

Local Work Group Summary Report for Kansas 2024

Prepared by the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD)

The following report summarizes the 30 Local Work Group (LWG) meetings that were held in Kansas in 2024. Each of the LWG meetings were conducted on a multi-county management unit (MU) basis with local conservation districts hosting each meeting. The LWG meetings were coordinated and implemented by local conservation districts with assistance from the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD) through the “Local Work Group Cooperative Agreement”. Through this cooperative agreement KACD representatives (Facilitators) worked closely with local conservation districts to plan, coordinate, and implement LWG meetings to provide a consistent local workgroup process that engaged local producers and stakeholders to assess needs and identify priority natural resource concerns at the local level.

The LWG meetings were conducted through January, February, and March, 2024. As previously noted, 30 LWG meetings were held with the assistance of 4 KACD facilitators. Each LWG meeting was conducted in-person, but offered remote participants the option to attend virtually via ZOOM utilizing the audio and video capabilities of the OWL system. There was a total of 510 participants in the 30 LWG meetings, of which, 72 were virtual participants. As LWG meetings were completed, KACD facilitators utilized LWG meeting video and audio recordings to develop individualized “LWG Meeting Reports” which were provided for review to each Conservation District within the management unit, with courtesy copies sent to applicable Supervisory District Conservationists (SDC’s) and Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations (ASTC’s).

To accurately capture the occurrence of all comments that were presented during the LWG meetings, a separate spreadsheet report entitled “[2024 State Resource Concerns](#)” was developed and is considered a companion document to the “2024 Local Work Group Summary Report for Kansas”. The “2024 State Resource Concern” spreadsheet lists the specific “state resource concern statements” which are captured by number and % of occurrence across all MU’s, and also by number and % of occurrence within each NRCS administrative area (see exhibit 1 map). For the purpose of this summary report, only those state resource concern statements noted during at least 50% of the LWG meetings serve as the basis for the LWG resource concern summary narratives included in this report. Also included within the summary narratives are those geographically unique or specific concern areas (i.e., urban, etc.) which were recognized as such during the LWG process.

Cropland Resource Concerns:

Soil Health

- Concern for a need to expand soil health practices (no-till/cover crops). Keep the soil biologically active and healthy. Cover crop adoption/expansion was once again a major discussion item in 2024. The concern exists that cover crop implementation is difficult to justify (economically) unless cover crops are able to be grazed. Additionally, how do we sell cover crop adoption based on intrinsic soil health benefits? The concern existed that economic data needs to be provided for non-grazers to justify cover crop adoption (especially in a corn/bean cropping system). These concerns were noted at 83% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern with the lack of diversified crop rotations was noted across the state. This concern was primarily associated with the increase of row crop production (primarily corn). The perception was this is driven by economics, crop insurance safety nets, and localized market demands. This concern was noted at 70% of the LWG meetings.
- There was a perceived need for additional education/training on cover crops/soil health (for both staff & producers) on the long-term benefits of soil health practices. This concern was noted at 60% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern with the overall nutrient management and implementation of nutrient management practices. This included concerns with proper soil testing, soil test interpretation, and the associated proper/efficient application of fertilizers. It was felt that additional education and training was needed to address this concern. This concern was noted at 53% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern that benefits from soil health practices take years to realize...perception there is a general apprehension to commit to the multi-year time frame needed to realize benefits...associated with farm economics...economics of surviving on a year-to-year basis. This concern was noted at 50% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern the interest in cover crops has leveled out...due to drought, current ag economics, insurance policy guidelines, etc....This concern was new to 2024 and noted at 33% of LWG meetings.
- Concern there is a need to establish grazing exchange systems to connect grain (cover crop) producers with livestock producers to more efficiently utilize cover crops for grazing. This concern was new to 2024 and noted at 27% of LWG meetings.

