

Locally-led conservation- *"Actions taken by conservation districts and local stakeholders to identify and prioritize natural resource concerns and to form an action strategy that will lead to the planned management and wise use of natural resources."*

Sponsor: NASCA Policy Committee

Title: Locally Led, Voluntary, Incentive Based Conservation Delivery

Subject: **Proposing actions to emphasize the importance of locally led, voluntary, incentive-based conservation delivery, utilizing existing conservation district expertise and experience**

Supporting material and/or documentation:

When the federal government formed the Soil Conservation Service in the 1930's, it realized that local leadership would be necessary to affect change and modify long-held beliefs. A model conservation district law that emphasized the importance of local action was drafted by President Franklin Roosevelt's administration and sent to all state and territorial governments. The proposal encouraged the formation of soil and water conservation districts, which would be charged with working with local producers to address local resource concerns and to demonstrate the effectiveness of conservation practices.

The state and territorial governments also recognized the need for local leadership and adopted laws creating local conservation districts. While the laws vary in scope, each holds to the principal that local guidance and direction is crucial for conservation district programs and services. Thus, conservation districts serve as the entity that America's landowners and producers turn to for local leadership of conservation delivery.

Regulatory programs to mitigate nonpoint source pollution exist at federal, state, and local levels. However, enforcement of this regulatory approach is often challenging over a broad landscape. History has demonstrated that voluntary, incentive-based approaches to conservation delivery have been more readily welcomed, often enthusiastically, by landowners and operators. Additionally, we are also seeing new market-based approaches to conservation implementation. These approaches are also voluntary but can provide substantial financial incentives to implement conservation practices on working lands. Since approximately 70% of the land base in this country is in private ownership, a commitment to locally-led, voluntary, incentive-based conservation delivery is essential to success. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), state conservation agencies, and conservation districts in every state have made this commitment.

However, making this commitment is just a place to start. We must also commit to collectively creating a workforce capable of meeting the technical assistance needs of every landowner and producer in the country. This will entail investments in training, hiring, and providing resources to staff from every level of the conservation partnership. To help secure many of these resources, we must also become more effective in sharing the needs and benefits of conservation in order to energize our peers, decision-makers, and cooperators.



We must also commit to securing the best available technology and expertise from all available sources. This means that conservation districts must channel all available conservation expertise through the effective leadership of local workgroups. These workgroups can help conservation districts assess natural resource concerns, provide resources for conservation implementation, draft recommendations for federal, state, and local funding mechanisms, and meet statutory requirements.

Action requested to be taken by NASCA:

The NASCA Board and staff will work with partner leadership to:

1. Educate policy makers about the value of the locally led conservation delivery system, and why conservation programs should be voluntary and incentive-based;
2. Recognize the importance of conservation districts in leading the Local Working Group process and re-emphasize that the core principle of the nation's conservation districts is to provide local guidance and direction for their conservation programs and services;
3. Locally-led conservation is most effective when directed by a Board that is diversified, energized, informed, empowered, and enthused. NASCA should work directly with NACD to:
 - a. Develop recommended standards and desirable skills, abilities, or knowledge for effective district supervisors/directors;
 - b. Publicize the importance and roles of conservation districts;
 - c. Develop conservation district supervisor/director self-evaluation tool/matrix;
4. Encourage and expand partnership relationships between local stakeholders, conservation districts and NASCA state-agency members to develop strategies to implement voluntary, incentive-based conservation at the most localized scale possible;
5. Reinforce at local, state and national levels that a vibrant, resilient and strong locally led conservation delivery system benefits the nation's natural resources, preserves and protects public and private lands, and contributes to the general health and welfare of the nation's citizens;
6. Advocate that a strong locally led conservation delivery system depends on a long-term financial and legislative commitment to efficiently and effectively address local natural resource concerns while being mindful of local producer challenges; and
7. Work with the National Conservation Planning Partnership as well as other agencies and organizations to ensure that training opportunities are made available to all core partner members and staff regarding the principles and sound planning methodology of the

locally led, voluntary, conservation district delivery system.

8. Encourage NRCS to draft program rules that promote locally-led conservation as defined above while allowing programs to remain voluntary and incentive-based.