



Orleans County, VT 2022 Local Work Group Results Report



Orleans County NRCRD Board Member and Dairy Farmer, Joanna Lidback addressing the Local Work Group.

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Executive Summary

What is a NRCS local workgroup?

A NRCS [local work group](#) (LWG) convened and discussed here serves as an advisory committee to the Vermont NRCS State Technical Committee, providing recommendations to USDA on local natural resource priorities for conservation activities, identify program funding needs and recommend program application criteria in Orleans County we pair this NRCS workgroup with advising our own work and the work of other regional partners. Local work groups in Vermont are organized by Natural Resources Conservation District Boundaries. The local workgroups generally meet every 1-3 years. This report is a summary of the results and recommendations of our Orleans County VT local workgroup.

Based on a review of the LWG, done by the Orleans County NRCD, the Orleans County Local Work Group highlighted these recommendations of notable significance.

1. Improve program coordination with the local NRCS - assisting NRCS with public outreach and information efforts to ensure that NRCS results are more inline with the LWG priorities, coordination of fielding conservation technical assistance requests and coordinated follow up assistance to landowners that don't make it through the NRCS ranking process.
2. Increase community engagement to raise awareness of conservation opportunities through increased conservation communications with communities.
3. Beyond the continuation of prioritization water quality LWG recommends adopting four over-arching additional goals for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):
 - Improve freshwater fish habitat
 - Protect and enhance riparian areas including address bank erosion
 - Promote signal practice invasive species projects and have Orleans NRCD directly involved in program delivery.
 - Improve soil health

Overview of the Orleans County NRCD Locally Led Conservation Planning Process and Local WorkGroup 2022 Meeting

The Orleans County Natural Resources Conservation District (OCNRCD) offered a 25 question [Locally Led Conservation Survey](#) that was shared with partners and the public who were invited to provide feedback on local conservation to be included in regional planning and program delivery. We then hosted a Locally Led Conservation Planning meeting on April 7th 2022 at the Goodrich Memorial Library in Newport VT from 9:30-2:30.

[The meeting agenda](#) included a morning session focused on VTDEC Basin Planning Strategies, lunch and visiting, and an afternoon session focused on NRCS programs. Our meeting had 25 natural resource professionals in attendance from 10 local, state, and federal organizations. We had a presentation from Ben Copans, VT DEC Watershed Planner and small group discussions focused on ideas for strategies to address water issues in agriculture, wetlands, riparian zones and floodplains, forestry, community engagement, and lakeshores. In the afternoon we had a presentation from David Blodgett, NRCS District Conservationist and small group discussions focused on barriers and needs. At the end of the day, the local workgroup discussed the Vermont Locally Led Conservation Ranking financial assistance pools and what resource concerns and practices to prioritize for those funds.

The following information are the results of these two LWG engagement efforts. Remainder of this report is divided into three sections: a summary of the outcomes; the results of the survey; and the last section is the notes from the meeting.

Orleans County Local Work Group Outcomes for consideration by VTDEC, VT NRCS, Orleans County NRCD and other partners.

Suggested Strategies to Improve Water Quality through VTDEC Basin Planning.

The main takeaways from the meeting include:

1. Improve the working relationship of partners and capacity of partners.
2. Address priority natural resource needs like improving incentives for wetland restoration work.
3. Increase natural resource assessments.
4. Raise awareness of conservation opportunities through increased conservation communications with communities.



Orleans County VT Local Fund pool recommendations

The local work group discussed two primary areas of interest for prioritization of a NRCS Local Fund pool proposal - Energy and Invasives. These two priorities were decided based on the survey results and based on feedback from the natural resource professionals at the meeting. The discussion concluded with the request that the Orleans County Conservation District submit a proposal focused on addressing invasives. Many of the Orleans County LWG participants are active in the recently created Orleans County Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) group. Based on NRCS soil conservationist field staff feedback, invasive plant control is underfunded by NRCS programs despite being a common landowner need and priority resource concern in Orleans County. Based on this feedback and the professional experience and judgment of LWG participants, it was concluded that invasive plant control needs to be the priority for a local fund pool proposal. LWG professionals working in Orleans County agree that there are relatively low infestations. These infestations can be addressed to mitigate the plant pest pressure natural resource concerns early with the use of NRCS programs to help to slow the spread of these toxic, nonnative, terrestrial invaders.

Orleans County VT Conservation Plan Ranking Component Weights

Each NRCS application goes through a ranking process, below are the five categories each category is given weight and the LWG can provide input on the ranking component weights for the NRCS to consider by providing suggestions on how important the score of each of the five categories should matter in the overall score of the application. NRCS Ranking is then customized to incorporate locally led input to evaluate the proposed conservation practices.

Five NRCS Ranking Components

- Vulnerability - Site vulnerability is determined by subtracting the existing condition and existing practice scores from the thresholds.
- Planned Practice Effects - The planned practice score will be based on the sum of the planned practice on that land unit which addresses the resource concern. These two scores will be weighted by a ranking pool to address the resource concerns prioritized by that ranking pool.
- Resource Priorities - National and State Program Priorities are set through the Farm Bill, Secretary and Chief Priorities, Locally Led Input from Local Work Groups, and State Technical Committee which address land and resource considerations.
- Program Priorities - National and State Program Priorities are set through the Farm Bill, Secretary and Chief Priorities, Locally Led Input from Local Work Groups, and State Technical Committee which address program purposes.
- Cost Efficiency - Summation of Planned Practice Points divided by the log of the summation of Average Practice Cost.