Erosion

- Active gully erosion (specifically ephemeral erosion) in cropland fields was once again a major discussion item in 2024. Ephemeral erosion concerns were associated with cropland fields that do not have structural practices applied (i.e., using only management practices to control erosion) and cropland fields that have failing (outlived practice lifespan) structural conservation practices. This erosion is worked shut every year, but reforms annually and is perceived to be a major source of sediment delivery. This concern was noted at 73% of the LWG meetings. Additionally, it was noted at several LWG meetings that existing ephemeral erosion areas in cropland that are not adequately treated continue to worsen to the point they transition to classic gully erosion.
- As noted above there is a concern with structural practices that have outlived their span and are failing...active erosion is occurring in these unmaintained structural practice systems. (terraces, waterways, ponds, etc.) This concern was noted at 70% of the LWG meetings. An associated concern was raised that structural practice maintenance has declined due to producers lacking time to perform maintenance, lack of landlord commitment, and cost of maintenance/replacement activities.
- Concern exists with grasslands being converted to marginal cropland (sodbusting) and not being adequately treated. Concern that grassland conversions to cropland are primarily treated with management/vegetative practices (i.e., no-till, cover crops) and concentrated flow areas are not adequately addressed leading to the occurrence of ephemeral erosion. This concern was noted at 63% of the LWG meetings.

Grazing Land Resource Concerns:

- Tree/brush (primarily cedar trees) invasion associated with grazing lands across the state was a major concern again in 2023. Contributing factors include: unmanaged land utilized primarily for wildlife; fear or hesitation to use prescribed burns (see related concern below); and lack of early identification of resource concern and lack of action to control. Tree/brush invasion was noted at 83% of the LWG meetings. In addition, old world bluestem concerns were noted at 67% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern with performing prescribed burns and the overall risks associated with prescribed burning. Concern that prescribed burning is not implemented as it has been in the past due to changing environmental conditions, increased fuel loads (brush/trees/invasive species), and fear of potential non-desirable outcomes (i.e., out of control fires, litigation, etc.). This concern was noted at 77% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern for the growing number of absentee landowners and the perceived lack of concern for, or understanding of, grassland management needs. It is

becoming increasingly difficult for local producers to address grassland related concerns without the understanding, concurrence, and support of absentee landowners. It was also noted that education and outreach efforts need to be made targeting absentee landowners. This concern was noted at 63% of the LWG meetings.

- Concerns with continued overgrazing of grasslands and perceived lack of adoption of prescribed grazing practices/systems. This concern was noted at 60% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern associated with the challenges managing grazing lands that are adjacent to tracts of land that are primarily managed for deer hunting...leading to a fear of prescribed burning, hesitation of spraying, and dealing with perennial seed sources of undesirable invasive species (cedars, hedge, locust, etc.). This concern was noted at 60% of the LWG meetings. A related concern is the number of grasslands that are being purchased for hunting with grazing management becoming an afterthought. This concern was noted at 60% of the LWG meetings. It was also noted that education and outreach efforts need to be made targeting landowners whose focus is managing lands primarily for deer hunting.
- Concern with lack of water availability...lack of reliable watering points for proper grazing distribution...on both large and small grazing operations. This concern was noted at 57% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern for the lack of available resources to assist/support producers in applying prescribed burning (burn associations & districts/groups, rural/municipal fire departments). This concern was noted at 50% of the LWG meetings.

Surface Water Quality & Quantity Concerns:

- Perception that more expansive use of soil health practices would improve water infiltration and subsequently assist in reducing excessive surface water runoff. This perception was noted at 57% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern with the overall nutrient management and implementation of nutrient management practices and its effects on water quality. This included concerns with proper soil testing, soil test interpretation, and the associated proper/efficient application of fertilizers. It was felt that additional education and training was needed to address this concern. This concern was noted at 53% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern with the amount of sediment and nutrient delivery to surface water supplies that are utilized for domestic purposes, and the subsequent negative

effect on those surface waters. This concern was noted at 50% of the LWG meetings.

