



National Association of Conservation Districts

Impacts of Executive Actions on Locally Led Conservation Issue Paper

Recent executive actions freezing and revoking conservation funding, reducing staff, closing local offices, and shifting priorities within federal programs have significantly impacted America's producers and our country's voluntary, locally led conservation delivery system.

In March 2025, NACD released an updated report on survey responses submitted by more than 400 conservation districts across 48 U.S. states and territories, sharing the local impacts of executive actions. Scanning the QR code below will allow you to access the report. NACD will publish updated versions of this report as we receive additional information from members, federal agencies, and partners. We encourage lawmakers to review this report and communicate with district offices to understand current local conditions. The information below summarizes the most prevalent issues and concerns shared by our members and partners.

There remains widespread uncertainty and confusion regarding the implementation and effects of many executive actions, while additional federal directives, legal challenges, and agency decisions are developing daily. NACD is encouraged that USDA and additional agencies have taken initial steps to honor existing contracts and rehire some recently terminated employees who provide important services and technical assistance to producers. NACD appreciates and stands ready to support the administration's commitment to eliminating redundancies, streamlining services, and improving the stewardship of taxpayer dollars. As agencies work to conduct reviews of programs and funding, NACD strongly encourages the consideration of local impacts on producers, communities, and conservation efforts.

While the impacts of recent executive actions vary across communities, conservation districts in every region of the country are experiencing significant issues:

1. Frozen Payments

USDA conservation programs provide support to allow producers and partners to invest in proven conservation practices that enhance water quality, bolster soil health, and control erosion, while also increasing the profitability and resilience of farm operations. Many producers and partners have fronted the costs of projects as part of signed contracts and have not yet been reimbursed. These delays have created uncertainty and distrust.

- As a result, producers are currently in tough financial positions, relying on interest-bearing lines of credit, and struggling to pay bills. Producers and farm communities are already struggling with low commodity prices while input costs remain at or near record-high levels.
- Critical infrastructure projects, including repairing reservoirs, constructing dams, and implementing community wildfire defense measures are on hold.
- Conservation districts and their associations are not receiving timely reimbursements for grants and agreements, resulting in significant financial strain and forcing many to terminate staff.
- Local economies are also strained as technical service providers and businesses selling seeds, building supplies, and equipment await payments.



2. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and additional agency staff firings and office lease terminations.

Since February, NRCS and other agencies have terminated thousands of employees and taken steps to close many state and county offices, severely impacting the delivery of conservation programs and services to producers. NRCS local offices are categorized as High-Impact Service Providers, and their staff travel to producers' operations to provide specialized technical services. Approximately 60 percent of conservation district offices are co-located with NRCS, and district staff are critical to the timely and effective administration of conservation services for producers.

- Already understaffed, NRCS had been working to hire and train thousands of employees to reduce existing backlogs in conservation programs, review and authorize projects, and provide on-the-field technical assistance.
- Office lease and staff terminations will exacerbate delays in NRCS delivering these vital services and ultimately postpone producers' efforts to adopt effective conservation practices.
- NACD supports assessing existing functions and services for redundancies and inefficiencies prior to making any targeted, performance-based workforce reductions.

3. Potential for long-term damage to federal programs and conservation delivery.

Delayed payments, increasing program backlogs, and understaffed local offices do not provide good customer service experiences for producers voluntarily enrolling in locally led USDA programs to put effective conservation practices on their operations.

- New obligations of some funding through conservation programs remain paused, which may have long-term impacts on practice implementation, producer service, and trust in programs.
- To maintain the health of, and producers' trust in, our country's locally led conservation delivery system, USDA and additional agencies must prioritize the expedited release of funds owed to producers and partners, rehire critical local conservation staff, and provide necessary resources for the effective administration of conservation programs.

About NACD

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents a nationwide network of 3,000 conservation districts and their state/territory associations, working with millions of landowners and farmers to manage and protect private and public working lands in the United States. Districts are local units of government that help put locally led, voluntary, and incentive-based conservation programs into action.

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