



# North Central Region Partners' Meeting

Hampton Inn and Suites Des Moines Downtown

Des Moines, IA

Capital Room

January 9 – January 10, 2025

## Board Attendance:

Jeri Thornsberry, IA

Eric Wessels, IA

Dale Shumaker, IL

Josh Curry, IL

Ethan Truax, IN

Roger Wenning, IN

Jerry Miller, MI

Randy Schellack, MN

Randy Smith, MN

David Hutsell, MO

Ron Willis, MO

Kris Swartz, OH, Region Chair

Matt Peart, OH

Monte Osterman, WI

Bob Micheel, WI

Ryan Britt, NACD Executive Board

Beth Mason, NACD staff, Recorder

Others in attendance: 36

## Draft Minutes

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Thursday, January 9

**1:00 pm**

### Call to Order

Kris Swartz, NACD North Central Region Chair

### Host State Welcome

Jeri Thornsberry, Conservation Districts of Iowa President

### NACD Opening Comments

Jeremy Peters, NACD CEO

### Are Extremes the New Normal? A Brief Look at Iowa Observed and Modeled Trends and the Evolving Risk Landscape

*Justin Glisan, Ph.D., State Climatologist of Iowa, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS)*

The presentation highlights recent and historical climatological trends as well as state of the science climate projections through the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century. Recent extreme events will be discussed along with how these types of events may evolve in a changing climate.

This presentation was followed by a time a Q&A and discussion.

### Importance of Conservation Practices in Mitigating the Impacts of Severe Weather & Maintaining Profitability

*Matt Helmers, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering at Iowa State University*

Across the U.S. Cornbelt we are seeing extremes of wet and dry periods which increases the need for resilient agricultural systems. Many of our conservation practices aid in improving the resiliency of the system and in the long run have the potential to improve the profitability of the system. This

presentation discussed a range of conservation practices and highlight how they might mitigate the impacts of extreme weather conditions.

This presentation was followed by a time a Q&A and discussion.

### **Ecosystem Services and Agricultural Carbon Market Programs: An Overview**

*Lisa Walsh, Project Manager, Ecosystem Services Market Consortium (ESMC)*

This presentation provided attendees with an overview of agricultural carbon and ecosystem services market programs to help them better understand how to engage with and potentially participate in these programs. With each program focusing on different crops, practice change requirements and general eligibility considerations, this presentation provided a deep dive into similarities between programs and how they are different. This presentation aimed to help participants better understand what types of programs may work for them/their district and what questions to ask before enrollment. ESMC is a non-profit organization collaborating with NACD on a USDA Climate Smart Commodities project to provide the agricultural community more information on market programs. Prior trainings and additional materials are available at: <https://ecosystems-services-market.org/trainings/> This presentation was followed by a time a Q&A and discussion.

### **Partner Spotlight: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

*Sergio Pierluzzi, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Coordinator*

*Andrew (Drew) Diallesandro, Partners for Fish and Wildlife State Coordinator (Iowa)*

Attendees were introduced to Pierluzzi and Diallesandro with the USFWS. The presentations highlighted the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the agencies' activities throughout the region – specifically in the state of Iowa. Following this brief introduction a time of discussion and Q&A was held.

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## **Friday, January 10**

**8:00 am**

### **NRCS Update**

Curtis Elke, Central Region Conservationist

Kasey Taylor, Northeast Region Conservationist

### **Approval of Minutes**

Motion to approve

Second

Motion unanimously passed

### **NACD Region MOA discussion/ratification**

No questions

Motion to approve

Second

Motion unanimously passed

### **NACD North Central Region Financial update and Region Scholarship update/discussion**

Mason gave a financial update on the region funds. Because the scholarships were handled at the Summer Meeting in Boston, there is no further update needed.

MN - Motion to approve the financial report

Second

Motion unanimously passed

### **Resolutions**

(See Appendix A for full text of resolutions)

#### The “practice-based” approach to conservation for producer success

Former AISWCD President and former NACD Board Member from IL Steve Stierwalt presented a resolution to the board for their consideration. If approved by the region board, this resolution will be submitted to the NACD Government Affairs Team to be considered by NACD at the NACD Annual Meeting. The group held discussion.