- Perception the occurrence of high intensity runoff events have increased over the last number of years. This concern was noted at 50% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern that unmaintained township/rural roads are a major contributor of sedimentation to surface waters...especially in those situations where inadequate road ditches exist. This concern was noted at 40% of LWG meetings.

Groundwater Quantity/Quality Concerns:

Groundwater quantity and quality continued to be major resource concerns in the western half of the state in 2024

- Declining ground water levels was a concern in the majority of the LWG meetings in western Kansas (i.e., having to drill wells deeper to locate reliable sources of water). In addition, it's been observed that wells go dry and streams lose their baseflow during heavy cropland irrigation periods. Recommendations shared at LWG meetings to address this resource concern included: adoption of drought tolerant crops and/or less water intensive need crops; incentives to reduce irrigation rates; improved infiltration rates on cropland; improved irrigation system efficiencies; broader use of moisture probes for irrigation water management; increased application of small watershed structures, impoundments, level terraces, and playas to facilitate aquifer recharge.
- Concern with increasing irrigation efficiencies and the economic challenges associated with transitioning from irrigated to dryland cropland, and working under LEMA's.
- The primary ground water quality concern identified for public/private water supply was nitrates in groundwater. Other groundwater contaminants identified were bacteria (E. Coli) and uranium levels (Garden City MU). Specific to uranium it was noted there is a high cost to test and financial assistance is needed to facilitate this. Additionally, a broader uranium concern exists with above ground biomass.

Streambank Concerns:

- Concern with streambank erosion and the perceived increase in active streambank erosion and the associated amount of sediment delivered to surface waters. These concerns are associated with an increase in stream channel width and incision, with subsequent head cut advancement up smaller tributaries into adjacent land uses. This concern was noted at 70% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern practices that address streambank erosion are too expensive (especially armoring) for landowners to install. Associated concerns are the success rate of applied streambank protective practices, the associated cost of maintaining streambank protective practices, and potential cost of replacing failed streambank protection practices. These concerns were noted at 53% of the LWG meetings.

Animal (Wildlife) Concerns:

- Concern with upland bird habitat degradation and lack of diversity across the landscape. This includes degradation and/or loss in native grasslands (including CRP acres) and riparian areas, loss of brood rearing habitat, lack of habitat connectivity, loss of edge effect in habitat areas, over grazing of grasslands, lack of diversified crop rotations, and clean/weed free cropland acres. These concerns were noted at 87% of the LWG meetings. Related wildlife habitat concerns include loss of and/or unmanaged windbreaks/shelter breaks, encroachment of woody and invasive species in grazing lands, and land fragmentation (particularly around urban areas).
- Concern with the declining populations of ground nesting game birds (quail, pheasant, turkey) and non-game birds. This concern was noted at 67% of the LWG meetings. This concern is closely related to the habitat degradation concern.
- An associated concern with habitat degradation is with invasive species encroachment...cedar, hedge, locust, honeysuckle, phragmites, teasel, winter creeper, sericea lespedeza, etc...and the detrimental effect on wildlife habitat. This concern was noted at 53% percent of the LWG meetings.

Forestry Resource Concerns:

Although not reaching the 50% state threshold, the primary forestry resource concerns noted were:

- Concern with loss of windbreaks/shelterbelts, or windbreaks/shelterbelts not being properly managed/maintained.
- Concern with lack of proper management and maintenance of forestland. Concerns include plant vigor, density thinning, removal of undesirable trees, and control of invasive species.
- Concern for loss of native hardwoods in forested area. Desirable native species being replaced with less desirable species.
- Concern with the lack of prescribed burns being applied in forestland.

