



United States Department of Agriculture

2017 Minnesota State Technical Committee Standard Operating Procedure

August 5, 2016

Minnesota State Technical Committee

Overview

The Minnesota State Technical Committee (MNSTC) serves in an advisory capacity to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on the implementation of the natural resources conservation provisions of Farm Bill legislation. The Committee is intended to include members from a wide variety of natural resource and agricultural interests. Chaired by the State Conservationist, Cathee Pullman, the MSTC is composed of representatives from Federal and State natural resource agencies, American Indian Tribes, agricultural and environmental organizations, and agricultural producers.

Responsibilities of the State Technical Committee

The State Technical Committee meets regularly to provide information, analysis, and recommendations to USDA officials charged with implementing the conservation provisions of the Farm Bill. The role of the State Technical Committee is advisory in nature, and has no implementation or enforcement authority. However, the USDA shall give strong consideration to the recommendations of the State Technical Committee in administering the programs under the Farm Bill. The State Technical Committee's advisory role in establishing program priorities and criteria. It is the responsibility of the State Technical Committee to:

1. Provide information, analysis, and recommendations to USDA on conservation priorities and criteria for natural resources conservation activities and programs, including application and funding criteria, recommended practices, and program payment percentages.
2. Identify emerging natural resource concerns and program needs.
3. Recommend conservation practice standards and specifications.
4. Recommend State and national program policy based on resource data.
5. Review activities of the local working groups to ensure State priorities are being addressed locally.
6. Make recommendations to the State Conservationist on requests and recommendations from local working groups.
7. Assist NRCS with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers' training needs.

State Technical Committee Membership

The MNSTC will include agricultural producers, nonindustrial private forest land owners, and other professionals who represent a variety of disciplines in soil, water, wetlands, plant, and wildlife sciences. The State Conservationist in each State will serve as chairperson. The State Technical Committee for each State will include representatives from among the following, if willing to serve:

1. NRCS
2. Farm Service Agency (FSA)
3. FSA State Committee
4. U.S. Forest Service
5. National Institute of Food and Agriculture
6. Each of the federally recognized American Indian Tribal Governments
7. Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
8. State departments and agencies within the State, including the following:
 - Agricultural agency
 - Fish and wildlife agency
 - Forestry agency
 - Soil and water conservation agency
 - Water resources agency
9. Agricultural producers representing the variety of crops and livestock or poultry raised within the State
10. Owners of nonindustrial private forest land
11. Nonprofit organizations (as defined under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986) that demonstrate conservation expertise and experience working with agricultural producers in the State
12. Agribusiness
13. Other Federal agencies and persons knowledgeable about economic and environmental impacts of conservation techniques and programs as determined by the State Conservationist.

The State Conservationist will invite other relevant Federal, State, and regional agencies, organizations, and persons knowledgeable about economic and environmental impacts of natural resource conservation techniques and programs to participate as needed.

New Membership

It is the responsibility of the State Conservationist to seek a balanced representation of interests among the membership on the State Technical Committee. To ensure that recommendations of State Technical Committees take into account the needs of the diverse groups served by USDA, membership will include, to the extent practicable, individuals with demonstrated ability to represent the conservation and related technical concerns of particular historically underserved groups and individuals; i.e., minorities, women, persons with disabilities, socially and economically disadvantaged groups, and beginning farmers and ranchers. Individuals or groups wanting to participate on a State Technical Committee within a specific State may submit a request to the State Conservationist that explains their interest and outlines their credentials. Decisions regarding membership are at the discretion of the State Conservationist. State Conservationist decisions on membership are final and not appealable to any other individual or group within USDA.

Specialized Subcommittees of State Technical Committees

Specialized subcommittees composed of State Technical Committee members may be needed to analyze and refine specific issues or research topics. The State Conservationist may assemble certain committee members, including members of local working groups and other experts to discuss, examine, and focus on a particular technical or programmatic topic, or combination of such. The State Conservationist shall appoint one of the MNSTC members as a chair, assign a NRCS consultant, and define the purpose, parameters, reporting frequency and lifespan of the committee. Recommendations of specialized subcommittees will be presented in general sessions of State Technical Committees.

Minnesota State Technical Subcommittees:

The following subcommittees have been identified. MNSTC members are encouraged to participate on one or multiple subcommittees. The subcommittees can be comprised of non MNSTC members. Each Subcommittee will have an assigned non-NRCS lead and a NRCS Advisor.

Conservation Easements

The roles and responsibilities of the Conservation Easements subcommittee is to provide input and direction for Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs. Input and direction provided may include, but is not limited to, the following: Application ranking criteria, geographic area rate caps, local and state priorities, compatible use agreements, restoration plans, management plans and management of easement acres.

Financial Assistance Programs (EQIP and CSP)

The roles and responsibilities of the FAP subcommittee is to provide input and direction for Financial Assistance Programs to include EQIP and CSP. Input and direction provided may include, but is not limited to, the following: Local work group recommendations, state priorities application ranking criteria, EQIP initiatives and efforts, funding pools, program evaluation.

Forestry

The roles and responsibilities of the Forestry subcommittee is to provide input and direction for conservation delivery for private forest land. Input and direction provided may include, but is not limited to, the following: Identifying and prioritizing forestland resource concerns, providing feedback on forestry standards and technical materials, developing priorities and delivery for forest land programs.

