Local Work Group Summary Report for Kansas
2022
Prepared by the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD)

The following report summarizes the 29 Local Work Group (LWG) meetings that were held in Kansas in 2022. 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.

Prior to the implementation of the LWG meetings a "Resource Assessment Survey" was developed by KACD and provided to each conservation district for voluntary completion. Each completed resource assessment provided a brief summary of the perceived resource concerns from the local area, which provided KACD facilitators with an initial introduction to the local resource concerns. The LWG meetings were conducted through February, March, and April 2022. As mentioned, 29 LWG meetings were implemented 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. The total number of LWG participants from the 29 LWG meetings included 623 in-person and 123 virtual. Once the LWG meetings were completed KACD facilitators utilized LWG meeting video and audio recordings to complete an individualized written "LWG Meeting Report" which was provided to each local conservation district within the management unit.

To accurately capture the occurrence of <u>all</u> comments that were presented during the LWG meetings, a separate report entitled "State Resource Concern Spreadsheet" was developed and is considered a companion document to the "Local Work Group Summary Report for Kansas". The "State Resource Concern Spreadsheet" lists in detail the specific "state resource concern statements" which are captured by number and % of occurrences across all MU's, and also by number and % of occurrences within each NRCS administrative area (see exhibit 1 map). For the purpose of the summary report, only those state resource concern statements which were noted at <u>50%</u> of the LWG meetings serve as the basis for the following LWG resource concern summary narratives. Also included within the summary narratives are those geographically unique or specific concern areas (i.e., urban, tribal, etc.) which were recognized as such during the LWG process. View the <u>State Resource Concern Spreadsheet.</u> (large file)

Cropland Resource Concerns:

- Cover crops/soil health

Soil health (specifically cover crop adoption/expansion) was a major concern associated with cropland. The concern existed that cover crop implementation is difficult to justify (economically) unless cover crops are able to be grazed. Furthermore, financial assistance is needed to facilitate the water and fence infrastructure needed on cropland to support grazing. Additionally, how do we sell cover crop adoption based on intrinsic soil health benefits? The concern existed that economic data needs to be provided in a non-grazing situation to justify cover crop adoption (especially in a corn/bean cropping system). These concerns were raised at 76% 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 raised at 62% of the LWG meetings.

- Erosion

Active gully erosion (specifically ephemeral erosion) in cropland fields was a major concern. The ephemeral erosion concern was 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 raised at 66% of the LWG meetings.

Grazing Land Resource Concerns:

- Invasive and Woody Species

Cedar tree invasion was a major concern associated with grazing lands across the state. 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 action to control. Cedar tree invasion was raised at 86% of the LWG meetings. In addition, old world bluestem and sericea lespedeza concerns were raised at 59% and 52%, respectively, of the LWG meetings.

A related concern, in some aspects to the woody/invasive concern, was the ability or hesitation to apply prescribed burns in proximity to urban areas and to lands being managed primarily for wildlife (landowners that want woody species). Furthermore, there is a concern with the overall general risk involved with performing a prescribed burn (losing control of fires, litigation, no insurance coverage, potential damage to infrastructure). Prescribed burning was a concern raised at 52% of the LWG meetings. Lack of contractors and/or Prescribed Burning Associations (BPA's) to conduct or assist in conducting burns was also a contributing factor.

- Prescribed Grazing

Concern with the lack of livestock water availability was raised at 52% of the LWG meetings. This concern impacts the application of prescribed grazing systems as well as addressing proper grazing distribution concerns. A related concern raised under programs was that inadequate livestock water does not always need to be tied to a plant resource concern and should be a resource concern on its own. Specifically, old watering sources (wells, ponds) that have lost their capacity/integrity. Existing water sources in this situation are not currently eligible for financial assistance and are considered maintenance issues.

Surface Water Quality & Quantity Concerns:

There was a 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 resource concern was raised at 50% of the LWG meetings.

There was a general concern with the perceived increase in frequency and intensity of flood (out of bank flow) events observed. This concern was raised at 50% of the LWG meetings.

There was a 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 50% of the LWG meetings.

Groundwater Quantity/Quality Concerns:

Groundwater quantity and quality are major resource concerns within the western half of the state.

- Quantity

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. A related concern was the unknown engineering design requirements and potential costs associated with playa restoration. This was a perceived factor in the landowners'/producers' decision not to potentially enroll in the SAFE program for playa restoration.

- Quality

The primary ground water quality concern identified for public/private water supply was nitrates in groundwater. Other groundwater contaminates 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:

There is a general concern with streambank erosion and the perceived increase of active streambank erosion. More specifically, these concerns are associated with an increase in stream channel width and incision, with subsequent advancement up smaller tributaries into adjacent land uses. This causes loss of riparian areas and cropland; advancing gully erosion; and leads to potential infrastructure instability. This concern was raised at 59% of the LWG meetings.