Motion to approve the resolution

Second

Motion was unanimously approved.

Immediately following this meeting, Steve Stierwalt will work with NACD Director of Government Affairs Chris Young to put the resolution in the appropriate format needed for the NACD Annual Meeting.

#### Heirs’ Property – Outreach Committee

Monte Osterman (WI) explains the details of this resolution and there was some discussion to follow.

WI - Motion to approve the resolution

Second

Motion was unanimously approved

Immediately following this meeting, Beth Mason will let the Government Affairs Team know the North Central Region supports this resolution.

#### Federal Procurement Law Changes for District Space Requirement Notification during USDA Field Office Solicitation Process – Minnesota Association of SWCDs

Randy Smith (MN) presented this resolution to the board and discussion followed. The board felt the better way to state this resolution would be to make the following changes

Original resolution:

NACD supports legislation to change federal procurement law requirements pertaining to USDA field office leases that would allow for the timely inclusion for posting conservation district (District) office space needs as part of the overall USDA/NRCS field office lease solicitation process.

Change to:

NACD supports changing federal procurement law requirements to allow adequate time for conservation districts to submit their office space needs and for those needs to be considered as part of the overall USDA field office lease solicitation process.

Since the region cannot make changes to the resolution at this meeting, but can only suggest changes, Ryan Britt, Executive Board Member and member of the Resolutions Committee said he would work with the Government Affairs Team to make the update and get it into the Resolutions Pad with the update – if Minnesota and the region board would like.

MN – motion to approve the resolution with the changes proposed

Second

Motion unanimously approved

### **Region Chair Elections**

Ryan Britt steps in to ask for nominations for Region Chair election.  
Nomination was received for Kris Swartz, current region chair from OH.  
No further nominations were received, so Kris Swartz remains Region Chair

### **Region Vice Chair Elections**

Kris Swartz asks for nominations for Region Vice Chair election  
Nomination was received for Roger Wenning, IN  
Nomination was received for Randy Smith, MN  
It was pointed out that Roger is the alternate for Indiana and therefore doesn't qualify as a candidate for the position. Ethan Truax, the current NACD Board Member for Indiana offers to swap positions with Roger to allow him to run for Vice Chair.  
No further nominations were received and a private ballot vote was called.  
4 votes for Randy/4 votes for Roger  
As region chair, Kris Swartz had the deciding vote, so he flipped a coin.  
Roger Wenning won the coin toss and was declared Region Vice Chair.

### **Executive Board Report**

Ryan Britt gave the Executive Board Report and was followed by Q&A.

### **Partner updates**

NASCA Report was given by Susan Kozak, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS)  
*Susan will no longer be the Region Representative for NASCA as she has been elected to the national officer's position. The new Region Representative for NASCA is Justin Hanson from Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR).*

NRCS State Conservationists – each state conservationist in attendance gave a report on some aspect of their state's operation.

**Meeting Adjourned** - approximately 10:30 am

Resolution; The "practice-based" approach to conservation for producer success.

NACD supports the scientifically proven "practice based" approach for evaluating and advancing conservation implementation as a basis for incentivizing conservation improvements and framing them as solutions that lead to producer success.

Why?

**Proven path to farmer and rancher success.** We as farmers and ranchers generally think in terms of what system of practices, we intend to implement to help make our farms or ranches successful. When addressing resource concerns on our farms or ranches, implementation of the appropriate scientifically proven suite of conservation practices also becomes important for our success.

**Conservation districts and NRCS promote practices.** Conservation districts and NRCS have a long history of promoting and incentivizing location specific, scientifically proven, conservation practices to address locally identified resource concerns. Whether the resource concern is water quality, water quantity, soil health, regeneration, soil erosion, carbon or others, using the best available local science along with local knowledge from conservation districts, NRCS, and other local experts is the most practical and effective approach. Local, on-the-ground experts know the best combination of practices to address local resource concerns and how those practices can be identified and implemented to best help our farmers and ranchers be successful.