Urban/Small Farm Resource Concerns:

- Perception the conservation partnership is not properly prepared to assist urban/small farm landowners and producers. Additional training is needed for the conservation partnership staff, and additional direction is needed from USDA on the urban/small farm initiative. Additionally, a focused outreach effort is needed to reach these potential customers. The perception exists that these potential customers are not aware of the conservation partnership and services available. These concerns were noted at 73% of the LWG meetings.
- Additionally, the following concerns were noted at 100% of the 2024 LWG meetings that encompassed major urban areas within Kansas (Kansas City, Lawrence, Topeka, Wichita). The concern of increased fracturing of rural landownership within urban area proximity, and the frequency of ownership change. Agricultural operational challenges faced within the urban footprint included: applying prescribed burning, dust control, odor control, pest management, control of invasive species, etc. There is a concern that individuals moving into rural areas have unrealistic expectations dealing with traditional agricultural leading to challenging interactions. Additionally, there is a perception the urban population generally lacks an understanding of traditional agriculture requiring additional education and outreach to address this knowledge gap. Within this focus area the following concerns were universally noted: increased runoff flows associated with non-permeable urban surfaces...roofs, roads, parking lots; concern with surface water quality associated with animal (pet) waste and over fertilization of lawns; and the number private wells within city limits being used for lawn irrigation systems.

Outreach Concerns:

- Concern was expressed by landowners, producers and conservation partners that there is a relatively uncoordinated effort between local/private/state/federal entities to promote, advertise, and implement resource protection programs. Landowners, producers, and conservation partners have found it challenging to understand and locate all sources of information, technical assistance, and financial assistance. LWG's saw value in a collaborative effort at both the local and state level for applicable entities to meet on a regular basis to ensure the scope of services/programs implemented by each is understood. This concern was noted at 83% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern reaching and providing outreach/education to absentee landowners. Concern with absentee landowners' lack of understanding of conservation practices and willingness to support/apply conservation practices. This concern was noted at 77% of LWG meetings.
- As mentioned previously under "Urban/Small Farm Resource Concerns" outreach within the urban setting was a primary concern. It's perceived a focused education/outreach effort is needed to tap this potential customer base, to improve urban awareness and use of conservation partnership services, to improve urban and traditional agricultural interactions and successes, and to better understand the perspectives and needs of the urban/small farmer. This outreach concern was noted at 73% of the LWG meetings, and at 100% of the LWG meetings that encompassed major urban areas.
- Concern the education/outreach needs of urban/specialty crop/small farm agriculture are not being met. There is a perceived need for a focused outreach effort to reach and assist these landowners/producers. This concern was noted at 73% of the LWG meetings.
- There is a perceived need for additional information, education, outreach concerning climate smart agriculture and climate program opportunities. This resource concern was noted at 73% of LWG meetings.
- Concern with the overall lack of landowner/producer participation in meetings, workshops, trainings, and field days. Significant efforts are put into developing meaningful educational/outreach events only to realize relatively low landowner/producer attendance and participation. This concern was noted at 70% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern reaching an audience with a diverse "age demographics". There is a perceived need for resource/technical support to share information targeting groups via social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, twitter, podcasts, etc. This concern was noted at 53% of LWG meetings.

- Outreach concern associated with receiving information on all available conservation programs (Federal, State, Local, NGO, etc.). Producers/landowners can't participate in programs they don't know about. This concern was noted at 50% of the LWG meetings.
- Perceived need for "conservation partnership" to become more familiar with "all" available programs...or at least have a familiarity with where to find and share this information. This concern was noted at 50% of LWG meetings.
- Concern financial professionals (ag lenders) and ag leaders (businesses/consultants) have a significant influence over producers in the consideration of adopting/applying conservation practices. The perception exists that additional outreach is needed with this group. This concern was noted at 50% of LWG meetings.
- Concern with perceived "non user friendly" websites. Websites can be too wordy, have too many associated links, and take too many clicks to find desired information. This concern was noted at 50% of LWG meetings.

