing to landowners, and working on-site, as essential, and as a shortcoming at present, including marketing to non-traditional customers. Some have adapted by co-locating personnel in local offices with traditional public agency service providers.

12. Are there opportunities for state conservation agencies to better participate in partnership with local conservation districts, the federal government, and wildlife management interests to better reach and inform landowners and deliver wildlife-related conservation services?

    COMMENTS: State conservation agencies and their wildlife management counterparts can improve their communication and coordination. Many of these agencies work very well together in-state; some do not. And national level organization and cooperation is lacking.

Appendix H *continued*

13. Who can landowners rely on to help make educated decisions about wildlife management on their lands, and is the conservation delivery system adequately staffed, trained or assisted by non-governmental organizations to meet this need?

    COMMENTS: Attendees commented on the lack of staffing and expertise in conservation agencies related to wildlife, and on a lack of information upon which landowners can rely. Wildlife agencies and NGOs may help to fill the void if cooperative and sustainable partnerships can be arranged, to help provide sources of information to landowners.

14. What successful examples exist at the state and local level to advance wildlife management goals as part of local conservation programs?

    COMMENTS: Several attendees described successful partnerships, including cooperative [contribution] agreements (NE, OH, IA) to employ biologists to help deliver Farm Bill programs, co-locating fish and wildlife staff in local conservation agency offices (MO), and coordinating field visits to landowners and incorporating services and programs of NRCS, US F&WS, and Pheasants Forever in delivering <u>at one time</u> information and advice to private landowners (SD).

15. What technological resources (including new and innovative technologies) are needed to improve delivery of wildlife management services to landowners?

    COMMENTS: Did not cover in abbreviated session.

16. How does your local conservation district involve wildlife management interests to assist landowners in conservation planning and decisions on lands within the boundaries of a conservation district?

    COMMENTS: (See #11 and #14)

<u>Analysis</u>

Comments received from wildlife managers at this abbreviated session reflect many similar concerns identified in Phase One listening sessions and in other follow-up and outreach sessions conducted under Phase Two of this evaluation. Wildlife managers (state agencies, NGOs) share many similar concerns with other public and private sector/NGO interests adapting to participate in the conservation delivery system. These include a desire for easier access to becoming part of the delivery system, greater certainty and long-term reliability of funding for contribution agreements and TSP funding, reduction in partner match requirement for contribution agreements, fewer paperwork requirements, more simple and adaptable programs, improved capacity to deliver information to potential customers, and better communication with public conservation agencies.

Wildlife managers have gained some good experience working as TSPs or under contribution agreements, and recommended several improvements to that system. These include the funding ideas mentioned above, together with co-location of technical staff, greater effort to promote more comprehensive conservation planning, and reduction in paperwork. Like private sector consultant TSPs, wildlife managers also see a market-driven tendency toward “cookie-cutter” conservation plans as a problem. They also see their role expanding in marketing to private landowners the opportunities for wildlife management options in conservation programs.

Several good examples were described where successful partnerships have been developed and put to use in meeting landowner needs. Use of contribution agreements in Nebraska, Ohio and Iowa has employed wildlife biologists to help deliver Farm Bill programs in those states. In Missouri, co-locating fish and wildlife staff in local conservation agency offices has helped in establishing a single point of service for landowners. In South Dakota, coordinating field visits to landowners and delivering information and services by NRCS, US F&WS, and Pheasants Forever, all at one time, has saved time and provided more consistent advice to private landowners. In each case, partners have combined their relative strengths to meet the needs of the landowner. These, and other, examples are models for success, and should be shared with other states and organizations.

Wildlife managers believe that they have an increasing role to play in delivering conservation to private landowners, and are eager to form new partnerships to do so. While many wildlife managers and organizations have successfully adapted to working on private lands, some wildlife managers appear to be in transition – moving from what may be considered their “comfort zone” in dealing with public land management, towards a more complex relationship with private landowners and managers. This transition appears to require a shifting of attitudes and expertise in some cases about how to communicate with owners, how to gain access through the conservation delivery system, how to understand more complicated landowner needs, and how to become a partner in delivering wildlife-related information and services to landowners. NASCA recognizes this opportunity, and should work together with national wildlife organizations to facilitate the adoption of successful models of cooperation.

Appendix H *continued*

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

NASCA thanks the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference for the opportunity to share the conservation delivery system project with its attendees. NASCA would like to thank all who participated in our session, and, in particular, Ron Helinski, Wildlife Management Institute, for his efforts in putting together a successful dialogue with attending wildlife managers, and Lynn Tjeerdsma, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, for making time for our discussion amidst a very busy committee schedule.

