Locally Led Conservation in Nevada by the 2017 NvACD-NRCS Agreement (December 4, 2017)

In January 2017, Ray Dotson, State Conservationist for NV NRCS, invited Nevada Association of Conservation Districts (NvACD) to enter into a Cooperative Agreement with NRCS to invigorate Nevada’s Local Work Groups (LWG) and the State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC). This is called the NvACD-NRCS Agreement. Why is this important to locally led conservation in Nevada? The STAC is led by the NRCS State Conservationist and is the means by which LWGs can recommend how NRCS expends its program dollars or sets its conservation standards and specifications in Nevada. It is a voice from the local to the state and national levels. It is also a means for relationships to be built with other members of the LWG. \*\*\*

The NvACD-NRCS Agreement will provide the tools and training to help six conservation districts (CD), two in each CD Area (the State Conservation Commission recognizes three regional areas in Nevada), conduct an inventory of resource concerns and utilize the information gained to create a Resource Needs Assessment (RNA) and subsequent conservation action plans. The process will generate recommendations for LWGs to submit to the STAC and ultimately assist coordination and cooperation with federal, state, and local planning and plan implementation.

Resources made available to CDs from the NvACD-NRCS Agreement:

* A Guide to creating Resource Needs Assessments developed by NvACD,
* Training to complete RNAs provided by NvACD,
* $4000 paid to a CD that completes the process of gathering the information needed for an RNA, develops a conservation action plan and submits the information to the STAC.

**Other factors supporting the fulfillment of the NvACD-NRCS Agreement:**

1. The process selected by NvACD, which basically follows the NRCS farm planning process but on an area-wide scale, utilizes tried and true NRCS planning tools such as the Resource Concerns Checklist and the Conservation Practice Physical Effects matrix. NvACD recognizes that CDs will need technical assistance to gather, process and compile this information.

National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and NRCS at the national level signed a $10 million Cooperative Agreement in 2017 to provide technical planning assistance for CDs; NvACD submitted an application on November 21, 2017 for funding to hire one position for each CD area to assist with the creation of the Resource Needs Assessments; we will seek retired NRCS employees who will have the necessary experience already. This is called the NACD-NRCS Agreement.

Partners at Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR Conservation District Program), the Nevada Department of Wildlife, and Intermountain West Joint Venture are current funding/cooperative partners in this application.

2. In 2016, the State Conservation Commission, with support by NvACD applied to NRCS for a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant called the “Nevada Coordinated Resource Management Initiative,” modeled after the RCPP grant approved for New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts. The Initiative was proposed to provide the technical and financial resources to assist each Nevada CD to develop an individualized Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP) and then fund the chosen conservation project that resulted from the development of the CRMP.

The RCPP application was for $5 million; more significantly, federal, state and other partners in Nevada committed an additional $18 million that would include staff time and allow certain portions of their project funding to go to projects decided by the CRMPs. Though the RCPP grant was not selected, these same partners are willing to make a similar commitment to the NvACD-NRCS Agreement process.

3. UNR/UNCE has committed $185,000 to develop and execute a survey instrument to maximize stakeholder input into the RNA process. This will assist CDs to identify where their community’s conservation values, goals and priorities stand based on the resource concerns identified by the RNA. It will allow the conservation action plans and STAC input to be built from a broad base of stakeholders.

4. The Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network facilitates dialogue among partners and trains community facilitators that will support the NvACD-NRCS Agreement process.

**How will this NvACD-NRCS Agreement enhance CD operation and other conservation work in Nevada?**

* Uses a tried and true method proven to extract the information needed to write conservation action plans
* A place for traction for NCCN
* Furtherance of partnerships begun by varied sage grouse efforts
* The process of working through a RNA will build relationships within the LWG and other CD connections that will be ongoing and strengthen conservation on the ground in that area
* Existing conservation groups in an area can add their expertise to strengthen the RNA process
* Assists a CD fulfill their responsibilities outlined in NRS 548
* The final result of a RNA gives teeth and provides a process to promote locally led conservation in Nevada; a CD/LWG will have information and recommendations to enable them to participate in federal, state, and local planning processes
* Creates an understandable mechanism for a LWG to function and fulfill its responsibilities

\*\*\*PLEASE NOTE:

* Local Work Groups (LWGs) are led by conservation districts and **specifically defined by USDA NRCS Manual** Title 440 – Programs, Part 501 – USDA Conservation Program Delivery, Subpart A and Subpart B. The only way to find this document is to search the title online. Only a LWG can submit recommendations to the NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee. See attached Manual description.
* A State of Nevada defined Local Area Work Group (LAWG) is not an NRCS LWG.
* NvACD hopes that the conservation district LWG will become the nexus for conservation in their particular area. All other conservation groups within a LWG geographic area would be welcome partners to work toward a RNA and all locally led conservation.