Training Opportunities:

- There is a perceived need for additional information, education, and training on climate smart agriculture. This concern was noted at 73% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern additional soil health training is needed for both staff and producers. The training needs included identifying the long-term benefits of applying soil health practices such as cover crops, no-till, crop rotation; appropriate use of cover crop mixtures; management of cover crops; and the economics associated with cover crop application. This concern was noted at 60% of the LWG meetings.
- There was a perceived need for additional prescribed burning training for staff and producers. Associated with this concern is the perceived lack of available resources available to producers to support prescribed burning (burn associations & districts/groups, rural/municipal fire departments). This concern was noted at 57% of the LWG meetings.
- Perceived need for additional training/education/resources to promote grazing lands health. This resource concern was noted at 50% of LWG meetings.
- Concern the conservation partnership needs additional training/awareness of all available programs (Federal, State, Local, NGO, etc.). There is an awareness

with the challenges associated with being familiar with all available programs. This concern was noted at 50% of the LWG meetings.

- Concern with training of new employees (NRCS and Partners). Providing timely training, appropriate training, field training/field experiences. Perception exists many new employees are focused on program deliverables rather than resource training. This concern was noted at 40% of LWG meetings.

Program Concerns:

NRCS Programs

- Concern that available financial assistance funds are insufficient, and that financial assistance is an important component when addressing resource concerns. This concern was noted at 77% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern inadequate livestock water..."water availability"...should be considered a stand-alone resource concern for EQIP. It was shared that water availability is not always tied to plant resource concern. This concern was noted at 73% of the LWG meetings.
- A concern exists that failing watering sources (ponds/wells), or water sources that have lost their capacity/integrity, are not eligible for "remediation" through federal FA. Currently remediation or rebuilding of water sources is considered maintenance and not eligible for federal FA. This concern was noted at 73% of LWG meetings.
- Concern with the amount of "paperwork and administration" that exists with implementing federal FA...the current program application/approval process is perceived to be complicated, cumbersome, and lengthy. This concern was noted at 70% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern additional FA is needed for rebuilding/replacing structural conservation practices that have outlived their lifespan and are considered failing (i.e., terraces, waterways, etc.). This concern was noted at 67% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern progressive levels of treatment should be allowed rather than having to meet RMS levels of treatment for FA programs. Specifically, a perception exists that grazing plans associated with EQIP applications/contracts are too restrictive and are not economically feasible for producers to follow. This concern was noted at 63% of the LWG meetings.

- Concern FA programs reward procrastinators rather than innovators/adopters. This concern was noted at 60% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern with the 590 practice (Nutrient Management) and the amount of documentation required. There's also a perceived concern with the inconsistency of guidance and application associated with this practice across MU/Area/State boundaries. This was a new concern for 2024 and was noted at 30% of the LWG meetings.
- There is a perceived need to build an inflationary factor into contracts due to cost increases when projects cannot be completed due to circumstance beyond participants control. This was a new concern for 2024 and was noted at 27% of the LWG meetings.
- Although this report primarily captures the state resource concern statements that were documented in at least 50% of the LWG meetings, it's worth noting there are numerous additional specific state resource concern statements captured on the "State Resource Concern Spreadsheet" under the heading of "Program Concerns: EQIP" that did not meet the 50% threshold.

FSA Programs

- Concern with the lack of appropriate management and/or maintenance of CRP acres due to program limitations and/or producers' unwillingness or ability to perform management and/or maintenance. Suggested considerations for improvement include to allow grazing earlier in the season, remove rental rate reduction for grazing, providing cost share on seedbed preparation for interseeding, providing more agency oversight of CRP field conditions, and holding CRP participants more accountable. These concerns were noted at 87% of the LWG meetings. An additional related concern is with encroachment of woody and invasive species in CRP.
- Concern CRP payments rates are too low which hinders interest in new contracts and renewal of expiring contracts. This concern was noted at 67% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern with the conversion of expired CRP to cropland. Perception exists that better incentives are needed to improve CRP re-enrolled. This concern was noted at 60% of LWG meetings.

