

NvACD / CD Resource Needs Assessments

Nevada's 28 Conservation Districts include the whole state and they are up to lots of great stuff including restoration on Nevada's rivers and in the Tahoe basin, pinyon-juniper encroachment removal for sage grouse, wildlife and increased water in many locations, partnering with local groups, the Zion Community Garden in Las Vegas, supporting Nevada Youth Range Camp and a whole lot more.

What is a Conservation District? They were founded in 1937 during the Dust Bowl with the philosophy that conservation decisions should be made at the local level and based on voluntary, incentive-based actions. They are governmental entities, much like school boards, directed by locally elected Supervisors that derive their authority from NRS 548. They are a vital link to connect private and public land interests in Nevada and they started nationwide because in the 1930s people understood something - if you want the government to help; it will work much better if local people guide it. Nevada Association of Conservation Districts (NvACD) is part of the movement to make that thought the way we do business in Nevada again.

NvACD is the non-profit, statewide network, voice, and advocacy association for Nevada's 28 CDs. We provide forums and training to educate CD Supervisors and others; we can lobby and are not subject to the open meeting law like CDs and the State Conservation Commission. We also recognize outstanding conservation work at our Annual Meeting and assist CDs to reach their potential.

NvACD is helping CDs increase their role as leaders of locally led conservation in Nevada. An initial group of Nevada CDs will write Resource Needs Assessments by bringing together local producers, local groups, agencies and general public to identify resource concerns and possible solutions to those resource concerns using Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) farm planning tools and other resources.

This information will be used to write conservation action plans that can serve to direct programs and funding from any source to resolve those resource concerns. Resource needs will drive the conservation actions and funding will be spent on the priority resource concerns as determined by local stakeholders.

Note the repetition of the words, "resource concerns or needs;" this process is effective because it is driven by resource concerns, not programs. It answers the question of what the resource concerns are BEFORE human traditions, wants, needs, values, biases, emotions or political position can cloud the issue. When the resource concerns are identified first, it keeps the human part from inadvertently dominating. It makes the focus be how to solve the resource issue at hand. This method will seek the most appropriate outcome, even if that may not appear to be the most desired at first blush. (Think of any contentious issue)

NvACD is helping CDs increase their role as leaders of locally led conservation by partnering and leveraging opportunity to obtain resources to help CDs complete Resource Needs Assessments. NvACD signed a Cooperative Agreement in 2017 with Natural Resources Conservation Service in Nevada; NRCS sought to increase the effectiveness of CD-led Local Work Groups and their State Technical Advisory Committee and NvACD will train and educate the initial seven CDs and the agencies, groups, and local publics that will help them develop the Resource Needs Assessments to accomplish that. The seven CDs are Lincoln County, Northeast Elko, Eureka, White Pine, Mason Valley, Smith Valley and Conservation District of Southern Nevada.

Federal and state agencies are committing staff time and project funding to the Resource Needs Assessment process. NvACD obtained funding from the National Association of Conservation Districts to hire retired NRCS employees who already understand the farm planning tools to help the seven CDs develop the Resource

Needs Assessments. University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, NDOW and USFWS Partners Program is funding UNR to develop a sophisticated survey instrument to improve the amount and quality of public input to the process.

There are many benefits to a CD and their local area when they complete a Resource Needs Assessment:

- They will have the information to inform the NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee
- They will have a plan in place to coordinate and cooperate with federal agency planning
- They will be able to direct funding from any source toward appropriate conservation projects
- The information can assist a county with local planning to address local resource concerns
- It creates a mechanism for a Local Work Group to function and fulfill its responsibilities
- It will further partnerships begun by varied sage grouse efforts

It is all about having the information in place to make the best decisions, at the local level, about how best to spend any program dollars available from any source to solve resource concerns, and how to locally lead planning for the future.

This “Locally Led” planning process establishes a foundation upon which the District’s conservation efforts are based. It provides the informational and scientific rigor for planning and project implementation that is on par with other federal agency planning and provides the context to develop collaborative solutions with state and federal partners. It challenges neighbors, both urban and rural, to work together and take responsibility for addressing local resource needs. It involves the community in the assessment of those needs, as well as the solutions and priorities. The approach emphasizes voluntary, non-regulatory, incentive-based actions before use of regulatory measures. It is not driven by any single piece of legislation, any one fiscal year or any individual program; it is an on- going, timeless approach that is not tied to any particular year. As such, it is able to be evaluated regularly to ensure it is effectively meeting the long-term needs of the local community.

Conservation Districts are statutorily the local group with the most authority and responsibility to lead locally led conservation across ownership boundaries; they are ideally suited to be the leaders to bring the concerns and planning from multiple agencies and groups together for the best result per NRS 548.

Here are many ways you can help, no matter how you are connected to conservation in your area:

- You can provide accurate, relevant input to identify resource concerns,
- Offer staff time of your agency or group to participate in the Assessment and support decisions made in the Assessment,
- Direct funding to projects identified by the process,
- Help distribute the survey and encourage people to respond to it,
- Participate or nominate participants to serve in the Local Work Group, on the State Technical Advisory Committee or as a local CD Supervisor,
- Involve your CD in local management,
- Provide specialists to analyze unidentified, or identified but unquantified problems, so they can be addressed,
- And most importantly, volunteer to be part of the solutions when opportunities arise.

We know you can find yourself or your agency or group somewhere on this list. The Resource Needs Assessment has the opportunity to find solutions for resource concerns in your area and is an obvious and practical way to build relationships; remember, everything is always about relationships. And most of all, find ways to say YES and anything is possible!