

## **Presentation Regarding Conservation Districts, Collaborative Groups, and Resource Needs Assessments in Nevada**

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Natural resource collaborative processes operate across a spectrum – they come in a variety of shapes and forms depending on the different personalities involved, the purpose to be accomplished, the facilitator style, and the depth of intensity at which they function. They come under many different titles as well – community-based organizations, local work groups, local area work groups, holistic management teams; clever names such as R.O.G.E.R, Results Oriented Grazing for Ecological Resilience or S.A.N.E., Stewardship Alliance of Northeast Elko, and more. Some don't even like to call them "collaborative" groups remembering "collaborators" of World War II, and favor the idea of "coordination" instead, using vocabulary that defines all parties as equal.

There is a story to these groups. They grew out of conflict in the 1990's and all use basically the same tools across the whole spectrum. Sometimes all the inconsistent terms and definitions get in the way, but the important thing to remember is whatever they call themselves or however they structure themselves, their intent is to bring people together. They work to reduce conflict and find solutions to problems or situations at a local level and by so doing can help stabilize the economies of rural Nevada. It is important work – for our people, for our resources, for our future.

Collaborative groups work across ownership boundaries and involve everyone with an interest to work together toward the same defined goals. As an example, the participants listed on the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program website for the Local Area Work Group or LAWGs includes: *"representation from private land owners, tribes, federal land management agencies, local governments, conservation districts, United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), United States Geological Service (USGS), Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS), University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Department of Defense (DOD), sportsmen, mining, energy, Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) users, agricultural and environmental interests."* I might also add from my own experience on the Lincoln LAWG, Nevada Division of Forestry, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, and Farm Bureau. The participants involved will reflect the purpose and area of the working group. I'd like to spend some time briefing you on some of the different groups that are out there and what they are up to.

Let's deal with two of the confusing terms, Local Area Work Groups and Local Work Groups. There are currently sage grouse Local Area Work Groups or LAWGs operating in Nevada:

North Central LAWG

Bi-State LAWG that you heard about in May

Lincoln LAWG

Buffalo Skedaddle LAWG

Northeast Nevada Stewardship Group (Sage grouse pod = Elko LAWG)

Vya LAWG

S.A.N.E. – Stewardship Alliance of Northeast Elko; you will hear more about SANE at your July meeting in Battle Mountain.

These LAWGs grew out of Governor Kenny Guinn's task force in 2000 to develop a plan that would conserve and protect Nevada's sage grouse and their habitat. This document laid the groundwork for the formation of Local Area Working Groups and provided them with a roadmap for developing conservation plans.

Since you are here in Pioche, a bit of history of the Lincoln LAWG. Our group began as a cooperative effort between Lincoln and White Pine Counties which later separated. A Lincoln County plan was completed and included as an appendix in the statewide Sage-grouse Plan. The Lincoln LAWG applied for Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) funds and the BLM completed some sagebrush work but had to return about half the SNPLMA funding since they were unable to use it in the allotted time due to the lack of completed soil surveys and watershed assessments to provide the required NEPA work. After some inactive years, the LAWG worked hard on a plan Addendum to the original that focused on PJ removal, sagebrush and meadow enhancement and reduction of corvids. Through this entire process, the LAWG had to deal with wind energy proposals, giant powerlines coming through Lincoln County, the threat of water transfers, wilderness areas being designated, and excessive wild horse numbers.

The Lincoln County Conservation District became involved in the LAWG several years ago and we have been able to bring private lands into the mix. We have created strong cooperation between the CD and BLM and other local groups so we work across ownership lines and create wildlife corridors to assist sage grouse to move more safely from the lower lek areas to the higher elevation late brood-rearing habitat. BLM is successfully applying for SNPLMA funds each year and accomplishing much work. The CD is currently working in the Wilson Creek area and in Cave Valley using State Conservation Commission grants and funds from other partners.

Now to confuse the matter:

Local Work Groups, not Local Area Work Groups that I just discussed, but Local Work Groups, are led by conservation districts and are specifically defined by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Manual Title 440. (See attached) Conservation districts or CDs are entities of state government, created nationwide in 1937 in response to the Dust Bowl with a philosophy that conservation decisions should be made at the local level; they derive their authority from NRS 548. They have locally elected Supervisors and appointments from county and city governments. Nevada's 28 CDs are ideally suited to work across private-public ownership boundaries and bring together landowners, groups and agencies to solve conservation concerns in their area.

Currently Eureka, Elko and Washoe-Storey LWGs are functioning. Nevada Association of Conservation Districts has obtained funding to assist CDs to revitalize more local work groups by conducting Resource Needs Assessments to identify resource concerns and possible solutions to those resource concerns. The information will be used to write conservation action plans that will serve to direct programs and funding from any source to resolve those resource concerns. I will present the full concept of Resource Needs Assessments later. When CDs get the LWGs functioning as intended, they will be able to provide a significant contribution to locally-led conservation.