The LWG is asked by NRCS to provide suggestions on the ranking component weights. These ranking Total ranking component weights must equal 100%. The planned practice points and efficiency percent are set nationally. These ranking criteria prioritize and subsequently fund applications that have planned practices that address priority natural resource concerns.

Orleans County VT Suggested Ranking Component Weights			
	Min %	Max %	Suggested Weight
Vulnerabilities	10	40	15
Planned Practice Points	15	15	15
Program Priorities	5	15	10
Resource Priorities	20	60	50
Efficiency	10	10	10
TOTAL			100%

Locally-Led Conservation Survey Results

Before the meeting OCNRCD conducted a [Locally Led Conservation Survey](#). The 25 question survey was shared with the public via multiple local online and paper media sources including the Conservation Districts' Facebook page, website, and newsletter. The objective of this survey was to gather the opinions and comments on natural resource protection priorities from a wide

range of community members including, but not limited to residents, farmers, and state and local organizations staff. The following results show the priorities of the survey respondents as well as current NRCS Newport field office conservation data. The first page of the survey was focused on NRCS programs and the second page was focused on general conservation program delivery. The results will be considered by regional professionals in planning NRCS program delivery.

There were 51 respondents to the survey. Respondents are categorized into 3 groups based on how they self-identified:

- 1) Partners - Employees of local organizations or state and federal agencies. 23 respondents.
- 2) Farmers - 14 respondents.
- 3) Residents and Lake Association Members - Neither partner nor farmer. 16 respondents.

3 respondents are categorized as both partners and farmers.

Survey Results Summary

Overall the results of the survey are that there is work to be done to align LWG priorities with the Newport NRCS obligated contracts, to streamline program delivery, address staff retention and improve community communications. Survey respondents' priority practices and percent financial assistance from respondents differ from the NRCS program delivery data. For example, the first survey question was "In your opinion, which land uses should receive the most financial assistance? 1. Cropland 2. Farmsteads 3. Pastures 4. Forestry/Wildlife 5. Specialty Crop. Please allocate a percentage for each THAT TOTALS 100%.", the respondents gave equal weight to the percent of financial assistance allocated to different land uses and Newport USDA Office funding distribution doesn't reflect these LWG survey priorities. Also, the land conservation practices implemented in Orleans County through NRCS programs do not fully reflect the survey respondents' top 10 practices. The results of the survey on resource concern priorities and the results of the NRCS resource concerns are essentially aligned and it's worth noting that the NRCS resource concerns are largely related to water and soil quality. This is not to say that the LWG doesn't fully appreciate all the great work that NRCS Newport engages in in Orleans but rather highlights some areas for more alignment.

Most respondents state that the biggest hurdle in NRCS conservation programs is poor and lengthy communication and staff turnover. One respondent commented, "Applying and then implementing practices often take a significant amount of time which also makes it extremely difficult." Respondents also expressed a hurdle of knowing about new and alternative conservation practices that might be available through NRCS like dam removal and river reconnection, floodplain restoration, and stormwater management. Many partners state that low levels of engagement with landowners and volunteers is another significant hurdle.

When resources are shared, projects are supported, planned and developed with clear strategy and good communication, respondents feel that programs are implemented well. Increased collaborations between NRCS, state and local programs can create impactful results in large scale efforts. Improved outreach, communications and streamlining of applying for these NRCS

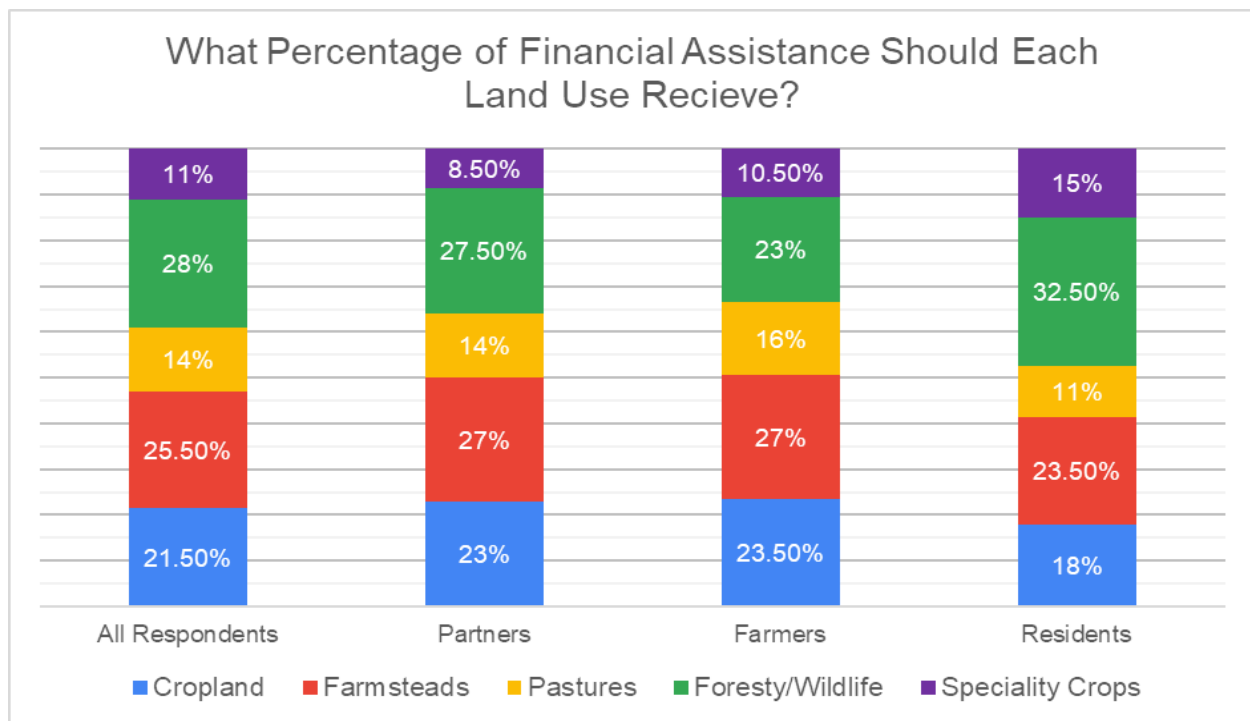
programs should be prioritized. It may also be difficult for residents and farmers to access the data they need, either due to not knowing where to find it or lengthy documents that could be summarized. Also, landowners with applications that don't get funded through NRCS should be made aware of other conservation opportunities through local partners and the conservation district is the appropriate organization to coordinate that work. Currently, other partners are not informed of landowners who are not funded but are interested in working with other partners to address their conservation goals.

