

1. (BOTH) – I want you to know this agenda item was Ray’s idea; we have put a lot of time and effort into making it a joint presentation. (RAY) ***

2. (BOTH) Puzzle – there is a process in place in the NRCS Manual that outlines a conservation district – local work group – state technical advisory committee, or STAC, process. What we want to talk about today is what all these terms mean, how the connection works, and how we can make this connection fit Nevada’s needs. Nevada is often unlike other states; this situation is no different. The large amount of federal land, the small amount of private land, the many partners at work, the distances, past history, and often limited staffs; all those considerations and more make natural resource work in Nevada a puzzle. What we want to talk about today is how to solve the puzzle, how to use this NRCS planning tool to help every partner we have to work together by the most effective way possible to solve resource concerns at the local level. I see the possibilities as limitless! (RAY) ***

3. (BOTH) CDs are important to Nevada as we hold the key to solving the puzzle. This is because we have specific authorities by state statute and a specific role in a federal planning system – the perfect combination to work for Nevada. We can meld funding, work across ownership boundaries, and be a safe place for local people to connect with agencies and groups. (RAY) ***

4. One of the authorities given to CDs by NRS is “to develop comprehensive plans for the conservation of renewable natural resources within the district,” and to bring them to people’s attention. Apparently, the practice of writing plans and putting them on the shelf was a problem in 1937 as well as today! Earlier I described the background of the Resource Needs Assessments, the process NvACD is supporting, now we are going to talk about how those Assessments will lead to conservation action plans and how this process can and should incorporate planning and implementation needs for all entities working on Nevada landscapes. ***

5. We also want to recognize the support and assistance of the CD Program in DCNR. Bettina and I like to say the Program and NvACD are two sides of the same coin. This map shows the three CD Areas, which gives definition to SCC commissioner nominations and sometimes other designations. ***

6. Before we get into the boring, government manual stuff, I want to whet your appetite for where we will get to by the end of this conversation. The boring, government manual stuff is necessary for the framework, but here are the benefits of the process NvACD has embarked on with NRCS help – a process you must always keep in mind is bigger than just NRCS, every agency and group here will benefit by their participation. I cannot emphasize that idea enough and will keep saying it over and over.

When I went around the state talking about Resource Needs Assessments and locally led conservation, this is how I described the benefits. “It is all about having the information in place to make the best decisions, at the local level, about how best to spend any program dollars available from any source to solve resource concerns, and how to locally lead planning for the future.

This “Locally Led” planning process establishes a foundation upon which the District’s conservation efforts are based. It provides the informational and scientific rigor for planning and project implementation that is on par with other federal agency planning and provides the context to develop collaborative solutions with state and federal partners. It challenges neighbors, both urban and rural, to work together and take responsibility for addressing local resource needs. It involves the community in the assessment of those needs, as well as the solutions and priorities. The approach emphasizes voluntary, non-regulatory, incentive-based actions before use of regulatory measures. It is not driven by any single piece of legislation, any one fiscal year or any individual program; it is an on-going, timeless approach that is not tied to any particular year. As such, it is able to be evaluated regularly to ensure it is effectively meeting the long-term needs of the local community. ***

7. Before we continue, we need to distinguish LAWGs from LWGs. The Local Area Work Groups are sage grouse focused. They have done great work to bring people together to accomplish projects for sage grouse. Relationships have already been built and I certainly hope the LAWGs will bring the expertise they have acquired to the LWG to help them identify resource concerns and possible solutions. A LWG in no way lessens or interferes with the working of a LAWG; they will do the work of a LAWG if there is no LAWG, or they can enhance the work the LAWG is doing by a broader function, additional partners, or pursuing solutions to concerns that will also benefit sage grouse. ***

8. Ray ***

9. Now let's get specific about what a Resource Needs Assessment, or RNA, is. Simply put, it identifies resource concerns and potential solutions to those concerns. It will provide the CD the foundation for their conservation efforts. The reason this is important to all our partners is that every square inch of Nevada is included in a conservation district, so wherever you are working; a CD is there and can work with you. RNAs work across ownership boundaries; therefore, this is not a BLM plan, or an NDF plan, or a USFS plan, or an NDOW plan. It is the one place all those plans can bring their elements together.