Appendix I – Conservation Delivery System Evaluation
2006 National Conference and Workshop Report
(*without appendices*)

May 9, 2006

Conference and Workshop Report
Held in Louisville, KY, April 11-12, 2006

Conference and Workshop Purpose

In 2004 and 2005, the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) entered into two contribution agreements with US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to conduct an evaluation of the national conservation delivery system. This two-phase project is a partnership initiative to determine how to improve the conservation delivery system, making it more effective and efficient in achieving results in conserving our natural resources and serving the needs of our nation's citizens.

NASCA completed work on the project's first phase with the hosting and reporting of two regional listening sessions held in Ohio and Utah in June and July 2005, including participation by a broad range of national, regional and local interest groups. NASCA conducted the Phase Two effort as a continuation of the evaluation process, to build on the recommendations of the two listening sessions and to conduct outreach to under-represented interests and geographic areas. The work-product of this effort is the development of specific actions that can be taken to implement the recommendations and to achieve the desired improvements.

Under Phase Two, NASCA focused on the following sources of follow-up:

- State NASCA member follow-up within states (some areas originally under-represented), using focus group meetings, surveys, and workshops;
- NASCA outreach to added interest groups (under-represented, new partners) at the national, regional and state level; and,
- NASCA consultation with traditional partnering organizations (e.g., NRCS, NACD, NASDA).

The Phase Two process culminated in this national conference, held April 11-12, 2006 in Louisville, Kentucky, to pull together the results of Phase Two, and to pave the way for implementation of recommendations to improve the conservation delivery system. NASCA invited to this working conference persons and organizations taking part in Phase One, groups to whom NASCA had reached out under Phase Two, and those who wished to present *their ideas* about how to institute needed delivery system improvements in an effective and efficient manner. See Appendix A for a list of attendees.

Appendix I *continued*

The purpose of the two half-day conference and workshop was to produce specific action steps to implement recommendations that enjoy wide support among the diverse attending interest groups. The meeting was billed as a *conference and workshop* because attendees had the opportunity to both listen to diverse interests *and* to become active participants in developing detailed action steps for implementation.

<u>Conference and Workshop Design and Conduct</u>

Following an opening luncheon, the meeting design included two distinctly different types of sessions – a first day series of three panel discussions followed by day two breakout sessions.

1. Panel Discussions

Panel discussions each presented a dialogue by five or six panelists representing varied interest groups and areas of innovation in conservation delivery (See Appendix B). Panel topics were identified and assigned for discussion based on three general categories of recommendations from the project's first phase:

- Improve Local Decision-Making
- Simplify/Streamline; Reduce Delays and Inconsistencies
- Better Apply Technology and Human Resources

The objective for panel discussions was to identify recommendations that panelists and attendees could support, to describe examples of where innovation and success were being put into action, and to set the stage for breakout sessions. Panels developed ***strategic priorities*** for further consideration and action by breakout sessions on recommendations that received good support.

2. Breakout Sessions

On day two, all attendees participated in concurrent breakout sessions of their choice (one of the three assigned panel topics – see Appendix C), where facilitators brought forward the strategic priorities for further action. Breakout session attendees participated in discussion and debate on these, and developed detailed ***action steps*** to begin implementation.

These two distinctly different types of sessions were linked through the use of ***Panel Reaction Sheets***, distributed to attendees in their registration packets for them to record their reactions (e.g., agreement, disagreement, new idea but feasible, won't work) to what the panelists described during panel discussions. Attendees completed and retained these sheets for their chosen breakout session, to facilitate a discussion on the strategic priorities and a prompt development of consensus items in the breakout sessions.

Appendix I *continued*

Action steps from the three breakout sessions were reported to the combined attendees at a closing luncheon. Additional comment was received and noted during discussion of these brief presentations. Action steps were well-received by the combined attendees.

Outcomes

The outcomes, or work-products, of the conference and workshop include the following:

- Strategic Priorities (panels)
- Action Steps (breakout sessions)

Also recorded as Appendix D are detailed panel notes in preliminary form. Strategic priorities and action steps are listed below.

Strategic Priorities

During each panel discussion, the moderator noted and NASCA compiled the points around which panelists found agreement that further, more detailed action was needed by breakout sessions. These were called ***strategic priorities***, and were assigned to the next day's breakout sessions for discussion. These are listed below by panel.

Panel One - Improve Local Decision-Making

- Outreach and involvement of local people in informed decision making.

- Muscle up conservation districts – new and diverse partners and board members.

- Communication marketing and activities for specific audiences who need more than what we have been doing. Funding for programs. There is a wide range of audiences needing something that we are not delivering.

- Public relations, outreach and letting people know what we are doing locally.

- Flexibility in policy-making, rules and programs based on local input and adequate accountability.

Panel Two - Simplify/Streamline; Reduce Delays and Inconsistencies

- An increasing diverse number of land owners and operators do not know about conservation programs.