Technical Assistance/Staff /General/Concerns:

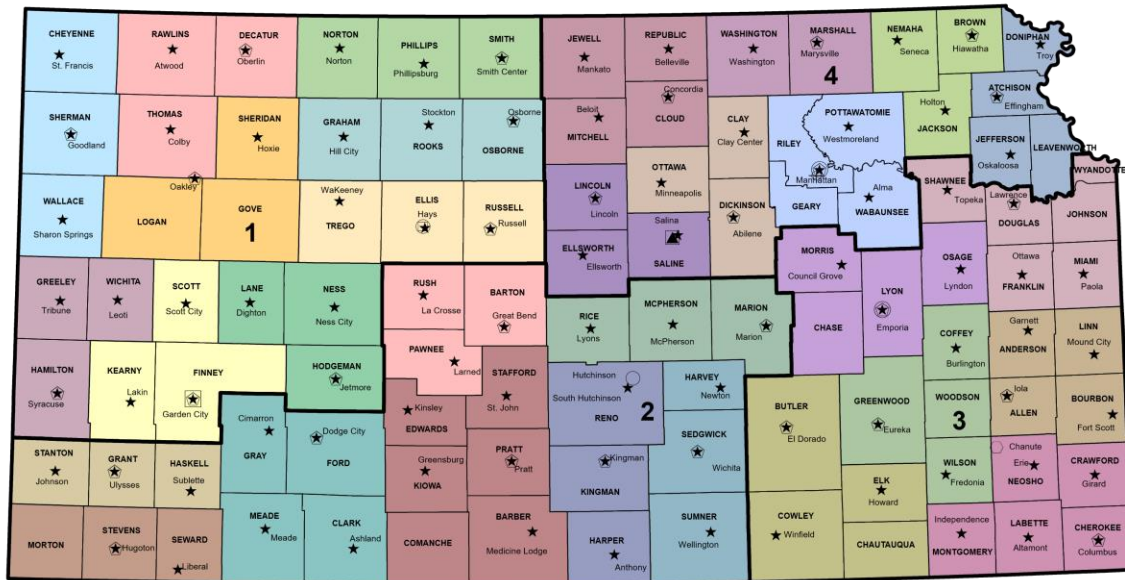
- Concern with lack of adequate staff, number of vacant positions, training/knowledge of existing staff (particularly new staff), and retention of staff. This concern was noted at 83% of the LWG meetings.

- Concern with contractor availability (contractors servicing soil conservation, spraying and brush/tree removal, well drilling, prescribed burning, tree planting, grass drilling, etc.). Perception exists that limited contractor availability may impact practice installation within financial assistance contracts, as well as conservation technical assistance (CTA) practice application. This concern was noted at 80% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern NRCS staff does not have time to spend time with landowners and producers in the field. This affects the ability to build trust and to fully understand the producers concerns and needs. This was a concern noted in 77% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern with cultural resource review process. Perception this has resulted in significant delays in practice start/implementation and become a road block for producers and contractors to start/complete a project within a reasonable time frame. This concern was noted at 70% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern NRCS needs to continue to provide responses (reports) to LWG sponsors on the "actions" that have been implemented as a result of input received through the LWG process. This concern was noted at 67% of the LWG meetings.
- Concern NRCS needs to place more emphasis on CTA planning vs programs. Spending more time with landowners providing a comprehensive evaluation of the landowner's resource concerns with treatment alternatives, along with follow-up after practice implementation. This concern was noted at 50% of the LWG meetings.

Exhibit 1



Kansas Natural Resources Conservation Service Multi-County Management Units*



NRCS Administrative Area

* Matched colored counties = Management Unit

▲ State Office, Salina

○ Area Office

★ Field Office

○ Supervisory District Conservationist Headquarters

□ MLRA Soil Survey Office

○ Technical Office

⊕ Plant Materials Center



Area Office

Area 1 - Hays Area 2 - Hutchinson

Area 3 - Emporia Area 4 - Manhattan

State Office - Salina