Results of Survey Respondents to NRCS program survey questions and Newport NRCS office data.

The section below includes aggregation of the survey results and direct responses from the survey. We also included results from an aggregation of the local Newport NRCS conservation work over the last three years to offer a comparison to the LWG survey results.

NRCS Land Use Financial Assistance Distribution

Respondents were asked to assign percentages based on how they think financial assistance should be distributed to different types of land uses. Results were relatively uniform across all groups however the resident group tended to prioritize Forestry/Wildlife and specialty crops with less emphasis on croplands and pastures.



The actual distribution of the Newport USDA office funds presents a difference than the preferred allocation of the survey respondents. The majority of funds are dedicated to farmsteads and secondly pastures (livestock). The remaining categories together only make up between 4-10% of the total funds obligated in Orleans County. The reason why there is a large

difference in the Newport NRCS financial obligations vs the survey results is because manure pits are very expensive.

USDA NRCS Newport Funding 2019-2021						
Year	Farmstead	Grazing	Cropland	Speciality Crop	Forestry	CAPs
2019	74.00%	16.00%	0.60%	3.40%	3.00%	0.60%
2020	72.00%	21.00%	0.50%	1.80%	1.20%	1.70%
2021	84.00%	12.00%	0.00%	1.60%	1.50%	1.30%
Average	76.67%	16.33%	0.37%	2.27%	1.90%	1.20%

NRCS Resource Concerns in Orleans County

Respondents were asked to rank all VT NRCS resource concerns by identifying and ranking their top four. The resource concern options are and were organized in the survey based on the resource type. Some of the resource types had up to two resource concerns to choose from and some types had nine to choose from. A resource concern is defined as a resource condition where degradation of the soil, water, air, plant, animal or energy resource base to the extent that the sustainability or intended use of the resource is impaired. The full list of NRCS VT Resource Concerns can be found through this [link](#).

Top 4 Survey Results Resource Concerns by Type				
Resource Type	1st Priority	2nd Priority	3rd Priority	4th Priority
Air	Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Particulate Matter	Airborne Reactive Nitrogen	Objectionable Odors
Water	Pathogens & Chemicals from manure, biomass, or compost	Nutrients transported to surface water	Pesticides transported to water	Nutrients transported to groundwater
Energy	Efficiency of Equipment & Facilities	Efficiency of Field Operations	N/A	N/A
Plants	Plant Productivity & Health	Plant Structure & Composition	Plant Pest Pressure	N/A
Soils	Bank Erosion of Streams & Shorelines	Soil Organism Habitat Loss	Organic Matter Depletion	Sheet & Rill Erosion
Animal	Aquatic Habitats for Fish & Other Organisms	Terrestrial Habitats for Wildlife and Invertebrates	Feed & Forage Imbalance	Low Quality and Quantity of Water for Livestock

Top Resource Concern by Topic Survey Responses	Frequency	% Of Total
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	26	51.0%
Pathogens & Chemicals From Manure & Biomass	21	41.2%
Efficiency of Equipment and Facilities	36	70.6%
Plant Productivity & Health	26	51.0%
Bank Erosion of Streams & Shorelines	23	45.1%
Aquatic Habitats for Fish & Other Organisms	24	47.1%

The Newport USDA office scheduled practices are largely addressing water and soil resource concerns. This is generally in alignment with the priority resource concerns of the survey respondents. Please Note: Efficiency of Equipment and facilities ranked highest but know that in the survey energy resource type only had two resource concerns to rank vs the others that all had 5 or more to rank.

Newport NRCS Data on Top 10 Resource Concerns 2019-2021	Frequency	% Of Total
Soil quality limitations	18	15%
Degraded plant condition	16	13%
Field sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss	15	12%
Concentrated erosion	10	8%
Livestock Production Limitation	10	8%
Water Quality Degradation	10	8%
Storage and handling of pollutants	8	7%
Wind and water erosion	7	6%
Soil Erosion	5	4%
Aquatic habitat	4	3%

Additional comments on resource concerns directly from the survey

- Horses and other livestock should have access to year round shelter
- Invasive species - terrestrial, aquatic, and forest (Please note that the survey listed resources concerns that do address invasives.)
- My primary resource concern is the protection of riparian habitat in heavily farmed river valleys and lands adjacent to upland creeks. Grazing primarily, and cropping, in these zones is a source of significant uncontrolled erosion and nutrient runoff into sensitive

waterways. Sedimentation and nutrient loads severely degrade the natural functions of aquatic habitat.

- Are water issues part of the education programs F&P offer at state park campgrounds?

