

Vermont Bulletin: SB_VT_440-24-06 Date: October 13, 2023
Subject: FY2025 Locally Led Funding Pool Proposals

Purpose: In Fiscal Year 2025 the Vermont State Conservationist intends to expand the use of “Locally led Funding Pools” to further support locally led conservation efforts. This bulletin announces the opportunity for Zone District Conservationists (DCs) and Local Working Groups (LWGs) to submit requests in Fiscal Year 2025.

Action Due by: April 19, 2024

Expires: September 30, 2024

Background: Locally led conservation is based on the principle that community stakeholders are best suited to identify and resolve local natural resource problems. Thus, community stakeholders are keys to successfully managing and protecting their natural resources. To support locally led conservation efforts the Vermont State Conservationist will continue to offer the opportunity for locally led funding pools in Fiscal Year 2025.

During development of the FY 2025 *Vermont NRCS Financial Assistance Programs Funding Pools & Spending Plan*, DCs will have the opportunity to submit a request for a locally led ranking pool delivered through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Locally led funding pools will provide a known amount of EQIP financial assistance funding to address locally identified resource concern identified in the proposal.

Locally led ranking pool proposals should be supported by a conservation action plan that outlines the natural resource conservation needs (see Part 500, Locally Led Conservation, 500.1A.). If a local conservation action plan has not been developed, proposals will still be considered if they are tiered to a broader action plan, such as a Statewide Action Plan or Tactical Basin Plan.

Additionally, the Vermont State Conservationist is interested in locally led proposals which address the following areas:

- Support USDA priorities of climate mitigation and adaptation by expanding implementation of Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) practices.
- Target and prioritize historically underserved (HU) producers and communities.
- Supported by a network of partner organizations who can assist with delivering technical assistance to support the locally led funding pool.

Action. DCs should discuss this opportunity with their local Conservation District Managers and the Conservation District Board by December 15, 2023. If the mutual decision is made to

pursue a locally led funding pool, DCs will use the guidance in **Attachment A** to complete and submit the proposal on **Attachment B**, to the State office by April 19, 2024.

If a locally led funding pool is not proposed, any information provided to NRCS by LWGs will be used to influence allocation Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART) ranking weights among resource concerns, practice priorities, and vulnerability points during the development of Statewide funding pools. LWG feedback not linked with a locally led proposal will not be used to create CART ranking questions.

Contact. Questions related to this bulletin should be directed through the District Conservationist to State office Resource Conservationist heather.wetzstein@usda.gov and Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations luis.aponte@usda.gov.

TRAVIS L. THOMASON
Vermont State Conservationist

Attachment A: EQIP Locally Led Ranking Pool Guidance
Attachment B: EQIP Locally Led Ranking Pool Request Form

References: [M 440 500 A Locally Led Conservation](#)
NCPP Local Work Group Guidebook (2021)

Attachment A

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Guidance

This attachment provides ranking guidance for FY 2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Proposals. Zone District Conservationists (DCs), with the support of Local Working Groups (LWGs), will complete Attachment B to this State Bulletin and submit the completed form by April 19, 2024 to heather.wetzstein@usda.gov. Zone DCs will use the guidance provided in this attachment when completing Attachment B.

Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool requests will be based off an action plan as described in Part 500, Locally Led Conservation. The action plan identifies natural resource conservation priorities, sets measurable conservation goals and objectives, identifies conservation technology needed to achieve these goals and objectives, identifies responsibility for action and a time schedule for completion of elements, identifies Federal, State, Tribal, local, and non-government programs and services needed to address specific conservation needs, and identifies a need to develop new programs or processes to address those problems not covered by existing programs.

Part I: Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Proposal Guidance

1) Introduction

This Part contains ranking guidance specific to the development of a locally led conservation ranking pool

2) General Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Requirements

Each proposal for a locally led conservation ranking pool must be based off the local action plan as described in Part 500.

