



**American Water Works  
Association**

*Dedicated to the World's Most Important Resource®*

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## **Working with the NRCS for Source Water Protection**

### **Why work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)?**

On December 20, 2018, the President signed the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, commonly known as the Farm Bill. That date marked the culmination of an extensive, long-term, and successful effort by AWWA to make source water protection a priority within U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation programs – and to designate significant funding towards those efforts.

Under the new Farm Bill, ten percent of spending on Conservation Title programs is to be directed to source water protection, *providing at least \$4 billion over the next 10 years*. These programs assist farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners protect and enhance environmental outcomes that have benefits both on and off-farm. Moreover, there is a now a directive for USDA to work closely with utilities to identify and prioritize areas that need source water protection.

In addition to the funding and prioritization successes, AWWA was also successful in gaining utilities a seat at the table in the state and local groups that decide how, where, on what, and how much of the conservation funds go toward SWP. The NRCS administers most of USDA's conservation programs and working with the Agency is vital if utilities wish to address nonpoint sources such as nutrients, sediment, and chemicals.

*In order to assure the successful deployment of these funds to protect source waters, utilities need to come to the table locally with NRCS state technical committees and local work groups to help discuss and prioritize source water protection needs.* In-depth information can be found in *USDA Tools to Support Source Water Protection* on [AWWA's Source Water Protection resource page](#) and the Source Water Collaborative's [Protecting Drinking Water Sources through Agricultural Conservation Toolkit](#).

### **Background on NRCS**

The NRCS was created in the 1930s to bring the Dust Bowl under control and restore the Nation's agricultural productivity. Concurrent with the Agency's creation was the establishment of local Soil and Water Conservation Districts who help provide direction to the NRCS. Today there are some 11,000 NRCS employees in 3,000 small offices around the country; most of which are co-located with local soil and water conservation districts.

If you need more information, contact your state NRCS office, or Adam Carpenter ([acarpenter@awwa.org](mailto:acarpenter@awwa.org)) or Tracy Mehan ([tmehan@awwa.org](mailto:tmehan@awwa.org)) at AWWA

NRCS is a technical agency with engineers, agronomists, biologists, soil scientists and a host of other scientific disciplines. NRCS employees provide direct technical and financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and forest land owners. Most work occurs on private lands, which make up 70% of the land area in the lower 48 states.

NRCS is decentralized and organized in each state with a State Office, Area Offices, and multiple Field Offices (generally one in each county). NRCS also has offices on Tribal lands. *NRCS office contacts can be found at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/contact/states/>.*

### **Opportunities for Engagement**

For utilities interested in engaging with the NRCS, there are four key individuals to contact:

1. State Conservationist – responsible for all NRCS activities in the state;
2. Assistant State Conservationist for Programs – responsible for all NRCS programs;
3. Area Conservationist – responsible for operations and programs in a multi-county area;
4. District Conservationist – responsible for the Agency’s work, usually within a county.

When contacting the State Office, explain your interest and ask what the Agency is doing for SWP in your area. Also inquire about becoming a member of the State Technical Committee and/or a Local Work Group. NRCS also has Tribal Conservation Advisory Councils. These committees are established under law and provide official ways to influence NRCS decisions. Members of State Technical Committees and Local Work Groups come from a wide variety of natural resource and agricultural interests and include representatives from Federal and State natural resource agencies, Indian Tribes, agricultural groups, environmental organizations, and agricultural producers. The committee meets regularly to provide information, analysis, and recommendations to USDA officials, who strongly consider their advice.

Utilities wanting to participate as members on a State Technical Committee may submit requests to the State Conservationist explaining their interest and relevant credentials. To become a member of the Local Work Group, contact the District Conservationist in your county.

### **State Technical Committee Role**

- Provide information, analysis, and recommendations to USDA on conservation priorities and criteria for natural resources conservation activities and programs, including application and funding criteria, recommended practices, and program payment percentages.
- Identify emerging natural resource concerns and program needs.
- Recommend conservation practice standards and specifications and program policy.
- Review and make recommendations ensure State priorities are being addressed locally.
- Assist with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producer needs.

### **Local Work Group Role**

- Help identify program funding needs, resource concerns, and conservation practices at the local level;
- Recommend program application and funding criteria, eligible practices, limits on practice payments, and payment rates;
- Participate in multicounty coordination; and
- Assist with public outreach and information efforts and identify training needs