There are other groups working as well; the Humboldt River Basin Network formed in 2017 and is beginning the work of building trust with existing entities. The ROGER group has been instrumental to inspire five of BLM'S 11 outcome-based grazing demonstration projects to be here in Nevada. In the BLM's own words, "Outcome-based grazing emphasizes conservation performance, ecological, economic and social outcomes and cooperative management of public lands." This is coordination and collaboration, which is also seen in the Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition and the Shoesole Holistic Management Team.

A classic example of how controversy turned to cooperation is shown by the Jordan Meadows Collaborative Group. In the sage grouse mecca of the Montana Mountains in Humboldt County, also important to Lahontan Cutthroat trout, drought was making things tough starting about 2011. As reported to me by Mark Freese of NDOW, finger pointing between agency and grazing permittees intensified until in 2014 the permittee called Mark to initiate a coordinated effort to protect the natural resources and make the ranch sustainable. The BLM brought in the facilitation of the National Riparian Service Team, and now the group of cooperators meets regularly and significant work is accomplishing the original goals. The Jordan Meadows Collaborative Group participates with the North Central LAWG.

Another incredible example of success is STORM-OV, *Saving Toads thru Off-Road Racing, Ranching & Mining in Oasis Valley*. Led by David Spicer to conserve the Amargosa toad around Beatty, the local people have created and rehabilitated habitat for the toad, and therefore other wildlife, while creating outdoor recreation events, providing education, and building relationships with state and federal agencies and a myriad of publics. In my opinion, these bottom-up efforts are the most successful. Top-down work such as the Clark County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) and the USFWS Recovery Implementation Teams (RIT) serve a role to bring people together as well but are not as effective as the bottom up groups.

Collaboration takes time, energy, passion and commitment by the parties involved. Nevada Association of Conservation Districts or NvACD, began an effort in 2017 to assist CDs develop Resource Needs Assessments. This is the presentation I have developed for outreach to those not directly involved but who are still needed in the process.

RNA POWER POINT

I say we all say yes to working together for our natural resources. This is what the Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network (NCCN) is doing; NCCN is developing within the state to serve as a bridge between various groups that are already operating such as those I have described, and to utilize their experience, knowledge and passion as a way to enhance, expand and network other conservation efforts across the state to build momentum and ability to lead to more and better conservation on the ground in a triple-bottom-line way. Currently the NCCN Coordinating Group includes 17 groups or agencies, including NvACD, please see the attached for our purpose/vision and core values and operating principles. You will hear more about NCCN at your next meetings.

You asked me to answer the question, **“What actions the Legislature could take to help Nevada communities better function within the confines of public lands.”**

1. Nevada Revised Statutes 548.105 (1) already recognizes locally-led conservation through CDs to be the policy of the State – *It is hereby declared, as a matter of legislative determination, that persons in local communities are best able to provide basic leadership and direction for the planning and accomplishment of the conservation and development of renewable natural resources through organization and operation of conservation districts.*

Your question clearly indicates that you understand that Nevada communities are affected in multiple ways by the predominance of federally controlled lands in the state. If CDs were funded at a level where they could effectively function in their full authority and responsibility then they would have the ability to step up to assist federal agencies get done what needs to get done that the agencies can't do themselves anymore. We have to figure out how to support agencies and their mission to make sure the needs of Nevada communities are met because the two are intertwined. New Mexico is an outstanding example of how federal agencies run dollars through the conservation district state association in order to get work done more effectively. USDA NRCS in Nevada initiated the idea for the Agreement we are using for funds for our Resource Needs Assessments to help their agency function better here. With greater funding also comes greater leverage – CDs can use seed money, if provided by the state – as non-federal match for other grant funds to achieve cross-jurisdictional work. It makes sense to strengthen a means that is already in place and parlay our state dollars two to three times.

One of the biggest problems facing CDs and other organizations and agencies in NCCN is a lack of match to apply for federal grants for conservation projects. Nevada leaves money on the table that goes to other states because of the difficulty of coming up with non-federal match funds. It would really make a difference if there was Legislative support for providing general fund match dollars for CDs and others to put conservation projects on the ground that will benefit rural economies and our environment as is done in other Western states.

Conservation districts are poised to take a leading role in locally led conservation in Nevada and assist their local communities. NRS 548.105 (2) states, *Recognizing the importance of locally led efforts for the conservation of renewable natural resources, the Legislature will strive to provide appropriations to conservation districts at a level comparable to the appropriations provided to similar districts in other*

*western states*. Unfortunately, Nevada consistently ranks at the bottom; a few years ago, we were 52<sup>nd</sup> out of 52.

2. Second to wildfire, wild horses are the biggest rangeland health problem in Nevada; they negatively affect Nevada's rural economy in multiple ways. The State of Nevada has existing authority to implement and demonstrate proper management of the Virginia Range horses in Storey and Lyon Counties and create conditions that everyone wants – healthy horses and healthy rangelands. Nevada manages this feral horse herd under NRS 569. A strong Legislative Resolution supporting Nevada Department of Agriculture to use the full authority in NRS 569 to manage the state horse herd will elevate much needed awareness of proper management, will promote sustaining a healthy horse population and will address serious public safety issues.