FY 2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Policy Updates:

- a) Ranking questions, points, as well as applicable land uses, resource concerns and practice list will be based off the LWG action plan as outlined in Part 500, Locally Led Conservation. DCs will develop these ranking pools to reflect the conservation needs outlined in these local plans. DCs will also request the amount of financial assistance funds through EQIP that will be necessary to carry out the objectives of the proposed ranking pool. The fund request will reflect the need outlined in the action plan.

- b) **Assessment of Applications:**

Applications for Locally Led Conservation Ranking pools will be made on Form NRCS-CPA-1200 and managed in CD, CART, and ProTracts.

3) Ranking Pool Naming

The Local Working Group may name its proposed ranking pool whatever it likes, provided that it will be clear to the planner what the ranking pool is when they are determining what ranking pools to assess their applications in. Ranking pool names will all begin with “2025_VT” and may end with “Local” or “Local Pool” to make it clear that it is a local ranking pool. CART ranking pools and Protracts subaccounts will have the same name.

4) Land Uses

The national EQIP ranking template includes a comprehensive list of available **Land Uses**. Attachment B includes the list of land uses on the national EQIP ranking template. DCs will select the land uses that would be included in the proposed locally led conservation ranking pool based on the action plan and what land uses would be applicable to the conservation needs identified therein.

5) Resource Concern and Resource Concern Categories

The national EQIP ranking template includes a comprehensive list of available **Resource Concerns and Resource Concern Categories**. Attachment B to this state bulletin includes the list of resource concerns on the national EQIP ranking template. DCs will select the TOP FIVE resource concerns that would be prioritized in the proposed locally led conservation ranking pool. Resource concern selection will be based on the action plan and what the conservation needs are within the conservation action plan area.

6) Practices

The 2024 VT EQIP Payment Schedule provides a list of available practices that DCs can consider when submitting their proposal for a locally led conservation ranking pool. DCs will use Attachment B to this state bulletin to select the practices that would be included in the proposed locally led conservation ranking pool. Practice selection will be based on the LWG's action plan and the conservation needs, goals, and objectives outlined in the conservation action plan.

7) Ranking Component Weights

The EQIP national ranking template provides the range that states may choose for each ranking components. Information about ranking weights is located in the CART Users Guide on the [CART SharePoint](#). Weightings should be established to ensure that applications best suited to achieving project purposes are prioritized. Where variability in project objectives exists (e.g. same project includes expectation of serving applications with both EQIP like objectives and CSP like objectives, and "vulnerabilities" could confound selections), DCs are encouraged to balance ranking component weights and use "categories" to optimize application selections.

8) Applicability:

States may use **either** a text question or geospatial assessment to determine pool applicability to application acres:

- Geospatial:

Land Unit Qualification = [ALL]

State must publish the geospatial layer that represents the applicability area.

- Textual:

Bracketed text in following question may be edited to be consistent with state practice in other program ranking tools, and/or to reflect expectations of tract location with respect to project area:

Treated acres (entirely/partially) within the applicability area, and application will address one or more project conservation benefit(s) in the applicability area?

9) Category Questions

Ranking Categories are available to support the need to have similar applications compete (only) ranked against one another. For example, categories may be used to:

- Ensure Historically Underserved Producers have opportunity to compete against one another.

10) Ranking Questions

- **Program Questions (200 Points Total)**

Zone DCs will create four ranking questions. A fifth question prioritizing CRP-TIP will also be required per national instruction 440-310. The total ranking points of these five questions will equal 200. Program questions should prioritize historically underserved groups, locations, and other non-resource concern priorities that are outlined in the conservation action plan.

- **Resource Questions (200 Points)**

DCs will create five ranking questions. The total ranking points of these five questions will equal 200 points. DCs will create five resource questions based on the conservation needs outlined in the conservation action plan. Other priorities should align with the agency priorities of climate mitigation and adaption by expanding implementation of Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) practices, and are supported by a network of partner organizations who can assist with delivering technical assistance to support the locally led funding pool.