NRCS Land Management Practices

Respondents were asked to prioritize 10 land management conservation practices out of 60 listed in the survey that they find important or think that are needed in Orleans County. Conservation practice means a specific on the ground treatment, such as: a structural or vegetative measure, or management technique, commonly used to meet specific needs in planning and implementing conservation for which standards and specifications have been developed.

More information on NRCS conservation practices is provided at https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/vt/technical/?cid=nrcs142p2_010537



Orleans County survey respondents prioritized land management conservation practices that address stream banks and wetlands restoration while a majority of the NRCS funded practices in the last 3 years have been used for managing farmstead facilities and pastures.

Newport NRCS Field Office 2019-2021 Top 10 Scheduled Practice by scheduled practices. The following two charts are the same information, just sorted by 1) number of practices and 2) funding obligation.

	Code	# of Practices Scheduled	Units	Amount	Obligation
1	Fence	195	Ft	347656	\$658,305.09
2	Waste Transfer	98	No		\$960,192.18
3	Cover Crop	92	Ac	10853.4	\$673,825.92
4	Heavy Use Area Protection	78	SqFt	174172.2	\$1,116,243.07
5	Underground Outlet	67	No	9054	\$77,938.76
6	Watering Facility	63	No	185	\$61,730.28
7	Conservation Crop Rotation	63	Ac	5885.7	\$67,138.24
8	Livestock Pipeline	57	ft	88082	\$107,278.28
9	Critical Area Planting	57	Ac	38.2	\$10,995.13
10	Trails and Walkways	52	Ft	41688	\$407,183.31

Practices like "heavy use area protection" and "underground outlet" are commonly related to farmstead facilities. "Waste Transfer" is scheduled for projects that result in long distance underground transfer of manure to satellite pits. This practice can serve to reduce fuel & fertilizer. Great for GHG emissions goals! This further reveals that practices scheduled by NRCS don't fully address those prioritized by survey respondents. Please note, that we recognize that these results are a reflection of the NRCS ranking and are not necessarily a reflection on the hard working, dedicated Newport NRCS staff.

Newport NRCS Field Office 2019-2021 Top 10 Scheduled Practice by funding amounts.

	Code	# of Practices Scheduled	Units	Amount	Obligation
1	Waste Storage Facility	41	No		\$4,395,804.12
2	Pond Sealing or Lining	13	sqft	492604.8	\$1,998,152.47
3	Heavy Use Area Protection	78	SqFt	174172.2	\$1,116,243.07
4	Waste Transfer	98	No		\$960,192.18
5	Cover Crop	92	Ac	10853.4	\$673,825.92
6	Fence	195	Ft	347656	\$658,305.09
7	Pumping Plant	42	No		\$565,136.27
8	Trails and Walkways	52	Ft	41688	\$407,183.31
9	Long-Term Protection of Land - Permanent Easement	3	Ac	409.1	\$377,500.00
10	High Tunnel System	32		80031	\$274,622.72

Newport NRCS funded contracts in the past 3 years and % of applications funded by year. This chart highlights the % of applications that don't get selected for funding. Further revealing the need for dialogue with NRCS and the Conservation District about how to best serve these landowners to meet their conservation goals and desires.

Fiscal Year	Number Applications	Requested Dollars	Number Contrats	Obligated Dollars	Percent Applications Funded Orleans County	Obligated funds	Percent of State Obligated Funds
2019	53	3,000,000	25	1,880,000	47%	12,000,000	16%
2020	42	2,400,000	29	1,665,000	69%	10,600,000.00	16%
2021	104	3,500,000	29	2,656,000	27%	9,562,000	28%

Additional comments on practices directly from the survey (9 responses)

- More incentives for conversion of riparian lands out of production.
- I would like better control, management and enforcement of laws relating to off road vehicles.
- We would like guidance in keeping our manure run off from contaminating water sources
- Too few practices to choose from.
- All answers are tentative.
- What about dam removal and river reconnection, floodplain restoration? stormwater management?
- We make sure the farmer that cuts and harvests our hay does not fertilize near the brook.
- Silvopasture system is planned for the future
- biomass electricity/heat
- Increase infiltration through improved soil health as a priority strategy to address the recognized issues - runoff, erosion, nutrient loss

Results of Survey Respondents Comments, Voiced concerns, and requests more information questions.

The information below doesn't include any interruptions from ONCRCD but is rather a direct copy of the respondents comments from the survey.

Hurdles and Roadblocks to Accessing and Administering Conservation Programs directly from the survey(31 responses)

- Getting landowners to respond to inquiries about conservation opportunities.
- Funding
- Landowner buy-in and engagement with voluntary conservation programs.
- I work with volunteers and there is a challenge getting things to happen with a schedule (like this meeting) that overlaps with people who have jobs.
- Don't know
- We are a small pasture/grass based farm raising meat. Most programs are for large dairies
- Delays, process, takes years And by the time the plan is being implemented it is outdated, staff changes, too many people involved
- Timely. Redundancy of application process.
- lack of staffing
- not a problem
- Staffing