Appendix I *continued*

- Simplify conservation program delivery processes.

- People set the conservation goals for their communities; flexibility in implementation is critical for dealing with local natural resource priorities.

- Advocate for a resource-driven conservation planning approach as opposed to program driven.

Panel Three - Better Apply Technology and Human Resources

- Work to better utilize existing and additional organizations that are available for conservation delivery, including private and government – think outside box, including training needs, roles, other.

- The conservation partnership should do a better job at communicating and using proven technology outside the current methodology.

- Communication gaps between different groups.

- Technical Service Providers (TSPs) are not yet embraced as equal partners in the process.

Action Steps

Based on these results of panels, breakout sessions began their discussion of strategic priorities and recommendations to arrive at consensus about which recommendations from that topic area were to be taken the next step toward development of specific ***action steps***. The resulting action steps are listed by breakout session below. Note that there is some overlap among these action steps, as breakout session attendees arrived at several similar action steps independently on related topics.

Breakout Session One

1. Outreach and involvement of local people in informed decision making.
    - Who? Conservation partners.
    - How? Host conservation forums (broader than farm bill) co-sponsored by stakeholder groups, ethnic groups, and organizations (i.e., county elected officials, planning boards).
    - Action Item 1: Develop a concept paper on how to engage local decision makers and a process design.
    - Action Item 2: Develop a strategic planning process that includes people or groups that you would not normally work with.

Appendix I *continued*

2. Empower local conservation boards and councils to be the conservation gateway for services.
    - Who? State conservation agencies and state associations.
    - How? Local board and council members' understanding of their powers and responsibilities, and use of recruitment techniques and strategies for new and diverse partners.
    - Action Item 1: Develop training and credentialing systems for local boards and staff.
    - Action Item 2: Application and routine revision of the recruitment techniques and strategies.
    - Action Item 3: Develop a mentoring or sharing system for conservation districts; look at RC&D Circle of Diamonds and other mentoring techniques.

3. Conduct communication marketing and other activities for specific audiences who need more than what conservation partners have been doing. There is a wide range of audiences needing services that conservation partners are not delivering. Therefore, funding is needed for expanded activities.
    - Who? Local conservation districts and RC&D councils.
    - How? Look at processes and examples to identify under-served audiences.
    - Action Item 1: Conduct an annual planning process that includes a self examination of under-served audiences and needs.
    - Action Item 2: Examine and include action items in annual plans to reach and connect with under-served groups.
    - Action Item 3: Include as part of an annual report provided to the state conservation agency and share among like organizations. Develop a state plan from the local needs assessments.

4. Establish flexibility in policy-making, rules and programs based on local input and adequate accountability.
    - Who? Conservation partners and clients at all levels.
    - How? An extensive feedback system that leads to a "Yes, we can!" attitude and a climate of acceptance of local recommendations. Involve all parties when it comes to rulemaking opportunities.
    - Action Item 1: Examine current business models for customer service and improvement, including [program] exit interview techniques.
    - Action Item 2: Develop a model feedback and responsiveness system for suggestions, rules, policies, development and improvements, etc.
    - Action Item 3: Secure real commitment from partners to listen to and act upon the recommendations made at the local level.

Appendix I *continued*

5. Carry out public relations and outreach, letting people know what conservation partners are doing locally.
    - Who? Conservation partners at all levels
    - What? Emphasize outreach by taking information to specific audiences.
    - Action Item 1: Translate conservation accomplishments and/or benefits to non-agricultural audiences.
    - Action Item 2: Provide training and working tools for local field staff dealing with public relations.
    - Action Item 3: States should share public relations and outreach strategies.

Breakout Session Two

1. Address the increasing diverse number of land owners and operators who do not know about conservation programs.

    Action Items
    - Support the development of a Center for Absentee Landowners. This would be a staffed, physical center where landowners can call, e-mail, and access web information related to conservation. This information would be in multiple languages and would provide basic education to non-traditional customers.

2. Simplify conservation program delivery processes.

    Action Items
    - Delegate more authority to state and local level to administer programs.
    - Establish a statewide system which trains and empowers local conservation staff to make decisions.
    - Consolidate “Farm Bill” and traditional conservation programs into three programs - cost share, easements, and watersheds.
    - Position Conservation Districts as a one-stop service center.
    - Establish Stewardship Agreements (Bock Grants to states).
    - Make available single practice programs (e.g., cost-share).
    - Establish a multi-agency communication system shared by conservation agencies (federal, state, county, local) to reduce redundant data entry and the number of forms required for each program.

Appendix I *continued*

3. People set the conservation goals for their communities; flexibility in implementation is critical for dealing with local natural resource priorities.