Grazing and Hayland

The roles and responsibilities of the Grazing and Hayland Subcommittee is to provide input and direction for conservation delivery for Grazing and Hayland. Input and direction provided may include, but is not limited to, the following: Identifying and prioritizing pasture and hayland resource concerns, providing feedback on related standards and technical materials, developing priorities and delivery for programs.

Practice Standards and Technical Materials

The roles and responsibilities of the Practice Standards and Technical Materials Subcommittee is to provide input and direction for technical delivery of conservation. Input and direction provided may include, but is not limited to, the following: Providing feedback and direction for standards and technical material updates, developing state conservation planning priorities, identifying technical development needs.

Priority Watershed

The roles and responsibilities of the Priority Watershed Subcommittee is to provide input and direction for technical delivery of watershed conservation planning. Input and direction provided may include, but is not limited to, the following: Providing feedback and direction for watershed selection and prioritization, updates to watershed studies and watershed monitoring activities.

Wildlife and CRP

The roles and responsibilities of the Wildlife and CRP Subcommittee is to provide input and direction for conservation delivery for Wildlife and CRP. Input and direction provided may include, but is not limited to, the following: Identifying and prioritizing CRP priority areas, providing feedback on related standards and technical materials, developing priorities and delivery for wildlife programs.

Others as Needed

Meetings and Frequency

The MNSTC will meet quarterly each fiscal year. Other meetings may be held at the discretion of the State Conservationist in a format of his or her choosing. The State Conservationist will call a meeting whenever he or she believes that there is business that should be brought before the committee for action. However, any USDA agency may make a request of the State Conservationist for a meeting.

USDA Fiscal Year	Quarter	Date	Location
2017	1	11/17/2016	Waite Park, MN
2017	2	2/23/2017	Waite Park, MN
2017	3	5/25/2017	Waite Park, MN
2017	4	7/13/2017	Waite Park, MN

Minnesota State Technical Committee Meeting Process and Procedures

The MNSTC process and procedures are as follows:

Scheduling Meetings and Public Notice

- MNSTC meetings will be scheduled on a quarterly basis
- A public meeting notice at least 14 calendar days prior to the meetings will be posted in the Pioneer Press.
- The meeting notice will also be posted to the NRCS State Web site and will include meeting time, location, agenda items, and point of contact.

Meeting Agenda and Content

- The meeting agenda will be developed to reflect the purpose and responsibilities of the MNSTC.
- MNSTC members will be e-mailed 30 days in advance of the meeting requesting agenda items.
- A meeting agenda will be prepared and provided to the committee members at least 14 calendar days prior to a scheduled meeting.
- Additional agenda items will be considered if submitted in writing to the State Conservationist at least 5 working days prior to the meeting.
- The State Conservationist may amend the agenda, at any time, without notice.

Meeting Materials and Handouts

- Handouts will be provided to the MNSTC at least 5 days before the meeting, when time and resources allow.
- Presenters are responsible for providing materials for their area or responsibility.
- Handouts and presentation materials will be sent to the MN State Office for distribution at least 5 days prior to the meeting.

Meeting Set Up and Communications

- VTC and Teleconference information will be sent out with the agenda.
- Presenters are responsible for contacting the MNSTC coordinator 5 days in advance for equipment and presentation needs.
- Committee members and public participants shall notify the MNSTC coordinator for coordination of and location of VTC attendance.
- VTC and the Teleconference host will set up 15 minutes prior to the scheduled start time.

VTCs are available at the following locations:

VTC Location	
NRCS Area 1 Office	Thief River Falls, MN
NRCS Area 2 Office	Fergus Falls, MN
NRCS Area 3 Office	Duluth, MN
NRCS Area 4 Office	Brooklyn Center, MN
NRCS Area 5 Office	Marshall, MN
NRCS Area 6 Office	Rochester, MN
NRCS State Office	St. Paul, MN

Conducting Business

The meetings will be conducted as an open discussion among members. Discussion will focus on the programs and activities identified in 440-CPM, Part 501, Subpart A, Section 501.0C. The following guidelines will govern meeting discussions:

- The State Conservationist or his or her designee will lead the discussion.
- Only one person may speak at a time.
- Every participant should have an opportunity to speak.
- The State Conservationist or his or her designee is responsible for recognizing speakers.
- State Technical Committees are advisory in nature and all recommendations are considered.
- Members may be polled, but voting on issues is not appropriate.
- The State Conservationist, in consultation with those members present, may establish time limits for discussion on individual agenda items.
- The State Conservationist will defer those agenda items not covered because of time limits to the next meeting.

Record of Meetings and Meeting Minutes

- Summaries for all State Technical Committee meetings will be available within 30 calendar days of the committee meeting and distributed to committee members.
- The summaries will be filed at the NRCS State office and posted to the MN NRCS State Web site.

Response to State Technical Committee Recommendations

- The State Conservationist will inform the State Technical Committee as to the decisions made in response to all State Technical Committee recommendations within 90 days.
- Notification will be made in writing to all State Technical Committee members and posted to the NRCS State Web site.

Annual Review of MNSTC

- Members will be reviewed annually for changes to the roster.
- The MNSTC SOP will be updated annually to reflect any changes.