11) Tie Breaker

- In the event of a tie, States must use the efficiency score calculated in CART when a tie breaker is needed between one or more EQIP assessments within a ranking pool. When using the tie breaker, NRCS will select the application with the highest efficiency score first.
- In the event the efficiency scores are tied, States must fund all tied assessments or none of the tied assessments.

12) Application Selection: EQIP Locally Led Conservation Funding

Zone DCs will use the Select Application Tool (SAT) to export list of applications, identify those applications that they have preapproved, and send this exported excel document to Heather Wetzstein. When selecting applications for funding, Zone DCs must ensure that they are selecting applications for funding in order of ranking score, highest to lowest. The business tool will not allow Zone DCs to preapprove applications in SAT. Therefore, side records, exported out to SAT will need to be created by the Zone DCs to document the preapproval that programs staff will make on their behalf.

Attachment B

2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - Completed by the DC

Land Uses

Check off those land use/uses that will be applicable to the proposed ranking pool

	Crop
	Forest
	Range
	Pasture
	Farmstead
	Associated Ag Land

Resource Concerns

In EQIP there are 17 nationally recognized resource concern categories for the program. Zone DCs will select the top 5 resource concern priorities from the list below based on the LWG action plan, where highest priority is 1. Only 5 resource concerns are to be selected, prioritized as 1 through 5, with 1 being the highest priority.

	Air Quality Emissions
	Aquatic Habitat
	Concentrated Erosion
	Degraded Plant Condition
	Field Pesticide Loss
	Field Sediment, Nutrient and Pathogen Loss
	Fire Management
	Inefficient Energy Use
	Livestock Production Limitation
	Pest Pressure
	Salt Losses to Water
	Soil Quality Limitations
	Source Water Depletion
	Storage and Handling of Pollutants
	Terrestrial Habitat
	Weather Resilience
	Wind and Water Erosion

Attachment B**2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - Completed by the DC****Core Conservation Practices**

Check the conservation practices recommended to include in the proposed ranking pool. These practices must address at least one of the five resource concerns selected and ranked above.

101	CNMP Design and Implementation Activity
102	Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan
106	Forest Management Plan
110	Grazing Management Plan
116	Soil Health Management Plan
120	Agricultural Energy Design
138	Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition
140	Transition to Organic Design
144	Fish and Wildlife Habitat Design
148	Pollinator Habitat Design
157	Nutrient Management Design and Implementation Activity
158	Feed Management Design
159	Grazing Management Design
160	Prescribed Burning Design
161	Pest Management Conservation System Design
162	Soil Health Management System Design
163	Irrigation Water Management Design
164	Improved Management of Drainage Water Design
165	Forest Management Practice Design
199	Conservation Plan
201	Edge-of-Field Water Quality Monitoring - Data Collection and Evaluation
202	Edge-of-Field Water Quality Monitoring - System Installation
207	Site Assessment and Soil Testing for Contaminants Activity
209	PFAS Testing in Water or Soil
216	Soil Health Testing
217	Soil and Source Testing for Nutrient Management
218	Carbon Sequestration and Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Assessment
221	Soil Organic Carbon Stock Measurement
222	Indigenous Stewardship Methods Evaluation
223	Forest Management Assessment
224	Aquifer Flow Test
228	Agricultural Energy Assessment
309	Agrichemical Handling Facility
311	Alley Cropping
313	Waste Storage Facility
314	Brush Management
315	Herbaceous Weed Treatment
316	Animal Mortality Facility
317	Composting Facility
319	On-Farm Secondary Containment Facility
325	High Tunnel System
326	Clearing and Snagging
327	Conservation Cover
328	Conservation Crop Rotation
329	Residue and Tillage Management, No Till
330	Contour Farming
332	Contour Buffer Strips
333	Amending Soil Properties with Gypsum Products
334	Controlled Traffic Farming

Attachment B**2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - Completed by the DC**