   Action Items

   - Provide for broad community involvement in locally-led conservation, including planning at the watershed level.
     - Encourage state and federal agencies to provide for greater program implementation flexibility. Train local staff on opportunities for flexible approaches.
   - Train conservation district supervisors and staff as to their authority and responsibilities (e.g., clearinghouse coordinator).
   - Put NRCS technical specialists in the field and hire administrative staff to do data entry.
   - Train conservation supervisors and staff on emerging program needs (watershed management, energy alternatives, airsheds and ecosystem management approaches) so as to better position conservation districts for future opportunities.

4. Advocate for a resource-driven conservation planning approach as opposed to program driven.

   Action Items

   - Establish a process to pay for resource-driven conservation planning (e.g., salaries/expenses for NRCS employees; general funding).
     - De-couple technical assistance funding from programs.

Breakout Session Three

1. Work to better utilize existing and additional organizations that are available for conservation delivery, including private and government – think outside box, including training needs, roles, other.

2. The conservation partnership should do a better job at communicating and using proven technology outside the current methodology.

3. Address communication gaps between different groups.

4. Resolve the issue that TSPs are not yet embraced as equal partners in the delivery process.

(see table next page)

Appendix I *continued*

Action Item	Responsible Party	Timeline
Develop state partnership agreements; include the traditional partnership, NGOs, TSPs, etc.	State agencies	1 Year
Hold an annual gathering of conservation partners (include non-traditional partners).	State agency or state association	1 year
Develop national and local conservation marketing plans.	NACD and state associations	1 Year
Develop a national conservation list serve.	National partnership	1 Year
Provide landowners with simplified summary of a comprehensive conservation plan.	NRCS, TSPs, cons. districts	1 Year
Develop web resources in downloadable formats to utilize IPODs, CDs, and other readily available technology.	NRCS IT Team	6 months
Create incentives for landowners to maintain a conservation plan.	NRCS/TSPs	Prior to next Farm Bill
Establish EPA recognition of a conservation plan as a TMDL component.	NRCS/EPA	Prior to next Farm Bill
Have comprehensive conservation plans weighted positively on EQIP score.	Local EQIP working group	1 Year
Increase the number of certified TSPs as conservation planners to handle 80% of the planning workload.	NRCS	2 Years
Train potential TSPs for conservation planning.	NRCS/partners	1 Year
Rename NTE rate as technical assistance incentive rate.	NRCS	October 2006
Create or enhance state TSP liaison with NRCS in each state.	NRCS	October 2006
Simplify and streamline quality assurance oversight and review of TSP work.	NRCS	Next Farm Bill

Special Notes

Two methods were used to make sure that all ideas and comments were captured at the conference and workshop. These include use and collection of ***question/comment cards*** for panels, and collection and review of certain ***Panel Reaction Sheets*** described above.

Each panel discussion was followed by a short question and answer period. Attendees were invited to place questions and comments for the panels on index cards during each discussion. These were collected and given to moderators to use during the question and answer period. Because not all questions could be answered in the short time allowed, and because it was important to capture the thoughts and ideas in every question, moderators retained question/comment cards for the breakout sessions, where they were incorporated into the discussion. Cards were also retained after the meeting to make sure that ideas expressed on the cards were documented in this conference and workshop report (see Appendix E).

Panel Reaction Sheets proved useful during breakout sessions in helping attendees quickly identify which recommendations enjoyed sufficient support to warrant development of action steps. Further, attendees were asked to return Panel Reaction Sheets for the two panel topic areas for which they *did not attend* a breakout session. This information was useful in checking responses to panel ideas that might not otherwise have been presented in breakout sessions. Review of the responses contained in these (otherwise unused) Panel Reaction Sheets indicates, in many cases, a reinforcement of the consensus developed in breakout sessions by other attendees and broad support for several actions. These and other responses in returned Panel Reaction Sheets are described in Appendix F.

The three breakout sessions differed somewhat in how they presented their results. To preserve the original context for their action steps, these presentation differences have been retained in this report. Only one breakout group included timelines in their action steps.

Further Actions

NASCA will incorporate the results from this conference and workshop into a final report for Phase Two of the Conservation Delivery System Evaluation Project, together with other results and information received during the project's second phase. The final report will describe input, recommendations and implementation actions that NASCA received and compiled during the project's two phases.

The final report will also outline the process that NASCA will undertake to develop consensus among NASCA member state agencies regarding implementation actions, to consult with partners about the best implementation approach, and to communicate to partners about opportunities for *their* action and contributions to help improve the conservation delivery system, based on recommendations and action steps developed during the project. Under a third contribution agreement with NRCS, NASCA plans to continue work to advance recommendations and track implementation of improvements developed under this project.

Appendix I *continued*

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