Animal (Wildlife) Concerns:

- Bird Population

There is concern with the declining populations of ground nesting game birds (quail, pheasant, turkey) and non-game birds. This concern was raised at 69% of the LWG meetings. This concern is closely related to the habitat concern below.

- Habitat

There is a 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 edge effect in habitat areas, over grazing of grasslands, lack of diversified crop rotations, and clean/weed free cropland acres. These concerns were raised at 55% 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, fragmentation (particularly around urban areas), and industrialization (i.e., wind turbines).

Urban/Small Farm Resource Concerns:

The primary urban/small farm concern presented dealt with the 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. More conservation partnership promotion/outreach is needed in this area utilizing non-traditional outreach methods (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, website pop-ups, etc.). These concerns were raised at 69% of the LWG meetings.

Additionally, the following concerns were raised at nearly 100% of the LWG meetings that encompassed major urban areas within Kansas (Kansas City, Lawrence, Topeka, Manhattan, Wichita). The concern of increased fracturing of rural landownership within urban area proximity, and the frequency of ownership change. This concern brought forward the challenges faced by agricultural landowners and producers in the management/operation of their farms and ranches. Challenges faced include: 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.

Climate Concerns:

The primary concern associated with Climate was the perceived need for additional information and education on climate smart agriculture and carbon sequestration. Although USDA has announced a "Climate Smart Initiative", there was little to no understanding on the part of the LWG's as to what this initiative included and what the intended outcomes were. The LWG's were generally supportive of the need for climate smart agriculture and recognized the agricultural challenges associated with adapting to changing environmental and growing conditions. This resource concern was raised at 79% of the LWG meetings.

There is a general concern with the increased intensity and frequency of rainfall events and the subsequent effects these events have on water quality, maintaining conservation practices, controlling erosion, and maintaining local infrastructure (i.e., roads, culverts, bridges). There was a concern with how landowners and producers prepare for and contend with these intensified rainfall events. This resource concern was raised at 55% of the LWG meetings.

Outreach Concerns:

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. The concern also existed that new non-traditional means of outreach would be required to successfully reach urban/small customers. This outreach concern was raised at 69% of the LWG meetings, and
at 100% of the LWG meetings that encompassed major urban areas.

The concern was expressed by both 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. Additionally, the creation of a media product (i.e., brochure, website, Facebook) that encompasses and explains the resources that are available from each entity was suggested. This would benefit not only landowners and producers, but also conservation partnership staff. This outreach concern was raised at 52% of the LWG meetings.

There was a 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 outreach concern was raised at 50% of the LWG meetings.

There was also a general awareness of the challenges associated with out-of-area or absentee landowners. This aspect of landownership appears to be increasing, presenting challenges with information, education, and outreach.

Program Concerns:

- NRCS Programs

There is a concern that available financial assistance funds are insufficient, and that financial assistance is an important component when addressing resource concerns. There was also a concern that higher contract costs are limiting the number of contracts obligated, thus limiting the number of participants assisted. Additionally, it was presented that financial assistance associated with replacing structural practices that have outlived their lifespan should be maintained. This resource concern was raised at 55% 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 28 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 include allow grazing earlier in the season, remove rental rate reduction for grazing, providing cost share on seedbed preparation for interseeding, and providing more oversight of CRP field

conditions, and holding CRP participants more accountable. These concerns were raised at 79% of the LWG meetings. An additional related concern is with encroachment of woody and invasive species in CRP.

Training Opportunities:

In 62% of the LWG meetings additional training on soil health was perceived to be a need for both conservation partnership 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.

In 79% of the LWG meetings there was a perceived need for additional information, education, and training on climate smart agriculture and carbon sequestration. Although USDA has announced a "Climate Smart Initiative", there was little to no understanding on the part of the LWG's as to what this initiative included and what the intended outcomes were.

Technical Assistance/Staff Concerns:

- Staff Time

There is a general concern that NRCS staff does not have time, or there is not available staff, 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 raised in 72% of the LWG meetings.

- Planning

In 52% of the LWG meetings it was expressed that NRCS needs to place more of an emphasis on CTA planning vs programs, and spend more time with landowners/producers providing a comprehensive evaluation of the landowner's/producer's resource concerns with treatment alternatives, along with follow-up after practice implementation.

Tribal Resource Concerns:

An important component to Federal assistance in Kansas is the nation-to-nation relationship that exists with each of the Kansas tribal entities (Iowa Tribe of Kansas & Nebraska, Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas, Prairie Band Potawatomie Nation, and Sac & Fox Nation of Missouri). Recognizing and understanding the resource concerns of Kansas Tribal entities is critical to providing effective assistance.