These are the CDs involved in the initial Agreement; my hope is eventually all 28 Nevada CDs will develop Resource Needs Assessments. NvACD has written a Guide that is available on our website at nvacd.org. It outlines the process and gives many links to further information. The Agreement with NRCS-NV has funded time and travel for NvACD to write the Guide and do outreach, and \$4000 will be paid to each CD that completes the RNA, organizes a LWG, and submits recommendations to the State Technical Advisory Committee by November 2019. ***

10. Our in-state Agreement with NRCS has provided the tools and understanding for how to complete a RNA, and our national Agreement with NACD the means to

hire the contractors to help the seven initial CDs work through the Resource Concerns Checklist and complete the Conservation Practices Physical Effects matrix, or CPPE. These two NRCS farm planning tools form the foundation of the Resource Needs Assessment and they identify the soil, air, water, plant and animal resource concerns. There is a paper on your table that lists the categories. The Resource Concerns Checklist is actually 7 pages long, I just combined all the first columns onto one sheet; the rest of each page is designed for the more detailed farm planning NRCS does. That is the beauty of this system; it can be scaled up or down depending on what intensity of detail is required for the job at hand.

The CPPE is a detailed tool developed over years of research, testing, and implementation by NRCS that links NRCS conservation practices to identified resource concerns. A Practice is an NRCS term for such things as a head gate for an irrigation diversion, a pasture improvement or a grazing rotation system; there are about 180 practices described. Here is the part of the definition of a Practice that gives the RNA/CPPE the equal footing with other federal planning: (QUOTE) “for which standards and specification have been developed and are found in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide.” (CLOSE QUOTE) They are rooted in all the information in the National Ag Library in Maryland.

To describe the process in common terms, this is some of the direction we have given to the contractors:

The NRCS Planning Manual offers several levels of SCOPE or DETAIL for completing a conservation plan. The needed analysis to meet the terms of NvACD’s agreement requires only the simplest of detail at a broad scale, much less than what would be conducted for any area, regional, or farm plan. ***

11. These are the questions to answer as a CD and committee use the Resource Concerns Checklist. For example: the category is soil erosion; you identify that there is significant wind erosion on cultivated fields in X valley during the spring and that last year’s flood has left some gully erosion along two miles of “test

creek” in Y valley. It is likely that you would not need to be any more detailed at this point other than to try to identify some of the causes for these issues. A CPPE review will identify what practices could be applied that would be beneficial for addressing these concerns for soil erosion. You do not need to carry the analysis any farther as this information allows you to complete a summary of how the CD would like to see funds and programs or priorities directed, which is the actual needs assessment. ***

12. The Resource Needs Assessment report will compile:

- The resource concerns identified,
- the list of possible conservation practices to address each concern,
- prioritization of the most frequently occurring concerns and the CD’s 1 to 5 priority order for working on them,
- where within the CD boundary to concentrate efforts to address these top concerns and
- if any of these concerns need further research, investigation, or focus of resources to address because we don’t know what to do about it at this point.

Remember, the intent is to conduct this at the simplest level that will comply with the agreement NvACD has with NRCS regarding informing the STAC process.