- So much planning work then not approved for lack of funding
- Time for the application process and data collection. This is where Orleans County NRCD has been an amazing partner. NRCS does not all follow through in a responsive or timely manner in our experience.
- Limited staff capacity to work directly on projects
- Ranking important projects focused in forestland, as forests dominate the land cover in Orleans County by total acreage, they should be ranked higher. (Note: FY23 NRCS is doubling the amount of funding allocated to forestry projects. This might change in the positive compared to the in the past it being hard to get forestry funded because it was a state wide pool)
- Funding and staff training, miscommunication, divide between ag and conservation folks
- Coordinating resources financial and technical assistance packages efficiently/what program is the best fit for each farm. Reaching underserved farm or farms that have not traditionally participated in state or federal programs
- Organizational capacity, regional coordination, flexible funding
- Connecting with the landowners to explore the ideas around stream/ditch/drainage network projects
- N/A
- being aware of available programs
- I have found it takes a lot of my time to work with state and federal workers to access programs and I have a limited amount of time to do this.
- Financing/labor
- Lots of things to know.
- training partners so they can be well informed in the field
- Agricultural protection by embedded Statute. Is it time to rethink the farm subsidies, protected status and explore alternatives to dairy farming? See recent legal decision that parses Ag rules which have, historically, protected famers, with a requirement to take responsibility for downstream consequences....
- The many varied pressures on this regions economic struggles.
- Tiered program eligibility doesn't work well for me.
- Educating people to what conservation programs do
- N/a
- During the Covid pandemic there is lack of accessibility to employees, bringing in outside experts to have a successful outcome, more information on programs yearly face to face meetings with government employees

Coordination of state, federal and local programing working well directly form the survey (26 responses)

- Don't know
- I'm not aware of private programs that are offered. Work well together when co-benefits are available to broaden the scope and incentives for a project
- The most successful programs have developed a clear strategy in how the program will be delivered and administered. Example - CRP/CREP. At the ground level NRCS, FSA and VTAAFm have developed a process to implement conservation projects.

Landowners know what they will receive financial and work with a conservation POC to implement the practice - their aren't multiple staff working with the LO on one aspect of the project. There is a big funding gap associated with aquatic passage.

- Don't know
- Most programs appear to target large operations
- The people seem to know each other and like each other but the process is slow and the information is contradictory and the solution become stale by the time they're implementing
- Current use is an excellent program.
- all paper work for funds need to be more simplified
- NRCS funding was in place for payments but State funding was never in place for payment on time (this is how it was when we where mandated to put in a manure pit)
- Federal and State often work well together when coming together on large projects (EQIP Assist Work). Can often clash in regards to Grazing work (PSWF doesn't cover as much work as EQIP and when we take away practices from an EQIP application and fund them through PSWF we reduce resource concerns and negatively impact ranking scores for EQIP). I find there are gaps in funding in regards to forestry/wildlife work.
- federal programs in forestry should be coordinated with consulting foresters who have a knowledge of the land, not just landowners.
- The current State Phosphorus reduction program is a good example of state and local NRCS partnership. Cover crop programs, projects. Caring Dairy, FARM through DFA could partner better with state programs, all have similar goals. NRCS and federal programs are not well advertised or promoted locally. USDA could take more active leadership, it seems the OC NRCD takes the lead, even though they likely have the smallest budget and least people working.
- Work well when there is a mutual understanding of mission overlap between organizations that are then taken advantage of and leveraged to increase what gets done.
- I do not work on the ground enough to know the challenges.
- US FWS works well in VT, AAFM clashes with DEC, State legislature works well. Gaps in funding for water quality
- Gaps in funding being awarded to more technical or innovative projects, because of gap in technical services/expertise/capacity
- Funding needed for human resources services in small organizations
- Restoration opportunities.
- Don't know.
- I am really frustrated about how hard it is to gain access to both state and federal programs. It seems like you have to already have a grant of state or federal funds in order to get another one and it is very hard to get funding for either a discrete small project or to get started on a larger project. Given the time it takes to fill out applications and meet with people, it is very frustrating to have it lead nowhere.
- Are there funds available for reforestation of low quality fields?
- When at the table at the same time

- CREP and other such on-farm programs seem to be very successful. More funding is needed for follow-up visits to implemented practices, and in increasing capacity to do conservation work.
- NEK receives less funding in Vermont?
- Material pricing/gas pricing no such thing as an electric tractor
- No communication between agencies-needs to addressed

Other General Comments directly from the survey (12 responses)

- More programs to address site drainage/gullies/water quality issues.
- Keep landfill leachate out of lakes and waterways.
- Unsure.
- Yes, for years I have advocated more forest scarification and that could be cost-shared and have sound standards. This would improve regeneration, and i have used this work to reestablish seedlings naturally, but it involves reentry, is costly, and needed mostly where winter logging has occurred.
- Limited farm bill funding limits large farm participation in field practices - FAP can help but the limit on this program is also challenging. RCPP can also fill in but that to is limited. payment rates for some practices aren't enough to incentivize even if they have big WQ benefits so some State incentive for water and sediment control basins, grassed waterways, Wetland restoration, riparian buffer (wider than typical), Two tiered ditch etc may help to get these installed (maybe Pay for P will help with this??)
- Hoping you are considering and addressing the issues surrounding the dump and how it affects the air, water, and land in this area.
- I also find it frustrating that once you apply for a project, it doesn't stay active. I worked a lot with the state in 2020 and then never received any funding. They never reconnected with me in 2021 to see if they could help. Not sure why not.
- We need protections for riparian areas and a lot of support for AOPs and other storm surge water management
- "groundwater protection. Hill Farmstead Brewery. Super idea. Uses 6 or 7 times the # of gallons to produce one gallon of beer. They are a farm business. Under your lens. Love their beer. Love the concept. But what happens when the groundwater is depleted or Poland Springs Corp. comes in to buy it.... Just a contrary thought about farming priorities in the new era.
- I have a similar worry about a local farmer who IMPORTS manure to manufacture methane then spreads it on fields in the Caspian watershed....How is that farming?
- Thanks...
- I've opted out of NRCS help, due to disagreeing with program eligibility.
- Thank you for your work.
- Regenerative agriculture ,biomass (heat, electricity, fertilizer source)
- Thank you for all your hard work Sarah, you are a true leader and our community is a better place because of the work you and your team do. You are a vital resource for local farmers. Much like the boots on the ground implementation arm of all these federal and state programs. We would not have participated in many of these programs without your support.

