

NORTH CENTRAL REGION WORK PLAN

National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Purpose

To establish a cooperative framework for achieving mutual conservation goals by enhancing coordination and leveraging the strengths of both organizations across the shared 8-state region.

Intent

1. **Advance Mutually Agreed-Upon Goals Through Locally Led Processes**
Support and empower local stakeholders to lead conservation efforts, ensuring that shared goals are developed collaboratively and implemented effectively.
2. **Facilitate the Exchange of Expertise and Resources**
Promote the sharing of technical knowledge, financial support, and strategic planning to strengthen mutual conservation initiatives and address shared priorities.
3. **Enhance Multi-Level Communication and Collaboration**
Improve coordination and information flow among federal, state, and local partners to foster unified and efficient conservation actions.
4. **Align and Streamline Voluntary Conservation on Private Lands**
Coordinate efforts to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of voluntary conservation programs, ensuring they are accessible and impactful for private landowners.
5. **Elevate the Visibility and Impact of Conservation Partnerships**
Highlight successful collaborations and amplify the benefits of conservation programs for wildlife, ecosystems, and working lands to inspire broader participation and support.

Background

The NACD North Central Region and the USFWS Midwest Region share an eight-state boundary. This shared region is approximately 90% privately owned and is home to diverse ecosystems and a strong network of conservation partners. Given shared missions around voluntary, non-regulatory conservation and technical assistance, NACD and USFWS seek to build a formalized regional partnership to align resources, build capacity, and address growing environmental challenges such as habitat loss, pollinator decline, and water quality degradation. This regional work plan will help facilitate the implementation of the national MOU between NACD and USFWS and guide efforts to accomplish agreed upon conservation goals.

Organizational Overviews

NACD Mission

To promote responsible management and conservation of natural resources on all lands by representing locally led conservation districts and their associations through grassroots advocacy, education, and partnerships.

USFWS Mission

To work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats, for the continuing benefit of the American people.

Shared Regional Priorities

The following priorities, goals, and action items were developed based on input and feedback from regional surveys, group discussions, and the NACD North Central Region meeting. Collectively, they reflect a shared need for stronger, more intentional collaboration between conservation districts and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Collaboration grounded in trust, clear communication, shared outreach, and coordinated technical and financial support can improve landowner engagement, enhance the efficiency of conservation delivery, and strengthen transparency and accountability in our shared conservation efforts.

These priorities, goals, and action items are not intended as directives, but rather as example strategies to serve as a guide and to generate ideas for collaboration, while recognizing the unique operations and circumstances of individual conservation districts in each state.

Priority 1: Relationship building/ Partnership development

Relationship building is essential to establishing trust, aligning priorities, and creating the foundation for effective collaboration among local and regional partners. Strong relationships enable clearer communication, more efficient coordination, and more durable conservation outcomes over the long term.

Goal 1: Improved Awareness

Objective/Action Item 1: Districts invite USFWS to state and regional meetings

Objective/Action Item 2: Districts invite USFWS and other partners to Local Working Groups

Objective/Action Item 3: Districts invite USFWS to board meetings

Objective/Action Item 4: USFWS invites districts to functions/meetings

Goal 2: Network building

Objective/Action Item 1: Inventory partners and assets in each state

Objective/Action Item 2: USFWS State Coordinator meets with State Association Executive Director/state leadership

Priority 2: Conservation delivery

Coordinated conservation delivery is critical to ensure that partners align resources, expertise, and outreach efforts to maximize impact and avoid duplication. A coordinated approach increases efficiency, improves service to landowners, and strengthens the overall effectiveness of regional conservation efforts.

Goal 1: Coordinated technical assistance

Objective/Action Item 1: Conduct joint landowner site visits with USFWS and other partners

Objective/Action Item 2: Shared expertise in delivery of programs addressing issues – watershed restoration, invasive and endangered species, etc.

Objective/Action Item 3: Explore technical agreement mechanisms

Objective/Action Item 4: Expand current projects (Scale up)

Objective/Action Item 5: Explore strategies that support all counties within a state, understanding that we all have capacity limitations.

Goal 2: Coordinated financial assistance

Objective/Action Item 1: Explore financial agreement mechanisms to streamline delivery of funds for targeted program delivery.

Objective/Action Item 2: Joint pursuit of federal, state, and private grant opportunities to facilitate coordinated program delivery (technical services, project implementation, trainings, outreach)

Priority 3: Communication and Outreach

Coordinated communication and outreach are essential to ensuring consistent messaging, reducing confusion, and presenting a unified approach to landowners and stakeholders. A shared outreach strategy strengthens partner visibility, builds trust, and improves engagement and participation across the region.

Goal 1: Telling our shared conservation story

Objective/Action Item 1: Joint outreach on newsletter/social media content

Objective/Action Item 2: Share success stories

Objective/Action Item 3: Prioritize the connection between the landowners we support, the communities they live in, and the connections our shared work provides to the natural world around them.

Goal 2: Partner to provide training

Objective/Action Item 1: Sharing of local program information to offices/contacts

Objective/Action 2: Provide education to districts on why these practices and programs are important

Goal 3: Community engagement

Objective/Action Item 1: Landowner engagement outreach

Objective/Action Item 2: Engage with youth programs

Objective/Action Item 3: Take our programs directly to our landowners (community field days at private properties, not always at county offices)