**Practices are something farmers and ranchers can control** There are many things that we farmers and ranchers can't control. The markets, regulations from Washington and our local states, and the weather. Weather can be the biggest risk factor that can determine the outcomes from our conservation efforts, which we have no control over. With the practice-based approach to conservation, the risk to farmers and ranchers is reduced by incentivizing the implementation of the practices with the highest potential for positive impact. If we don't recognize the upfront effort required and fail to incentivize the practices, it puts undue risk on we producers and can undermine the credibility of reward and reporting programs. Focusing on after the fact modeled outcomes ignores many other important factors and outcomes that are vital to sustaining resilient agricultural systems and protecting the natural resources of our local communities.

**Producers like the practice-based approach.** When trying to get our fellow producers to make beneficial practice changes, the easiest thing for a producer to do is say no. Producers understand practices and the "certainty" that can come with the practice-based approach to conservation that is important in trying to get the producers answer to be yes.

**The scientifically proven, practice-based approach works!** We as conservation districts know our districts! We know the practices that work in our districts, for the resource concerns that we are trying to address. The district's local knowledge can be an economical, effective resource for getting the right practices implemented to address our local resource concerns, that will help our producers to be successful!

# RESOLUTIONS

**Sponsoring Entity: Outreach Sub-Committee**

**Resolution Title: Heirs' Property**

**Background/Rationale:**

Unclear titles to land (heirs' property) can prohibit land stewards from accessing federal conservation programs. Trusted Conservation Districts (CDs) currently help farmers obtain farm and tract numbers, demonstrate land control, and access legal and financial assistance. Improving CD capacity to address heirs' property concerns can help land stewards conserve forest and working lands, access conservation programs, and promote their financial and operational stability. It can also extend CDs' connections to additional partners (e.g., land stewards, attorneys, genealogical researchers, mediators, state legislators). Activating local support for states, which have not enacted Uniform Partition Acts, can enable federal funding to address these challenges.

**Resolution Text to be Included in Policy Book:**

NACD supports efforts to promote uniform partition of heirs' property policies that provide protections for heirs, including notice, appraisal, and right of first refusal to prevent ownership loss of working lands with conservation potential. NACD further supports the development of resources and training to help conservation districts positively impact landowner/operator access to federal or state assistance and funds to improve soil and water conservation, as well as improve outreach and assistance to landowners and operators, resulting in increased enrollment in conservation and emergency programs (e.g., USDA, FEMA assistance).

**Sponsor(s) Actions to Date:**

Heirs' Property White Paper and Toolbox submitted to Outreach Sub-Committee. May 15, 2024  
Outreach Sub-Committee discusses and approves development of resolution and policy regarding Heirs' Property. July 3, 2024.

Chair Monte Osterman presents Heirs' Property White Paper and Toolbox to DPR. Boston, August 10, 2024. DPR recommends a Peer Review and resolution forthcoming.

Outreach Sub-Committee edits and recommends resolutions and background statement to be presented to NACD Board at the February, 2025, NACD Annual Meeting. September 25, 2024.

**Impact on Existing NACD Policy:**

None. Strengthens NACD's overall mission and goal to support every acre, every American, every day.

**Potential Financial Impact on NACD:**

None

**Potential Fiscal Impact on the Federal Budget:**

None

**Authorized Titles and Signatures:**

Monte Osterman, Chair, Outreach Sub-Committee; Nancy Carter, Outreach Sub-Committee member

**Email:**

n3157w@yahoo.com

**Meeting and Date Adopted by Sponsoring Entity:**

Outreach Sub-Committee, September 25, 2024.