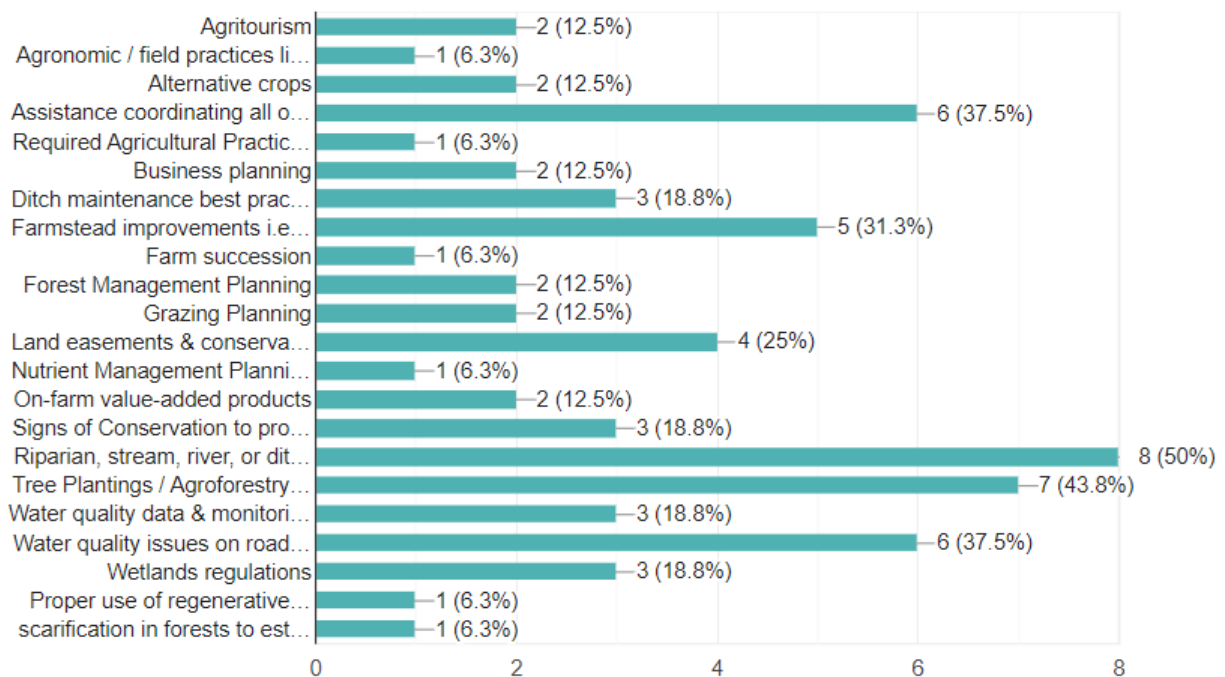
- Thank you
- Thank you for letting my voice be heard

Topics Respondents requested follow up directly from the survey (16 responses)

- Ditch maintenance best practices, Land easements & conservation, Riparian, stream, river, or ditch improvements for healthier waterways, Tree Plantings / Agroforestry / Stream Buffers, Wetlands regulations
- Water quality issues on roads & developed land
- Agronomic / field practices like cover crops, crop rotations, etc., Grazing Planning, Nutrient Management Planning and soil and manure sampling, On-farm value-added products, Proper use of regenerative methods to improve yields while improving environment
- Farmstead improvements i.e. heavy use areas, leachate systems, fencing
- Farm succession
- scarification in forests to establish seedlings
- Assistance coordinating all of the staff at different conservation organizations that work with you, Ditch maintenance best practices, Forest Management Planning, Riparian, stream, river, or ditch improvements for healthier waterways, Tree Plantings / Agroforestry / Stream Buffers, Water quality data & monitoring, Water quality issues on roads & developed land
- Land easements & conservation, Signs of Conservation to promote good stewardship, Riparian, stream, river, or ditch improvements for healthier waterways, Water quality data & monitoring, Water quality issues on roads & developed land, Wetlands regulations
- Assistance coordinating all of the staff at different conservation organizations that work with you, Signs of Conservation to promote good stewardship, Riparian, stream, river, or ditch improvements for healthier waterways, Tree Plantings / Agroforestry / Stream Buffers, Water quality data & monitoring, Water quality issues on roads & developed land, Wetlands regulations
- Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs), Farmstead improvements i.e. heavy use areas, leachate systems, fencing
- Alternative crops, Business planning, Riparian, stream, river, or ditch improvements for healthier waterways, Tree Plantings / Agroforestry / Stream Buffers, Water quality issues on roads & developed land
- Agritourism, Assistance coordinating all of the staff at different conservation organizations that work with you, Farmstead improvements i.e. heavy use areas, leachate systems, fencing, Land easements & conservation, Riparian, stream, river, or ditch improvements for healthier waterways, Tree Plantings / Agroforestry / Stream Buffers, Water quality issues on roads & developed land
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- Alternative crops, Business planning, Ditch maintenance best practices, Farmstead improvements i.e. heavy use areas, leachate systems, fencing
- Assistance coordinating all of the staff at different conservation organizations that work with you, Land easements & conservation, Signs of Conservation to promote good stewardship, Riparian, stream, river, or ditch improvements for healthier waterways, Tree Plantings / Agroforestry / Stream Buffers
- Agritourism, Assistance coordinating all of the staff at different conservation organizations that work with you, Farmstead improvements i.e. heavy use areas, leachate systems, fencing, Grazing Planning, On-farm value-added products