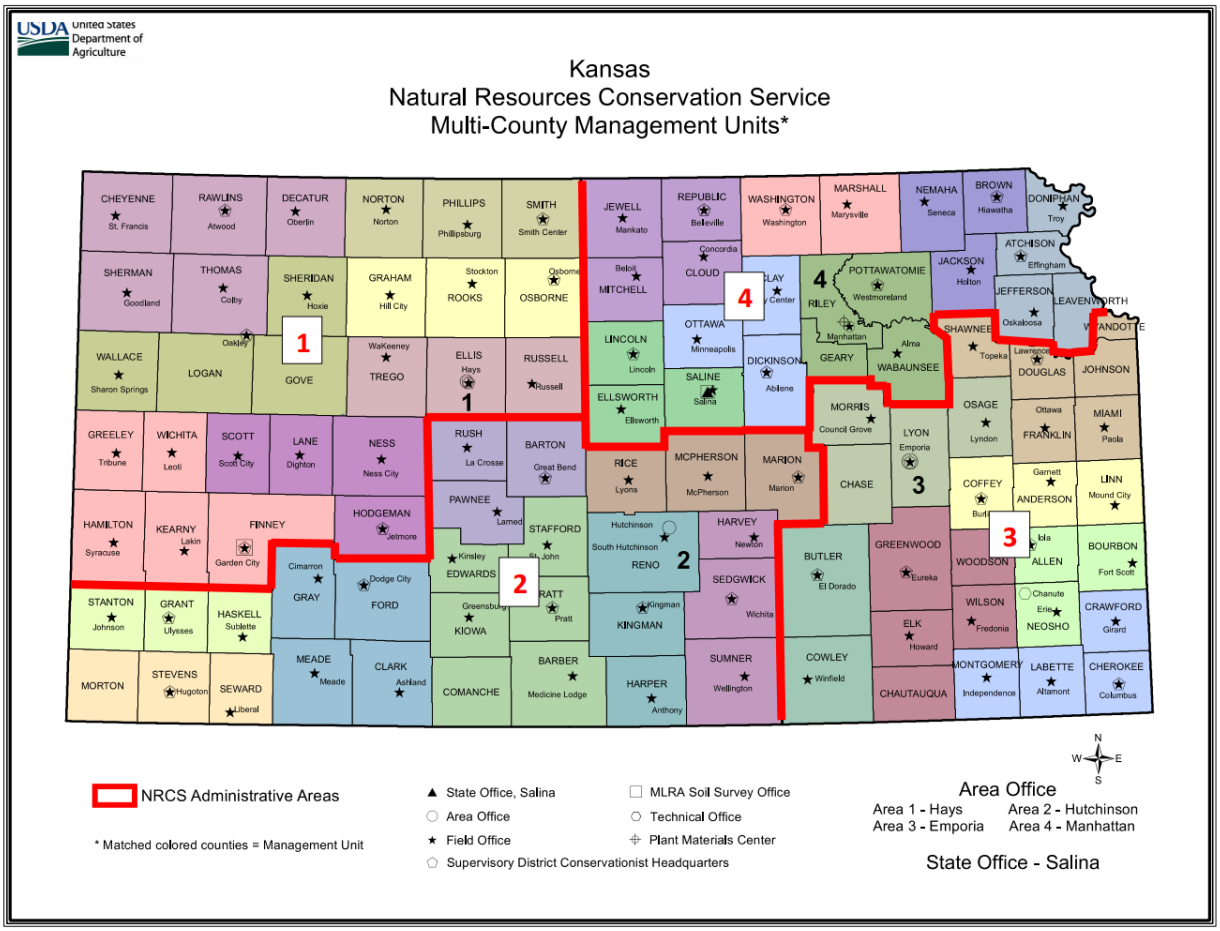
As each of the Tribal entities own and operate cropland, soil erosion is a resource concern, particularly ephemeral and classic gully erosion. In NE Kansas, this type of erosion generally requires the application of structural conservation practices which can be costly to implement. Soil health is a resource concern and expanding soil health practices such as cover crops is seen as an important component to improving the