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**Sponsoring Entity: Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts**

**Resolution Title: Federal Procurement Law Changes for District Space Requirement**

**Notification during USDA Field Office Solicitation Process**

**Background/Rationale:**

NACD supports legislation to change federal procurement law requirements pertaining to USDA field office leases that would allow for the timely inclusion for posting conservation district (District) office space needs as part of the overall USDA/NRCS field office lease solicitation process. || Current federal procurement requirements limit the inclusion and timing of District office space notification and considerations when USDA/NRCS is soliciting for new or replacing office lease agreements. || Changes would allow for Districts who want to be co-located (or co-mingled) if warranted to proactively establish, notify and negotiate with current or potential new landlords to address District operations and services within the same timeframe as the USDA when they are soliciting for federal office requirements. This does not require USDA to pay for the district office lease space. SWCD should have the option if they want to be included in the solicitation process. || Procurement changes would ensure that the federal lease solicitation process would inform current or potential landlords of space and operations requirements for conservation districts as a non-federal/ special purpose unit of government. || This policy supports voluntary conservation implementation by enhancing cooperators' access to local, state, and federal conservation technical assistance and programs ||

**Resolution Text to be Included in Policy Book:**

NACD supports legislation to change federal procurement law requirements pertaining to USDA field office leases that would allow for the timely inclusion for posting conservation district (District) office space needs as part of the overall USDA/NRCS field office lease solicitation process.

**Sponsor(s) Actions to Date:**

Sponsors' Actions on this Issue to Date; | The MASWCD has been addressing this issue for several years. Our work has included ongoing communications and addressing the issue through: | MASWCD members have submitted and passed a local resolution on this topic during our December 4, 2024, annual business meeting. | MASWCD has an excellent working relationship with Minnesota NRCS State Conservationist, and we have communicated and conducted joint meetings with both state national agency leadership. We do have wonderful support from our state federal partners and the issues that we are collectively addressing are national requirements. | The MASWCD has conducted a meeting to address leasing issues that included National FPAC representatives, members from NRCS state and area leadership, and local SWCD representatives that are currently going through the lease process for field office negotiations. | MASWCD did submit a resolution to NACD that requesting congress allow USDA to streamline and provide greater authorities for NRCS State Conservationists and their partners within their respective states to address their local leasing process and management. The resolution did elevate the issue and while helpful, previous requests or responses were seeking to address the federal administrative processes and timeline (via USDA) but through ongoing and continued dialogue it has warranted the need for potential law changes to federal

procurement law and not just changes to administrative process. | Minnesota may be slightly unique and with having over 400 SWCD employees, office operations are critical for serving landowners. We continue to experience an ongoing progression of SWCDs moving out of the local field offices. Please note Minnesota SWCDs have garnered their own leases with landlords and do pay their own rent. One of the challenges we continue to experience is the timing for districts to negotiate as an equal partner prior and during the field office solicitation process, including notification of when federal lease agreements are scheduled to be re-negotiated or changed. We understand that conservation districts do have local autonomy and may need to relocate from the USDA field office based on business reasons, etc., but when districts leave because of the federal process to address field office lease agreements and services, it is problematic. We do value our NRCS and Conservation District partnership. |

**Impact on Existing NACD Policy:**

Co-location of Agencies

- |1. NACD supports the authorization of the Secretary of Agriculture to lease space independent of GSA. (79) AO2024/TBR2029|
2. NACD supports working with NRCS and USDA's Farm Production and Conservation Business Center (FPAC) on federal office lease policies and processes that enhance opportunities for conservation districts to negotiate lease agreements and space configurations that allow NRCS and District staff to be co-located in field offices. (21) A02024/TBR2029| |

**Potential Financial Impact on NACD:**

This does have a financial impact for federal law changes but were not sure of the numerical value. There may be also be additional costs if NACD were to consider doing an assessment on the number of conservation districts that are no longer co-located with NRCS and the driving factors.

**Potential Fiscal Impact on the Federal Budget:**

NA

**Authorized Titles and Signatures:**

Randy Smith, Minnesota Delegate to NACD; LeAnn Buck, MASWCD Executive Director

**Email:**

leann.buck@maswcd.org

**Meeting and Date Adopted by Sponsoring Entity:**

4/12/24