Summary of Requested Follow Up Topics



What type of work do you do on the land? Directly from the survey

- Land owner/ want to know best practices for own land & community at large
- vegetable gardens
- habitat restoration
- Volunteer work through conservation organization with a focus on hunting/fishing
- logging, trail construction
- Recreation, surface water management near lake.
- tree planting primarily, some land rented out
- We pasture raise beef, chicken, lamb, pork and turkey
- Farming, forestry, orchard, livestock.
- planting, trimming, farming, crops, hunting

- Pasture management, haying
- United States
- Manage for wildlife, planting corridor for safe crossing for wildlife
- conservation planning
- Garden and Chickens
- United States
- maintain naturally vegetated lake shore
- Organic gardening, woodlot management, sugaring, mushroom foraging
- consulting, planning, design; vegetable gardener in my 'spare time'
- Dairy Farmers wife - do administrative work, ie grant applications, NMP, financial etc, calf / heifer chores etc
- Fisheries and aquatic biology
- Support partners in identifying efforts to improve WQ and help to fill in gaps in funding and resources.
- Forester
- Advising/consulting/project management
- Ecologist
- Water quality and wildlife habitat improvement project implementation
- None
- dairy farm and crops
- Dairy farmer
- Forest management and gardening
- FARMS
- Gardener. Consumer. Not a subsidized entity.
- river protection
- Vegetable gardening, cropping
- dairy farm
- Riparian management and enhancement
- Farming
- Dairy Farming and Land Stewardship

Summary of Orleans County Local Work Group Meeting

The April 7th Orleans County Locally Led Work group meeting hosted two small group breakout sessions. The morning session was focused on developing strategies for addressing water quality improvement. The small groups were organized by different sectors - agriculture, wetlands, riparian and floodplain, forestry, community engagement, lakeshores. The afternoon session focused on discussing NRCS resource concerns and programs organized by organizations that were represented at the meeting. Here is a summary of the results of those sessions.

Improve Landowner Connections

- Need to go see and hear the landowners on their land, especially sometimes after public meetings.
- Use “neighbor to neighbor” knowledge/connection to make the landowner contacts, also have people come forward and express interest in participation.
- Past work showed education and outreach is very important to connect landowners with where/why/how
- All programs need a focus on landowner relations
- Incentivise gatherings

Address Barriers

- Funding:
 - The NRCS State-Wide funding pool impacts relative ranking for local projects.
 - Recommend NRCS distribute funding equally by region.
 - Limited/no funding to protect things in good shape
 - Complexities of funding sources and a web of funding sources to compete one project and/or fund one position.
 - Need better incentives - doesn't seem to get people excited about Wetland Restoration
- Increase education/outreach to landowners:
 - Landowner awareness of value working with Natural Resource Professionals.
 - How to raise awareness of Conservation funding opportunities
 - Education outreach, to get people to attend planning and strategy meetings
- Buffers
 - Land use along rivers on Ag land is of high value and is a consideration when designing programs.
 - Lack of native planting stock is a significant limitation to restoration project implementation
 - Notice a “stigma” of taking land out of protection
- Limited Resources
 - Farm and Partner Match Money
 - Time
 - Capacity - staff
 - Mindset
 - Conservation is really slow
- Lack of engineering support
- Change is happening, even if slow, but there is a lack of community engagement and community awareness.
- Hire consultant to help set up conservation communication strategies



- Loss of conservation opportunities when NRCS non ranked out projects are not handed off to other partners to access other sources of funds.
- Timing and speed of USDA programs
 - Changing the process to encourage quicker turnaround with smaller work loads
 - Shortening application to CTA visit to contracting process and or coordinating with the conservation district certified conservation planner to do these CTA visits.
 - Could there be an “NRCS fast lane” for example could there be a simpler/canned process for certain practices like if you are willing to address this NRCS by doing this.
- Paperwork for the USDA programs
- Having appropriate staff available to assist landowners in access programs.
- Staff turnover and building trust - staff working on name recognition can take a long time in

a rural setting, so people know what/why you are contacting them.

- People caring about the lake and river if not “in their backyard”.

- Language REALLY Matters

- Framing/Packaging is important

Example: “Technical” Meetings (TBP, Watershed) vs Community Meeting

- Tile drain fields are now more challenging to change, can limit where you’re able to plant if you have to maintain tile over time. Very expensive and landowners do not want to change tile of affected field



Resource Concerns

- Water quality is still a top priority
 - Nutrient Runoff is of “Higher Importance than pathogens”
 - Sediment and slowing the flow should also be included
- Concern about impacts to the groundwater and Lake Memphremagog from the landfill
- Priority Practices
 - Heavy use area protection
 - Roof structures
 - Waste storage management
 - Nutrient management implementation
 - Soil health
 - Organic matter depletion
- Energy related concerns - Priority (GHG, Electricity, CAPs)
 - Interested in finding more energy efficient practices (innovative)
 - Manure injection and composting
 - Soil carbon amendments
 - Equipment modifications
- Overarching climate change concerns

- How does the VT climate action plan intersect with the Orleans county priorities?
- Irrigation for crops
- Prioritize tributaries and ditches
- Prioritize diversions and drainage controls on farmsteads
- Prioritize practices that occur in the shoulder, more vulnerable seasons
- River corridor conservation, acquisition and removal of obstacles (road/rip rap/buildings).
- Private road, driveway and farm road runoff
- Increase Assessments
- Control invasives - assessments, mapping of and funding
 - (Aquatic Habitat, Bank Erosion, Wildlife, etc.)