These two tools allow adequate opportunity for a CD to do more detailed analysis on any specific issue at any time in the future. The work will lead to a conservation action plan on any issue. What I just read, you can find in Appendix B of the RNA Guide found on the NvACD website. ***

13. Of KEY importance to all this is to constantly remember that this process is effective because it is driven by resource concerns, not programs. It answers the question of what the resource concerns are BEFORE human traditions, wants, needs, values, biases, emotions or political position can cloud the issue. When the resource concerns are identified first, it keeps the human part from inadvertently dominating. It makes the focus be how to solve the resource issue

at hand. This method will seek the most appropriate outcome, even if that may not appear to be the most desired at first blush. ***

14. The identification of resource concerns is done by CD Supervisors and committees organized by the CD; additional public input will be provided by the survey instrument being developed by UNR and funded by Cooperative Extension in Clark County, USFWS Partners Program and Nevada Department of Wildlife. You can help develop the survey by sharing your thoughts at lunch today. Alec Bowman and Inga Sullivan are here to get input from you to make the survey the best it can be. ***

15. This process will help us reach our goals and meet our expectations that CDs and all our partners, not just NRCS, I am going to say it again, not just NRCS but all our partners, can use this system to accomplish their work, and figure out what is best for Nevada. In the past NRCS did NRCS, BLM did BLM, USFS did USFS, NDF did NDF, CDs did CDs and so on. Sage grouse taught us that partnerships are the best way to go. Nevada is different than anywhere else; programs designed elsewhere don't work well here, we have to labor together locally to make them productive to solve our resource challenges, of which we all know we have many. This answers the oft-asked question, how can efforts be coordinated and synchronized in Nevada to prevent duplication of effort and accomplish the best effect for the resource? Whatever the need, no one can work alone any more.

If you would like to talk more specifically about this or have questions you don't get answered during the discussion after this presentation, Gary and I are available with some copies of the Guide to talk with you at the lunch break. ***

16. (BOTH) Part of the Agreement NvACD made with NRCS is to find members for the STAC and have CDs activate their LWG to provide recommendations for the STAC. That is very important, but I am most grateful that NRCS recognizes the larger impact of the LWG; I really like this second paragraph that states that an integrated solution is the way to go. (RAY) ***

17. The process starts with the conservation district, they are elected or appointed officials, responsible for knowing the resource concerns in their area. When we took on the Agreement with Ray to re-energize the STAC, we had to decide how to do that. We decided to go back to basics as outlined in the Manual. The basics are answered by the RNA. The process puts the CD in a lead role to convene and lead the LWG and then bring the LWG's recommendations to the STAC. ***

18. (BOTH) I look forward to having all these groups represented at LWG meetings. It will take time to develop these relationships. NvACD has been working to get the buy-in at the state level for agencies and groups by building relationships at NCCN and directly going to agency leadership and discussing the benefits for the agency or the group with them. The CD will need to do this as well with the local offices. To make this all work it will require both levels – the local to participate and the upper to support what the local is doing and participate at the STAC level. Both have to understand and be on board. (RAY) **

19. Ray ***

20. NRCS can't address every issue, but a LWG with a completed Resource Needs Assessment to know where the problems are, can utilize the resources of other agencies or groups to solve a problem. This makes the ways and means of the LWG far bigger than what just NRCS can provide. Say a wildfire occurs after NRCS funding cycles are over and rehabilitation needs to happen across ownership boundaries and it needs to happen now. BLM and NDOW funds are immediately available. A LWG can be the forum to respond immediately; if an RNA is in place it makes it even better. ***

21. This is the exciting part, to work together across ownership boundaries and leverage other non-NRCS dollars. ***

22. Ray ***

23. (BOTH) (RAY) We want to move forward! ***

24. Ray ***

25. Ray ***

26. I have been living, eating, sleeping and breathing RNAs for the last two years. And I am still learning about them. Maybe I am slow, but don't beat yourself up if you can't realize all the possibilities at this moment. Just the other day I was still concerned that we weren't getting enough detail into our discussions for the RNA in Lincoln County. Then, an epiphany struck! My worry was answered when a light bulb lit up and I finally grasped for myself the thought that Rick had been saying all along – the detail comes in the conservation action plans. This will happen for most of us about different aspects of this. For some it will be the role of the CD – what can they really do to be helpful? ***