338	Prescribed Burning
340	Cover Crop
342	Critical Area Planting
345	Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till
350	Sediment Basin
351	Well Decommissioning
353	Monitoring Well
355	Groundwater Testing
360	Waste Facility Closure
362	Diversion
366	Anaerobic Digester
367	Roofs and Covers
368	Emergency Animal Mortality Management
372	Combustion System Improvement
374	Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation
378	Pond
379	Forest Farming
380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment and Renovation
381	Silvopasture
382	Fence
384	Woody Residue Treatment
386	Field Border
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover
391	Riparian Forest Buffer
393	Filter Strip
395	Stream Habitat Improvement and Management
396	Aquatic Organism Passage
410	Grade Stabilization Structure
412	Grassed Waterway
420	Wildlife Habitat Planting
422	Hedgerow Planting
430	Irrigation Water Conveyance
436	Irrigation Reservoir
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation
442	Sprinkler System
443	Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface
449	Irrigation Water Management
464	Irrigation Land Leveling
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet
472	Access Control
484	Mulching
490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
500	Obstruction Removal
511	Forage Harvest Management
512	Pasture and Hay Planting
516	Livestock Pipeline
520	Pond Sealing or Lining, Compacted Soil Treatment
521	Pond Sealing or Lining, Geomembrane or Geosynthetic Clay Liner

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522	Pond Sealing or Lining – Concrete
528	Prescribed Grazing
533	Pumping Plant
554	Drainage Water Management
557	Row Arrangement
558	Roof Runoff Structure
560	Access Road
561	Heavy Use Area Protection
570	Stormwater Runoff Control
574	Spring Development
575	Trails and Walkways
576	Livestock Shelter Structure
578	Stream Crossing
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection
582	Open Channel
585	Stripcropping
587	Structure for Water Control
590	Nutrient Management
592	Feed Management
595	Pest Management Conservation System
601	Vegetative Barrier
603	Herbaceous Wind Barriers
604	Saturated Buffer
606	Subsurface Drain
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment
614	Watering Facility
620	Underground Outlet
627	Wastewater Treatment – Milk House
629	Waste Treatment
632	Waste Separation Facility
633	Waste Recycling
634	Waste Transfer
635	Vegetated Treatment Area
636	Water Harvesting Catchment
638	Water and Sediment Control Basin
642	Water Well
643	Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities
644	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management
645	Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
647	Early Successional Habitat Development-Management
649	Structures for Wildlife
654	Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment
655	Forest Trails and Landings
656	Constructed Wetland
657	Wetland Restoration
659	Wetland Enhancement
660	Tree/Shrub Pruning
666	Forest Stand Improvement
670	Energy Efficient Lighting System
672	Energy Efficient Building Envelope
782	Storage Facility – Nursery Substrate
805	Amending Soil Properties with Lime

Attachment B

2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - completed by the DC

	808	Soil Carbon Amendment
	810	Annual Forages for Grazing Systems
	812	Raised Bed
	821	Low Tunnel Systems

Attachment B

2025 EQIP Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool Request Form - completed by the DC

Applicability and Category Question (if submitting a geospatial layer request, specify this in the space below and include a detailed explanation of what the boundaries are):

Program Questions

Question Number	Question	Points
1	Is the applicant enrolled in CRP-TIP?	5
2		
3		
4		
5		
Total Points		200

Resource Questions

Question Number	Question	Points
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
Total Points		200

Ranking Component Weights

Total ranking component weight must equal 100%. Zone DCs will select vulnerability, program priorities and resource priorities percentages. Percentages for each must be between the minimum and maximum percentage located in the EQIP national ranking template, as outlined below. The planned practice points and efficiency percent are set nationally.

	Min %	Max %	Suggested Weight
Vulnerabilities	10	40	
Planned Practice Points	15	15	15
Program Priorities	5	15	
Resource Priorities	20	60	
Efficiency	10	10	10
TOTAL			100%

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Funds Being Requested (\$)

Ranking Pool Deadlines

Check here if the preferred funding cycle for the Locally Led Conservation Ranking Pool proposal is to follow the State funding cycle for 2025.

For a separate funding cycle, specific to this proposal, provide the following:

	Suggested Date
Application Sign Up Deadline	
Application Ranking Deadline	
Application Obligation Deadline	