Strategies / Opportunities

- Partnerships
 - Incentivise partnering
 - Prioritize being more intentional about coordination of services
 - NRCD staff for Coordinate Funding /Fundraising for landowners.
 - Use partners to strategize and focus efforts
 - Increase funding & regional coordination
 - Project areas IDed through assessments, but also should include input from partners & other members of the group
 - Improve cross program/partner knowledge of who/when landowner already contacted about a project “have they already been asked to do this project?”
 - Partners understanding and promoting new NRCS practices
 - Floodplain Restoration
 - Floodplain Easement
 - Annual NRCS training for partners
 - Reach out to non-traditional partners to develop connections and develop interest
 - VAST - generally have good connections w/ landowners
 - Fish & Wildlife clubs - maybe people of interest for these type of projects
 - Wild Conservation Group
 - NCCC
 - Farm Bureau
- Funding
 - Promote a la cart practices vs Comprehensive Conservation planning
 - NRCS Emergency Floodplain funds- how can we make these funds available all the time?
 - Funding needed to help someone connect the education and outreach efforts to organize efforts

- More Funding for Greeter Stations
- Increase funding for habitat preservation & future riparian old growth
- Increase Forestry project funding and funding for FMPs
 - Important as a mechanism to engage w/ NAT. resource Prof.
- Education & outreach
 - Increased attendance at watershed level planning meetings, maybe need to be incentivized to help people take time off, coordinating the meeting.
 - Promote Lakewise
 - Host septic social
 - Continued Education for Lake Greeters
 - Mandatory Training for contractors on erosion - like an erosion control field day
 - Erosion Control Workshops for Road Crews and contractors similar to NH erosion control workshops.
 - Welcome Packets for all lake association for New Owners
 - IDEAs, NRCD conservation field day, Orleans City Fair, Other already public events
 - Need to have better way to communicate benefits of riparian and wetland restoration projects
 - Spreading out tasks of coordinating outreach and gatherings. Rotate around organizations.
 - Increase education for logging contractors
 - Increase Education to partners for improved outreach on NRCS program “Knowing the right NRCS program and practice to recommend can be very challenging”
 - Partners work with NRCS on program outreach to proactively finding projects instead of waiting for applicants coming to NRCS
 - Hire more Outreach/Community engagement focused staff working in the watershed
 - More Targeted Conservation Outreach
 - Schools
 - NCSU
 - More community awareness
 - Always work on making it sound fun
 - Beer
 - Food
 - Walk/Tour
 - Music
 - Connecting with others
 - Hire consultant to help set up conservation communication strategies
 - Conservation Branding work for orgs and farm operations in the watershed
- Other
 - Innovation in implementation methods
 - Outreach and TA for River corridor conservation
 - Adopt stream wise in the Memphremagog watershed Better strategically target watersheds 303d or HUC12 across multiple sectors
 - Emergency funding town sponsor, Landowners don't understand.(??)
 - Needed Culture Shift in Agriculture

- How to use peer to be cool to be a dirt farmer
- Study and identifying and understand barriers of engagement
- From high production agriculture of getting most out of land to fully embracing buffers or cover crops (eg.)
- Promote creative, innovative programs that are approachable for farmers
 - Caring Dairy
 - Pay for phosphorus
- Showing Success
 - Publicity
 - Farmer to farmer
- More in-state processing of ag products
- NRCS supporting Hydro-seeding of buffers
- Invasive control before planting riparian project and support sustained control
- Strategies - Differ for Franklin + Orleans County. Find ways for cross pollination
- Increase involvement of licensed foresters in forestry operations
- Support and increase wake boat regulations
- Work with landowners on Septic Systems Updating
- Address Runoff by Boat Launches
- Consider Impacts of AirBnBs due to increased landuse/impacts
- Address access road and culvert erosion in forestry
- Address culvert runoff around lakes especially around stabilizing outlets.
- Improve communications between lake associations & towns
- Increase LAKE WISE capacity and funding
- Increase support and consultation services for Lake Monitoring results Interpretation
- Certify Subcontractors

Next Steps

- Orleans County NRCD will transmit the Local Working Group's results to the State Technical Committee.
- Orleans County NRCD will submit a NRCS local fund pool proposal on the behalf of the LWG to address invasive species.
- Orleans County CISMA invasive outreach and media campaign
- Partners work with VTDEC on including basin planning priorities discussed at the LWG.
- Orleans County NRCD will develop a factsheet with NRCS on how LWG can engage with NRCS public input opportunities.
- Partners work on outreach with new audiences with missing voices like the snowmobile clubs, Lions, Rotary, Real Estate agencies, Chamber of Commerces, NEK Collaborative, and any tourism agencies.
- Include Vermont Association of Snow Travels local representatives, town officials and VTrans District 9 staff at the next LWG meeting.
- Partners continue to monitor the emerging pollutants of concern, e.g. forever chemicals, other partnerships - e.g. Lions, Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, tourism - regional and state.

Directory of Acronyms

CISMA - Cooperative Invasive SPecies Management Area

LWG- Local Work Group

VTDEC - Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation

NRCD - Natural Resources Conservation District

OCNRCD - Orleans County Natural Resources Conservation District

GHG -Green house gasses

CAP- Conservation Activity Plan