27. For you, I would suggest a quiet afternoon reading of NRS 548, an astonishing array of authority from conducting surveys and research, demonstration projects, repair and restoration of wetlands and stream corridors, to administering any project and cost-share on federally financed projects, among many other authorities just as striking. I would venture to say that should the CD Law be written today, we would not be given this breadth of opportunity. CDs themselves, and their partners, need to come to an understanding of what CDs can do. The common situation in Nevada is a CD has no staff, therefore their capacity is limited. NvACD and the CD Program are trying to get that changed, but as I said earlier, I hope the Legislature's Interim Public Lands Committee's response to the NCCN presentations will be the turning point where the State of Nevada gets fully behind locally led conservation with funding and staffing. Until then, and continuing after, the partner agencies and groups can bring their resources to a shared work environment. ***

28. Some of you may struggle with the NRCS terms in the Resource Concerns checklist; NRCS has politely explained each of those in great detail which can be found on our website under the RNA tab and this is why we hired previous NRCS folks who were already familiar with the terms and process. Some of you may wonder why we are using the Resource Concerns Checklist at all? ***

29. Remember I said before that this process answers the question of what the resource concerns are BEFORE any human considerations can cloud the issue and inadvertently dominate. Think of any contentious issue you have dealt with in your area – this method can get you past the emotions hurdle and on the way to actually solve the problem with buy-in of people focused on the problem, not their previous assumptions. Then we will ultimately get to what we truly want, a fixed problem.

Some may be concerned about their own authorities being compromised in this process. A LWG and STAC are advisory only; it is there to assist, not to take over anyone else's territory. Their authority comes from the willingness of partners to work together but each partner maintains its own roles and responsibilities. ***

30. It is like when various components of Emergency Management Services come together on a car accident scene. The highway patrol controls the scene, the fire department puts the fire out and uses the jaws of life to open the car door, the ambulance service provides the medical assistance and transport of those injured, the Trauma Intervention Program volunteers assist the victims not needing a ride to the hospital, and the highway department ultimately clears the debris off the road. Each entity brings their training and skills to the scene and work together to solve the problems they find there but they don't do each other's jobs. They are there to do THEIR role and responsibility. Maybe even more importantly to what we are talking about here – they practice on a regular basis, so when the emergency happens, they are ready to know how to work together and they have relationships built. I see a conservation district as the Incident Command; where would you see yourself or your agency?

A LWG and a STAC needs to meet more than once a year to maintain relationships or bring new staff or partners into the fold, to keep each other apprised of opportunities or constraints within their own systems, to identify and respond to a new problem, to evaluate results of work on an action item from a conservation action plan, or just to practice working together like the EMS folks do. Maybe the EMS example here is more than a just a good way to illustrate how this works. We are in an emergency situation in Nevada – wild horses, too much and not enough wildfire, invasives, T&E species, lesser functioning riparian systems, a difficult national conversation or the lack thereof, all make it harder for us to do our jobs. We have to work together and this process provides a roadmap to find the way. A roadmap has many routes, but at least we are all going the same direction. Each CD area will be different, but this process gets us following a common means, and if we all follow it, it will reduce the number of efforts to support. ***

31. (BOTH) (RAY FIRST) This is the ongoing process that keeps the RNA valid. ***

32. (BOTH) Many NCCN Partners are here today for which we are very glad, and they are committed to the same goals as we are. I particularly like the NCCN Core Beliefs: natural resources and human communities are interdependent. Community-based, locally led conservation is the keystone to working landscapes and sustainable communities. Sounds a lot like what CDs were originally created to do! NCCN will soon have a website where you can find more information. (RAY) ***

33. (BOTH) It is all balanced on CDs, the blue puzzle piece from the second slide. We need to make coordination the way we do business in Nevada. The more we do it, the more we recognize it, the more we fund it, the more practical it becomes to do. It is the only way to find lasting success. The CD – LWG – STAC connection is a means already developed and of good design. It can leverage funding and cooperation to achieve cross-jurisdictional work and is based on longstanding relationships. (RAY) ***