overall health of the environment. As each of the Tribal entities own and operate grazing lands, plant vigor and health are a concern. Providing the appropriate grazing land infrastructure (watering facilities, fencing), practicing proper grazing distribution, addressing invasive species (brush & herbaceous), and the incorporation of grazed cover crops is important to addressing this resource concern. 3 of the Tribal entities have an active cattle operation, with each of the Tribal entities having a bison herd. Expansion beyond "traditional agriculture" is a priority of some of the tribal entities. This includes the incorporation of specialty crops and the growing practices (i.e., hoop houses) associated with that production. Specialty crops are being grown to provide fresh produce for Tribal members, and to expand into additional markets (i.e., industrial hemp, honey). A resource concern of improving environmental diversity and protecting environmentally sensitive areas exists which includes maintaining and re-establishing native plants/pollinators, wetlands, and forestlands; and in the case of the Iowa Tribe establishing a Tribal National Park. A resource concern of water quality and water quantity exists for each of the Tribal entities. This is a priority concern for the Kickapoo Nation as a stable/safe domestic water supply is needed. Over all watershed health (stream health, riparian area protection, landscape diversity, responsible land use, etc.) is recognize as being critically important. Cultural preservation and protection are a resource concern which not only emphasizes the protection of culturally important/sensitive areas, but also prioritizes the importance of preserving the culture of each Tribe. Along these lines, emphasis is placed on education and Tribal educational programs. Regaining tribal grounds (land purchases) is a priority among the Tribal entities, along with the application of sound resource protecting practices as these lands are acquired.

General Comments and Observations of Facilitators:

- Local Work Group meetings need to occur in January, February and March to improve producer/local stakeholder attendance and participation.
- Look at alternatives, or additional options, to encourage broader participation from producers/local stakeholders. The virtual component worked well, but there may be an opportunity to increase participation virtually by having potential participants meet at local service center offices as a group to participate virtually…particularly in the larger 5/6 county MU's. It may be beneficial to have someone present (i.e., District Manager) that could serve as an on-site facilitator to ensure virtual participants are being heard and fully participating.
- Contractor availability is a concern that needs to be recognized (contractors servicing soil conservation, spraying and brush/tree removal, well drilling, prescribed burning, tree planting, grass drilling, etc.). Limited contractor availability may impact practice installation within financial assistance contracts, as well as conservation technical assistance (CTA) practice application.

Exhibit 1


USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Kansas
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Multi-County Management Units*
CHEYENNE St. Francis
RAWLINS Atwood
DECATUR Oberlin
NORTON Norton
PHILLIPS Phillipsburg
SMITH Smith Center
JEWELL Mankato
REPUBLIC Belleville
WASHINGTON Washington
MARSHALL Marysville
NEMAHA Seneca
BROWN Hiawatha
DONIPHAN Troy
SHERMAN Goodland
THOMAS Colby
SHERIDAN Hoxie
GRAHAM Hill City
Stockton ROOKS
Osborne OSBORNE
Beloit MITCHELL
Concordia CLOUD
CLAY Clay Center
POTTAWATOMIE Westmoreland
RILEY Manhattan
JACKSON Holton
ATCHISON Effingham
JEFFERSON Oskaloosa
LEAVENWORTH
WYANDOTTE
WALLACE Sharon Springs
LOGAN
Oakley
GOVE
WaKeeney TREGO
ELLIS Hays
RUSSELL Russell
LINCOLN Lincoln
OTTAWA Minneapolis
DICKINSON Abilene
GEARY
Alma WABAUNSEE
SHAWNEE Topeka
Lawrence DOUGLAS
JOHNSON
ELLSWORTH Ellsworth
SALINE Salina
MORRIS Council Grove
LYON Emporia
OSAGE Lyndon
Ottawa FRANKLIN
MIAMI Paola
GREELEY Tribune
WICHITA Leoti
SCOTT Scott City
LANE Dighton
NESS Ness City
RUSH La Crosse
BARTON Great Bend
RICE Lyons
MCPHERSON McPherson
MARION Marion
CHASE
COFFEY Burlington
Garnett ANDERSON
LINN Mound City
HAMILTON Syracuse
KEARNY Lakin
FINNEY Garden City
HODGEMAN Jetmore
PAWNEE Larned
STAFFORD St. John
Hutchinson South Hutchinson RENO
HARVEY Newton
BUTLER El Dorado
GREENWOOD Eureka
WOODSON
Iola ALLEN
BOURBON Fort Scott
STANTON Johnson
GRANT Ulysses
HASKELL Sublette
GRAY Cimarron
Dodge City FORD
Kinsley EDWARDS
Greensburg KIOWA
PRATT Pratt
Kingman KINGMAN
SEDGWICK Wichita
ELK Howard
WILSON Fredonia
Chanute Erie NEOSHO
CRAWFORD Girard
MORTON
STEVENS Hugoton
SEWARD Liberal
MEADE Meade
CLARK Ashland
COMANCHE
BARBER Medicine Lodge
HARPER Anthony
SUMNER Wellington
COWLEY Winfield
CHAUTAUQUA
MONTGOMERY Independence
LABETTE Altamont
CHEROKEE Columbus
1
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E
S
NRCS Administrative Areas
* 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