Thank you for asking this question. It shows a willingness to address real problems concerning public lands in Nevada. The locally based conservation groups I mentioned are all about people meeting in the same room to talk about a common problem and trying to find solutions. This is what drives the coalition of participants in the Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network – to make coordination and collaboration the way we do business in Nevada. The more we do it, the more we recognize it, the more we fund it, the more practical it becomes to do. It is the only way to find lasting success and help Nevada's communities function better within the confines of public lands.

# Local Work Groups (LWG) Natural Resources Conservation Service

## Fact Sheet

August 2011

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### What is a Local Work Group?

The locally led conservation effort is the foundation of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) conservation program delivery process. The local work group supports the locally led conservation effort by coordinating USDA programs with other Federal, State, tribal, and local conservation programs to provide an integrated solution to addressing natural resource concerns.

### Purpose

Local working groups provide recommendations on local natural resource priorities and criteria for USDA conservation activities and programs. Convened by the local conservation district, the local work group responsibilities include:

- Develop a conservation needs assessment identifying broad conservation goals to solve natural resource problems;
- Identify priority resource concerns that can be addressed by USDA programs;
- Recommend USDA conservation program application and funding criteria, eligible practices (including limits on practice payments or units), and payment rates;
- Assist NRCS and the conservation district with public outreach and information efforts;
- Identify educational and producers' training needs; and,
- Recommend program policy to the State Technical Advisory Committee based on resource data.

### Membership

Local working group membership should be diverse and focus on agricultural interests and natural resource issues existing in the local community. Membership should include agricultural producers representing the variety of crops, livestock, and poultry raised within the local area: owners of nonindustrial private forest land, as appropriate;

representatives of agricultural and environmental organizations; and representatives of governmental agencies carrying out agricultural and natural resource conservation programs and activities.

Local work group membership may include:

- NRCS designated conservationist.
- Members of conservation district boards or equivalent.
- Members of the county Farm Service Agency (FSA) committee.
- FSA county executive director or designee.
- Cooperative extension (board members or manager).
- State or local elected or appointed officials.
- Other Federal and State government representatives.
- Representatives of American Indian and Alaskan Native governments

### LWG Meetings

- Occur at least once each year;
- Meetings are open to the public;
- Meetings will be conducted as an open discussion among members; and,
- Individuals attending the local working group meetings will be given the opportunity to address the local working group.

### For More Information

Contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service or the local conservation district in your county for more information. The NRCS office is listed in the telephone book under U.S. Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all of its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD)."

## **Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network**

The Nevada Collaborative Conservation Network (NCCN) is a state-wide<sup>1</sup> effort to promote, support and incentivize local, community-based, collaborative conservation efforts in order to create and maintain thriving ecosystems and associated wildlife, communities and economies.

NCCN active participants (a.k.a. NCCN Coordinating Group) include representatives from the following organizations:

- Locally-led, community-based work groups
- NV Governor's Office & Sagebrush Ecosystem Program
- University of Nevada, Reno – Cooperative Extension
- NV Association of Conservation Districts
- NV Department of Wildlife
- NV Department of Agriculture
- NV Association of Counties
- NV Department of Forestry
- NV Conservation Districts Program
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Intermountain West Joint Venture
- Bureau of Land Management
- US Forest Service
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- The Farm Bureau
- Great Basin Landscape Conservation Cooperative
- Natural Resources Conservation Service

## **NCCN PURPOSE/VISION**

### ***Vision***

A state where people with different individual, organizational, and institutional perspectives work together to achieve locally-led conservation and working landscapes that provide a wealth and diversity of thriving ecosystems for the species, recreation, businesses/ industries and families/ communities that depend on them.

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of the NCCN is to help facilitate a proactive, inclusive, and responsible solution-based approach to resource issues. Partnerships will be fostered by demonstrating the benefits of collaboration and community-based conservation to achieve working landscapes and sustainable communities. Recognizing local stakeholder participation and leadership as a critical contribution to conservation and resource management, we will work to increase the connectedness of communities to land and wildlife management agencies/organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> Plan is to start with sagebrush ecosystem focus, and then expand to southern NV.

## ***Core Values & Operating Principles***

### **Core Beliefs**

- Human communities and natural resources are interdependent
- Community-based, locally led conservation is the keystone to working landscapes and sustainable communities.

<b><u>Collaboration will:</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build trust to provide a foundation of hope and mutual understanding</li><li>• Create and enhance working relationships</li><li>• Embrace local knowledge</li><li>• Honor cultural uniqueness</li><li>• Incorporate sound science</li><li>• Create an adaptive learning and management approach</li><li>• Enhance ecosystem health</li><li>• Serve the needs and desires of Nevada’s people, ecosystems, and economies</li><li>• Consistently identify and accomplish needed conservation actions in a timely manner</li></ul>	<b><u>We share a commitment to:</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support creation of locally-led, community-based solutions</li><li>• Coordinate efforts between groups and individuals</li><li>• Build collaborative consensus-based processes at the local and state level.</li><li>• Seek inclusive representation of each community’s unique diversity</li><li>• Be accountable to ourselves and our partners</li><li>• Respect and listen to each other.</li><li>• Consider each other’s perspectives</li><li>• Sustain the integrity of natural resources</li><li>• Transparency</li></ul>
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